

## Mr. Kiwi (or New Zealand)

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ABSTRACT: In memory of New Zealand's cultural anthropologist, folklorist and musician, Phil Garland.

KEYWORDS: Obituary; Phil Garland

There are no simple words, or teams of words, to fully express or to explain Philip Humphrey Garland's legacy: musical genius. He was a folk, cultural anthropologist who was also a folk musician. The oral historian of New Zealand. Yet straying from such platitudes and stating he was a Great Man helps.<sup>2</sup> Plus looking at his body of work. And juxtaposing him with other greats. All the time, remembering what Garland did was larger than just write down the songs he heard. His analysis and methodology (using transcriptions and informants) forces a rethinking of the legacy of all things folk. The idea(s) of what/who is folk, folklore and folk music must be more inclusive. In addition, purity tests will not help since work created by the folk are examples of 'artistic communication in small groups.'<sup>3</sup> Instead, there needs to be an agreed upon system to chart local variants.

Garland died an icon. Hence it is reasonable to use the words and ideas of another who spent his professional career writing about iconographical/canonical beings. Harold Bloom primarily concerned himself with writing and writers. His rules for canonicity work very well here too, in detailing Garland's extraordinary gifts. One example is being able to free the work from conventional constraints, and 'transcend limits.'<sup>4</sup>

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1 This is an American baseball allusion. Reginald (Reggie) Martinez Jackson had a memorable moment in Game 6 of the 1977 World Series. Reggie hit three home runs on three pitches, earning the nickname 'Mr. October'. This player was already a star before the 1977 World Series, but after that, baseball was forever changed.

2 I used this passage in lamenting the passing of Australia's luminary. Charles Manning Hope Clark. Phil Garland has the same gravitas. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, 'One comfort is, that Great Men, taken up in any way, are profitable company. We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to hear.' Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 3.

3 Moira Smith, 'Introduction: Looking at the Overlooked,' *Journal of Folklore Research*, 44. 2/3 (2007), p. 109. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40206946>

4 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), p. 524.

In *Faces in the Firelight: New Zealand Folk Song & Story*, Garland writes,

My main wish in writing such a book is to stimulate interest in our national folk heritage. I want people to realise that despite its relative youth, New Zealand does have a vibrant and exciting heritage. Few Kiwis ever get to hear them or even know they exist, thanks in part to an ongoing cultural cringe which manifests itself in the broadcasting media's seeming reluctance to play anything that smacks of a unique local identity.<sup>5</sup>

Such a lamentation is one many luminaries of culture—especially those from ‘technologically’ superior, can attest—the idea of folk, the *volk*, or masses having material worth one's time. This is why many in the United States can relate—those who still listen to old-timey or the blues and enjoy the enthusiasm and not the apologies for such music, as when the ‘King of the Blues,’ B.B. King, proclaims: ‘I love to sing my blues.’<sup>6</sup> An early success, this piece announces King's reason for being.

Everybody wants to know,  
Why I sing the blues.  
Yes, I say everybody wanna know,  
Why I sing the blues.  
Well, I've been around a long time  
I really have paid my dues.<sup>7</sup>

Further, into the song, he repeats his passion ‘I just love to sing my blues.’<sup>8</sup>

Phil Garland loved to sing. He loved telling yarns. His stamina and ear for folk music and its place in New Zealand lore has brought not only his fellow New Zealanders closer to their heritage, but those of us who had only heard his name.

Garland sought an authentic, New Zealand musical voice. One recognized from grog shops or halls. Why was the work so hard? He gave institutional and commercial answers. Of establishment wishes, ‘the great Kiwi clobbering Machine.’ A machine that would ‘sanction those who did not fit in, dared to be different.’<sup>9</sup> The second being ‘cultural cringe’.<sup>10</sup> A phenomenon defined as ‘a lack of self-confidence about one's own culture

5 Phil Garland, preface by Phil Garland, *Faces in the Firelight: New Zealand Folksong & Story* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2009), p. 7.

