

Singing From the Same Song Sheet: Patriotism in the 1917 Classroom

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Abstract

This article reviews how singing came to be used as part of the school experience in 1917 to foster a sense of patriotism, and to support New Zealand's commitment to the First World War. To start, key curriculum initiatives that embedded singing in schools as part of the compulsory curriculum prior to the First World War are outlined. The main barrier to effective singing in schools was always the level of competence that teachers had in facilitating this activity. As the First World War progressed patriotic songs were made available for school use. Examples of this repertoire illustrate how the songs became more sophisticated and overtly patriotic. Political forces shaping the school experience such as the influence of the National Efficiency Board in encouraging displays of patriotism, particularly flag saluting ceremonies, are also highlighted. As part of the increasing custom of patriotic displays, singing became an integral element, particularly the two national anthems of New Zealand: 'God Save the King'; and 'God Defend New Zealand'. The First World War provoked a wave of new compositions, both songs and instrumental works. There was a well-organised Society for the Encouragement of New Zealand Music and one of the aims of this organisation was to support the official introduction into public schools of songs composed by New Zealanders. There was increased patriotic zeal following the end of the First World War, but the incorporation of songs inspired by the war no longer had the same currency and they began to fall away from the repertoire.

Keywords

First World War; New Zealand; patriotism; schools; singing

'No more noble aspiration could inspire poet and composer than to hand down to posterity some memorials of the great and heroic deeds of our soldiers.'¹

The Education Act of 1904 made singing compulsory in New Zealand primary schools. Following this, a syllabus of school music was published to support teachers in implementing this aspect of the school curriculum. At secondary level the inclusion of singing was left to the discretion of school principals. George Hogben, Inspector-General from 1899–1914 and Director of Education from 1914–1915, was responsible for the design of the new syllabus of 1914 which maintained the status of singing as part of the curriculum up to Standard

Six (approximately 12 years of age).² He believed that education was one of the strongest unifying influences in society and therefore that it was the role of schools and teachers to shape children into productive, moral, and healthy citizens prepared to serve their country in both peace and war.³ His opinion was that the war had been forced upon the British empire and as such New Zealand was honour bound to defend other nations in order to keep loyal to established treaties.⁴ His determination that students should be taught about the war was conveyed in many ways, one of which was through singing.⁵ Although clearly supportive of singing in schools from a policy perspective, Hogben also advocated strongly for teacher autonomy and liberty in the classroom and was often

1 Josiah Hanan, 'New Zealand Music', *Star*, 25 August 1917, 10.

2 'For Good Service: Mr G. Hogben Honoured', *Dominion*, 16 November 1915.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

quoted, saying ‘get the best teacher you can, and when you have got him, leave him alone’.⁶ The Chief Inspector of Schools noted in February 1914 that this gave the teacher ample opportunity to develop a programme that would materially improve the quality of singing in schools.⁷

The Regulations for Inspection and Syllabus of Instruction for schools included four expectations for singing lessons, and for singing exercises to be practised in schools.⁸ These were:

- By wisely chosen songs to awaken the imagination, and widen the capacity for emotion, while subjecting expression to artistic restraint.
- To cultivate the musical ear and the love of sweet sounds, and to train the pupils in the use of the melodious tones in their voices.
- To give some practical elementary knowledge of musical notation, and thus lay a foundation for further musical progress.
- To develop musical taste, by the singing of appropriate melodies, aided by suggestions from the teacher.

These regulations show that singing in the curriculum was used for a range of purposes, including: as a moral force; for voice and aural training; and for recreation and pleasure.

Meeting these expectations was the responsibility of the teacher and as such required not only choosing repertoire but also having the skills to develop singing ability. However, by June 1914, the perceived state of singing in state schools was so poor it prompted the Auckland Society of Musicians to initiate a petition, co-signed by all of the musicians’ societies in New Zealand, asking the Minister of Education, J. Allen, to appoint a committee of prominent musicians to consider the matter and make recommendations.⁹ There was no action taken by the minister to establish the proposed committee upon receipt of this submission.

