

From The Ashes

A Case Study of the Re-development of Local Music Recording in Rabaul (Papua New Guinea) Following the 1994 Volcanic Eruptions

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Abstract: Over the last decade, a series of publications – such as, most notably, Steve Jones's *Rock Formations* (1992),¹ Michael Chanan's *Repeated Takes* (1995)² and Paul Théberge's *Any Sound You Can Imagine* (1997)³ – have offered accounts of the impact of various technological innovations on contemporary music culture. Almost without exception, they have advanced their analyses with near-total reliance on examples drawn from the North Atlantic core of the Western music industry. To date, the impact of various technologies on the music cultures and industries of the rest of the planet have been little examined. While these cultures and industries may 'lag behind' their better-facilitated western counterparts in terms of provision of new equipment and associated creative and industrial practices, the impact of new technologies on these territories is just as marked and complex as it is in the West.

This article attempts to contribute to a broader mapping of the phenomena by addressing regional developments at the farthest periphery of the Western music market, that of the Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG). More specifically, this article analyses the re-development of the recording industry in Rabaul, the capital and major port of PNG's East New Britain (ENB) province, in the aftermath of the volcanic disaster which afflicted the region in 1994. In order to analyse the relation between technological and cultural development – and to make the issues involved comprehensible for the reader unfamiliar with contemporary PNG culture – the article begins with a brief overview of PNG's contemporary music industry. Discussion then centres on the two principal recording enterprises to emerge in Rabaul since the eruptions, Thomas Iulungan's Island Sounds Studios and Glen Low's Barike project. The article concludes by discussing the implications of the article's specific case studies for local music scenes in similar regional and/or national contexts.

**Papua New
Guinea's music
industry: a brief
historical
overview**

PNG's contemporary music industry is dominated by two labels which between them account for some 80-90 per cent of the industry's turnover – Chin H. Meen Supersound Studios (henceforth CHM) and Pacific Gold Studios (PGS) – both of which are (now) based in the country's capital city, Port Moresby.⁴ The PNG industry began in 1977,

in the year following national independence,⁵ when the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) began releasing album-length cassettes of locally recorded material.⁶ Since this period, the PNG music industry has been based solely on audiocassette sales, bypassing vinyl and only recently introducing a limited range of CD product. CHM began operating in 1980, in Port Moresby, as an offshoot of the CHM company's electronic and music goods retail operation (their manufacture of audio product allowing them a profit-maximising 'vertical integration' of production, distribution and retailing). PGS was established in Rabaul in 1983⁷ and – despite the exclusion of its products from CHM's distribution and retail network – rapidly became a major rival to its longer-established competitor.⁸

Despite the limited size of PNG's population and, as significantly, the restricted size of its cash economy,⁹ PGS and CHM both engaged in intense industrial competition in the 1980s and 1990s and became highly profitable enterprises. As in any other culture industry, the two labels have competed to attract new talent to their stables. In this, both companies have promoted the advantages of their studio facilities to attract intending artists.¹⁰ Given the cost of importing studio equipment (usually from Australian retailers), and the expense (and time disadvantages) of relying on overseas support and maintenance services,¹¹ this aspect of CHM and PGS's rivalry has been a notably costly one. Indeed, the companies' constant upgrading of facilities from the mid-1980s to early 1990s exemplifies the economic phenomenon known as 'ratcheting', whereby cost and technological complexity are regularly 'notched up' in a competitive process which can acquire its own momentum, often requiring increased profit maximisation to feed the cycle.¹² Due to the companies' costly investment in facilities, and their (associated) orientation to short-term income maximisation, both CHM and PGS have operated their studios on a production-line basis, using standardised methods and personnel to churn out (generically similar) product at a high rate. CHM, for example, has run its Port Moresby studios virtually round-the-clock over the last decade in order to produce a large volume of releases. This practice has relied upon a production set-up whereby individual artists principally provided voices and songs to be packaged in a standard format, heavily reliant on pre-set rhythms and the signature musical elements of the studio musicians who also engineer the recordings. As one artist who has recorded a series of albums with CHM in the early 1990s expressed it:

You go in and sing and go out again. Other singers come in ... but the [backing] tracks are something the same ... the studio players keep on going ... You have to really work to get any of your own type music ideas in. ... The engineers, they do what Mr Chin wants – that's their job and they do it.¹³

