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Local interpretation:

Music video, heritage and community in contemporary Vanuatu

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Abstract

Music video production in Vanuatu has developed in a distinctly different manner to either its Melanesian neighbours or the international anglophone music sector that dominates global markets. Produced on minimal budgets for artists with very low expectations of financial returns from their creative activities, a substantial proportion of Vanuatu music video production is orientated to (various aspects of) social communication amongst a culturally diverse and spatially dispersed national community. In addition to promoting musicians and the communities they emerge from, Vanuatu videos often convey specific public information messages, address social issues and tensions and/or reinscribe aspects of local cultural heritage in new contexts. This article provides an introduction and overview of Vanuatu music video production and case studies of key music video albums and individual tracks.

Keywords: cultural heritage, music industry, music video, social information, Vanuatu

As cultural change blurs the boundaries between the traditional and the modern, indigenous reference to *kastom* (social structures and practices perceived as traditional) in contemporary Vanuatu is rather vague. Ni-Vanuatu remain aware of *kastom* ideals but can manipulate interpretations to suit changing needs... The ambiguous nature of *kastom* therefore allows communities to address the changing social (and natural) environments while always rooted in basic cultural values (Naupa 2005; in Fingleton, Naupa and Ballard 2008: 28)

Introduction

Following its inception as a promotional form in the early-mid 1970s, music video has become an internationally produced and circulated form that is part

of a multi-faceted audiovisual media environment alongside related forms such as TV advertisements, corporate promo features, television programmes, feature films, video games and internet media. While it overlaps with other forms, it also comprises a distinct media area with its own genealogies, genres, fashions and (most appropriately for the focus of this article) local inflections of these. While the majority of analyses of music video production sectors, styles and/or auteurs have focused on North American and/or Western European production, analysis of other industrial contexts provides significant insights into local engagements with the form and of its realization within particular commercial, stylistic and technological spaces. Study of the development of music video in Melanesia is particularly illuminating since it reveals diverse and differential patterns of development at one of the furthest removes from the centre of the Western music industry and its product dispersion apparatus.

In terms of Melanesian media, the history of music video production in Papua New Guinea (detailed in Hayward 1995 and updated in Hayward 2007a) provides one example of how the medium was primarily *re-invented* by early directors (with only tangential address to/modelling on Western examples). The sheer volume of music video production in contemporary Papua New Guinea, where popular music video compilation series released on VHS cassette series by the CHM Supersound company number close to 150 releases (with DVD compilations also now making an impact) is notable for a country with a population of just under six million, many of whom are outside the cash economy and where the average per capita income is c. Australian \$685.¹ In complete contrast, music video production in Fiji (population c. 920,000, per capita income c. Australian \$3300), which has had an equally thriving popular music industry over the past two decades, is minimal. Music video's marginal presence in Fiji² is explained by a number of factors, including the careful regulation of (and allied lack of innovation in) Fijian television by a series of governments concerned to maintain conservative social values and morés and the reluctance of the two major national recording companies

1. Per capita income figures used in this article are adapted from the World Bank Annual Report 2006, online at: <http://tinyurl.com/dzrykr>.

2. While minimal, there has been some music video production activity in the Fijian industry, mainly for major acts that have sought and/or obtained international sales, exposure and video production assistance from international companies. The most prominent of which are Black Rose, a band that worked with Mangrove Studios in Noumea, which included a bonus DVD disc with its *Rosiloa: Hits, Videos and Remixes* album (2006); and Danny Rae Costello, whose product has been licensed through CHM in Papua New Guinea and regularly been featured on PNG music video compilations. There have also been occasional special project music videos, such as the Danny Rae Costello-produced *We Are Fiji* single/music video, commercially released on DVD format in 2005 (see Cattermole 2008 for a detailed analysis).

(South Pacific and Procer) to invest in music video production without obvious broadcast opportunities. The access to high production value Bollywood musicals and Indian music videos to Fijian-Indian audiences (initially on video cassette and DVD and now through access to Indian satellite channels) has also minimized demand for local Indo-Fijian pop and music video productions. Despite its more recent inception (detailed below) the development of music video in Vanuatu has more closely resembled that of Papua New Guinea in terms of volume of activity but has also exhibited distinct national characteristics that further emphasize the diversity and flexibility of the form.

(NB The following article concentrates on the industrial and social contexts of ni-Vanuatu music video production and of the visualization of [pre-recorded] music tracks in the videos concerned rather than sustained discussion of aspects of the musicology of the audio components of these.)

Cultural and Industrial Contexts

The present-day nation of Vanuatu has a population of around 205,000, the majority of which is indigenous (*ni-Vanuatu*).³ Employment and average per capita income are low (c. Australian \$1485) with many outer island residents working on the fringes of (if not entirely outside) the cash economy. Linguistically, Vanuatu is highly diverse. Along with around 110 local indigenous languages, the national pidgin language, *Bislama*, is spoken alongside English and (to a diminishing extent) French. Although there are a number of traditional musical practices in parts of the country, these have not developed into contemporary music forms and the most prominent musical styles are Christian music, Pacific pop-reggae and string-band music. The latter form developed out of engagements with western popular music and instrumentation during and after World War II. As its name suggests, stringband is an acoustic style that predominantly uses strung instruments in ensembles that also feature lead and harmony vocal parts.⁴ Almost without exception, Vanuatu stringbands are community based and strongly interactive with and supported by their home communities and broader language groups. Christian music occurs in congregational and secular/popularized forms, the latter drawing

3. The remainder comprises Australian and French nationals (a remnant of the Anglo-French condominium that ruled the archipelago until 1980), a small Chinese community, active in commerce, and members of various other Asian, European, Melanesian and Polynesian countries.