The issue of teacher competence in guiding students with singing in schools had been identified in the Cohen Commission report on the education system in 1912.¹⁰ This report suggested singing was such an important subject that special attention should be paid to it in teacher training colleges. It also recommended Saturday classes for those currently in service to raise the standard of the teaching of singing throughout the country. During the war years professional development programmes were offered around the regions by travelling instructors.

These required a significant commitment from teachers with some programmes running for 12 consecutive, compulsory Saturdays.¹¹

Within schools there was a tension between the emphasis placed on singing from an educative as opposed to recreative perspective. Otago school inspectors, in their annual report of 1917, make no mention of the educational value of singing simply commenting that some teachers did not value the recreative effect of incidental singing. By contrast Mr A.H. Robinson, speaking to the New Zealand Educational Institute, maintained the educative value was far greater than the recreative value.¹² He was dismissive of those who thought otherwise saying ‘that there were many who regarded it merely as a little sing-song—a kind of “smoke-oh” with as much relation to education as a smoke bears to the actual work in hand’.¹³

The *School Journal*, established in 1907, was one of Hogben’s progressive educational initiatives. This quarterly free publication was the first school book to be produced by the Education Department for use in New Zealand schools. During the war years patriotic songs were included in the editions of the *School Journal*. Although the sentiments were clear, the lyrical quality was often unsophisticated, as can be noted with the ‘Flag Song’ from the June 1914 edition of the journal:¹⁴

Some flags are red or white or green,
And some are yellow too.
But the dear, dear flag that we love best,
Is the red and white and blue.
Then hail the flag, the bonny flag,
Of red and white and blue.

We love our native country’s flag,
To it our hearts are true.
Above we wave in splendid folds,
The red and white and blue.
Then hail the flag, the bonny flag,
Of red and white and blue.

Fortunately for the students, teachers and any audience, these home-grown songs started to gain more lyrical maturity as the war progressed. ‘New Zealand, the Land ‘neath the Southern Cross’, which featured in the November 1915 *School Journal*, offered more lyrical substance using rhyming couplets as the main

6 Herbert Roth, *George Hogben: A Biography* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., 1952), 152.

7 ‘Chief Inspector of Schools’, *Press*, 10 February 1914, 4.

8 Department of Education, *Regulations For Inspection and Syllabus of Instruction* (1914), 29.

9 ‘Present-Day Music’, *New Zealand Herald*, 16 June 1914, 9.

10 Mark Cohen, *Report to the Commission on Education in New Zealand* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1912), 18.

11 Susan Braatvedt, *A History of Music Education in State Primary and Intermediate Schools 1878–1989* (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 2002), 145.

12 A.H. Robinson, ‘Educational Institute’, *Otago Daily Times*, 7 June 1919, 13.

13 *Ibid.*

14 *School Journal* Part 2: June 1914.

poetic device.¹⁵ A range of patriotic war song themes are covered, in particular fighting for Britain as the Motherland, honour from service and for supreme sacrifice. This song geographically locates with the reference to the Southern Cross and gives equal status to New Zealand and Aotearoa as the name for this land.

In southern climes, in the rough rolling seas
A fair land is planted well fanned by the breeze
"Aotearoa" the long white cloud
Her people are happy contented and proud
Of their land and their home with its sea girt shore
New Zealand the fairest "Aotearoa".

Chorus:

New Zealand! Fairland 'neath the Southern Cross
New Zealand! The home of the free
Her mountains so high, her valleys so green
Her rivers, her lakes, like silver their sheen
Oh give me New Zealand, the land of my birth
New Zealand, my own land the fairest on earth.

In her sons and daughters, the old blood still flows
They still love the mother through weal and through woes
Her cause it is their cause, they spring at her word
To render assistance, If need draw the sword
New Zealand! No craven! Her beacon fires light
The mother is calling boys into the fight!

God grant that her sons may with honor return!
Help those that are sick, comfort all those who mourn
May all raise their voices in praise, not in grief
As one who rejoices in sweet found relief
New Zealand acclaim them, her sons who replied
To save her, and who for her honor have died.¹⁶

Along with the repertoire provided by the *School Journal*, other war-related songs were also used for school performances. An example can be seen in the patriotic selection for a concert in aid of the school picnic fund at Pakowhai School in October 1916.¹⁷ The following songs were performed: 'I will make a Man of you'; 'I want to be a Soldier'; and 'Sergeant Daddie, V.C.'