While this approach is not necessarily antithetical to the production of successful, quality pop music,¹⁴ and resulted in the production of a number of original and popular releases by artists such as Helgas, Basil Greig and Ronnie Galama, it is an approach which (as discussed further below) has attracted substantial criticism from PNG producers and recording artists. If PGS has not operated at quite this peak of industrial 'efficiency' – and has devoted a considerable time to particular artistic development projects (such as the bands Tambaran Culture and Sanguma II¹⁵) – it has also attracted criticism for insensitive productions of artists' material¹⁶ and for pressuring hit acts to produce high volumes of new recordings in order to exploit their popularity. Former PGS recording engineer Glen Low has, for instance, singled out PGS's management of mid-late 1990s band Quakes,¹⁷ and, particularly, the number of cassette albums recorded and released by them in 1996-8, as an example of commercial exploitation detrimental to the artists' 'quality control' and long-term reputation.¹⁸

CHM's and PGS's competitive investment policies have further emphasised the gap between their industrial/financial power and that of PNG musicians, since, as Michael Webb has identified, many popular, frequently-employed PNG bands did not even own their own 'bandsets' (i.e. stage/rehearsal equipment) in the 1970-80s¹⁹ (and, indeed, still do not in the 1990s). This imbalance in financial power has arisen from both the shrewd ('hard edged') management style of the studios and the particular nature of PNG as a nation which does not have copyright legislation (and thereby protection of artists' rights and income).²⁰ CHM and PGS operate a policy of only returning (highly limited) royalties to artists after they have cleared (notional) recording costs (these costs reflecting studio overheads locked into the dynamic of the previously described ratcheting syndrome). In CHM's case, recording artists do not receive royalties on their releases until sales pass the threshold of 2,000 copies²¹ – a relatively high target in a market where sales of 5,000 are currently considered as mid-range (and where many albums would not meet that cut-off).²² Given this squeeze on artists' remuneration from cassette sales, it is unsurprising that those artists who have amassed industrial and technological *savoir-faire* (and advantage) from the PNG music industry over the last two decades are those who have also been in the privileged position of being employed as studio engineers for the two majors.

The role of Rabaul PGS rose to industrial prominence by nurturing and exploiting the musical talents of ENB's indigenous population, the Tolai, and the 'mixed race' population that began to emerge in the busy port of Rabaul from the 1920s on.²³ The label's success in the mid-late 1980s was largely due to the popularity of releases by Barike, a 'mixed race' ENB rock band, and of various recordings made by Tolai vocalist George Telek (as both a solo artist and vocalist with the rock band

Painim Wok and the acoustic Moab Stringband).²⁴ In 1984 Thomas Lulungan, a local Tolai musician, joined the staff of PGS as a junior sound engineer.²⁵ He worked for the company until 1985 before relocating to Port Moresby to join CHM, where he learnt production techniques from expatriate staff and went on to become CHM's first local (ie indigenous PNG) producer (a position referred to in PNG as 'chief sound engineer').

From 1987 Lulungan played an active part in CHM's A&R (Artist and Repertoire) activities²⁶ – identifying emerging musical talent in Rabaul and bringing artists to Port Moresby to record.²⁷ CHM's extensive involvement with ENB musicians convinced Lulungan of the desirability of the company establishing a studio in Rabaul to compete with PGS. The opportunity arose when CHM upgraded their Port Moresby studios from an eight to 24 track facility. Lulungan dismantled the old studio facilities, shipped them to Rabaul and had them installed in new premises. During 1987-88 he commuted between the two centres before training guitarist Basil Greg and acquiring vocalist-engineer John Wong from PGS, to work as sound engineers at CHM Rabaul (and returning to Port Moresby for the majority of his production work).

From 1987-94 PGS's recording operation was heavily orientated around the personnel of their most successful band, Barike. Glen Low, the band's bass player, a local musician of Chinese/Tolai New Irlander parentage, headed the studio, and several other members of the band were also employed by PGS in various capacities – giving them highly advantageous (and flexible) access to facilities. Like Lulungan at CHM, Low has identified ENB artists as providing the focus for PGS's commercial activity in the mid-1980s to early 1990s, arguing that the Rabaul Studios were 'carrying Pacific Gold in Moresby ... who weren't doing anything in making successful product, just leaving it to us to make hits'.²⁸ While there is a degree of exaggeration to Low's claims in this regard, it is undeniable that Rabaul constituted a highly productive centre for music recording and stylistic development in the 1980s to early 1990s, with local Tolai bands establishing themselves at the forefront of the PNG music industry and providing the major labels with their most profitable acts.