4. The Vanuatu stringband line-up typically comprises three to four acoustic guitars, one or two ukuleles and a 'bush bass' (comprised of a single string attached to a tea-chest [or similar resonating box] with a flexible neck, allowing for pitch alternation and/or note sharpening or damping) and may also include percussion.

strongly on U.S.-derived Gospel and Gospel influenced pop.⁵ Like stringband music, the form is strongly embedded within local and/or extended religious communities and is frequently deployed in support of particular social causes and charities. The local style of Pacific pop reggae derives from the convergence of local forms of rock and reggae in the early 1980s (and is often simply referred to as 'reggae' or 'Vanuatu reggae'). While pop reggae acts generally develop in specific community contexts, they tend to be less closely tied to particular community groups and local issues than either stringband or Christian music.

Commercial music recording began in the early 1980s, pioneered by Paul Gardissat's Vanuata Productions, which operated until 1988, releasing close to 150 albums.⁶ Jean Marc Wong bought out the company in 1989 and developed it into the major national recording operation, releasing over 100 albums to date. Other studios and associated recording labels have operated for limited periods during the last two decades, including two established by foreign musicians and/or engineers—Vanu Wespa, established by West Papuan band The Black Brothers during their residency in Vanuatu in 1983–1988, and Ocean Deep, operated by Japanese sound engineer and musician Ken Oshika in 1997–1999. In terms of ni-Vanuatu initiatives, the first independent operations commenced in the mid-1990s in the form of Sina and Vantrax, established by John Josiah and Timteo Kalmet respectively. The early-mid 2000s have seen a marked increase in the number of recording operations in Port Vila, the majority of which have used low-cost digital recording and production equipment and have operated out of small premises in downtown Port Vila. The most significant of these is Tropik Sound, established by Benson Nako in 2005. VKS productions, a commercial offshoot of the Vanuatu Kaljoral Sente (VKS), also commenced producing and retailing local music CDs in the mid-2000s.

Music and Vanuatu media

As Bolton (1999) has detailed, the first radio programmes heard in (what was then) the Anglo-French condominium of the New/Nouvelle Hebrides were compiled by French residents in Port Vila for broadcast through Radio Noumea (in the French colony of Nouvelle Calédonie) to local radio receivers. Bolton has identified one

5. Gospel music is enduringly popular in a country where attendance at established Anglican, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches and more recent arrivals continues to be high. Indeed, many prominent Vanuatu performers have arisen from this context, most notably Vanessa Quai. Other established performers in the genre include solo performer Laisa Boedoro and vocal groups such as The Reunion Singers and The Monument Singers.

6. These have recently re-entered the public sphere as a result of a programme undertaken by the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, funded by a grant from the European Union Non-State Actors programme in 2000, which has seen Gardissat's catalogue digitized, re-mastered and made available through the National Museum.

of the significant aspects of this service as the show's inclusion of Vanuatu *kastom* songs as particularly notable, since prior to the program's broadcasts many ni-Vanuatu had perceived that, in the main:

Europeans disapproved of and discouraged local knowledge and practice. To radio listeners, therefore, the broadcast of indigenous songs and stories represented an affirmation of local knowledge and practice at a period when such affirmation was not generally accepted from Europeans (1999: 341).

National radio broadcasting was formally established in 1966, primarily as an information service, but by the end of the decade Radio Vila began to broadcast *kastom* and/or stringband items. During the 1970s and 1980s the station continued to combine public service content and (limited) coverage of ni-Vanuatu culture, including airplay of Vanuatu pop as that became popular. The present radio system, comprising two national radio stations operated by the Vanuatu Broadcasting Corporation (Radio Vanuatu and Nambawan FM 98), was established in 1994 and signalled an end to the highly localized public service radio detailed in Bolton (*ibid.*). Over the last decade VBC music playlists have favoured western pop music, with the new Efate-orientated commercial station FM 107 (introduced in 2007) being the major outlet for local product, reggae and 'world music'.

Following legislation passed in 1992, a television broadcasting service (VBTC) began operating in 1994. Despite its national brief, VBTC principally serves residents of the capital (and the country's major urban area), Port Vila, and adjacent areas of Efate island. Factors such as the broadcasters' transmission range, combined with a lack of electricity and/or television sets on outer islands, limit its audience reach elsewhere. Along with occasional coverage of major music events, such as the annual Fes Napuan music festival, VBTC's most significant contribution to local music culture occurred in the form of a 30-minute long, fortnightly contemporary music show entitled *Pacific Tempo*. Initiated in 2002, the show provided valuable exposure for Vanuatu performers, many of whom are based (and perform near-exclusively) in Port Vila. Produced, directed and edited by Jean-Baptiste Calo, the show was popular with viewers before being axed in 2005.⁷ Due in substantial part to the inception of *Pacific Tempo*, local music video production commenced in 2002 with dedicated operations such as Bistaveos, run by former Won Smol Bag theatre actor and University of Ballarat graduate⁸ Joe Tjiobang,⁹ operating, shooting and editing in one-room premises in central Port Vila. In 2006 Calo began working as an independent music video producer, immediately securing high profile commissions for artists such as Vanessa Quai.

