

2021

Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards
Kaupapa Māori Category

Nomination for Dr Te Oti Rakena

School of Music

Waipapa Taumata Rau | The University of Auckland



Te Whare o ngā Pūkōrero Pūoro

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*Ka hahana te rongō i ahau, i ahau e tū nei e
He rongō nōhea e mārama
He kura huna
E haku i te tangi o whatumanawa kia rongohia e whatumanawa
He pūmanawa nōnanahi
He mana atu*

(Āio, Tuirina Wehi, 2008)



Ko Tamatea rātou ko Maungataniwha, ko Taranaki nga maunga
Ko Whakaraupō rātou ko Hokianga, ko Tanga'oe oku moana me awa
Ko Takitimu rātou ko Ngātokimatawhaorua, ko Aotea oku waka
Ko Te Wheke rātou ko Ngāpuhi, ko Taiporo'enui oku marae

1. Pūrākau tuatahi: Ko wai ahau?

My mum grew up on her tūrangawaewae in South Taranaki. She became a teacher, brought up four children and supported my father's ministry. My dad was descended from a family of Māori ministers baptized in Te Tai Tokerau. Born in Rāpaki, the kāinga of my Kāi Tahu grandmother, raised in Taranaki and the Hokianga, he became the first Māori President of the Methodist Church and the first Tumuaki of Te Taha Māori o Te Hāhi Weteriana. He guided the decolonising of the modern church, articulating an indigenous understanding of the gospel in his book the *Māori response to the Gospel*, drawing on liberation theology and heavily influenced by critical pedagogy.

Jane Kelsey (2019) and political commentator Moana Maniapoto (2016) claim my parents impacted the thoughts and political activities that shaped the radicalisation of many young

activists in the Maori sovereignty and social justice movements from the 1970s to the 1990s, and beyond. My parents' models of pastoral care, indigenous activism and commitment to education have shaped my narrative as a creative artist and pedagogue.

Ko Te Oti Rakena ahau, te pōtiki o Rua Rakena raua kō Joy Rangiwahia.

2. Pūrākau Tuarua: cultural archives

A performance artist presents a work in an art gallery at an international symposium. He invites indigenous participants to contribute. We enter the gallery, walking down a red carpet, and react to the paintings on the wall. Unlike dignitaries sipping champagne and admiring the art objects, we cry, we grieve, we scream, we look with horror at the public representations of colonial history. We fill the space with a soundscape rarely heard in a temple of western art. We create a different type of community music. (Rakena, 2019)



Sistema Aotearoa, Hui Taurima Manukau, 2021

This narrative illustrates a powerful message. In some contexts, objects from the Western cultural archive can act as public reminders of historical trauma. This is one of many moments when I've been reminded that I'm part of a collective that continues to experience the impact of colonisation and its associated trauma. This has motivated me to decolonise the spaces in which I teach.

This document focuses on the teaching innovations I have implemented in my time as a teacher on the voice programme at the University of Auckland. It highlights positive outcomes for all students and particularly for Māori and Pacific students, their families and communities.

The portfolio is supplemented by audio and video extracts that bring to life my students and my teaching contexts.

<https://youtu.be/ggO5wSmDqh4>

Waiata is important. Tuirina Wehi gifted the School of Music choirs her waiata Āio, and I sing a mōteatea. These strands of *matauranga Māori hou* entwine with the images, the students' voices and this text.

3. A Kaupapa Māori Studio: the importance of place

Both colonisation and globalisation were born out of the antithesis to the idea of groundedness to a place. (Smith, 2007, p. 69)

In order to understand what constitutes excellence in Kaupapa Māori teaching-learning in my context, it is important to understand its problematic whakapapa. Classical performance entered our consciousness through colonisation and continues to contribute to the perceived superiority of Western knowledge and cultural archives (Smith, 1999). Ethnomusicologist McKinley states it is important to critically write and research back against conventions that sustain and benefit cultures of power and privilege (2015).

This portfolio demonstrates how I teach back, allowing Māori knowledge, culture and experience to 'find voice' in the academy and validate its use in higher learning institutions (Royal, 2012).

Kaupapa Māori has contained many meanings and, like any term, people attach their own interpretation to it. (Durie, 2017, p.15).