The eruption and its aftermath On 19 September 1994 the volcanoes of Tavurvur and Vulcan, to the south and south east of Rabaul, erupted, showering dense ash over the harbour and surrounding villages. Large areas of the town were completely covered and the weight of volcanic material caused roofs to collapse, destroying a wide range of residential and commercial facilities – including the town's two music recording studios – and disrupting (and dispersing) the town's lively music culture.²⁹

Later in the month, after the activity had subsided and following resumption of flights into the region, CHM sent Lulungan to Rabaul to

evaluate damage to the company's studios. Upon arrival Lulungan found that in the two weeks since the eruption looters had excavated part of the studio and removed a majority of the recording equipment. While observers such as Klaus Neumann have noted that the majority of looting in the immediate post-eruption period 'was carried out mainly by Tolai villagers from [nearby] areas that had only partly been evacuated, such as Pilapila, Volavolo and Tavui',³⁰ the stolen recording equipment appears to have been rapidly removed from ENB (and not to have re-emerged in the hands of local musicians). During October 1994 Lulungan arranged excavation of remaining equipment (including some multi-track recorders and effects units) and dispatched these to CHM's headquarters in Port Moresby. Low had greater success in salvaging equipment from PGS and, under instruction from PGS's owner Greg Seeto, arranged shipment of equipment (including the studio's 16 track mixer) to Port Moresby.

Any initial plans CHM or PGS may have had to rebuild in Rabaul were complicated by both the removal of their equipment (and its reassignment to use in Port Moresby) and the difficulties inhabitants of the affected region had in gaining pay-outs from their insurance companies (despite pressure from Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan in the months following the eruptions).³¹ Lulungan has estimated that the destruction of facilities and lack of compensation resulted in both CHM and PGS losing 'thousands of thousands of kina' each.³² As Russell Blong and Chris McKee have identified, in their detailed survey of the implications of the eruptions for the insurance industry, another factor behind CHM and PGS's decision is that '[t]he extent and the severity of looting [in the immediate post-eruption period] soured substantially the attitudes of many people towards returning to, or reinvesting in Rabaul'.³³

Despite considerable pressure from Low and Lulungan, neither CHM nor PGS agreed to rebuild in Rabaul, nor, in PGS's case, consented to sell equipment from their former Rabaul studios to former PGS employees wishing to establish their own operations there. The (unspoken) consensual view between CHM and PGS appears to have been firstly, that a dual-centre base for their national operations was financially unsustainable, and, secondly, that Rabaul's musical 'energy' had dissipated in the 1990s (and no longer merited dedicated studio facilities). As Seeto has argued, speculating on the viability of new industry initiatives in the region:

[t]he success of new studios in Rabaul is dependent on their ability to organise and nurture the talent as we had to do back in the early '80s. ... Only time will tell whether Rabaul can reclaim its previous title as being a major music centre. I don't think [new producers] can rely on the old established artists as most have become 'passé'

or have become 'born again Christians',³⁴ which has depleted the talent pool of Rabaul musos [musicians].³⁵

Unsurprisingly, given their pivotal roles in the development of the ENB industry (and the highly successful and distinctive Tolai rock style), Low and Lulungan have disagreed with this characterisation and asserted that Tolai rock and acoustic stringband music³⁶ has neither declined in quality, nor lost its (generic) appeal to local PNG audiences. In contrast to Seeto's characterisation of a contemporary waning and/or 'shortfall' in Tolai musical activity, creativity and accomplishment, Low and Lulungan have identified the frustration of ENB artists at their recent treatment by the two majors. Low and Lulungan have pointed to CHM's and PGS's production practices as a major problem, arguing that the companies' policies of recording quickly and – they argue – often insensitively, has resulted in a low standard of albums being released.³⁷ A further impediment to ENB artists has, of course, arisen from the withdrawal of studio facilities from the region. In an article published in 1996, Low complained that:

With all the recording companies now having their studios based in Port Moresby, many Tolai musicians feel they cannot afford to travel to Port Moresby to do their recording anymore. Musicians are expected to meet their own travel and accommodation costs every time they go to Port Moresby to do recordings, and for a band that has five to seven members, that can be a real problem, especially bands that want to record for the first time. Even bands that may have recorded cassettes in the past still find it expensive to travel to and from Port Moresby for any other recordings they want to make.³⁸

A characterisation Lulungan has concurred with entirely, noting that.

One of the main purposes of coming [back] here was that I had these Tolai bands complaining to me that 'How come we are supposed to be the first people who had music, here in Rabaul, and here we are being ignored by CHM and Pacific Gold ... it's been three years now since they left us and nobody's making any attempt to come back here.' And so I decided 'Ok, I'll do it, just to help these guys out' ... I don't think we will ever run out of bands [to record] in Rabaul. Rabaul is the central point of the New Guinea Islands ... Rabaul is easily accessible ... and now they know I have opened up they would rather come here than spend a lot of money going to Port Moresby³⁹

These characterisations refer to the process by which Rabaul had first become peripheralised as a result of CHM's and PGS's increasingly capital-centralised operation and then obliterated altogether by the volcanic eruptions of 1994 and the failure of CHM and PGS to rebuild. Both producers emphasise the demand for recording facilities in

Rabaul/ENB, and Lulungan goes further, suggesting a new centrality for a Rabaul/ENB-based recording facility servicing the north-western PNG islands (principally, New Britain, New Ireland, The Duke of York group, Bougainville and Buka⁴⁰). However, as the following sections illustrate, Lulungan and Low's approaches to facilitating industrial re-establishment are significantly different – Lulungan opting to work within the duopolistic structure he sees as entrenched in the PNG industry for the foreseeable future, and Low striving for a model of autonomy which represents a rejection of the policies and institutions of the two majors.

