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# Goemulgaw Lagal: Natural and Cultural Histories of the Island of Mabuyag, Torres Strait.

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### COVER

Image on book cover: People tending to a ground oven (*umai*) at Nayedh, Bau village, Mabuyag, 1921.  
Photographed by Frank Hurley (National Library of Australia: [pic-vn3314129-v](http://pic-vn3314129-v)).

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# 'Sweet sounds of this place': contemporary recordings and socio-cultural uses of Mabuyag music

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Music is an important cultural practice for the people of Mabuyag Island, Torres Strait, Queensland. Both on the island itself and among the many Mabuyag Islanders living elsewhere, it provides a readily transportable means to reaffirm links not only to the Kala Lagaw Ya language but also community memories. As an educational tool, music also provides a means to link different generations. This chapter focuses on two key community musicians, brothers Dimple and Gabriel Bani, members of culturally engaged extended families that are proactively using music to strengthen Mabuyag cultural practices.

□ *Mabuyag island, music, ethnomusicology, commercial recordings.*

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... the island comes alive to the sound of my drum,  
rhythmic dancing feet, sweet sounds of this place ...

(Cygnet Repu [2009a], *Midnight Hour*).

Music is a key component of socio-cultural life on Mabuyag and amongst its many emigrants living across the Torres Strait region and mainland Australia. By its direct linkages to the language, culture and communal memories of the home island, music helps define, via *Ailan Kastom* (Beckett, 1987) and formal and informal education (Costigan & Neuenfeldt, 2002), what it is to be a Mabuyag Islander, a Torres Strait Islander and also an Indigenous Australian. It provides a soundtrack for the contemporary construction of an evolving sense of community, a sense that is sung as much as it is told or danced.

To explore the multiple and multifaceted uses of music in the lives of Mabuyag people, this chapter combines description, analysis and excerpts from interviews with two prominent musicians, singers and cultural custodians: brothers Dimple and Gabriel Bani. Although music and dance are often performed together, the focus here is primarily on the socio-cultural uses of music of all kinds, both secular and sacred. The focus is also primarily on the years 2000-2014, when I had direct involvement with the music of Mabuyag-based or affiliated musicians, singers and songwriters as a music producer and researcher (Mabuyag, 2008; Neuenfeldt, 2001; Neuenfeldt, 2011a, 2011b; Neuenfeldt & Costigan, 2004). Whilst I do not claim to be an expert on the music of Mabuyag, I have had an active role in helping to record, produce, archive and present it to wider audiences.

### **MABUYAG, MUSIC RESEARCH AND SELECT RECORDINGS**

Mabuyag may be a small community of approximately 300 people but it has a large regional reputation for its strong music culture. It also has had a long, albeit sporadic, history of being the focus of

ethnomusicological research, recordings and analysis. In 1888, Haddon (1890) described elements of Mabuyag's music and dance. A decade later as leader of the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, he provided more information on Mabuyag's musical culture, including descriptions of musical instruments, songs, dances and dance paraphernalia (Haddon 1912a, 1912b, 1912c). Copies of Haddon's recordings are held at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra (n.d.). During the same expedition, Ray and Myers also recorded and analysed 14 Mabuyag songs (Myers, 1912).

In the 1960s, Laade (1977) recorded music on Mabuyag for the album *Traditional Songs of the Western Torres Strait: South Pacific*<sup>1</sup> and his field recordings were later archived (Laade, 1990). One unforeseen but interesting result of his recordings was the documentation of direct immigrant influences on the music of Mabuyag. In particular, a chant on the album was only recently identified as coming historically from Oinafa village on the island of Rotuma, which is now part of modern day Fiji. Rotuma was the source of numerous migrants to the Torres Strait region during the colonial era and also had an impact on other cultural practices in the Torres Strait region (Neuenfeldt, 2007: 100; Mua, 2007; Mullins, 1995). Dimple and Gabriel Bani's father, the late Ephraim Bani, hereditary chief of Wagadagam, linguist and cultural authority (Calvert, 1997), published an article on Mabuyag songs, which includes 16 transcribed, translated and annotated songs (Bani, 1976). In the realm of sacred Christian music, the *Eastern and Western Hymn Book and Liturgy* (Pilot, c.1973) contains un-credited hymns popular within the Mabuyag community.