My discipline uses place-based pedagogies that originate in Europe. These models become 'displaced' when transported to other locations and are flawed unless educators integrate local community values. A Kaupapa Māori framework allows me to include practices drawn from Māori epistemologies into the studio. I achieve this by considering the scholarship from Māori academics and education strategies developed for Māori by Māori. This ontological shift grounds the displaced pedagogical models specifically in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Socio-political changes over the past 50 years have created artistic spaces where all voices can contribute to nation building and all New Zealanders can explore Te Ao Māori. I design culturally safe learning contexts that allow non-Māori to engage with Māori worldviews and te reo Māori. This offers students different ways of thinking about music and conceptualising singing.

Excellence in teaching singing transcends the daily tasks of studio delivery. I nurture artistry, explore a singer's musical identity, discover their unique voice and integrate all aspects of their learning culture into a personalised studio experience. I nurture singing storytellers.

I went to the University of Auckland to study voice with Te Oti, I wanted to learn how to be an opera singer and he helped me find my voice in other ways... He taught me a confidence and a way of relating to people and the world that is so often lacking in university teaching.
(Graduate student, 2016)

The following sections of my portfolio describe how this process, something I call studio-ing, developed as a concept and underpins my teaching innovations.



Senior voice studio students, 2019

4. Māuitanga

4.1. Studio: A “secret garden” (Hyry-Beihammer, 2011)

Studio learning in the university context is unusual. Students study with the same performance teacher for the entire length of their degree. The closest mode, when you consider duration, is PhD supervision. There are, however, significant differences.

Students enter from high school. They acquire autonomous learning skills while exploring the freedom of university life. Their adolescent brains are still developing and reorganising to

accommodate this autonomy. They are also learning to cope with the core studio practice of critique.

The context is highly individualistic and focuses on training technical skills in three modes: studio, ensemble, and lecture. I teach across all three modes, and over the years I have innovated these models with strategies derived from a research project, *Success for All* (2007). Funded by the Teaching Learning Research Initiative, the study reported Māori and Pacific Island student experiences in studio. Students incentivised and enhanced their learning, overcame cultural barriers and improved outcomes by mobilising a community of learners beyond the studio (Rakena et al., 2016).

This study has informed the development of my studio praxis for over 10 years. I consciously create a community of learners; students who socialise, sing and study together. I am part of this community and witness their stories in studio, at dinner, over coffee, in rehearsal, on social media and in performance. In turn they witness mine. My students prosper because they feel supported and their families' interests and communities' values are respected. I ensure that *whakapapa*, *manaakitanga* and *whanaungatanga* operate throughout the student's learning experience.

Dr Rakena has successfully lived out the concept of whanaungatanga and created an inclusive community where we as parents and he, as a professional, can join hands together for the success of our children.

This approach challenges hierarchies that can occur in a critique learning environment. It builds trust which is vital for a teaching-learning relationship that is longitudinal and diminishes the isolation some university students feel in studio learning environments.



Voice Department 'Meet the first years' function, 2018

4.2. 'Studio-ing': creating a learning community

My studio exists beyond a specific physical space. It operates in a conceptual space. Inspired by Christopher Small's (1998) relational concept 'musicking', I turn the studio, an object, into a verb. Studio-ing is to actively take part in any capacity of the teaching-learning moment across all domains and in any setting.

At its core the concept of studio-ing describes a space where learning goes beyond content and skills. It is a social space with the potential to empower learners, develop relationships, heal trauma and build resilience. Studio-ing moves the emphasis from the crafting of the art object, the conventional objective of the classical studio, to the wellbeing of the student musicking.

The concept is heavily impacted by the diversity of my students. My students are from different cultures, some are living with mental health issues, some are realising their sexual orientation and gender identity. Studio-ing activates a sense of connection and reimagines the studio as a therapeutic space.

I came into the programme as a slightly shy gay man and to have this teacher who was such a powerful gay role model, someone who was so open about his identity, so committed to using his identity to help others, was utterly life changing. You cannot put a price on that kind of experience. (Voice student, 2016)



This model has enhanced all my students' educational experiences, but particularly Māori and Pacific Island students who have expressed concerns about the cultural unresponsiveness they encounter in other learning cultures.