Island Sounds Following his post-eruption work in Rabaul, Lulungan returned to his position as a house producer at CHM's Port Moresby studios in early 1995. He continued there until the expiry of his (three year) contract in October 1996, when he declined the option of extending his employment and returned to ENB.⁴¹ Reflecting his dissatisfaction with his position with CHM in the mid-1990s, he took time out to consider various alternative career options, before resolving to start his own studios.⁴² Despite an agreement in principle with CHM to distribute material produced by Lulungan in PNG and Melanesia, and pitching his business as a (relatively) low-cost enterprise, Lulungan found himself unable to secure bank loans for his project.⁴³ Drawing on his knowledge of the introduction of a series of low-cost digital technologies in the mid to late 1990s – of the sort pitched by western manufacturers at the home/semi-professional studio market – he self-financed a low-cost studio set-up (using savings accrued during his employment at CHM) and installed this in mid-1997.⁴⁴

In marked contrast to the locations of PGS's and CHM's former studios in central Rabaul, Island Sounds' studios are located at the end of an un-signposted, un-made track, in Pilapila, a quiet cluster of villages, ten kilometres west of Rabaul. The studio comprises two rooms – a studio and recording booth, connected by a glass viewing panel – in Lulungan's family home, a (five room) fibro cement house (and, consequently, is only operational during the day, when family members are out⁴⁵). The studio facilities include a portable eight-track hard disk digital recorder, MIDI keyboard, a monitoring system, a DAT recorder and an analogue tape two-track recorder. Due to the equipment's maximum capacity of eight (simultaneous) tracks, Lulungan uses a common home recording technique known as 'bouncing', where six separate instrumental parts are recorded onto two tracks, with equalisation, effects and stereo panning. This then leaves the remaining tracks free again for further recording. Lulungan is not concerned by this somewhat unwieldy procedure, as he perceives the loss in sound quality to be minimal as a result of the digital – as opposed to analogue – recording processes used.⁴⁶

One of the principal limitations of Island Sounds studio's current set-up is its lack of a medium-large size studio space in which several

musicians can perform simultaneously. The recording space comprises a single microphone recording booth, sound-proofed with four mattresses, principally used to record vocal tracks. Instrumental tracks (usually provided by guitar, bass and keyboards) are recorded by Lulungan in the adjoining studio room. Despite this drawback, Lulungan has recorded the well-known stringband The Junior Devils, recording instrumental parts one-by-one, and producing a final mix after all parts have been individually recorded. While Lulungan acknowledges that there are difficulties in getting ensembles to record in this manner – noting of the Junior Devils that ‘they were really shocked because they were used to sitting around [together] with microphones ... it was a bit difficult for them’⁴⁷ – he has also emphasised that the process allowed for a greater clarity and balance of instrumental mixing on the final tapes than is usually the case in PNG stringband recordings:

The quality was amazing, it came out really good because of the separation ... [since, when] you do one guitar by itself on the track, you can do anything you want with it, rather than recording all of them together, where the other mike picks up the other one and the other one picks up ... and then you have a muddy sort of sound, you can't get a clear mix because what you're mixing might be a combination of two guitars and a bit of ukulele.⁴⁸

In addition to his own facilities, Lulungan uses CHM's studios in Port Moresby to undertake further post-production work. His usual procedure is to take his DAT (or two-track analogue tapes) and transfer them to analogue tape in CHM's studios, adding any required overdubs before producing two-track masters ready for duplication (overseeing every phase of the procedure in order to ensure quality control).⁴⁹ Lulungan has noted that responses to his early recordings from CHM boss Raymond Chin and his sound engineers have been highly positive. Commenting on such perceptions, Lulungan has emphasised his creative autonomy, and, particularly, the setting of his own time schedules, as the most important contributory elements behind the quality of the music he has produced (and, conversely, the restraint of this as a key factor underlying his frustration in previously working as a house producer⁵⁰).