Beginning in 2008, the Torres Strait Regional Authority has funded and produced a series of community CDs/DVDs across the Torres

Strait region, including one recorded on-location at Mabuyag: *Mabuygiw Awgadhaw Nawul: Traditional and Contemporary Music and Dance of Mabuiag Island, Torres Strait* (Mabuyag, 2008). The CD features 17 sacred songs written and performed by community musicians and singers, whilst the DVD includes interviews about the past and present uses of music in the community and also dances by primary school students from the Mabuyag Campus of Tagai College.<sup>2</sup> Songs from the CD have been broadcast on regional and national Indigenous radio. They have also been featured on the *Rhythm Divine* (2008) radio program on the Australia Broadcasting Corporation's Radio National network. As well, Cygnet Repu's (2009b) *We Sing Kumbaya* is included in the DVD soundtrack for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Galleries at the National Gallery of Australia; the Queensland Government and Q Music's (2009) *Home: A Collection of Songs from Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists*; and also a compilation CD of Indigenous music for the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Songs of Indigenous Australia* (Repu 2008). In 2011, Dimple Bani and Gabriel Bani recorded *Ngay E* (Peter, 2011) and *Wa Ngay Izalu* and the Wongai Family recorded *Thessalonia* and *Ni Mina Koey Awgadh* for *Kawailagal Wakai: Music and Dance from the Inner Western Islands of Torres Strait* (D & G Bani, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).

Other relatively recent recordings of Mabuyag music include the late Ephraim Bani's collaboration with Torres Strait Islander singer-songwriter Henry 'Seaman' Dan. He provided translations from *Kala Lagaw Ya* into English for two Mabuyag maritime songs, *Gubaw Paruka* and *Black Swana* (Dan, 2000, 2002). Dimple and Gabriel also performed their father Ephraim's song *My Home Wagagadam* for the film *Four*, based on Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and partially

filmed in the Torres Strait region (Slade, 2007). Dimple and Gabriel recorded a tribute to him, *My Father's Time*, for the *Sailing the Southeast Wind* community CD (Bani et al., 2005). Cygnet Repu also recorded a song for the *Sailing the Southeast Wind* CD, *Kaidhu Baba* (Repu, 2005), and released a solo CD *Islander* (Repu, 2009c) featuring all original Mabuyag music. As well, he has produced several home-recorded and locally-distributed CDs. Cygnet and Gabriel also arranged and sang the backing vocals on Seaman Dan's version of *Gubaw Paruka* and Cygnet sang backing vocals and did a translation into *Kala Lagaw Ya* for Seaman Dan's version of the Pigram Brothers' iconic pearling song *Saltwater Cowboy* on the *Sailing Home* CD (Dan, 2009).

The *Strike Em!: Contemporary Voices from Torres Strait* community CD contained *Awgadh Noe Ayimdhin* by Cygnet Repu (2000) and *Sibuwani A Mamal Awgadh* by Dimple and Gabriel's brother Edmund Bani (2000), both are *kores*, contemporary Christian sacred songs (Lawrence, 2000), sung by residents of Thursday Island, the Wongai Family Warriors.<sup>3</sup> A *kores* by the late Maynard Bani, *Kuiku Garka Yesu Keriso*, was recorded by the Church of Torres Strait Choir Group of Thursday Island for the National Library of Australia's book and double CD *Verandah Music* (Bani, 2003; Seal & Willis, 2003). Singer and instrumentalist Danny Bani, Gabriel's son, recorded *Life Is* with the hip-hop group Mau Power (Patrick Mau) for the CD *Two Shades Of Grey* (Mau Power/Blaze, 2009) and *Complete Me* with Mondae, *Small Town Syndrome* with Rebellious Vibe and *Hold On* with Mau Power for *Kawailagal Wakai: Music and Dance from the Inner Western Islands of Torres Strait*. He also recorded three songs *Bigger Better Stronger*, *Waiting in This Storm* and *If You're Gonna Run Away* for the Arts Queensland's CD *Listen Up 2!: More Emerging Indigenous*