4.3. Pūrākau Tuatoru: Historical trauma-informed pedagogy

I have a student cohort of Māori singers who converted the School of Music acronym ‘SOM’ to Shades of Māori, naming themselves the 50 Shades of Māori gang. The name references the well-known novel, but also alludes to our variation in skin shade, the urban slang to ‘throw shade,’ and acknowledges there is no universal rendering of Māori.

Within this ‘gang’ we have fluent Māori speakers and students who have never visited their marae. Whatever their experience, they self-identify as Māori, and value their connection to this community of learners.

I receive a text from a student. He is scheduled for a lesson but has had a family death. It is his uncle. The death is reported in the news; it involves a violent domestic dispute, drug related. The police believe the wife, or her family is responsible. They have a young child. My student, holder of cultural knowledge and fluent in te reo, is responsible for taking te tūpāpaku home. The 50 SOM gather around, give koha to the whānau and provide support to the student. A few hours later he calls again. His great-aunt has suddenly died and now he is leading the whānau through two tangi at different marae. He sounds overwhelmed and tired but wants to meet. He knows I understand the demands of tangihanga. He asks if he can come to his lesson just to sit in the space and breathe. He comes; he is there for several hours, and he talks it out. One by one the gang come by to see him, sit with him, to listen, to sing. Not just Māori students, all the voice students gradually stop by. One of our collective hurts and we are there to tautoko. (Rakena, in press)

This pūrākau supports historical trauma literature linking population health disparities to the socio-economic realities of Indigenous communities (Pihama et al., 2014). It highlights the burden of colonisation carried by Māori students like mine and shows how learning processes can be disrupted. It also demonstrates the role of manaakitanga as the tutor prioritises the health and wellbeing of the student. In applying the concept of *Tapa Whare Whā*¹ to studio-ing, I assess which *taha* needs strengthening to maintain balance in the student’s life.

This pūrākau appears in a Routledge publication entitled *Trauma and Resilience in Music Education*. It describes “studio-ing” through a series of experiences related by my Māori students.

¹ This refers to Mason Durie’s holistic Māori health model.

This is such a powerful and profound chapter ...this really is a model for studio teaching. You weave theory through so powerfully throughout and I appreciate the way that you privilege Indigenous voices in your work. The windows into your studio that you offer here really speak to what is possible in the one-to-one teaching space. I don't think that we consider deeply enough the idea of human flourishing and what that might mean for our pedagogy. I also really appreciate your "studio-ing" riff on Christopher Small. That's such a beautiful way to describe it...you have made a strong case for what music teaching (in the studio or elsewhere) could and probably ought to be. (Editors, Routledge, 2021)

5. Pūkengatanga

I have chosen to highlight three other teaching initiatives that have been recognised with awards and in music education publications. They demonstrate how I 'place' kaupapa Māori frameworks onto other signature music pedagogies and disseminate specialised vocal knowledge from the studio to the community in order to lift up our traditions.

5.1. Cross-disciplinary: Tuia, tui, tuia (MUS 758/DAN 302)



This project explored alternative methods of teaching collaborative skills to voice and dance students. Normally this training occurs within discipline-specific ensembles like choir or chamber music. Here, students shared cross-discipline information on technique and creative processes through a series of interactive tasks.

We also made space for mihitanga, rare in the western education model, but for Māori, an essential way of knowing and as a teacher helpful in understanding the student's pedagogical needs. This activity encouraged students to reflect on and share the influences that shaped their artistic choices and career pathways.

You can probably tell by the way I walk I like hip hop... I was brought up with Latin Music, dad's a congo player, mum's a salsa dancer. I'm Latin by descent. I was bought up on Dad's foot when he was playing the congos... so I love singing but I'm more music driven, like the instruments and the beats and stuff cause I'm a dancer. (DAN 302, 2008, dance participant)

This innovative course breached the traditional contexts of classical vocal training. Underpinned by Māori concepts, the course positioned the Māori worldview as normative and through mindful and culturally responsive planning allowed students to gain deep structural knowledge of another performance discipline and obtain important skills for working in collaborative environments.