The first release on the Island Sounds label was *Bely*, by the New Ireland artist Bely Mesak, the artist's second album (which followed an earlier release on PGS – entitled *Bely: Solo of Kavieng* – which both Lulungan and Mesak feel was poorly produced). While the album does not deviate from the standard style of PNG pop recording in any radical way, its mixing and style of accompaniment is notably ‘cleaner’ (in terms of instrumental separation) than many mid-late 1990s CHM and PGS albums, and demonstrates the capacity of small-scale studios such as Island Sounds to produce material capable of circulating and

competing with the majors in the PNG market. But while the quality of its recordings *may* make Island Sounds competitive, its reliance on CHM for distribution is a major commercial disadvantage.

Island Sounds' current contractual agreement with CHM involves Lulungan completing the masters of material and supplying these to CHM with complete (side a and b) track sequencing for cassettes. He supplies track details, together with artists' photos and other text information, to CHM for them to produce final cover designs, which appear with the Island Sounds logo on. The financial arrangement is similar to that CHM operates with the Tumbuna Traks label, and for PNG distribution of material by the popular Fijian singer Danny Rae Costello. This comprises a straight royalties deal, with Island Sounds receiving 1.5 kina per cassette sold. One of the results of the relatively low return to the studios is that small operators such as Lulungan have to work on an essentially optimistic basis, requiring a succession of medium-high selling releases – ie in the region of 5,000–10,000 copies in PNG (in the late 1990s) – in order to return any significant income to cover overheads, repay his original capital investment and remunerate recording artists (let alone make a profit). Unlike CHM's (previously mentioned) standard artist deal (in which royalty payments only commence after sales of 2000 plus copies), Lulungan further eschews profit-maximisation (and causes cash-flow problems for his company) by offering artists immediate royalty payments on all copies sold – attributing his policy in this regard to his sympathy for the economic plight of artists, in that 'they rely on us [ie record companies] for their income'.⁵¹

Artists scheduled to record for Island Sounds in 1998-99 include three gospel groups, a student group from the Gaulim Teachers College in ENB, musician Dixon Butabu and members of the Soul Survivors, and B Jets from Morobe. While Lulungan's company requires a number of these releases to achieve considerable commercial success in order to establish profitability for the label, Island Sounds' current studios only represent phase one of Lulungan's current plan for redeveloping recording operations in ENB. Phase two involves the construction of a custom-built studio facility. His preferred location, near the town of Kokopo, close to the new urban centre of ENB, on land he has owned since the early 1980s, currently possesses the major disadvantage of not being connected to the local electricity grid. With cable connections due to be completed by the end of 1999, he envisages building the structure and installing equipment in stages, dependent on cash flow, from the first series of Island Sounds' releases – and hopes to be operational by early 2000.

Glen Low/Barike Unlike Lulungan, who was based in Port Moresby at the time of the eruptions, the professional impact of the 1994 catastrophe upon Low

was immediate, destroying a facility – and job – he had nurtured over a seven year period. Similarly to Lulungan, Low initially hoped for a redevelopment of PGS, either at Rabaul or elsewhere in ENB. The refusal of PGS to agree to this, or to assist in establishing an associated operation there, led Low to consider how his musical activities, and particularly, the career of his band Barike, could be facilitated without re-locating to Port Moresby. Low responded by moving to set up an independent recording studio for Barike on family land near the village of Kerevat (to the north west of Rabaul). Like Lulungan, Low undertook this initiative without a bank loan, or any other kind of commercial investment. However, unlike Lulungan he did not even attempt to secure such funding, contending that this is ‘just impossible to get – for anything, not just a music studio business – unless you are an expat [i.e. Australian/westerner resident in PNG],⁵² and instead relied on family support. Low estimates initial expenses for studio construction as around 130,000 kina, which was principally expended on 24-track digital recording equipment. Similarly to Lulungan, Low used local materials to construct his studio, combining pragmatic financial considerations with a conscious desire to ‘make it local’. A group of nine local carpenters constructed the building and interior fittings using ENB woods. Soundproofing was constructed using balsa wood, obtained free-of-cost from a nearby plantation, combined with sand.

While the primary intention behind the establishment of the studio was as a recording base for Barike, Low also considered the need for his facility to ‘regenerate’ its construction costs at an early stage and designed the main studio to be sufficient in size to accommodate ensembles as large as 40 member (gospel) choirs, allowing Low income from such clients (and smaller ensembles of various kinds). However, unlike Lulungan, Low specifies that such clients are only intended to have access when Barike do not require the studio for recording or rehearsing (and he currently envisages that most future client acts will be ones he personally wants to work with).

In PNG terms, the establishment of a studio (principally) dedicated to the use of a single band is an innovation (and reflects Barike’s position as one of PNG’s leading bands for over a decade). Indeed Low identifies Barike’s very success as *necessitating* such an investment in order to allow the band to expand their market (and creative horizons):

Barike have become about as successful as they can in the PNG market. ... We need to look to overseas sales as a way of making more business income and getting ourselves running, making our minds how we want.⁵³

For Low, this involves securing the band a (viable) position outside the primary production and distribution duopoly of CHM and PGS. Low’s

strategy is twofold. First, to develop an independent distribution system in PNG, to maximise local returns on the band's material, and second, to access the overseas market.