*Performers from Tropical North Queensland* (2013) and has recorded an album *db*, released in 2014. Thursday Island-born but Northern Peninsula Area-based singer-songwriter Erris Eseli (2011) recorded *Away from Home* for a community CD/DVD recorded for the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council. Dimple Bani (2010) recorded four Mabuyag songs (*Ampuru*, *Dogai I*, *Sawurakeke Gima Zazilnga* and *Sawurkeke*) for curriculum use by Tagai College and his mother Mrs Petharie Bani (née Misi) told Mabuyag stories (Figures 1-2). Dimple and Gabriel Bani sang in Torres Strait Creole on Henry 'Seaman' Dan's (2012) version of *Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter* for his *Sunnyside* CD. Although there are relatively few readily-available recordings of Mabuyag music, they are exemplary examples of the importance of music in socio-cultural life. Many of the recordings listed here have been archived with the National Library of Australia ([www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)) and the National Film and Sound Archives ([www.nfsa.gov.au](http://www.nfsa.gov.au)). Some are also available through the Torres Strait Regional Authority's Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island.<sup>4</sup>



FIG. 1. Dimple Bani with guitar recording Mabuyag songs for Tagai State College Curriculum Project 2010. Image courtesy: Karl Neuenfeldt.



FIG. 2. Mrs Bani recording Mabuyag stories for Tagai State College Curriculum Project 2010. Image courtesy: Karl Neuenfeldt.

### THE PERSPECTIVES OF DIMPLE AND GABRIEL BANI ON MABUYAG MUSIC AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

Although there are many talented and committed Mabuyag community musicians and singers, the following excerpts are from interviews with two of those who have been proactive with music, music education and recordings. Hereditary tribal chief of Mabuyag Dimple Bani and Gabriel Bani provide some personal perspectives on the many socio-cultural uses of traditional and contemporary, secular and sacred Mabuyag music.

#### DIMPLE BANI

Dimple is the eldest son of the late Ephraim Bani (Alpher, 2005) and Petharie Bani (Figures 1-2). He was born in 1961 at Thursday Island and initiated (*buwalwoeydham*) as hereditary tribal chief of the Wagadagam tribe of Mabuyag in 2005. He grew up on Thursday Island, at Mabuyag and also in the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA), where the family of his mother resided at Cowal Creek, now Injinoo. As a member of the Koey Buway clan of the Wagadagam tribe, his totem (*awgadth*) is the crocodile (*koedal*); his wind is the north-west wind (*kuki*) because that is the geographical area of Mabuyag where the tribe originated.

Dimple's earliest memories of music are in family and community contexts (Dimple Bani, 2009): 'When I was growing up I heard [and] saw the dancing and the singing. My recollections was when I sat with my uncles, they used to sing songs. There was never a minute that you sat without singing a song. They'd be telling you stories and they'll be singing as well.' He also remembers the importance of sacred music in the form of Christian language hymns: 'Growing up you also served in churches so you were also exposed a lot to hymns.' Importantly however, Dimple also notes that to him 'sacred' music also encompasses traditional chants:

[Regarding] sacred music, I think the earliest that I experienced would have been the [traditional] chants. The sacred music is always in the chants. There has never been any other type of music to accompany that... The chants that I, for the first time, [was] exposed through my initiation [as chief], those songs had not been sung for a hundred years. They were sung there for the first time ... It was a sacred feeling, a feeling of respect and a feeling of humility. Especially for that type of music, for those types of songs that you were exposed to in the middle of it all [the initiation]. It was happening around you, and for your sake and it was privileged.<sup>5</sup>

He is also aware, and proud, that he comes from a lineage known for its music skills:

I think the important thing was that I come from a background of music because my great grandfather Ephraim Bani Senior was a composer and choreographer of music and dances. I guess that [with] that inheritance my father [Ephraim] took up that role. Even my uncles like the late Father Michael Bani were all

composers and choreographers. You were in the middle of it all. There would have been dancing and songs almost everyday of your life. [As well], my great grandfather and my grandfather, they composed island hymns that are sung in churches.