The theoretical base of the project worked from a Kaupapa Maori perspective allowing participants to engage with their artistic whakapapa, tīkanga Māori, and te reo Māori. It was successful because of its reciprocal nature; as students fostered each other in discovering, developing and interpreting their artistic whakapapa. (MUS 758, 2008, voice participant)

I was awarded a University of Auckland Teaching Excellence Award in Innovation (2010) for this course. This has inspired a less siloed and monocultural approach to skills development in the School of Music and led the way for more cross-faculty collaborations.

5.2. Enabling Future Teachers: Culture Matters (MUS 761)



In 2012, the School of Music restructured its degree programme. For the first time in our history we actively prepared students to teach music in the community by adding a pedagogy specialisation. I developed one of the modules, Culture Matters, which enhanced students' practical training with research relevant to our context.

The module aimed to produce future teachers who think as music instructors and as critical-cultural workers. It highlighted local research projects, like Success for All (Rakena, 2007) and Nga Hua a Tane Rore: the benefits of Kapa Haka (Pihama et al. 2014), that utilised Kaupapa Māori and Pacific methodologies to report Māori and Pacific Island music learning experiences.

This module gave students the following opportunities:

1. to observe non-western research methodological processes in action
2. to experience the impact a collision of cultures has on student learning
3. to witness the teacher's struggle to connect with students because they were unaware of differences in epistemologies. (See Rakena, 2016)

Dr Rakena ...developed a unit on cultural understanding that has been outstanding and valued by all students. In particular, I have noticed with considerable interest, how Asian students (who are well represented in music) have been able to adapt Dr Rakena's tools of cultural thinking to redress their own musical and genealogical heritages within a postcolonial context informed by the Treaty of Waitangi and indigenous knowledge and ways of being. ...Māori and Pacific students in the class have responded positively to the pedagogical approach presented, which has further enabled and encouraged their own development. This kind of teaching has been of outstanding value to the students as a whole, as they continue to find their way in the community as professional musicians and teachers. (David Lines, Associate Dean (Academic), School of Music)

"Culture Matters" had a profound effect on my own teaching. While imparting the value of culturally sensitive teaching practices, I was aided to identify some of the unique learning needs of my particular student cohort (braille music) as being not dissimilar to those of other minority groups. (MUS 761, 2014)

5.3. Kapa Haka: Sustaining musical ecologies

I developed workshops that re-contextualized vocal health practices for trainers working in kapa haka, a genre that moves between traditional Māori and Western singing styles. The performers dig deep for emotional connection to the text and allow it to come out vocally unfiltered. This can put the vocal instrument at risk. This partnership addressed vocal

challenges and explored ways to maximize rehearsal process and optimise singing experiences (See Rakena, 2015).

If you didn't hear we came a close second to Te Waka Huia, only behind them by one point!!!! ...Heaps of great feedback ... the main thing they keep bringing up is our amazing singing. Definitely a great start for Ngā Tūmanako. (Nga Tūmanako, 2012)

Nga Tūmanako won Te Matatini in 2019.



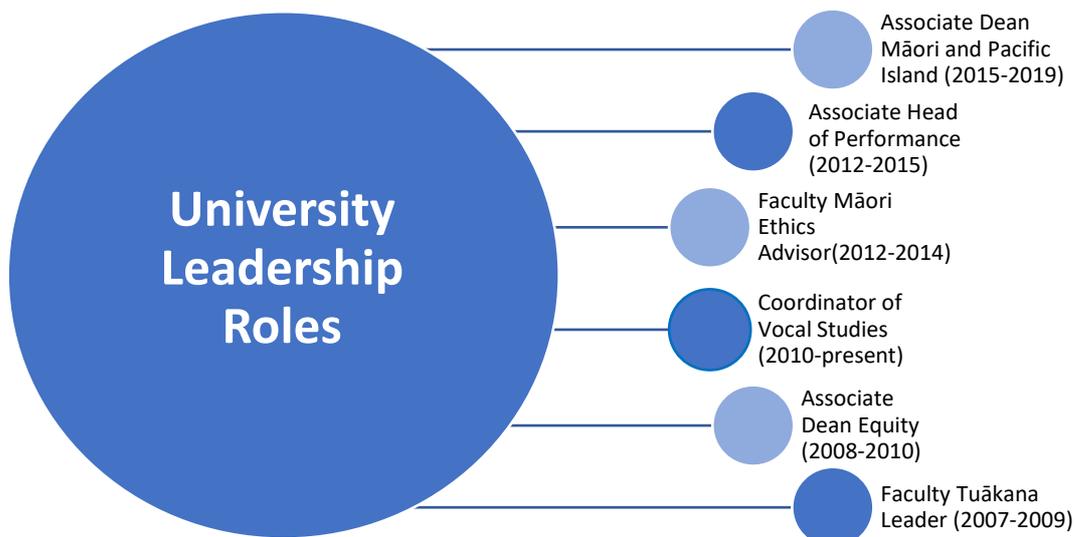
Ngā Tūmanako leaders with winning taonga at Te Matatini, 2019