While PGS never secured distribution for Barike's material outside of Melanesia, Low has noted that his experience in working with leading Tolai vocalist, Telek, and Australian producer/keyboard player/vocalist David Bridie, on tour in Australia promoting Telek's eponymous Origin Records CD album in 1997 and 1998, was instructive in educating him in how to tour and promote bands overseas. It also familiarised him with the kinds of music, which can be marketed to western audiences. To this end, Low currently intends to use the new studios to facilitate a major 'revisitation' of Barike's back catalogue of recorded compositions:

I think I have an idea of the international music market now, and we can re-record our material, our best material, in a new version and try to sell it overseas. I think Barike, recorded in a new way could make it [overseas]. Our material and our music, the playing, is good quality ... we can have a chance if we plan and make it together.⁵⁴

Low has also stated that he envisages future Barike material being produced and packaged in two versions, one for the domestic market, reflecting PNG tastes, and the other aimed at an international world music market

Michael Webb has argued that Barike's initial career, in the early-late 1980s, was based on their 'familiarity with (and individualised remakes of) Western rock, pop and country hits'⁵⁵ and their mediation and 'brokerage' of these, as a mixed race band, to the Tolai community of ENB (and the broader PNG music scene). He has also identified the manner in which shifts in PNG market tastes leading to the 'public valuation of unique 'ethnic' pop sounds' in the 1990s resulted in Barike developing a 'heavier reliance on Tolai elements in its sound and repertoire'.⁵⁶ Low's current re-focusing on a world music market, and the (perceived) tastes of its audience, represents a parallel aspect to Tolai artist Telek's similarly increasing re-orientation towards an international sound (and market) during the 1990s,⁵⁷ and, more generally, of the increased market aspirations of other well-established artists in PNG and the broader Pacific music scene.

As will be evident, much of this section has addressed the perceptions, aspirations and commercial strategies of Low and Barike, rather than achievements (and Low's studio operations and vision will undoubtedly merit further attention as to the actual outcome of his plans at a future date). The value of these discussions is that the concept (and

construction) of Low's Barike studio demonstrates that there are viable options available (albeit restricted to those sufficiently financially abled) for producers and recording artists to attempt to exert a degree of commercial-artistic autonomy within national-industrial contexts such as PNG which are heavily dominated by relatively conservative commercial interests.

Conclusion As detailed in this article, the volcanic eruptions of 1994 can be seen primarily as an accelerating agent upon the decline in importance of Rabaul as a centre for the established PNG music industry – as represented by the CHM and PGS duopoly – rather than the cause itself. In the absence of specifically dedicated cultural development funding, it is unlikely that *national* music industry operations will recommence in ENB, given the lack of any obvious industrial logic for this to occur. In this regard, the place and prominence of Rabaul and ENB has declined from its strength of the 1980s. However, the tradition of music industry operations in the area, combined with the region's strong music culture, has produced the situation where recent (relatively) low-cost, compact music recording technologies can enable the establishment of local music production centres, whose product can both circulate within local cultural 'catchment' areas and also be picked up by national companies for national/Melanesian distribution. In this regard, the emergent sector within ENB offers a model for other regional centres – and parallels the similar emergence of local operations in centres such as Madang and Goroka over the last three to four years.⁵⁸ But, lest we seem to be suggesting an imminent boom in local music production, it should be emphasised that even the lower cost studio equipment and facilities addressed in this article require a considerable amount of investment (by local standards) and have only been made possible in ENB by two established industry figures drawing on their own savings and/or family assistance. While recent, low-cost recording technologies (and access to them) can be seen to be empowering in local/national contexts such as those described here, the nature of the global music industry suggests that it is unlikely that countries such as PNG can enter the world music market as anything other than fringe sources of musical product (rather than as national players in their own right).⁵⁹ While the benefits of maintaining regional stylistic diversity are considerable, we need to retain a focus on the broader economic contexts that serve to perpetuate an essentially imbalanced relationship between the West and its 'others'.

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Notes 1 Steve Jones, *Rock Formations Music, Technology and Mass Communication* (Newbury Park [US]. Sage, 1992).