Like other musicians and singers of his generation growing up in remote Indigenous communities, musical tastes were broad and community musicians were expected to perform a range of genres to appeal to all generations in a community (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004). So whilst living in the NPA, he was exposed in particular to country music from Aboriginal friends: 'We used to have the old pick-up [stylus] record players and some had all the country music ... like Jim Reeves.' He also absorbed popular music of the 1970s by artists such as Elvis Presley, Creedence Clearwater Revival and Elton John. Playing such diverse genres meant that when he began recording later he already knew the basic conventions of contemporary music and consequently could also use them to present Mabuyag community music in new contexts.

The incorporation of Western musical elements is especially relevant to the on-going popularity and cultural importance of *kores*. Unlike language hymns, which are often sung acappella with only traditional drum accompaniment (*buruburu/warup* drums), *kores* are sung to chordal instruments. As well, different denominations of Christianity in Torres Strait have their own protocols for what instrumentation is deemed suitable. For example, evangelical churches would not usually use traditional percussion but rather a Western drum kit (Neuenfeldt, 2011a).

In the context of changes in how *kores* are composed and used, Dimple observes:

I guess the instruments had the most bearing on that change. We started to

play different types of instruments. Guitars came into play; the band came into play. In churches we have a lot of bands now sitting in the corner somewhere. And that change of music it sort of came in as you encounter different types of musical environments.

His own musical education in community music took place overwhelmingly in informal contexts (Costigan & Neuenfeldt, 2002), operating within extended family structures and also through the oral transmission of knowledge.

Most of the time it was what you absorbed [in the community]. Then in a sense it became an educational tool ... [Fundamental were] the roles my uncles played because that's where all the education was exposed to me. Because this is the person you get along with, these are your mother's brothers, maternal uncles. They are, in the Torres Strait Islands' family structure, the people who educate you. They teach you. They take you through to maturity. Prepare you for society, I guess ... You confide in them. You learn from them. They tell you all these things that you should know about. I think that the education of music and understanding actually comes from them. They exposed that. Where, I guess, you were sat down and you were told, not in a teaching sense but you were told in the sense of a story.

Because he already had fluency in *Kala Lagaw Ya*, the process had a different dynamic than might happen today:

Because you were already exposed to the languages, you understood everything ... Whereas today it's not so much, in the sense ... that

languages are not spoken [as much] in homes. I think that's the importance of your learning as in a traditional sense. That you would have learnt when a language hymn was sung in church you automatically learnt and understood what they were singing about. Whereas today, you are taught that language for you to actually learn and understand through the singing of the songs.

Because of changes in language use influenced by migration and English being the main language of education, Dimple emphasises the critical role of music as a means to stimulate and reinforce traditional language use, in particular through language hymns:

The importance now is to get the language hymns back into play. We go back and again to the languages, they have a lot to do with getting the hymns back sung, especially by our young people. Because when you look at it now with the old people that are living now only they actually know the hymns that are sung and it seems to be staying at that level at this moment. And the work is now being done to expose those hymns further down the generations. At the moment it's sitting up there with these elders. If these elders passed on tomorrow then the hymns would go with them. So there is a lot of work being done now at the moment to pass that on ... I was just sharing with some of the elders and they were talking about [how] the hymns have to once again be sung and taught.

Recording the hymns for projects such as the TSRA's community CDs/DVDs (for example, *Mabuygiw Awgadhaw Nawul*) is not only important for documentation and circulation: 'It's also a tool that you can

actually sit down and learn from ... You can play that over and over and all of a sudden you are singing hymns'.

Being the hereditary tribal chief, as well as a member of musically and culturally engaged extended families, carries with it certain expectations, personal and communal. Dimple believes that while there are certainly some obligations, there are also opportunities that he has come to realise are important:

People had expectations, yes. And I guess it's not something that you keep tabs on. It's something that is a purposeful thing for me now. What you learnt was for you and your family but most importantly what you had or what you learnt was for the community itself.

Similar to other concerned and committed Torres Strait Islanders, Dimple sees education in cultural practices, including music, to be a paramount ingredient in healthy communities.