6. Whakamana

I am described by colleagues as innovative and transformational and acknowledged in my field as a creative thinker, someone who generates ideas outside of the box. For this reason, I am often invited to contribute knowledge through performance, publishing and research across multiple domains in my field and invited to take leadership roles within my institution and increasingly internationally.

6.1. Sustained Excellence in Leadership

My service roles have scaffolded me through a range of activities associated with achieving my University's equity objectives. These include implementing academic support strategies, teaching and curriculum reviews, creating cross-faculty foundation pathways and advising University level audit committees.



Te Oti is the School's first Manutaki Tuitui Rāwaho – a name that reflects the layers and significance of his role within and beyond the School. He is a natural leader, and someone who consults and considers on so many levels before taking action. As Head of School, I rely on his qualities of te pono, te atawhai, te maarama me te mohio which underpin his ārahitanga. Te Oti is not only valued in our School, he is treasured.
 (Dr David Chisholm, Head of the School of Music)

In these roles, Te Oti has consistently drawn upon Mātauranga Māori. He has also contributed, at Faculty executive level, to strategic enhancements on behalf of Māori and Pacific students. In his dual roles as singer and educator, I see Te Oti as an embodiment of the Māori and Pacific Voice, in both senses of the word: speaking and singing the living culture; and speaking and teaching from out of that culture on behalf of its people.
 (Associate Professor Nuala Gregory, Deputy Dean of Creative Arts and Industries)

6.2. Contributing to the International Indigenous Arena

I have strong networks with music educators from the field of Community Music (CMA) a research commission subsidiary of the International Society for Music Education (ISME). In 2016, I became the first New Zealander and Indigenous commissioner to CMA. In 2018 I became the chair of that Commission.

My co-editor and I have closely read your work and we love it! It's going to make a great contribution to the book, but also the field. We're actually looking forward to citing it in our own work, as it covers new ground in terms of Indigenous perspectives on service learning.
 (Editor, Springer, 2015)

In 2019 ISME created a Special Interest Group, Decolonising and Indigenising Music Education (DIME). I am the first Indigenous committee member and responsible for creating an Indigenous Steering Group (ISG) to work in partnership with the committee.

These international organisations allow me to participate in the global decolonising music education project. I have significant publications, keynote presentations and leadership roles in this field. I have also had the opportunity to promote Māori and Pacific community music educationalists in our publications.

This network has facilitated publication opportunities and conference participation for my PhD students. They are able to access online forums which provide community music research, professional practice and pedagogy resources. I am often invited to participate in online symposia and contribute to the online resources.

Te Oti, your collaborative work over the past years in the service of the Community Music Activities commission (ISME) and your perspectives on decolonizing the music curriculum, research, and practices have served to guide much of our work at the LCMC.

(Invitation to become a research fellow from Laurier University, 2021)

6.3. I am a Performer



Historical Trauma Performance with voice students

Performing is an important component of my teaching and leadership profile. As my students began to participate in high-profile competitions, I realised my praxis had become too theoretically focused and removed from the realities of performance. I returned to the stage to enhance my studio teaching, to remind myself what singers, foreground in the performance moment. Modelling professional level skills has increased the credibility of information delivered in studio. I believe these are contributing factors to my students' ongoing success nationally and internationally.

His singing was a joy to hear, and as the co-ordinator of vocal studies at Auckland University he gave a pure demonstration of the art of singing.