- 2 Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes a short history of recording and its effects on music* (London Verso, 1995)
- 3 Paul Théberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine* (Hanover [US] Wesleyan University Press, 1997)
- 4 The remaining 10-20 per cent of the industry is accounted for by a range of smaller operations such as Tumbuna Traks (in Madang), Kumul Studios (in Goroka) and Kalang and Walter Bay (in Port Moresby)
- 5 In the period from the end of World War One to 1975, PNG was administered by Australia
- 6 Local music recording and retailing actually commenced in 1975, the year of national independence, with the first local records being released by the Institute of PNG Studies Kristen Kaset also began releasing locally produced Christian music in 1976
- 7 PGS emerged from a previous Rabaul-based recording company, Soundstream, which began operating in 1980 as a partnership between Greg Seeto, a local musician of Rabaul-Chinese extraction, Australia producer Philip Foley and mixed race (Euro-Melanesian) engineer Eddie Schultz. In 1983, after releasing commercially successful recordings by ENB-based bands such as Unbelievers Revival and Rastaman Vibrations, and the debut album by Barike, Soundstream dissolved, with the former partners establishing rival studios in Rabaul Foley established Kuanua Studios with former NBC producer John Doonan (which operated until 1987), while Seeto founded PGS Unlike PGS, Kuanua folded in 1987, without establishing itself as a major operation
- 8 For discussion of the development of the PNG music industry see Malcolm Philpott, 'Developments in Papua New Guinea's Popular Music Industry' in *Sound Alliances*, ed Philip Hayward (London and New York: Cassell, 1998) For discussion of the development of Pacific Gold in the 1980s see Michael Webb, *Lokal Musik Lingua Franca Song and Identity in Papua New Guinea* (Port Moresby National Research Institute, 1993), pp 195-228
- 9 With a substantial proportion of the population subsisting by traditional means and/or only in limited and/or infrequent paid employment
- 10 See Webb, pp 195-99 for discussion of PGS's promotion of its facilities
- 11 Particularly given PNG's sliding currency exchange rate in the 1990s
- 12 This has been a particularly marked tendency in Hollywood cinema over the last two decades (and also represented one tendency in music video production in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when stars such as Madonna and Michael Jackson competed with big budget ever-more-spectacular productions).
- 13 A CHM recording artist speaking off-the-record to Philip Hayward, interview in Port Moresby, September 1994.
- 14 For example, the commercial success of (and current critical regard for) material produced in 'hit factories' such as New York's Brill Building in the early-mid 1960s, or Jamaican studios such as Black Ark in the 1970s
- 15 Tambaran Culture and Sanguma II were PNG acts that blended traditional elements and contemporary rhythms and instrumentation in the style known as 'PNG Contemporary' For reference to their careers see Philip Hayward, *Music at the Borders* (Sydney: John Libbey, 1998), pp 184-86 (Also see Denis Crowdy 'Creativity and Independence Sanguma, Music Education and the development of the PNG Contemporary Style', *Perfect Beat*, 3, no 4 (January 1998), pp. 13-25 for discussion of the origins of the style and Sanguma's role in its development)
- 16 Tolai singer (and folklorist) Julie Toliman-Turalir has, for instance, commented on how rushed, insensitive production and inappropriate rhythms and arrangements

- detracted from the quality (and market appeal) of her 1990 PGS album *Taba Po-Ot* (interview with the authors, Rabaul, September 1998).
- 17 Described by Seeto as 'Tolai stringband with a beat' (in Malcolm Philpott and Greg Seeto, 'PNG Contemporary and the Commercial Sphere', *Perfect Beat*, 4, no. 3, 1999, p. 98).
 - 18 Glen Low, phone interview with the authors, 27 November 1998
 - 19 Michael Webb 'Pipal Bilong music tru'/'A truly musical people' – Music Culture, Colonialism and Identity in Northeast New Britain, Papua New Guinea after 1875' (unpublished Wesleyan University PhD thesis, 1995), pp 509-511
 - 20 For a discussion of the various – and complex – ramifications of this, see Don Niles, 'Questions of Music Copyright in Papua New Guinea', in *Sound Alliances*, ed Philip Hayward (London and New York: Cassell, 1998), pp 123-26
 - 21 Stated by Thomas Lulungan, interview with the authors, Pilapila village, ENB, 22 September 1998.
 - 22 Precise information on PGS's arrangements in this regard was not available to the writers at the time of writing
 - 23 Rabaul's mixed race population derives from the contact between Tolai, Chinese, German, British, Australian, Ambonese, Malaysian, mainland New Guinean and Pacific Islander individuals and communities in the small but economically highly active port (See Michael Webb 'A long way from Tipperary – Performance culture in early colonial Rabaul, New Guinea, and the genesis of a Melanesian popular music scene', *Perfect Beat*, 3, no. 2, 1997 for a discussion of musical aspects of this population, pp 32-59)
 - 24 In 1992 Telek left PGS and signed for CHM (amidst considerable acrimony) He also signed to Origin Records, for Australasian releases in 1997, and to the British-based international label Real World in 1998
 - 25 Lulungan's musical career began while he was at school in Rabaul in the mid-1970s when he co-founded the band Pacific Vibrations. He went on to perform with popular Tolai rock band Painim Wok (with George Telek) and then formed his own band, Pebble Webb, before re-locating to Port Moresby to study at the NAS. While at the NAS he also performed with the re-formed Molachs band – also with Telek – before returning to ENB to teach Expressive Arts at Kerevat National High School.
 - 26 The crucial creative development and product 'grooming' role within a recording company
 - 27 As he has subsequently emphasised 'First of all, I brought the Rabaul bands over to get CHM going. One of the factors that got CHM to be known nationwide from 1987 on was the fact that I started [recording them]' – from an interview with the authors, Pilapila village ENB 22 September 1998
 - 28 Low, op cit
 - 29 See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul – Yu Swit Moa Yet (Surviving the 1994 Volcanic Eruption)*, (Port Moresby. Oxford University Press, 1996) for further discussion of the eruptions and post-eruption re-organisation and reconstruction.
 - 30 Ibid, p. 82
 - 31 Standard insurance policies in PNG (and, indeed, other countries) do not include coverage for volcanic-related damage, coverage of this kind (when available) entails payment of an extra premium. During a period of increased earthquake activity in the Rabaul region in 1983-84 (and the anticipation of imminent eruptions), PNG insurance companies raised their volcanic coverage premiums to a level felt to be prohibitive by many. As a result, relatively few businesses were adequately covered for damage caused by the 1994 eruptions

