

Reviews (Books)

The World's Din: Listening to Records, Radio and Films in New Zealand 1880–1940. By Peter Hoar. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2017. 288pp. NZ price: \$45.00. ISBN: 9781988531199.

Good-bye Maoriland: The Songs and Sounds of New Zealand's Great War. By Chris Bourke. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2017. 294pp. NZ price: \$59.99. ISBN: 9781869408718.

HISTORIANS ARE INCREASINGLY attuned to the noise of the past. What people hear and how they listen relay a set of meanings and ideas about relations, expectations and habits of behaviour, produced through historical, cultural and technological circumstances. In the experience of modernity, sounds are no longer limited by locale but can be transported and reproduced endlessly in any given time and place.

Peter Hoar's *The World's Din* introduces this 'sonic turn' into New Zealand historiography. Whereas histories of sound in New Zealand have been institutionally focused (often with a nationalistic theme), Hoar explores the dramatic transformation in what people heard and, equally, in the way they listened, from the invention of recorded sound in the 1880s to the inauguration of the 'television age' in the 1940s. This audio modernity collapsed time and space and changed ideas of culture, education and 'humanness', as well as habits of cultural production, consumption and commodification. The book is organized accordingly, tracking the recording, selling, organizing, domesticating, teaching and orchestrating of sound in the various socio-technical settings of records, radio and cinema. The result is a rich history which historicizes soundscapes as in many ways radically different to twenty-first-century ears, but also part of a continuum of change, the impact of which is still being felt (or heard) today.

Hoar's goal is to give us this history while also making the case for a serious consideration of soundscapes in historical writing generally. A striking, recurring theme of the book is how the recorded sound circulated through gramophones and radio sets, and in local cinemas, was uniform, but not heard or received in a uniform way. Audio technologies could be disruptive as well as hegemonic. Sonic modernity became the stage for a variety of actors: the progressive evangelists and celebrities of sound as well as its purveyors and charlatans, from public theatres to private parlours. Hoar fits them all into this punchy 288-page volume.

The aural revolution was international, and as the title of the book indicates, Hoar pays special attention to ways that élite and popular listeners alike chopped and changed sound for their own purposes, in a global circulation of noise. Soundscapes and audio technologies played a crucial role in assuring New Zealanders they were part of a 'modern, connected society' (p.99). Tensions between British and American soundscapes in the interwar period became part of the cultural politics of sound. Hoar shows how 'listening' to the past can radically shift our thinking about relations and technology. The sounds of cinema, for example, bring into question Belich's recolonization thesis, by showing that the imperial relationship was eroding rather than strengthening during the late 1920s and early 1930s when synchronized sound was introduced into New Zealand theatres. It also shifts New Zealand cinema history

from its fixation on the arrival of the talkies in the 1920s. Silent cinema differed in time and place and relied on musicians to produce sound effects and react to audiences, in a complex relationship between sonic production and reception. There was considerably more continuity than interruption in cinema practices. Bringing the ‘cultural static, distortion, and noise’ that shaped and contested these soundscapes into historical view is one of the book’s many valuable contributions.

As an unabashed partisan of ‘audio modernity’, Hoar challenges the reader to think about these ‘convergences of experiences’ (Peter Gibbons’s phrase) and builds a broad conceptual understanding of soundscapes that will aid future histories. As the author notes, there is much work to be done in this area. Hoar has produced a book of rare blending that advances striking historiographical arguments, while remaining an enjoyable and brisk read that will appeal to a broad academic and public audience, aided by rich footnotes and bibliography.

The book’s brisk pace, though enjoyable, is at times wanting in detail. Professionalization, social control, class and gendered experiences of sound are all discussed in brief terms. Hoar describes Māori encounters with Pākehā soundscapes and notes that New Zealand society ‘monitored, maintained, and controlled the noises that may have otherwise undermined and complicated the dominant Pakeha conception of nationhood’, with little sense of how these soundscapes can be placed in a broader schema of cultural colonization. The most striking omission is the neglect of the soundscapes of New Zealand during the First World War. Rather than extending the book’s arguments about the potentials of conformity and disruption in the ‘mobilising of sound’ as part of the war effort, the chapter on ‘military radio’ instead focuses on the travails of the New Zealand Wireless Troop which operated in the often forgotten Mesopotamian–Persian theatre of the war.