7. Although, at the time of writing (early 2008), it is under consideration for reinstatement.

8. Tjiobang studied Performing Arts at Ballarat in 1995–2000.

9. Also referred to as Joe Jeffred Bong in various press accounts.

Music video in Vanuatu

Since *Pacific Tempo's* demise, TV exposure for music videos has occurred either within programmes or as 'filler' material in the schedule. The timing of the show's termination, at a time when recording artists were beginning to factor music video production into their promotional and creative activities, combined with the establishment of production facilities and skills in Port Vila, precipitated the development of music video production for packaging and distribution on DVDs.

While the estimated market for ni-Vanuatu music DVDs is around 800–1000 copies, production companies such as Bistaveos only manufacture between 150–200 copies per release, and retail them for between 2000 and 2500 vatu (c. Australian \$28–c. \$35) per copy, since piracy is rapid and rife. Given the absence of gazetted copyright legislation in Vanuatu, a number of Port Vila retailers routinely pirate local music DVDs and retail them for less than 1000 vatu (c. \$14). Despite this situation, there has been a steady stream of DVD releases in Vanuatu from 2005 on. These are either compilation DVDs, such as Bistaveos's *Eli Koleksen* (2006), featuring clips for artists such as Nauten, Joe Max and Alphongs Jack Kalontano; or single-artist DVD albums, such as Akoma's *Rhythms From the Rising Sun*¹⁰ (2006). Given their minimal commercial viability as stand-alone products, Vanuatu music DVD releases can be regarded as primarily promotional artifacts. But this alone does not explain the volume of production in Vanuatu's music market. Rather, one of the principal factors behind music video production in Vanuatu appears to be that of public expression and prestige for the artists and the specific families, communities, localities and/or language groups concerned (with those aggregations also comprising the main sales focus and potential market for the DVD product). This aspect is a significant factor in understanding the dynamics of music video production in Vanuatu, the themes explored in ni-Vanuatu music video texts and the genre types that can be identified.

As a form, music video essentially comprises a visual track that attempts to variously complement, extend and/or enhance a pre-constituted music track and, thereby, assist in the promotion of commercially retailed audio products and the artists who produce them. In the majority of cases, lip-synched vocal miming of sung lyrics provides a core element of the visual text.

Many videos also feature combinations of the following elements:

- instrumental performers miming their parts;
- musicians and/or non-musical performers dancing (in approximate synch) to the music's rhythm;
- footage of actual onstage performances and/or rehearsals;

10. Spelling as on DVD cover and label.

- informal footage of the band (socializing etc.);
- singers (and/or other band members) acting in narrative fragments;
- footage of scenic locations;
- stock footage (from television programmes, films etc.);
- visual effects sequences.

In the majority of music videos internationally, the series of elements itemized are primarily deployed to enhance the appeal—and consequent saleability—of the music track and featured artist.

A substantial number of Vanuatu music videos conform to the characterization, particularly those produced for successful solo performers and pop reggae acts. In characterizing Vanuatu music videos, those produced to promote releases by popular pop/Gospel performer Vanessa Quai are the most distinct in terms of their international exposure, production values and similarity of style to Western models. But they remain the exception rather than the rule in that her pan-regional success (see Hayward 2007b) has facilitated production budgets and treatments that reflect their intended international audiences and, in several cases, the employment of off-shore directors and editors.¹¹ Music videos produced for popular stringband Tokosouwia, for instance, provide a more representative example of standard ni-Vanuatu promo style. The band's 2005 DVD release *My Sweet Santo Taon* (video producers uncredited) features 12 mid-tempo songs (in the band's habitually bright, major-key bouncily rhythmic style). Three videos utilize live performance footage and six employ skeletal narrative elements to visually represent the love/relationship theme clearly signalled in their lyrics and song titles (such as 'Darling Lin', 'Gel Wallarano'¹² and 'Mix Malo Shefa Girl'). Of the remaining three songs, one ('Tourism Song') is a straightforward tourist promotional track, one is (effectively) an extended promotion for one of the band's favourite socialisation venues ('Harbourview Nakamal') and the third is a celebration of the Vanuatu Football Federation ('VFF'). The latter three are notable for their functional address to broader commodities and sectors. Tourism songs are a regular feature of many Vanuatu stringband repertoires, due in substantial part to their prominence as tourist entertainers,¹³ and Tokosouwia's tourist song and video are relatively conventional examples of the type. 'VFF' is also relatively conventional as a both a celebration of an object of national pride, and as an example of the international association of soccer and popular music (particularly

11. Her music video catalogue includes material produced by Mangrove Studios in Noumea, CHM in Papua New Guinea and in-concert numbers sourced from Romanian television.

