

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 39: Slice of Heaven. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons. If you want to support HANZ go to [patreon.com/historyaotearoa](https://patreon.com/historyaotearoa). Last time, we covered the story of Barnet Burns, an English trader who came to New Zealand seeking a new life. Before that we had our series on tā moko, Māori tattooing. This time we will be starting a new set of episodes on taonga pūoro, Māori musical instruments. We will talk all about the various different instruments, how they were played, in what situations they were played and all that good stuff. As this is a podcast, a specifically audio format, I won't have to try too hard in describing what these sounded like, instead I will of course be giving you a taster of the voice of each instrument. That is also how I will be referring to each instrument from now on. We have talked and will continue talking about Te Ao Māori, essentially translated as the Māori world, part of which is how the world is viewed through a Māori lens. Something I found really fascinating while researching taonga pūoro was how Te Ao Māori was applied to them, in the sense that they didn't often refer to the sound that the instruments made, they talked about the voice it had or in some cases the multiple voices more in the sense that it's a liveing, breathing thing. So we will be following their example and talk about the voices of these instruments that were used to communicate with the land, the birds and tūpuna, ancestors.

To start with lets talk about what Europeans thought of taonga pūoro. I can hear you all groaning from here and I get it, I feel your pain cause we all know how this is going to go down. That's why I'm putting this here at the start so that we can get it out of the way but it is still a perspective that is valuable and should at least be noted. So, as you have probably guessed, Europeans almost universally hated the melodies coming from Māori instruments. Elsdon Best describes numerous instances of people's complaints of instruments making a "shrill, hoarse sound" or "a most horrid noise" or "a hideous bellowing" or "entirely discordant, if not absolutely hideous to an European ear". You get the idea. He also talks about someone who said of one instrument "they produce a sound similiar to the sound of bagpipes". Best refutes this however saying "I would say that nothing is less like that of the bagpipes". As someone who goddamn loves the bagpipes I can't really decide if either of these are meant to be insults or compliments.

Now that we have passed that unpleasentness, lets get onto what we are really here for. Taonga pūoro mostly consist of wind instruments and a few percussion ones with only a single string instrument. The plan was to cover each instrument based on the musical group it fits into, to kinda make sure there was some sort of order to these episodes. However I want to stay more in keeping with the Te Ao Māori perspective with this so instead of using the Western or Pākehā grouping system I will use a more Māori one which tends to group the instruments based on the atua, god, that they come from. So the instruments that call to birds and the forest are grouped under Tānemahuta, god of the forest, instruments that use shells are of Tangaroa, god of the sea, the flutes are grouped under Raukatauri, goddess of flutes with the other instruments that are blown into coming under Tāwhirimātea, god of wind and storms, gourd instruments are put under Hine Pū te Hue, goddesss of gourds and finally instruments that are to do with setting rhthym are in the family of Papatuānuku, the earth mother. Please note that this grouping system does not nessecarily reflect the views of Māori of the time or even today.

Lets start then with those instruments that come under Tānemahuta, seperator of Rangi and Papa, maker of the first woman, father of birds, trees and mighty atua of the forest! Woah, neat... Karanga manu are bird callers that were used for a few different purposes than the obvious one you might be thinking of. They fit easily in the palm of the hand and can be played with just a couple of fingers, being basically a small bell looking object, with the blowy end being small and the noisy end being big. Karanga manu were made mostly from rock such as sandstone, soapstone and perhaps

pounamu which may initially indicate that they wouldn't be part of Tāne's demense, if it wasn't for the bird calling. What truly muddies the water here though is that a subset of karanga manu were the poi āwhiowhio which was made from a hollowed out gourd with two holes drilled into it on each side. A cord would be pulled lengthways through the neck and sometimes feathers attached near the larger holes. The idea potentially being that as the poi āwhiowhio was swung around, as that's how it was played, the feathers would baffle the air around the holes and change the sound or perhaps to attract birds visually. Being made of a gourd but used to attract birds makes this taonga pūoro sit squarely in both Tāne's realm as well as Hine Pū te Hue's realm, goddess of gourds, although since they were swung around to make the sounds of the winds they were also said to come under Tāwhirimātea as well. Cause you know, when we're talking about culture and anthropology nothing is ever too straight forward, so keep that in mind going forward that when I say an instrument is in a certain realm or category, that is always a bit fluid depending on your interpretation. What the karanga manu were used for was attracting birds to catch for either as pets or to eat which was done by mimicing their calls. The poi āwhiowhio was used to catch kererū in particular but it was also used in rituals for the start of the hunting season, particularly by Tūhoe. Though a source from Ngāti Kahungunu said in one of the books I read that it may also be used to attract a lover. If you are somewhat familiar with the origin story of this iwi, that may come as no surprise. One of the other reasons Māori used these was to commune with the birds and the wider forest. This is a running theme that we will encounter in that taonga pūoro are thought of as the objects through which the gods, spirits and ancestors can be communicated to. In the case of karanga manu, the birds were said to give advice and wisdom from Tāne or that persons tīpuna as well as other tid bits. Another subset of these was the karanga weka, no points for getting what this was used for. This instrument mimics the weka call to attract them though it is noted that its effectiveness changes depending on the region with the instrument needing to be adjusted for local 'dialects' that the weka have. As far as I can tell there aren't any surviving karanga manu from the pre-European period, another theme that we will encounter often. However there is one karanga weka made of soapstone that is held by the British Museum, the only example of its kind. So what does these sound like? Well, here you are...