Fortunately, Chris Bourke’s *Good-bye Maoriland* is a timely intervention and an excellent accompaniment. This smart-looking publication aims to contribute to our understanding of how New Zealanders experienced, shaped, imagined and understood the period 1914–1918 through sound, particularly music. Bourke explores the music that mobilized and organized people’s emotions and bodies, managing death and loss during the war, and also closed off the war effort from critique. Bourke does this through a chronological and thematic approach, tracing shifting soundscapes of war among the war’s various participants; soldiers, as well as ‘the homefront’; women and families; Pākehā and Māori; militants and opponents of conscription.

Bourke’s contribution is to extend already established scholarly interpretations of the war. He traces a familiar story, from New Zealanders’ imperial enthusiasm at the outbreak of the fighting in 1914, through the patriotic music used in fundraising and recruitment, to the increasingly mournful music as the war continued, and finally to the role of music in peacemaking. Songwriting was a popular response to the war by both men and women, amateurs and professionals. International circulations of wartime music meant that songs produced in Britain could be redeployed in New Zealand patriotic fundraising. Soldiers appropriated music, such as traditional Samoan songs, Anglican hymns and French music hall ditties, to suit their purposes – to familiarize, for example, the soundscapes of Gallipoli.

What *Good-bye Maoriland* does differently is show how the war irrevocably changed musical culture in New Zealand. The war took familiar musical forms and practices, such as Vaudeville, as well as the associational networks of churches and brass bands, and transformed emerging infrastructures and organizations of

amateur and professional music. This was out of necessity rather than nationalism. New Zealand music had been dominated by German influences, relying on repertoires, teachers, sheet music, instruments from Germany; all 'silenced' at the outbreak of the war.

Sonic taonga are also considered in this volume. Waikato-Tainui waiata, such as Te Puea's 'E Huri Ra Koe', provide a way to discuss opposition to the war. It also shows how music has provided an important thread of cultural memory. Bourke's is the first written treatment of the history of First World War music. Māori Television has, of course, made the performance and discussion of music a key part of its Anzac Day broadcast since its inception in 2004. The referent to 'Maoriland' in the book's title (from the eponymous song by Raymond Hope) is never directly addressed in the book. This is something of a missed opportunity, as thinking about music extends our understanding of this genre in 'antebellum' New Zealand. It would seem that, for Bourke, 'Maoriland' is a forgotten world, part of New Zealand's distinctly popular, amateur musical culture collapsed and transformed by the experience of total, global war.

The World's Din and *Good-bye Maoriland* invite us to consider vernacular soundscapes of local worlds, as well as the circulation of sound texts in Tasman, imperial and global networks. They are excellent reading in tandem. *World's Din* provides a theoretical framework to think about the making and reception of sound, and its broader historical context, while *Good-bye Maoriland* provides something of a source reader for New Zealand's First World War sounds and songs. Both show that experiences of listening, although ephemeral, are important and necessary to understanding the past. Given that podcasts and other audio media are increasingly preferred to written histories, offering rich and immersive audio experiences, both these books are timely reminders that we need to think how new digital contexts can incorporate sound texts and shape how we locate, compose, produce and distribute our histories.

ROWAN LIGHT

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The Camera in the Crowd: Filming New Zealand in Peace and War, 1895–1920.

By Christopher Pugsley. Oratia Books, Auckland, 2017. 509pp. NZ price: \$80.00. ISBN: 9780947506346.

BEFORE BEING RECOGNIZED as a major player in the film industry through Sir Peter Jackson's work, New Zealand could claim a rich cinematic history. When film emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, New Zealanders quickly embraced the new technology and began making and watching films. This history, however, has been somewhat neglected. Notable exceptions include Geoffrey Churchman's *Celluloid Dreams: A Century of Film in New Zealand* and the edited volume *New Zealand Film: An Illustrated History*. With *The Camera in the Crowd: Filming New Zealand in Peace and War, 1895–1920*, Christopher Pugsley adds to this growing