Further moves to strengthen the place of singing as part of the school experience were introduced in 1917. The *New Zealand Fern School Book*, published in 1917, was produced to support singing in schools.¹⁸ In his introduction to the collection J. Rennie notes the perceived want of teachers for distinctive New Zealand school songs. All of the lyrics were by M.A.J. Crawford with music by G.B. Laidlaw. Of the ten songs, nine were based on New Zealand nature themes: 'The Fern'; 'Toi

Toi Grass'; 'The Crimson Rata'; 'Raupo (Bulrushes)'; 'Fantails'; 'Cowbells'; 'Kowhai Bells'; 'Manuka'; 'Pawa Shells' with 'Our Flag' inspired by New Zealand's commitment to the First World War. The flag was a popular theme for patriotic songs and 'Our Flag' draws heavily on the imagery of pride in nationhood, supreme sacrifice, and of fighting for the flag.¹⁹

Silver stars on an azure sky,
our own dear flag is passing by,
Silver stars on an azure ground,
The Empire's cross above them found;
Proudly we welcome that flag of Blue,
It aye will find us staunch and true,
Staunch and true to our native land,
By sea borne breezes gently fanned.

Hearts beat fast and the tear drops fall,
As each brave deed we soft recall,
At sight of stars on an azure ground;
For foreign lands have many a mound,
Sacred dust of our boys that fell,
For silver stars they loved so well;
Brave and true for the flag they died,
The flag that is our joy and pride.
Ne'er let Greed or Dishonour stain,
Our flag of blue for fleeting gain,
May it stand for Truth and Right,
And stainless float in honored might;
Bright as stars let our record be
In lands 'neath the Southern Cross so free;
Greet we proudly that flag of blue,
To Home and King we'll e'er be true.

A critic of these works, writing under the non-deplume A. Musician, stated unambiguously that:

There can be discovered in the music hardly a single redeeming feature worth mentioning. Under ordinary conditions this plain valuation of a futile attempt would have been gladly spared publicity. But, unfortunately for the composer, the collection bears the imprint: "Authorised by the Education Department of the New Zealand Government for use in State Schools," a statement which makes it an imperative, if unpleasant duty to enter a protest and denounce an act of folly on the part of that Department. If ignorance of the law is deemed no valid excuse for the offender, why should ignorance of music exempt the Education Department from responsibility in that, as in any other educational subject entrusted to their care and supervision?²⁰

15 *School Journal* Part 3: November 1915.

16 *Ibid.*

17 'Pakowhai', *Hastings Standard*, 9 October 1916, 3.

18 M. Crawford and G. Laidlaw, *New Zealand Fern School Song Book Containing Ten Beautiful Songs with Music in Old and New Notations* (Dunedin: Mills, Dick and co., 1917), 22.

19 *Ibid.*

20 A. Musician, 'A School Song Book: Music under the Education Department', *Press*, 11 August, 1917.

In 1917, the National Efficiency Board recommended that schools introduce flag-saluting ceremonies. The practice of saluting the flag was not new in schools and the *New Zealand Journal of Education* had previously provided rules for flag drills in 1903. The intention of this practice was to instil in the minds of school children a strong patriotic sentiment through overt displays of conformity. The Board was following the lead of American schools in recommending the adoption of this practice and they had the full support of the Minister of Education, J.A. Hanan. Singing, particularly of both of New Zealand's national anthems: 'God Save the King' and 'God Defend New Zealand', was included as part of the flag-saluting ceremony and for other occasions such as Anzac Day, Empire Day, Declaration Day, and Dominion Day. Some schools also celebrated Trafalgar Day and Waterloo Day.