6 B.B. King, ‘Why I Sing the Blues,’ *Live & Well*, MCA, 1969.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 Smith, p. 111.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

in comparison with that of other nations. This cringe is produced by the colonial situation.<sup>11</sup>

Institutions control access. ‘People constantly ask me where can they listen to Kiwi songs and why they are never played on the radio.’<sup>12</sup> Such answers speak of hegemony—no different than those in ‘post’ movements. ‘The answer from the commercial radio stations is often the same: ‘It doesn’t fit our format.’<sup>13</sup> Granted such an honest answer has a certain amount of integrity to it, but also regret, for who counts as being ‘our’?

Garland knew there was a thirst for New Zealand folk music. This belief sustained him. He understood his audiences wanted their stories to be spoken, sang in an unabashed way. Similar to an older type of American rap musicians, who based their ability on giving the people needed respite. ‘I don’t sing, I bring, much delight / Like a star shining bright on the darkest night.’<sup>14</sup> A people who endured calamities like the Hunger Years,<sup>15</sup> is one that has earned such support. Even if those who pilot the radio waves have different agendas.

Yet this is not a rallying cry against corporations. Nor a geopolitical treatise on the universality of all Indigenous and folk movements. No one is perfect. Indeed, there are two worrying aspects in Garland’s seminal work, *Faces in the Firelight*. The Māori are there, but in the background—a problem discussed in the culture and society at large. ‘When people talk about New Zealand folklore, they most often mean Pākehā folklore. Māori lore is somehow considered a separate domain.’<sup>16</sup> Garland does not dismiss them. In explaining New Zealand’s West Coast gold rush he writes, ‘They had come in their thousands, heeding the call—English, Irish, Scots, Americans, French, Swiss, Germans, Australians, Māori, and Chinese—as cosmopolitan a crew as you’d find anywhere.’<sup>17</sup> Hence he acknowledges their worth, but seems to place them in another location. ‘The Māori story is of course a very different one, but I’m dealing here with European music in New Zealand and it doesn’t make good reading, when all said and done.’<sup>18</sup> It is his genius and veracity on these matters that make the dearth of commentary seem odd. Also, a scarcity of females; he includes the infamous such as Minnie Dean. ‘The only woman ever to die on the gallows in New Zealand.’<sup>19</sup> Plus a few more entries (Willow Macky and Dinah Jacobs/Lee), but for an artist with his gifts, the lack is peculiar.

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11 *Ibid*, p. 112.

12 Garland, p. 7.

13 *Ibid*.

14 Run DMC, ‘Raising Hell,’ *Raising Hell*, Profile, 1986.

15 Garland, p. 37.

16 Smith, p. 106.

17 Garland, p. 89.

18 Michael Brown, ‘In Search of Native Song: Traditional Folksong Collecting in New Zealand,’ (2006). Accessed on 25 Nov. 2017. <<http://www.mustard.org.uk>>.

19 Garland, p. 138.

Garland was not indifferent or sexist. And as the late great Epeli Hau'ofa once said, 'Immediately after the passing away of someone we love, we recall and talk only of the good things he or she has done with and for us. The human failings of the loved one are shelved for later occasions.'<sup>20</sup> I am only lamenting what strikes the living about those who have passed—who have spoiled us.

There was a sad realization after John Birks 'Dizzy' Gillespie, the jazz trumpeter, died. Of course, his death was the first shock. The second was the understanding that there would be nothing new from him. Yes, perhaps there would be songs, unearthed scribbled on tablets or somewhere on a memory stick, but any 'newly discovered' material would have a time stamp. Phil Garland's insight and music will always be with us, but we will miss waiting for the next new song—or an old one he retooled for his audiences. In addition to more texts, opening us to new (whilst old) music. Though at least we have the path he took.

Garland spoke of being 'blown away by rock 'n' roll music.'<sup>21</sup> That before he came into his calling, this other music genre, a child of folk music had 'claimed another soul.'<sup>22</sup> Such seductions have been noted, but with Garland, a more profound change came later. He writes that after handling 'a Gibson 12-string guitar'<sup>23</sup> he took 'a liking to the tone and full sound.'<sup>24</sup> Next, realized 'it was used in folk music circles by such luminaries as Pete Seeger, Leadbelly and even the Kingston Trio.'<sup>25</sup> Then insight. 'The more I listened to the music, the more I was captivated, and began my love affair with folk music.'<sup>26</sup> He had come home.