(SMCO Reviews, 27/11 2017)

From its opening scene, dominated by the imposing presence and performance of Te Oti Rakena's Ferryman, The Bone Feeder offers an extraordinary operatic experience.

(NZ Herald review, 24/3 2017)

6.4. Summary of Research Grants and Awards Relating to Teaching and Learning

RESEARCH GRANTS		
2007	Tuia, tui, tuia: A performance exercise in hybridity in Aotearoa/New Zealand	Nga Pae o te Māramatanga
2007	Success for All: Improving Māori and Pasifika Student Success in Degree-level Studies	Teaching and Learning Research Initiative
AWARDS		
2021	Research Fellow, The Laurier Centre for Music in the Community (LCMC), Ontario, Canada.	
2017	Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award.	
2012	New Zealand Association of Research Educators Group Award (NZARE): Success for All Team	
2010	University of Auckland Excellence in Teaching Award (Innovation)	
2010	University of Auckland Excellence in Equity Award, Success for All Research Project	

7. Mātaki

7.1. Student Evaluation of Performance Teaching

Capturing meaningful data from evaluations conducted in the one-to-one teaching context is difficult. However, if students are not happy, they seek other teachers. In the early years of my university career some students left my studio, which provoked self-reflection, a shift to prioritise positive student experiences and actively support students as they move into the community as professionals. Rather than content, I reexamined my learning culture. Over the last 10 years my studio has flourished and as evidenced in my supplementary video, students are positively impacted by their studio experience long after they leave university.

In this portfolio, I introduce an evaluation innovation suggested by students, the Alumni Performance Impact Model (APIM). Under COVID-19 restrictions we trialled the *Mentimeter* interactive online presentation software in our performance class. Students enter feedback by accessing the software with a unique code on their digital devices. Their comments are displayed anonymously on-screen in real time. APIM builds on this approach with graduates who provide videos that respond to questions about their experiences with my teaching. This had great uptake by alumni who found the process both informative and performative.

My postgraduate students edited the videos, interspersing student feedback with the voices and faces of my students in various teaching and performance contexts, singing and studio-ing.

8. Pūrākau Mutunga

I end my portfolio with the poetic *pepeha* from a Māori-Samoan student. He ‘placed’ his final recital assessment by including *tīkanga*, *te reo Māori*, and *mātauranga Māori*. His recital is an example of how kaupapa Māori can be entwined with the rigor of a conservatory assessment.



He tūrama Ngaro (Lost light)

Ko te Aroha te māunga
Ko ngā Roimata te awa
Ko te Matenui te waka
Ko te whānau mārama tōku iwi
Ko ngā whētū tōku hapu
Ko te manawa tōku marae
Nō hinengaro ahau
Ko Kaimomotu tōku ingoa

(Takerei Komene, 2020)

Haumi e, Hui e, Taiki e.



Voice class opera scenes rehearsal

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A Pacific Pūrākau



Samson Setu performing at the Proms, Auckland Town Hall

Pacific peoples and their stories play a special role in Aotearoa New Zealand. As tangata whenua, I position my teaching initiatives, research and service roles within our shared history and culture, a place noted by Teaiwa and Mallon (2005) as ‘an anchoring point’ and for me, a point of departure for the collective advancement of Māori and Pasifika student success.

The Prior Learning Project: Enabling Pacific students

Many students enter the School of Music with strong performance skills but variable degrees of musical literacy. Musicians need to audiate, a process that makes sense of the information received by listening to or reading music. Training that results in strong audiation skills has historically been reserved for families accessing private music studios and high decile schools. This has created an equity issue for the School of Music as increasing numbers of highly skilled Pacific singers struggle to complete core musicianship courses.

The Prior Learning Project explored Pacific student experiences with course content. The initiative gathered narratives from Pacific students using Talanoa. We asked what skills would have better prepared them for success in our courses. All indicated a higher degree of musical literacy.

This led to workshops funded by the University's Centre of Learning and Research in Higher Education. The project confirmed the notion that when developing strategies for improving the achievement of Pacific students, the students are the experts in the room.