Most of the things that we know has to become an educational tool now; to teach the young, the children after my generation so that it can be continued into the future. I think that's the importance. Before, it was all celebrations. [For example], it still is today a nice, important part in the way you conduct the initiation ceremony today. It's very important that you will know what songs you will sing and that they tie-in with [it]. It's not you just think of something out of your head and you want to sing it just because it sounds traditional. It will be a purposeful tie-in with what the occasion is. Even the dances that are performed and songs that are sung are tied-in with the occasion that is happening there, because they're stories that you will tell for people to see.

Here again the issue of language use is relevant because:

I guess it will be difficult at this stage where some people won't be understanding the languages that are spoken or sung. But most of the people will after they've been had some sort of exposure to it. What is the importance of telling that story? Whether it's on the *sugu*, the dancing platform [in the *kod*], or whether you are sitting with someone and just sharing the stories. It is actually now becoming an important part of education for our people of the Torres Strait Islands.

Part of the role of education could be a move towards the standardisation of some Mabuyag cultural practices such as music, something that Dimple and others are keen to encourage, as witnessed by involvement in producing curriculum materials for Tagai College:

We are putting up a structure here on Mabuyag and most of the things we will do right from the structure will be the messages, the songs, languages, the spellings will be standardised throughout the nation ... to the Torres Strait Island people living down south, in Western Australia. And everything will be spelt the same; everything will be sung the same. Without a structure existing people can do what they like but with it in place they will always be asking or finding out the correct way to go about doing these things.

Part of the reason for such a move is also that some cultural practices may not have been adequately researched or approved by home-island communities, in particular in the large diasporic Mabuyag and Torres Strait Islander community on the mainland. Such perceived misuse or misappropriation

of cultural practices such as music and dance can cause communal discord:

We will be standardising and it will stop people from dancing the dance that *they* would want to dance. [For example], if it's a Mabuyag Island dance but they'll dance it in the way they think it should be danced. If it is a normal type dance where you don't have any hand implements [dance apparatus], you don't have any head gear. [But then] when some people, a group down south say (in Brisbane some of them are doing it now), when they start dancing to the tourists there is a type of dance without those implements. But they'll put something on their heads to dance that dance to make it look spectacular.

Thus for people such as Dimple, there is the constant challenge of negotiating and balancing (both intra- and inter-culturally) the at times vexing issues of continuity and change, in particular with traditional practices. But for him adherence to tradition is paramount for those wanting to use Mabuyag cultural practices such as music: "you will have to seek ... authority or permission ... because its original form is always [unvarying], it doesn't change. It stays the same throughout generations".

And finally, as a composer of contemporary Mabuyag songs, Dimple Bani has a clear sense of why he composes and records:

As far as I'm concerned personally, all my songs that I have composed up to this date have been about history and our lifestyle. Some [community people], you know their dreams are diminished. They set goals but they don't accomplish those goals. These songs are to add strength as a reminder to them for who they are and the history that they're in and

everyone will identify with it. And it will bring them, I guess, back to a common ground.

GABRIEL BANI

Another person who uses music to help encourage a common ground for Mabuyag people is Dimple's younger brother Gabriel Bani (Gabriel Bani, 2010) (Figures 3-4). He is the second youngest child of the late hereditary chief Ephraim Bani and Mrs Petharie Bani (née Misi), Gabriel Bani was born in 1964 at



FIG. 3. Gabriel Bani with buruburu drum while recording for *Kaiwalagal Wakai: Music & Dance from the Inner Western Islands of Torres Strait* 2011. Image courtesy: Karl Neuenfeldt.



FIG. 4. Gabriel Bani with backpacker guitar while recording for *Kaiwalagal Wakai: Music & Dance from the Inner Western Islands of Torres Strait* 2011. Image courtesy: Karl Neuenfeldt.

Thursday Island. He is also a member of the Koey Buway clan and, like Dimple, grew up on Mabuyag and also in the NPA.

Gabriel remembers early encounters with Mabuyag music: 'The first memory was going to church ... The hymns, the language ... together with the community celebrations.' Music has always been a major part of socio-cultural life:

even now when [visitors] come to my house [on Thursday Island], the whole family just sings. There's just songs, there's just singing and there's music. That's a very big part of our lives today. And that was a special part in our growing up, that Mabuyag way, even when the families moved over to the NPA ... the dancing, the celebration, the singing. And it wasn't just on special occasions; it was everyday. Even if someone would explain [or] talk to you about the season or something ... They'd sing you a song.