Contemporary genres like rock and roll and pop are newer versions of folk music. Hence we should be able to see those traces if we juxtapose them with what is more commonly known as folk. I will test this idea by looking at four arrangements. Two from Garland, 'The Dying Bushman,' and 'And When They Dance.' The remaining from Billy Joel, 'The Piano Man' and 'Downeaster Alexa.'

We should see commonality. Even back to their European roots, though for many a Kiwi tune, there might have been a stopover in Australia. This is a point Garland grappled with before coming to his conclusion. He recognized though few could be proven beyond a reasonable doubt created in New Zealand, what was song had legitimacy.

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20 Epeli Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), p. 172.

21 Garland, p. 15.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

‘The Piano Man,’ ‘And When They Dance,’ ‘Downeaster Alexa,’ and ‘The Dying Bushman,’ have a 19th-century English hymnal flavor.<sup>27</sup> This might rankle some, and that point has been made—even when dealing with those attempting to create a wholly (and holy) homogenous legacy of British folk music.

The comparative work of folklore shows that all folklore is from somewhere else, an inconvenient fact that renders fruitless any search for a truly national folklore, that is, folklore that is indigenous, distinctive, and useful in forming national identity. It is more profitable to focus on folklore in New Zealand—wherever it comes from and however it compares to traditions in other parts of the world. Freed from the search for national folklore, we can appreciate the appeal of the various folklores that are present in the nation.<sup>28</sup>

Folk music is universal—heard in even far-flung pop oases like New York City and Los Angeles. Indeed ‘The Piano Man,’ prompted Billy Joel, one of the United States’ elder rock/pop musicians, to stardom. This was one of his ‘break out’ songs. Yet the loneliness seen in the narrator’s life mirrors that in ‘And When They Dance.’

‘Piano Man’ begins with a piano riff that travels into a harmonica playing the chorus melody before the voice enters with the first verse and first stanza.

It's nine o'clock on a Saturday,  
The regular crowd shuffles in,  
There's an old man sitting next to me  
Makin' love to his tonic and gin.<sup>29</sup>

The patrons are battlers, but worn. Their nobility comes in their Everyman stances, though there is no escape for any of them, as seen clearly in one particular individual.

Now John at the bar is a friend of mine,  
He gets me my drinks for free.  
And he's quick with a joke or to light up your smoke,  
But there's someplace that he'd rather be,  
He says, ‘Bill, I believe this is killing me.’  
As the smile ran away from his face.<sup>30</sup>

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27 Interview with Amy Gillick, professor and musician in the Gateway Chamber Orchestra.

28 Garland, p. 116.

29 Billy Joel, ‘Piano Man,’ *Piano Man*, Columbia, 1973.

30 *Ibid.*

This bar piano player knows his audience. ‘It’s me they’ve been comin’ to see/ To forget about life for a while’.<sup>31</sup> Yet what the listener and piano player know, unlike the crowd, is this is the only place for him. He will not rise any higher, though the patrons think differently. ‘Man, what are you doin’ here?’<sup>32</sup> This lament of things and times past are present in ‘The Dying Bushman.’ Plus the loss of one’s lively hood. The isolation afforded a musician is also featured in ‘And When They Dance.’<sup>33</sup>

Garland explains ‘And When They Dance’ was a bush band song, inspired by Roy Abbott<sup>34</sup> whilst working in Australia. Garland, is a master craftsman, creating his own version ‘they ne’er touch the ground,’<sup>35</sup> instead of ‘they scarce touch the ground’ from the Abbott version. As with ‘Piano Man’ there is an omniscient narrator. He is central yet aloof. His ability to be heard and not seen works for his profession; as the next stanza tells, class divisions have not hampered him. Nor the lasses who dance. They are as detached (from the on-lookers, perhaps) as he is. In that, these two groups need each other but not of each other.

I’ve played for the gentry, I’ve played for them all,  
From a small country gig to a debutantes ball.  
If there’s one thing that joins them the big and the small,  
It’s the lasses who dance till the morning.<sup>36</sup>

The works are foreclosed. We are never allowed into their lives or if they harbour other plans for their lives.