Leaves, reeds and other such floral items were also used to imitate bird calls for various reasons, these instruments being called tuarōria. The leaves of karamū and pāpāuma, a shrub and a broadleaf tree respectively, were favoured to be folded and blown, although this obviously changed depending on where you lived and what plants and birds were available in your area. The leaves would be folded along the centre rib and held at both ends by the thumb and index finger which would create a tunnel and then blown into. You could then change the pitch by increasing or releasing tension on the leaf, which would often have a reedy kind of voice. Other plants that could be used were harakeke, kiekie, and tī kōuka (hopefully all plants you are somewhat familiar with now!). Some of these leaves would be too waxy to blow into so they would be drawn across each other to create alarm calls, which was apparently quite effective for weka or for scaring off other species. A source that I read also gave an example of some hunters on the Whanganui River who would cut a clump of reeds, hold them in their hand and make bird calls with them, before discarding them. There was also another instrument that was used to catch kiwi specifically. It's called by a few different names depending on what region you are talking about such as kākara by Tūhoe and Te Arawa, tatara in Whanganui, rore by Tainui and pātētē in the South Island. What it was is a kind of rattle made by weaving a flax collar with either hardwood or bone cylinders hanging off, which would obviously make a bit of a noise, particularly when the collar was put on a dog. There isn't really any information on why this worked, that seems to have been lost partially cause there isn't any historical examples, but the thinking goes that perhaps it sounded like worms or

insects moving in the leaf litter which kiwi would want to eat. It would also be helpful for the hunter as kiwi are nocturnal and would be hunted in the dark so it was an easy way for the hunter to keep track of the dog. Unfortunately I was unable to find a clip of the tuarōria but you can see it in action if you watch episode five of *Artefact*, a short series on Māori TV that I would highly recommend.

The last few instruments we have just talked about are what Brian Flintoff calls songs of the birds, presumably as that is the inspiration for those instruments and generally what they are trying to imitate. The next few instruments are what he calls songs of the insects as they likely take their inspiration from and try to imitate the sounds of insects, though they still come under Tāne's domain as insects are found in forests along with these instruments still being used to communicate with birds. The rōria is an interesting little instrument that is kinda similar to the Jew's harp, if you are familiar with that. If not, it is an instrument that sort of looks like a comb but with just one flat tongue sticking out. I'll put a picture up on [historyaotearoa.com](http://historyaotearoa.com) under this episode if you want to have a look. They are often made out of mānuka, supplejack wood or sometimes whalebone. The way it was played was by holding the wider base in one hand and putting the long tongue next to your open mouth in parallel. The tongue would then be struck, flicked or pressed on so that it would wobble and vibrate with the open mouth acting as a resonator. The mouth could then be opened or closed to change voice of the instrument. By this action the player could also speak words or karakia and sing or hum as they played, which was done both for entertainment but also speaking with the spirits. It was also said that playing it could relieve the tension in the fingers after a days weaving. Once Europeans arrived the rōria fell into disuse as the metal Jew's harp was presented to them. Māori seem to have been really keen on the harp more so than any other European instrument, likely because it already resembled something that they were familiar with as opposed to say drums or the violin. In fact, they thought it was so cool that boxes filled with harps were provided as payment for blocks of land, along with the usual items. The tongue of these metal Jew's harps or rōria would sometimes be covered in wax would give the instrument a slightly gentler voice.

Although pretty much all taonga pūoro would be considered wind or percussion instruments in the Western view, there is one, just one, string instrument, te kū. These were essentially small versions of a bow that you would see an archer in other cultures wielding. It makes for an interesting thought as to why Māori found it useful first as a musical instrument and not a weapon of war, in fact never really making that link at all instead perhaps taking this idea and applying it to cutting down trees if you remember back to the carving episodes. We don't know a huge amount about how it was played but we do know that they were played close to the mouth, similar to the rōria, and that the string was struck with a striker or the fingers. Again like the rōria they were often made of supplejack or whale bone, though we don't know what the string itself was made of as no historical examples have survived but if I had to take a stab it possibly could have been harakeke or something similar.

