

The search for the sound of young Polynesia

The 1983 NZ Music Awards had several Maori or polynesian nominees representing the entertaining talent of a people, who are taken for granted as natural entertainers both home and abroad. The names go on and on, Inia Te Wiata, Kiri Te Kanawa, Howard Morrison Quartet, John Rowles, Maori Hi Fives, Golden Harvest, Billy T James, Herbs and a host of others.

Many artists are more well-known overseas on the Asian or Pacific entertainment circuit than they are at home. That's because it's possible to make a good living from entertaining overseas.

But what have these Maori and Polynesian artists got that makes their sound distinctive. That's a question that's being taken very seriously by some music people. Is it more than brown-skinned Pacific people playing and singing funk,

soul, reggae, blues and disco by black American artists?

One of the people looking for the contemporary sound of young polynesia is Maui Prime or Dalvanus as he's professionally known. He's been on the lookout for some ten years of his professional singing career and he says he's close to the source of the sound now.

He's launched a new record label, Maui Records as the waka to carry the

sound of young polynesia into the next century. And with his first record release on his label, he's chosen to turn the Maori world on its ear by recording the 1983 Polynesian Festival winning poi song 'Poi E' with a strong disco accompaniment. That's the sound of the Patea Maori Club complete with poi, backed by the driving sound of top session musicians.

To date it's selling well around New Zealand despite the rather limited airplay the record is getting, mainly on the Tonight Show. The problem is one that all music different from the norm has, it's unprogrammable. That is it doesn't fit in the nice and simple formats that New Zealand radio stations and television have for music.

For one thing, it's not in English and for another, it's not the traditional sound of the poi, what with the loud, brash disco beat.

These are the problems that Maui Prime believes we have to look at as a nation if we are to discover what makes the indigenous people of the Pacific distinctive in their sound. Perhaps it's a Pacific Motown sound.

Firstly let's look at the credentials of the man who's making sound waves. Maui went to Australia some ten years back, and with sisters, Cissy and Bartletta, became known as Dalvanus and the Fascinations. Their style was labelled as 'sepia soul' and they soon established a large following.

Maui — "The music scene is much more geared up there to provide support and work for entertainers, from protection on copyright for songs to professionally managed club circuits."

Dalvanus and the Fascinations performed at the opening of the Sydney Opera House and over the years have sung in concert with such greats as Issac Hayes, Dionne Warwick, The Commodores, The Pointer Sisters, Osibissa, Ike and Tina Turner, Petula Clark and Eartha Kitt.

They signed to Reprise Records in 1974 and then moved on to Festival. It was here that Maui met a man who was to leave a big impression, Roger Davies, the manager of the Australian group, Sherbert.

Maui — "He told me to go for a Maori/Pacific sound and leave the soul/cabaret. He said we'd never get anywhere without an ethnic sound, that came from our background."

That sort of remark posed a few problems for Maui as he now readily admits. At that time he wasn't quite sure what his ethnic background had qualified him to sing about on the music circuits of Australasia.



Maui Prime