So long may I travel and far may I roam,  
From Auckland to Christchurch, a long way from home,  
And I’ll stare at the people who I’ve never know,  
Those lasses who dance till the morning.<sup>37</sup>

‘And When They Dance’ is in duple meter.<sup>38</sup> Like ‘Piano Man,’ the main beat creates a waltz-like effect, supporting the lyrics which are about the places the musician has worked and the dancers.<sup>39</sup> Also like ‘Piano

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31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*

33 The weight and tone also reminds me of Johnny Cash’s cover of the ‘Streets of Laredo,’ also known as the ‘Cowboy’s Lament.’ *American IV: The Man Comes Around*, American Recordings, 2002.

34 In *Faces in the Firelight*, Garland says he had ‘taken the liberty of changing his Australian place names to fit the Kiwi situation.

35 Garland, p. 158.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

38 Gillick interview.

39 *Ibid.*

Man', we see halls filled with wayward souls, a sort of urban isolation and anonymity—loneliness in a crowd. The lyrics are nostalgic.

The melodies and choruses are characteristic of many European ballads. Though slightly sad and romantic, the lyrics depicting the unremarkable and unheroic characters in the bar, make the song a realistic depiction of everyday people ambling through life. Indeed, the piano player is like a Pied Piper, leading them away (albeit) temporarily from the realities of their lives. Such class and musical arrangements are tied to those in the United Kingdom.

The works are reminiscent of early Scottish folk songs (a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eight note), referred to as a 'Scotch Snap.'<sup>40</sup> This subconsciously causes a listener to think of English or Scottish folksongs, the fountain that flowed into New Zealand.

Garland was always conscience of England, of course. Nonetheless, what he did was insightful. Though the works had British and/or/then Australian fingerprints, he knew the linking themes applied to New Zealand. Hence his versions added Kiwi landmarks and phrases. He transformed (and elaborated) on what was already there. 'Folklore takes on local colouration in response to the local environment—a process known as oikotypification.'<sup>41</sup>

Songs about whaling, fishing off a coast or deep ocean have the same connections. The locations are important—but not more than the themes of respect via hard work. But also the desperation seen when what was 'easy' (nostalgically, if nothing else) for generations, or grandfathers then fathers (I was a bay man like my father was before<sup>42</sup>), has become more difficult for present generations. We see this in 'The Dying Bushman'<sup>43</sup> and then later in Joel's 'Downeaster Alexa'.

I've knocked around the logging camps, since early boyhood days,  
I've seen the famous axemen come and go.  
Now me chopping days are over, I shall swing that axe no more,  
On the hillside where the native timbers grow.<sup>44</sup>

The first stanza begins with a yesteryear backdrop. This is a song about loss. The second stanza talks about the tools this older worker has. Not only has he worn down, the equipment is beyond repair.

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40 *Ibid.*

41 Garland, p. 113.

42 Billy Joel, 'Downeaster Alexa,' *Storm Front*, Columbia, 1989.

43 Garland, p. 30.

44 *Ibid.*

For me slasher is all rusty, and my axe handle's broke,  
 I've laid them both behind the whare door.  
 For the rata and the rimu have got so goddamn tough,  
 That I really cannot cut them any more.<sup>45</sup>

The next stanza also tells of someone who does not feel welcome. Time has passed him. The loss goes beyond not having employment. The narrator has also left those places known via the work.

I'll no longer tread the tramway in the valley far below,  
 No more I'll hear the hauler's whistle blow  
 As I wander down the track I shall keep on looking back,  
 Please don't take me from the only home I know.<sup>46</sup>

After the plaintive yearning, 'Down the valley of the shadow, / I'll soon be on the track, Where I've often seen old bushmen go before.'<sup>47</sup> There is resignation, being at the mercy of time and economic forces. These antagonists are also what drives the narrator (and story) in Joel's 'Downeaster Alexa.'

Well I'm on the Downeaster Alexa,  
 And I'm cruising through Block Island Sound.  
 I have charted a course to the vineyard,  
 But tonight I am Nantucket bound.<sup>48</sup>

The piece begins well enough, a man going to work. However, by the second stanza the listener realizes the times have changed—financially.