Lets move away now from the realm of Tanēmahuta and his forest and head into the realm of his brother Tangaroa, lord of the ocean. Unlike the instruments that come under Tāne's influence, Tangaroa's weren't used to speak to the fish and dolphins, it was more to do with what they were made of. Namely shells, and in the case of the pūtātara they were large triton shells of the *Triton australis*. The thing about these shells in particular though is that they weren't native to Aotearoa so they were very difficult to come by. Either they had to be brought over when Māori first arrived or they had to be collected when they washed up on the beach, mostly in the North Island. As result a pūtātara was highly prized and often passed down through the generations with some being given names, which wasn't uncommon for instruments that were rare or of great significance. For example the two pūtātara in some versions of the creation story were made after Tāne returned

with the three kete of knowledge and named Puororangi and Te Wharara-o-te-rangi. There is also Te Awa A Te Atua, a pūtātara from Tūwharetoa which was used to announce the birth of a high ranked child. Due to this high importance, they were often targeted as key items for looting for their practical, spiritual and symbolic power. Even as recently as the 1980s pūtātara have been recognised for their symbolic power when a group led by Tame Iti, a well known Tūhoe activist, protested a plan by a timber company to plant trees in an important historical site. During the course of this protest, police confiscated his pūtātara. We will talk a bit more about what these instruments were used for in a bit but you're probably screaming at your phone or computer for me to tell you what the hell they are, so lets go with that next. Pūtātara were sometimes called war trumpets though that really only encompasses part of what they did but essentially they were a form of trumpet, of which Māori had a couple. As we mentioned before they were made from large triton shells although they could be also be made from slightly smaller shells from *Charonia lampas rubicunda* which is a native sea snail so the shells were more readily available. Now, using shells as trumpets isn't a uniquely Māori thing, they are used all over the Pacific and even the world but the thing that makes pūtātara truly unique is that the narrower end of the shell would be cut off or sanded off and a wooden tube that would act as a mouth piece added. These seem to have been added mostly to smaller shells to deepen their voice with the larger shells just having a hole put into the side that would be blown into. These mouth pieces were sometimes extensively carved as well, as we will find with many other taonga puōro as we go forward. Another modification they would sometimes have is a kind of patch of wood over the main hole of the shell which would change the voice of the instrument. This bringing together of wood and shell also has a bit of a symbolic meaning of bringing Tāne and Tangaroa together, argueably the two most important gods in the Māori pantheon. Pīango is sometimes used to tie the various parts of the pūtātara together which symbolises peace, which stems from a story involving the two atua and the personification of sand sedge. Another way that the voice could be altered is that a poi-like object could be put into the opening of the shell which would muffle it a bit more. Again this is a bit of a uniquely Māori thing as in other areas of the Pacific the hand would be used for this purpose. Pinning down what pūtātara sounded like is actually slightly more difficult than you might imagine and is tied a little into what they were used for. I know I said I wasn't going to mention Europeans' opinions again but just quickly, this instrument divided them up a bit. Some said it gave a "rude noise" or a "hideous bellowing" however Abel Tasman himself said of it, "They draw from it five or six sounds similar and as sweet as those of the piccolo. These natives evidently have a taste for music." Are you picking up what their putting down? What these quotes seem to indicate is that the pūtātara has a few different voices, some that are more bold and others that are perhaps more subtle. How this ties into their use is that each one had it's own unique sound, or at least unique enough that it could be distinguished from another. So a party who were announcing their arrival with a pūtātara could be easily identified just by the voice of the instrument, if it was known to tangata whenua. Other uses include announcing a death in the Urewera as well as being played at a tangihanga and the followers of Rua Kēnana, a Māori prophet born in 1869, regulated their day to day activities such as lighting fires, emptying ovens and calling people to dinner. Pūtātara were also used to announce to people foraging on the beaches that there were sharks by giving off a few short blasts. Eventually cow horns were used for similar purposes after the arrival of Europeans. In more modern usage, though still likely able to be traced back to other Pacific cultures, players will sometimes join a waka and play.

There are a few more instruments that we will talk about from the demese of Tangaroa but that is where we will leave it today so we can talk about them properly and don't run out of time. So, next time we will continue our discussions on taonga puōro, Māori musical instruments. Discussing what

they looked like, what they were used for and other interesting quirks we can find! Along with of course giving you a taste of what they sound like.

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can reach me through email at [historyaotearoa@gmail.com](mailto:historyaotearoa@gmail.com) or Twitter at History Aotearoa or Facebook at History Aotearoa New Zealand Podcast. This podcast is a one man band, if you enjoy listening to me talk history, you can support us through Patreon, buy merch from [historyaotearoa.com](http://historyaotearoa.com) or rate us on iTunes or your preferred podcast platform, it means a lot and helps grow, spreading the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tū atu, hoki tū mai. See you next time!