12. I.e. 'Girl from Wallarano' (a location on north Malekula).

13. Indeed stringbands often provide visitors with their first cultural impressions of Vanuatu, welcoming visitors arriving at the international airport and those disembarking from visiting cruise vessels.

with regard to national sides and the World Cup competition). The national profile of soccer was significantly boosted by Vanuatu's famous 4–2 victory over New Zealand in the 2004 Oceania Nation's Cup; and the song celebrates the launch of a FIFA¹⁴-funded National Football Academy and headquarters utilizing VBTC footage of visiting FIFA dignitaries, shots of the celebration and images of the band's singer miming in the company of members of the national soccer team. On a more local level, the lyrics and image sequences of the remaining track, 'Harbourview Nakamal', celebrate the virtues of a specific *nakamal* (kava bar¹⁵) and its product. While the video is open for interpretation as an extended advertisement for a commercial operation, such a reading would be reductive in that the quality (and/or hygiene) of kava establishments, their amenities and location are a source of pride for the bars' habitués and the communities they represent. The band's inscription within the space of the *nakamal* in the video evidences a sense of community pride which is also present in the title and cover design of the band's *My Sweet Santo Taon* DVD. While notable, the community/patriotic address of the three Tokosouwia videos discussed above represents a fraction of the greater engagement with community representation, commemoration and/or conflict resolution evident in several other ni-Vanuatu music video productions.



Figure 1: *Frame-grab from Harbourview Nakamal video*

14. FIFA—the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, the world's premier soccer body.

15. Kava is a fluid obtained from the roots of the plant *Piper methysticum*. Its active ingredients, *kavalactones*, have a mild tranquilizing effect. Kava is sold in bars, usually alongside food or other beverages.

Music video and community media in Vanuatu

A number of ni-Vanuatu music videos operate in the area delineated by Anna Naupa in the quotation that prefaces this article. In this space, celebrations and interpretations of *kastom* (understood as social and/or cultural heritage) develop in new contexts as cultural producers 'manipulate interpretations to suit changing needs' (Fingleton, Naupa and Ballard 2008: 28). In a country where national television has a limited penetration; where literacy is limited; and where oral/performance culture is the most prevalent (and, arguably, effective) means of communication and education, music video parallels its parent form of ni-Vanuatu music (and, especially, song) as a medium for the communication of specific messages.

Message songs of various kinds are common in *kastom* song repertoires in many parts of Vanuatu, commemorating particular individuals or incidents or else addressing issues of sustenance, social conduct, belief, mythology and/or cosmology. Illustrating this with regard to one particular island (and language group), Dixon Keller and Kuautonga (2007: 15) have identified Futuna island's traditional songs as 'a rich cultural heritage rooted in centuries past' that circulate as:

bedtime stories, entertainment for the long nights, tales to share with a group of friends, inspiration for music to perform together during special events, or sometimes the idle pastime of elders (ibid.).

Compositions by contemporary Futunese songwriters have continued local traditions in contemporary styles of music by commemorating notable individuals and also by addressing specific issues (such as Isaac Seru's 1990s composition 'Tapioca', which argues for consumption of the traditional locally-produced foodstuff in preference to rice).¹⁶ Songwriters associated with nationally successful Futunese stringbands like Fatuana Matua, such as (most prominently) Donald Wotu, have continued to write similar material and also diversified into songs supporting national campaigns (such as that encouraging the cessation of forest clearing) and promoting national bodies (such as VBTC and Tourism Vanuatu).

In the post-independence period there has been a growing tendency for communities to establish stringbands to act as a community focus, training opportunity and source of (some minor degree of) economic benefit for unemployed youth, particularly those in migrant communities in the urban and peri-urban fringes of Vanuatu where traditional lifestyles are increasingly untenable and employment in the cash economy is scarce and tenuous. This purpose is aptly summarized by the cover notes to the Fatumana Cultural Group's debut CD *Vanuatu—The Purple Paradise* (2005) that describe the impetus to form the band in the following terms:

16. Which has to be imported and purchased for cash.

The cultural group was established with the opinion of uniting and keeping youth of Futuna in Port Vila away from city hoons and other exotic attractions that blend with city life. There was also the view of getting employment by entertainment that pays incentives to members of the group, and the opportunity to hear, learn and rediscover our past. Back to my roots and the feeling of true identity and a deep sense of spirituality.

The music video projects discussed in the final section of this article operate at a point of intersection between this re-affirmative cultural 'self-help' strategy and the broader community service roles that are evident in much ni-Vanuatu culture. One distinct form of the latter comprises the use of dramatic performance for educational purposes pioneered (in the modern context at least) by the Wan Smol Bag¹⁷ community theatre company.

Wan Smol Bag was established in Port Vila in 1989 by expatriates Peter Walker and Jo Darras and ni-Vanuatu volunteers Charleon Falau and Joe Tjiobang. The company's initial aim was to convey community health education messages in accessible and entertaining formats. Functioning as an independent organization, the company has subsequently expanded its remit and undertaken public information campaigns on medical, social and environmental issues throughout Vanuatu (on behalf of those national and international agencies that have project funded them) and also trained ni-Vanuatu teachers, medical and social workers about the use of theatre (and associated musical and media activities) with community groups.¹⁸ Typically, Won Smol Bag's performances are under an hour's duration and feature drama, comedy and song followed by discussion sessions about the issues raised and possibilities for action (which are, in turn, communicated back to the sponsoring agencies). The company's visits to various parts of the national archipelago have provided isolated communities with valuable external stimuli and also highlighted the use of performance in modern communication contexts. Some insight into the character of Won Smol Bag's activities can be gained from Liz Thompson's description of a particular project undertaken in Kuramambo village in 2000:

The Environment Unit in Port Vila had asked them to put on a play about the preservation of a local bird. They had already asked the people to create a sanctuary, but given the bird was a much valued food source, it offered them an income they were loath to lose despite suggestions there would be compensation. The idea of the trip to Kuramambo was not only to raise awareness, but

17. The company's name is the Bislama term for 'one small bag', reflecting the highly portable nature of the theatre group's props and costumes. See the company's website <http://www.wan-smolbag-theatre.org/> for further details.