Following the tabling of a letter from W.B. Scandrett, former Mayor of Invercargill, to the Southland Education Board, along with his generous offer to provide sixteen thousand copies, they voted to introduce daily singing of the national anthem with a new patriotic verse for 'God Save the King':²¹

God bless our splendid men,
Send them safe home again,
God bless our men.
Keep them victorious,
Happy and chivalrous,
They are so dear to us,
God bless our men.²²

Journalist P. Lawlor recalled that prior to the First World War 'God Save the King' was only played at events when the Vice-Regal party was in attendance, but as the war progressed so too did the playing of anthems, with the French and Russian national anthems also regularly played at public functions and the audience standing at every occasion.²³

In a circular to schools sent in September 1917, and endorsed by the Minister of Education, a programme for Dominion Day outlined by the Senior Inspector to schools included guidance for instruction in History, Geography, Composition, Arithmetic, and Recitation and singing:²⁴ 'Recitation and singing. – Selections from Bracken and other New Zealand poets might be read, and a striking verse committed to memory. Failing these,

let any poems of a patriotic character be read or recited. For singing, the National Anthem, the New Zealand anthem, and other New Zealand songs should be sung'.²⁵ Although Bracken's 'God Defend New Zealand' was not officially recognised as a national anthem until 1977, this shows it had become firmly entrenched by 1917. This also suggests that Bracken, who had died in 1898, had been elevated in status as a patriotic poet of national pre-eminence. However, he was not a musician and the accompanying music that would lead to his poem becoming the New Zealand national anthem, and subsequently sung in schools nationwide, was acquired through a competition. In 1876 three German musicians based in Melbourne had been given the task of selecting the music and they chose the score composed by J.J. Woods, a teacher from Lawrence in Otago.²⁶

Dominion Day was never a public holiday but it was no doubt eagerly embraced by students as it typically meant an early dismissal for students after the formalities were concluded. Dominion Day events at Pukahu School in September 1917 were reported as follows: 'The children assembled, saluted the flag and sang a patriotic song. The headmaster, Mr R.H. Florence, then addressed the children on the growth of New Zealand and patriotism. After singing the National Anthem, the children were then dismissed for the day'.²⁷ Likewise, at Lyttelton District High School the principal, Mr E.U. Just: '... called for three cheers for our soldiers at the front. The children gave a hearty response, and followed up by singing *Sons of New Zealand*. After giving further cheers for Dominion Day and singing the National Anthem, the proceedings terminated by the children marching past and saluting the flag'.²⁸

There was a political and societal expectation that teachers would participate fully in school based patriotic ceremonies. The Alien Enemy Teacher's Act of 1915 had enabled Education Boards to easily dismiss from teaching any non-British citizen who had citizenship of an enemy state.²⁹ Furthermore, there were well-documented examples of teacher dismissals for expressing negative sentiments towards New Zealand's war effort. This was consistent with a general rejection of German popular culture during the war. For example, the Auckland Liedertafel was renamed the Auckland Male Choir and the Dresden Piano company became the Bristol Piano company.³⁰

21 William B. Scandrett, 'A Patriotic Suggestion', *Manawatu Herald*, 5 February 1916, 5.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Pat Lawlor, *More Wellington Days* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., 1962), 89.

24 'Dominion Day', *Manawatu Herald*, 18 September 1917.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Max Cryer, *Hear Our Voices We Entreat: The Extraordinary Story of New Zealand's National Anthems* (Christchurch: Exisle 2004), 42.

27 'Pukahu', *Hastings Standard*, 28 September 1917.

28 'Dominion Day', *Press*, 25 September 1917.

29 Roger Openshaw, Greg Lee, and Howard Lee, *Challenging the Myths* (Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1993), 121.