We took on diesel back in Montauk yesterday,  
 Left this morning from the bell in Gardiner's Bay,  
 Like all the locals here I've had to sell my home.  
 Too proud to leave, I worked my fingers to the bone.<sup>49</sup>

This is the position seen in 'Piano Man,' and 'The Dying Bushman;' economic displacement coming. The only (seeming) cure is to run. For this ship's captain, he is running after his quarry whilst seeking a respite from his troubles.

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45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

48 Joel, 'Downeaster Alexa.'

49 *Ibid.*



I got bills to pay and children who need clothes.  
 I know, there's fish out there but where God only knows.  
 They say these waters aren't what they used to be,  
 But I got people back on land who count on me.<sup>50</sup>

The captain works hard and the same for his crew, but at the end of his run, and the song, he seems to only have his ship. Empty. As the song closes with these lines: 'Can't make a living as a bay man anymore / There ain't much future for a man who works the sea / But there ain't no island left for islanders like me.'<sup>51</sup>

The central character is the common man. The subject matter of the lyrics and the descending nature is sung gives a sense of falling or a slightly depressive effect. However, the music is somewhat defiant and determined, even heroic. The violin solo is reminiscent of 'fiddling'.

The battler's ethos is another component of these works. A depiction of the struggles of the common man or woman; loneliness, facing inevitable outcomes, which affect the listener. They ennoble the human spirit against struggle and the inevitabilities of ageing. All have ties to English/Scottish/Irish traditions (fiddles, rhythmic figures, the tradition of telling a person's story through ballads, choral/gospel music).

Phil Garland conjured while he taught. No different than what has been said about other greats—to their culture and/or nation. 'Shakespeare, as we like to forget, largely invented us; if you add the rest of the Canon, then Shakespeare and the Canon wholly invented us.'<sup>52</sup> Icons are confident enough to know what is there then enhance our material to show us what we have overlooked. 'The inventor knows *how* to borrow.'<sup>53</sup> This by doing. 'I mean I was only a young fellow in my mid-20s with no previous experience in field collecting. I've now got a much better idea of it all; of fitting folk music in its social context.'<sup>54</sup> But that does not mean Garland had a myopic agenda. Instead, selective. 'Of course most of my work has been done in the countryside, outside the cities. I'm not very urban at all. But today we live in an age when there must be songs of unemployment, and the economic and social things that hit the cities, but I haven't heard a great deal of that.'<sup>55</sup>

The larger task of ensuring New Zealand folk music obtain the same level as Australian, or British, is not complete. Luckily there is a guidebook. Granted, the path has its controversies and pitfalls. Questions

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50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 Bloom, p. 40.

53 Bloom, preface, p. 11.

54 Alwyn Owen, 'Phil Garland: In Search of the Elusive Kiwi Folk Song.' *Music in New Zealand* 27 (1994), p. 42.

55 *Ibid.*

over who gains a place is very important. Here I refer to Indigenous peoples, still leery since first contact.

New Zealand has been better at understanding their power, but colonialism's shadow is a difficult phantom to evict. 'It is fair to say that until fairly recently the New Zealand Pākehā self-image has been one of homogeneity rather than diversity.'<sup>56</sup> Garland has shown any and all how and why material should be shared. Such actions might alleviate tribal squabbles and point to a more profound idea. Work is not diminished by this process. Hence it can be kept canonical whilst supporting local flavours. Garland does as much when he says of a toast.<sup>57</sup>

With a little bit of sugar and a little bit of tea,  
A little bit of flour you can hardly see.  
With hardly any meat between you and me,  
It's a bugger of a life, by Jesus.<sup>58</sup>

Although this is probably Australian, origin-wise, he gives it a New Zealand spin:

Where the keas call and the trees grow tall  
And there's very little to please us.  
It's here I've to stay till the end of May  
What a hell of a place, by Jesus.<sup>59</sup>

All things folk are foundational of any, if not all cultures. Even in China folk singing is deeply historical and societal. It has its own 'Dao.' *Bo Cai Zhong Jia Zhi Chang* means learn widely from others' strong points to make your own stronger suits. If we who are left behind, follow in this Great Man's wake, the world and its music would be a better, richer place.

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56 Smith, p. 110.  
57 Garland, p. 272. A four-line verse that may be used as a quip or sarcastic retort.  
58 *Ibid.*  
59 *Ibid.*

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