18. See Gaskell and Taylor (2004), for a discussion of their approach and evaluation of their success.

also to pass on the skills of performance; the community became the actors. With the help of Peter Walker and two leading actors they created a play in which the villagers became the endangered birds, they sang and danced and used Custom stories to convey ideas that had been discussed in workshops. The final production was extremely successful, children left the theatre ground singing the melodies, people laughed and talked about the issues raised. Not only did they reconsider the question of conservation... they performed their first play (Thompson 2000).

A number of the company's performances have been documented and adapted in video productions and have been circulated to schools and communities in this form. Significant examples of the latter include the 1992 AIDS awareness production *Like Any Other Lovers* (1992), funded by the South Pacific Commission; *On the Reef* (1995), which addressed the need for careful maintenance of coral reef resources and ecology; and *Vot long Pati la!* (1999)—an ambitious, feature-length drama about the harmful effects of bribery and corruption on local and national government. Another production with particular relevance to this focus of this article was *Pacific Star* (1994), a musical comedy about the introduction of tourism to a small Vanuatu island and its personal and cultural impacts.

Understood against this context, the unusual thematic content of a number of Vanuatu music videos conforms to a distinct national deployment of media for public service purposes. In the case of the videos discussed below, this aspect has also been facilitated by the funding and commissioning of the videos by the artists and communities they emerge from (rather than by the recording companies who release their material on cassette or CD¹⁹), giving such productions a distinct rationale and dynamic.

Video releases

In terms of music video material, community and socially activist functions are apparent in both album projects by artists and individual songs and music video tracks included alongside other material on DVD releases. With regard to the former, the most significant example to date is Esau Vate's DVD album *Paunangisu in Unity*, directed by Tjiobang to music tracks produced by him.

***Paunangisu in Unity* (2005)**

Paunangisu²⁰ is a village located on the north-east coast of Efate to the immediate south of nearby Kakula island. The village began as a missionary settlement in

19. The standard pattern in the West is for music companies to fund and organize the production of music videos, treating the expenditure as an advance against projected income.

20. Also spelled 'Paonangisu' and 'Paonanguis'.

the late 1800s, housing members of communities from inland areas of northern Efate and from Tanumiala (on Kakula), and was located close to the area of Takara, an area subject to dispute between communities from northern Efate and Emau island and European settlers (Guiart 1973: 314–17). Following independence in 1980, Government policy supported the return of freehold land acquired by expatriates during the colonial period to its previous indigenous owners. In addition to the difficulties involved in avoiding alienating overseas-owned companies, investors and expatriate residents, issues of rightful traditional ownership proved particularly complex and resulted in a series of intense and often protracted disputes about land rights between rival communities that spilled over into broader social resentment and rivalry. In recent years the mixture of communities described above has often led to disputes that have been complicated by Tongvan claims for Paunangisu (based on historical associations) and disputes with foreign-owned tourism ventures around the village area, in Takara and on Kakula island. These issues have afflicted the Paunangisu community both internally and with regard to its relations with adjacent communities in northern Efate. A continuing history of social problems led to internal and external attempts to stabilize and enhance community life in the region in the 2000s. Along with several infrastructural projects that came to fruition in 2007 (including the establishment of a police post at Paunangisu and a regional water supply based in the village) a number of social projects were undertaken.

In the period 2001–2003 the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights funded a programme of activities aimed at the 'Promotion of a culture of peace, tolerance and coexistence among ethnic groups' that included two projects conducted under the aegis of The Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific. These concerned two communities on Efate, Fresh Water, on the peri-urban fringe of Port Vila, and Paunangisu. Members of these two communities participated in the production of a (Bislama language) video documentary that addressed the issue of 'living together as different communities' and which was subsequently circulated to schools. As part of this initiative Bistaveos Productions conducted a project aimed at raising people's awareness of tolerance through the production of song texts on tolerance and human rights in Vanuatu. This initiative, in turn, led to the establishment of the Esau Vate stringband in the village. As the cover of their DVD album stated:

Paunangisu in Unity is special and unique in that it brings a message of PEACE, UNITY and HOPE seen through the eyes of youths who feel they have been deprived from enjoying their normal village life due to the 25 years of disputes and unrest in the village... This DVD album is dedicated to the people of Paunangisu who through their heartaches and pains, have managed to unite again in the hope that laughter will once again flourish.

Shot in and around Paunangisu and Port Vila by Tjiobang, the 12-track DVD includes visualizations of standard stringband song materials written by composer Alphonso Jack K, including three love/relationship songs ('Tevine Ifira', 'Melisa' and 'Laisa'), two celebrations of contemporary Vanuatu ('Port Vila Town' and 'Wan Pipol, Wan Nesen') and (unusually) a Fijian themed song ('Wan nite long Suva'). The remainder of the material comprises a health campaign song ('Alpinos') and five locally-themed songs ('Eawiri tai manga', 'November 10', 'Paunangisu', 'Elolapa' and 'Imere'). 'Alpinos' addresses a particular issue, emphasizing the song's strong anti-smoking message by combining a series of shots of men smoking with images of a health-campaign display tent, shots of a well-stocked tobacco store and graphic features such as a rocking stick-man figure (comprised of cigarettes), which opens the video, and a red cross bearing the slogan 'No kilim you' ('Don't kill yourself') that concludes the visual sequence.