Prior Learning Project-Solfege class

We adapted culturally-based strategies students were familiar with, adding hand signals to the Tongan solfege system, creating analysis tasks using Pacific hymnals rather than Bach chorales and offering individual keyboard lessons (the most requested skill), accessing music literacy through kinaesthetic training.

The project has been described as ‘a proactive and innovative solution’ to issues arising from inequitable access to adequate prior music learning opportunities. Students completing this initiative had a 100% pass rate for stage two and three theory papers. Many of the students completing this project have moved into postgraduate programmes and some are studying internationally. This project has contributed to the music content in our Tertiary Foundation Certificate Music pathway and the support mechanisms offered by our Tuākana academic network.

Impact

I would like to highlight three Pacific Island students that have benefitted from the ‘studio-ing’ learning culture and the Prior Learning Project.



Benson Wilson, winning the Bel Canto competition.

Benson Wilson (New Zealander born Samoan, Apia and Saoluafata) was a typical first-in-family student attending university. He stumbled and got up, watched and learned, and sought guidance from individuals he trusted. Without these steps, he could not have fully participated in the university experience. He has gone on to international opera programmes and the international concert platform.

Benson Wilson often uses words like “fortunate”. He acknowledges he’s been lucky with his New Zealand support team, which he refers to as “his village”. It includes his “very supportive” family and a “committee” of trusted teachers and tutors who provided lessons and advice. (2018 interview with festival.nz)

- Winner 2016 Lexus Song Quest (NZ)
- Winner 2018 Bel Canto Competition (Australia)
- Winner of the 64th Kathleen Ferrier Award (UK)
- 2019 National Opera Studio Young Artist (UK)
- 2020/21 English National Opera Harewood Artist

Manase Latu (Leimatu'a, Taunga in Vava'u) has studied with me since he was 16 years old. He went on to win several important national awards, including the New Zealand Aria Competition and the most prestigious singing competition in Australasia, IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition.

Samson Setu (Salelologa, Fogapoa, Fasito'o-uta and Vaimoso) is a product of Dilworth college in Auckland, introduced to singing through their choir programme. Samson has been a New Zealand Opera Emerging Artist and part of the Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation training programme.



2019 IFAC HANDA Australian Singing Competition, Sydney- Samson Setu (finalist), Dr Te Oti Rakena, Manase Latu (winner)

Manase and Samson are the first New Zealanders and first Pacific singers to be accepted into the New York Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Development Programme. They were both shoulder tapped by the Artistic Director of the Metropolitan opera after adjudicating them in a local New Zealand competition.

Tō matou iwi/O le nu'u o matou

Studio-ing has a natural synergy with the Pacific concept *Va*. As a studio expression of *teu le va* (Anae, 2016), I prioritise reciprocity and develop specific rituals that ensure everyone nurtures and values the relationships in the teaching-learning space. This concept extends to the students' families, who are central to the learning experience. For this reason, I asked

families of my Pacific students to share their experiences of my teaching initiatives and the impact on families. How they receive my teaching has been mostly unknown to me, and in humility I share their perspectives.



Manase Latu and his father after winning the New Zealand Aria competition in 2018

Joy has been ours when our son enlightens us with stories and the experiences of Dr Te Oti Rakena teaching. The concerns parents have for the safety, wellbeing, and success of our children, we have witnessed Dr Rakena having for our son. We are also aware that he not only does that for our son, but he does that for other Pasifika students.

Te Oti puts us at ease. We never feel inferior, nor do we feel intimidated to ask questions or make comments before him. We stand together in celebrating the achievements and successes of our son, and we equally share the pride and joy of what he has become. Te Oti has proven himself to be a great father to our Pasifika students and a great helper to us, the Pasifika parents, with the words of our son "I wouldn't be what I am or where I am today without the help and contribution of Dr Te Oti Rakena.

(Parents to Manase Latu Jr)

References

- Anae, M. (2016). Teu le va: Samoan relational ethics. *Knowledge Cultures*, 4(03), 117-130.
- Teaiwa, T., Mallon, S., Liu, J. H., McCreanor, T., & McIntosh, T. (2005). New Zealand identities: Departures and destinations. (pp. 207-209) Victoria University Press.



Joel Amosa Lexus Song Quest winner, 2018