- Some shrewd individuals responded to the hike in premiums in the mid-1980s by diversifying their investments through such strategies as purchasing land in the Kokopo area, outside the area of expected volcanic damage in the event of an eruption, (correctly) anticipating a rise in land values in Kokopo if Rabaul was substantially damaged – cushioning their losses within the town itself (Thanks to Russell Blong for this information, personal communication with the authors, 4 March 1999)
- 32 Lulungan, op cit.
- 33 Russell Blong and Chris McKee, *The Rabaul Eruption 1994 Destruction of a town* (Sydney Natural Hazards Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1995), p 44
- 34 A phenomenon which, in the 1990s, has usually seen PNG musicians formerly employed in rock bands renouncing – and often denouncing – popular music
- 35 Personal correspondence with the authors, 17 February 1998
- 36 Which has been substantially neglected by CHM and PGS in the 1990s
- 37 See Low's previously discussed identification of Quakes as an example of this
- 38 Cited in Walter Darius, 'Musicians' Lament', *Post-Courier – Music and Culture Magazine*, 29 April 1996, p 12
- 39 Lulungan, op cit
- 40 And other smaller islands in the region
- 41 Reflecting his high-profile position in the PNG music industry, this was a move, which was prominently reported in the press (see Vaii Jenkins, 'Lulungan heads home', *Post-Courier – Music and Culture* supplement 23/96, p 2, for instance)
- 42 Such as taking a position as a school teacher in ENB and undergoing a period of postgraduate study in Australia
- 43 Receiving rejections on the basis of the (supposedly) high-risk nature of the enterprise
- 44 Recording commenced in July 1997 with Lulungan producing a gospel album by Sam Tarere, a guitarist who also works as his assistant, which was released on the CHM label
- 45 A complete contrast to Lulungan's previous employment with CHM which often required him to work weekly night shifts in their high-use studios
- 46 Use of digital technologies avoids the marked degradation of sound quality, which affects successive 'generational' analogue dubs
- 47 Lulungan, op cit
- 48 Ibid
- 49 Lulungan has also experimented with taking his eight-track digital recorder to Port Moresby and transferring the recordings direct to CHM's studio analogue tape set-up
- 50 In PNG producers continue to be referred to as 'sound engineers' (perhaps reflecting their subservience to record company executives with regard to the sound design of the recordings they produce)
- 51 Lulungan, op cit
- 52 Low, op cit
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid
- 55 Webb, 1995, p 515
- 56 Ibid
- 57 See Webb, 1995, pp 543-60 and Philip Hayward, *Music At The Borders – Not Drowning, Waving and their engagement with Papua New Guinean Culture (1986-96)* (Sydney John Libbey, 1998), pp 100-204 for further discussion
- 58 Madang's Tumbuna Traks and Goroka's Kumul Studios

- 59 Local realities still constitute considerable impediments. Lulungan, for instance, still awaits a connection to an under-developed electricity grid before even considering the expansion of his current facilities to a more effective and accessible location.
- 60 Our acknowledgment of Greg Seeto's assistance in researching this piece does not imply his agreement with the analyses we offer (and his assistance is therefore doubly appreciated).