Three of the local themed songs refer to community aspects. *Eawiri tai manga* promotes engagement with non-traditional economic options by inter-cutting quasi-documentary sequences of young westerners being shown areas of Paunangisu land by male members of the community inter-cut with footage of community meetings and the singer and back-up vocalists lip-synching and dancing on location. The video for 'November 10' inter-cuts images of the singer lip-synching on a rural road with semi-documentary sequences of two men leaving the village to gather copra (dried coconut flesh)—an activity that has become increasingly important for communities such as Paunangisu as a cash crop to compensate for the decline of the local fisheries brought about—at least in part—by the villagers' own attempts to conserve traditional fishing grounds from complete exhaustion by declaring their own Marine Protection Areas (MPAs).²¹

'Paunangisu' in many ways provides the DVD's thematic centre, with its lyrics and opening image of a burning house followed by footage of community meetings reflecting on a community crisis point that occurred in 1996 and the longer-term attempts to resolve this that the Esau Vate stringband and the DVD represent. Illustrating the flexibility of local cultures and the desire to both perpetuate and acknowledge tradition *and* draw on modern elements, the song's music is somewhat atypical of the group's usual stringband fare, beginning with a picked introduction on nylon string guitar and featuring choruses

21. See the summary UNESCO report on MPAs (and, specifically, Paunangisu and Mele) online at: <http://www.unesco.org/csi/wise/indigenous/vanuatu3b.htm>.

closely similar in melody and vocal delivery to Abba's 1976 hit 'Fernando',²² a nostalgic recollection of times of trauma and commitment to change.²³ Read against its referent, in particular (although there is no evidence that this is the dominant mode of the song's local reception), the warm chorus works to diffuse the past trauma through redirection of community pain into optimism—an aspect reinforced in the video by images of the three colourfully shirted and garlanded singers swaying in time as they lip-synch the chorus with an older woman seated below them smiling confidently into the camera and the lead singer gazing down affectionately at her (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: *Frame-grab from chorus section of Paunangisu video*

The two locality songs address islands outside the immediate vicinity of Paunangisu, demonstrating a pride in and cultural awareness of broader Efatese history and identity. 'Elolapa' is a straightforward celebration of the virtues of Lelapa island off

22. See Tagg (1981) for discussion of the music and affectivity of 'Fernando'.

23. The lyrics specify this as occurring around the Rio Grande—suggesting the topic as the Mexican revolution—but, as might be expected from a mainstream pop song, use this reference allusively rather than as any more specific/didactic element.

the north-west coast of Efate (and also includes visual and lyrical references to nearby Eretoka²⁴) and was shot on the waters between the islands and the Efate mainland and nearby beaches. 'Imere' addresses the relocation of the residents of Imere island on the adjacent mainland area of south-western Efate in 1950 and their resettlement at Mele village. The song commemorates the original evacuation, celebrates the cultural heritage of the island (now run as a resort island known as 'Hideaway') and affirms the islanders' new home in Mele. Along with the video's shots of the island and adjacent shore, the historical linkages enacted by the video are most apparent in the form of the elderly male (implicitly represented as an original migrant) who dances along with the song as he accompanies the singer on a walk through the present-day village site.

If Esau Vate's *Paunangisu in Unity* DVD can be considered as a consciously interventionist production, a second DVD produced by Bistaveos represents what might be considered a more 'organic' extension of local *kastom* forms into a new audiovisual medium.

Akoma: Rythms [sic] from the Rising Sun (2006)

Akoma are a stringband from the north-west of Tongoa island (north of Efate, in the Shepherd island group). The ensemble have a standard stringband line-up and musical style but are notable for featuring a variety of vocal textures and ornaments. The band's 16-track DVD album is based on its eponymous CD/cassette release and the videos were produced by Bistaveos, with acting direction, scenarios and choreography provided by Karl Cooper and Jack Moses. The band's community base is emphasized by the DVD's lengthy credits for local participants, which include reference to the band's finance officer and the chairman of their fundraising committee. Akoma's song topics reflect the relatively stable social context of their community base and the island's recent history, and the DVD includes three welcome/farewell songs, five love/relationship songs, a concert clip and a Christian morality song. The remaining six compositions address aspects of local culture and history. Intersecting with the Esau Vate project, the lyrics and visual text of 'Paunangisu' provide a further plea for community harmony in that village (which, as discussed above, is subject to Tongoan land claims) and the remaining five tracks reflect on more specific Tongoan themes.

24. Eretoka (also commonly referred to as 'Hat island' on account of its appearance from the sea) is a world heritage listed historical site, being the burial place of Roy Mata, an important thirteenth-century chief reputed to have unified previously warring clans and to have established a degree of social stability on Efate.