30 Chris Bourke, *Good-Bye Maoriland* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017), 131.

Coupled with the in-school experience there were also much larger inter-school events. For example, the Wellington Queen's carnival of July 1915 featured a choir of 800 students from schools around the region.³¹ They performed two concerts of national hymns and patriotic songs in the Town Hall. The support for school displays of patriotism was widespread although some questioned the appropriateness of on-going celebration events particularly in 1917 with the huge toll being exacted on the western front. Mr S.R. Dickinson, Headmaster of St. Andrew's College in Christchurch, asked: 'Are we such fools as to think there is going to be a regular perpetual jubilee of prosperity after the war is over, and that there will be no more wars to be prepared for? If we are, by all means let us put off getting what will make our children fit, and go on simpering vapid platitudes about parental love and "our dearest pledges", and all the rest of it'.³² Festivals for the encouragement of New Zealand music were established in 1916. In Christchurch, Mr A. Lilly, composer of the music for 'We're coming back, Zealandia!' said that: 'If the New Zealand born composers were only treated with a little patience and consideration they would show that they could produce work on a far higher plane than the modern trashy, decadent German work which was in the main pot-boiling pure and simple'.³³ His strong advocacy for New Zealand compositions was widely supported and in August 1917 he received political support in a widely circulated letter from the Minister of Education, part of which said 'during war, such as is at present convulsing the whole world, the influence of music cannot be overestimated in inspiring deeds of heroism and gallantry...'.³⁴ Hanan followed this up with a letter suggesting a meeting between the two to discuss the prospect of introducing into public schools more songs composed by New Zealanders. However, this initiative did not progress to any formal implementation.

Hanan continued to support singing in schools. His 1918 Education report is evidence of that and notable for his strong support of the arts underpinning his

educational vision. He said: 'All true education is the play of life upon life; of the activities of the child on the activities of life—hence the great importance of such subjects as English, civics and history, geography, singing, and a study of nature, not only in the primary, but in the secondary schools and in the universities'.³⁵

There were hundreds of songs and tunes composed between 1914–1918. Not all of these were directly related to the First World War but the majority were patriotic and as such would be considered appropriate for use in the school setting. The Patent Office records the following order of musical submissions for the beginning of 1917:

- 'O' God defend NZ'
- 'Band march "Featherston"'
- 'The Boys of Killarney'
- 'When we meet you Kaiser Billy in Berlin'
- 'We'll never forget our boys'

Within the wave of patriotic song writing it is possible that some progressive teachers also encouraged their students to compose, although this was not part of the teaching syllabus guidelines. Finding evidence of patriotic song writing from school students would be a worthwhile starting point for further research. A few years later, there was strong support for students to write original music when E. Douglas Tayler was appointed Supervisor of Musical Education in 1926.³⁶

After the First World War many schools kept flag-saluting ceremonies and commemorative days but singing of patriotic songs was not maintained to the level it had been previously. Openshaw has noted there was a 'rapid expansion of patriotic activity'.³⁷ However, the reasons for this new wave of patriotism, although stemming from the First World War were not focussed on the war, therefore songs about the First World War and the great and heroic deeds of our soldiers were no longer as relevant.

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In 2002 he founded the musical collective Ceol Manawatū and has produced three studio albums. The primary focus for Ceol Manawatū is the arrangement, recording, and performance of original music connected to Manawatū. In 2007 he travelled to Belgium with the band Wild Geese to perform at the 90th commemoration events at Messines. The following year

31 'Children in Song', *Dominion*, 2 July 1915.

32 S. Dickinson, 'Enlightening the community mind', *Education Crusade*, 23 April 1918, 4.

33 A. Lilly, 'New Zealand Music', *Press* 15 September 1916.

34 Hanan, 'New Zealand Music'.

35 Josiah Hanan, *Report of the Minister of Education for the Year Ending 31 December 1917: Session 1-11, E, 01* (1918).

36 John Thomson, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 269.

37 Roger Openshaw, 'The Highest Expression of Devotion: New Zealand Primary Schools and Patriotic Zeal During the Early 1920s', *History of Education* 9, no. 4 (1980): 333–34.

he was invited to play the lament at the Service of Remembrance for New Zealanders at Polygon Wood and at the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate. He is an invited member of the New Zealand Pilgrimage Trust.

He has a particular interest in the music associated with the First World War, both historical and contemporary, and has recorded several war-related songs: 'Passchendaele': <https://youtu.be/osR16hyH9eM>; 'Anzac Cove': <https://youtu.be/BCvBxeLMJdk>; and 'Maunganui Duff': https://youtu.be/Pqwo3_tDe1E. P.D.Turner@massey.ac.nz