Two tracks signal their address to historical incidents or *kastom* stories through use of monochrome sequences. '1942' visually represents its lyrics' relation of a wartime incident at Undine Bay Plantation through an extended black and white narrative sequence; while 'Nitue' combines full-colour lip-synch mime and dance sequences, enacted by young men in traditional costume, with sepia-tinged images representing the lyrics' account of a young boy who takes a shell used by an older woman in pandanus cloth making and floats it out to sea. Chastised by the woman, he distracts her and then dives into the sea himself. Including a far briefer and more fragmentary narrative thread, 'Sinarewo' begins with a group of young men dressed in westernized garb progressing to a feast before including images of young men dressed in long banana leaf 'kilts' singing and tapping sticks cut to the rhythm of the stringband song (together with occasional, somewhat ambiguous, narrative fragments of a boat at sea, searching the waters). 'Medley' is visually striking for its male and female performers' festive attire. Decorated with brightly coloured body paint and wearing pink and red clothes, tinsel head-dresses and sashes and feathers in their hair, the performers participate in a traditional squatting dance while swaying and miming to the song lyrics. Similarly to 'Sinarewo's' dance sequences, this aspect is comparable to what I have referred to elsewhere as the 'clan/locational' genre of Papua New Guinean music video where:

The central element... is the lip-synched performance of a song by its singer in his or her village or rural location accompanied onscreen by fellow clan members, usually dressed in traditional ceremonial costume and body paint, performing traditional-style dances that have been edited to fit the rhythm of the singer's pop/rock track' (Hayward 2007a: 166).

Inter-cut with its mime sequences 'Medley' also features a sequence of young boys and an older male dressed in banana leaves running, chasing and symbolically capturing another male before performing a circular winding dance around him.

Like Titus Tilly's videos for Ronnie Galama's 'Rinunu' (1991) and 'Goruna' (1992) (see Hayward 1995: 8–11), 'Riri Ndalao' provides a vivid retelling of a *kastom* story. This element is presented as one of three strands of inter-cut images. The sequence begins with a mature woman accompanying two men down to a beach and being buried in the sand leaving only her face exposed. The two men then paddle out to sea. A magical figure, entirely swathed in banana leaves, comes onto the beach, approaches and attempts to dig her up only to be interrupted by the return of the two fishermen who pull him off, menace him with spears, kill him and then pull the woman up from the sand. This narrative thread is interwoven with sequences of three traditionally clad vocalists miming, sitting by a tree and dancers performing in the grounds of a local resort.



Figure 3: *Frame-grab from Nitue video*

In addition to Bistaveos's work, other video producers have produced material with similar sensibilities. The Dausake Stringband's 2007 DVD album, for instance, produced by Simion Tovovur and Sam Obed²⁵ (for Nbanga Ma Productions), engages with *kastom* themes alongside more contemporary ones. The Dausake Stringband, from Nguna island, off the north coast of Efate, has enjoyed a degree of national popularity and its musical style (typified by the musical arrangements and mix on the album) is premised on typical ni-Vanuatu up-tempo stringband grooves, with prominent ukulele and percussion elements.

After an introductory credit sequence of the band performing followed by a title caption, the 11-track DVD begins with a sequence shot in black and white showing a male, dressed in traditional clothing educating two similarly attired boys in the history of the island and community (with a Dausake track mixed behind his speech). The sequence then switches to colour as a ukulele introduction signals the transition to the stringband's contemporary musical version of the Tapesu story. The song's lyrics are (loosely) mimed by three men in traditional clothing worn (over coloured lap-laps) in a bush setting where they perform a dance routine that includes mimed gestures of drinking as they

25. From the VKS's National Film and Sound Unit.

splash water from a pool in the rock. Following this track, the DVD includes a range of material that provides a number of representations of the band and Nguna before returning to representations of *kastom* culture in the concluding track, 'Children's Medley'. Along with the two *kastom*-themed videos that 'book-end' the DVD, the nine other tracks comprise regular stringband fare such as love/relationship songs ('Angels Wing' and 'Pine Wood Postlight 535'), a concert footage video ('Sounds of North Efate'), a patriotic song ('Independens Day') and an (allied) affirmation of young people's engagement with contemporary Vanuatu ('Mi Stanap Yet'). The remaining four songs are specifically addressed to Nguna and local sites.

'Sleeping Lion' is essentially a tourist/promotional video with lyrics and images that extol the virtues of the island but this function is complicated (and linked to the DVD's opening track) by the mythic/*kastom* allusion provided by its opening image of a dugong preceding that of a man in ceremonial *kastom* garb lying on the sand at the water's edge (suggesting a transformation between the two). 'Taloa' and 'Vaolely Village' are more specifically focused on the communities specified in their titles. The music of the former is distinct from the majority of tracks on the DVD by virtue of its slower tempo and prominent keyboard lines, which give it a more sombre feel appropriate to the topic of the song—the founding of the Presbyterian church in the village in 1855 and its subsequent history. The song's visualization includes shots of plaques, old photographs and related location shots together with images of older, devote community members and with sequences of the band's singers, crisply dressed in white shirts, miming in the village and on the beach. 'Vaolely Village', by contrast, is set to a more typically up-tempo rhythm and opens with images of two colourfully dressed young women dancing with the singer on a path as he lip-synchs the opening verse, with the song and images extolling the virtues of village and the warmth of its hospitality. The final song 'Motalava Hit' (whose title refers to another location, Mota Lava island in the northern Banks group) offers a distinctly different representation of the band's performers and Nguna society. Despite being set to a standard stringband groove, the song is sung in a quirky and energetic style by the singer who appears lip-synching in the video, an individual with long dreadlocks and a red, gold and green cap and scarf, embodying the 'rasta' image popularized by Bob Marley and still prominent in Vanuatu (particularly around Port Vila). Indeed, the setting of his figure (and those of the other dancing men) in the natural landscape recalls similar 1970s and 1980s images of the 'rural Rastafarian' in Jamaican reggae iconography, providing a very different example of the assimilation of foreign styles and beliefs to that presented in 'Taloa'.

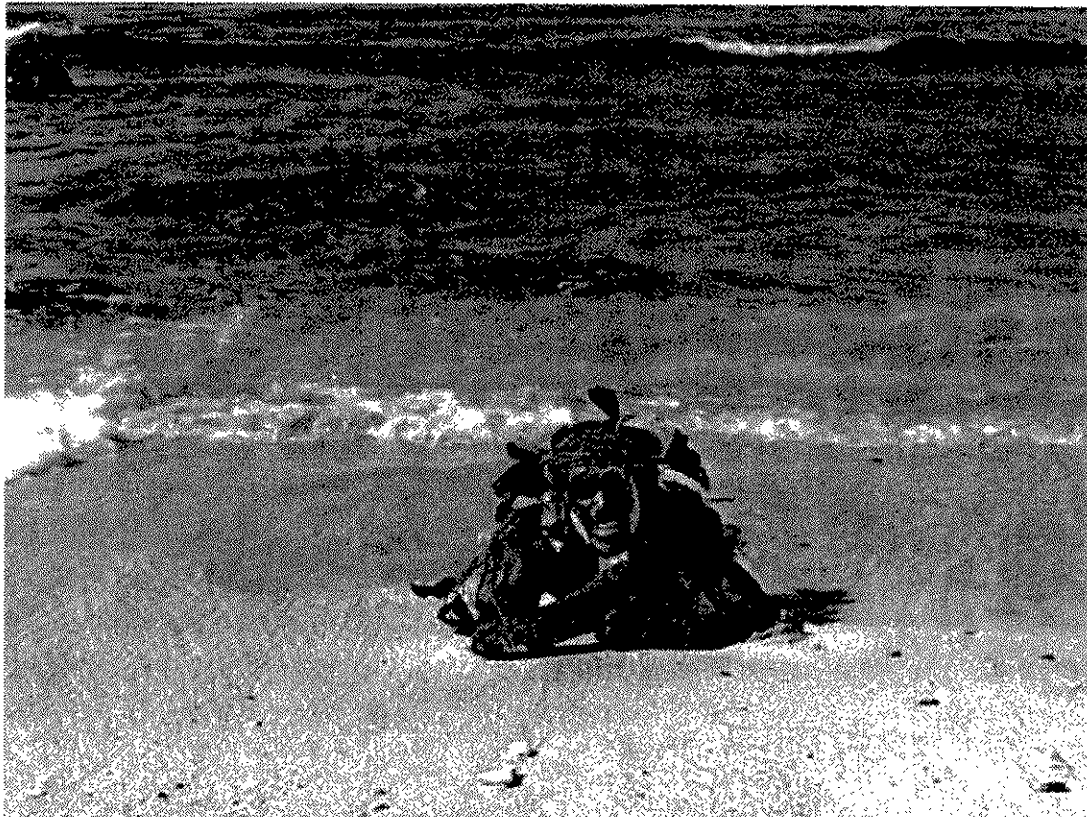


Figure 4: *Frame-grab from Sleeping Lion video*

The DVD concludes with a track entitled 'Children's Medley' which visually and thematically returns to the focus of the DVD's opening, mixing colour footage of lip-synching singers, accompanying performers and three young boys dressed in *kastom* garb lip-synching and dancing with a series of black and white sequences that illustrate the *kastom* stories alluded to in the lyrics. Commencing and concluding with both reference to *kastom* and *inscription within* a new medium, Dausake's DVD provides a multi-faceted representation of early twenty-first-century Nguna life premised on the band's stringband tracks.

Conclusion

The multinational nature of the western music industry's production and distribution of music video texts has tended to produce a homogenization of styles determined by established industry preconceptions of and formulae for effective music video marketing. While alternative approaches to visual style have occurred at the low-budget 'indie' margins and/or in self-consciously 'alternative'/artistically avant-garde niches, these have not required reconceptualization of the form and function of music video. The latter enterprise is one that has occurred at the geo-economic margins of the global industry, in contexts where audiovisual media

have less entrenched institutions and audience preconceptions than those of the highly commercialized centre. Similar to the Papua New Guinean music video sector in the early 1990s,²⁶ contemporary Vanuatu offers a space and context for strategic applications of music video techniques and form to representations of local community and heritage. In one of the paradoxes of globalization, videos such as those discussed above have not remained locally materialized artifacts, isolated from global consumers, but have, rather, become accessible to global audiences through the 'back door' of the Internet, posted on sites such as YouTube. While ni-Vanuatu access to this medium is highly limited, the expression of ni-Vanuatu identity by indigenous producers has transcended its production context and target audience and entered a transnational sphere. However limited international consumption—let alone adequate *comprehension*—of its texts might be, their presence in the international digital sphere floats ni-Vanuatu signs into new contexts without the mediating filtration of western documentary, infotainment and/or fictional representation, achieving another kind of national independence to that so regularly celebrated in stringband repertoires and ni-Vanuatu music in general.

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26. Before the CHM company established a near-monopolistic market share and standardized music video production—see Hayward (2007).

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