Although he remembers old songs being sung during his formative years the tradition of community song writing is not static. For example, at the time of his oldest brother Dimple's initiation as tribal chief in 2005:

There was a special song composed by one of our maternal uncles, Erris Eseli [from Injinoo]. That song was [sung] coming from the *kod*, a sacred place of initiation and meeting, a men's place. The song was about coming from the *kod* into the community<sup>6</sup>... And when the movement comes from the *kod* the community humbles itself for what comes out from the *kod*. And in this case it was initiation. They were bringing back Dimple to go through his presentation into the community, that they'd already done the initiation

...That was a special song at that time. Even that song linked us with not only dad [Ephraim Bani] but also the ancestors who were before ... [passed down to the eldest son] from Athe [grandfather] Bari right down to Athe Koedhi and all the others, Athe Aki and Athe Mabua [and Athe Bani]. You know that was a song that was just composed in the year 2000 but it was a special one and it was sung to everybody with the old songs.

Learning music from both of his parent's families, Gabriel recalls that certain kinds of songs had a marked effect on his late father Ephraim:

special songs were sung ... [Dad] was very passionate and you know he was always emotional about certain songs and it was always the songs to do with the wind, the north-west wind, and songs to do with the island. It always hit that soft spot with [him].

Similarly, he found as he grew older, "I could understand why he cried all the time. Because when I started to sing those songs, it hit that soft spot in me as well."

Although community music in Kala Lagaw Ya had a profound impact on his musical education, the popular music of the 1960s and 1970s in English was also influential:

It was in the 1970s, [and] going to school music is a part of your life, singing and [making] music. So of course we embrace the rock culture, whatever was happening then, the Beatles and the Bee Gees ... It was a common thing to have a guitar in the house so everybody was playing guitar. Your dad was playing the guitar ... and your big brothers were playing the guitars, and your uncles were playing and they were also composing songs ...

composing love songs in language as well as in English.

His first public performances outside of his extended families and the Mabuyag community were in bands at the Federal Hotel on Thursday Island in the late 1970s, performing songs by Electric Light Orchestra, Kiss and Pink Floyd. He says: "We listened to a particular song and then we tried to reproduce it as it is." Later when he and other Mabuyag singers started blending traditional and contemporary popular music, and also mixing the Kala Lagaw Ya and English languages in songs, other issues arose.

A major issue is how to follow Indigenous cultural protocols to obtain permission to use particular songs, words, chants or dances (Neuenfeldt & Costigan, 2004). In general terms he notes:

I guess it goes back to the composer of the song, whether it's your family song, because your composer is your grandfather or great grandfather. But there are certain songs that are seen as family songs that are acceptable for you [to record]. But obviously if it's a song from another family, another clan group, we will sit down with that family. And that's the right way to ask if we can use that song.

Within his own extended families and community background:

some of the recordings we've made has been from songs from uncles from the maternal side, from mum's side [Misi, Bagari, Eseli, Baira and Peter families] ... Just out of respect we'd go to our maternal uncles and find out it's okay [that] we're going to use [a] great uncle's song. And they give us [permission], people like Erris Eseli [at Injinoo] ... and Father

John Eseli at Badu. So we would be speaking with them. Most of the songs that we're doing now, they're just within the family.

When it comes to blending old and new music, some general approaches have evolved, including "a trend over the last few years ... where you sing your English, then you sing your language. And basically the English describes what the language song is about." This bilingual approach is an important kind of linkage because as Gabriel explains:

The way we've spoken to people is about just passing that [language] on to our younger generations. Because language is not there with them as it was with us ... but to present it in such a way where it's like an educational thing. You know they can link, "oh so this ...", and then by the time they come around to learn about the language the songs will actually help them to identify [parts of a recorded song]: My father's time, so we are told, *Ina naki okiw maalu ugu puidhanu, ngoelmun butaw matha kalas tidai uzari* ... "oh, so *okiw* means that was their working ground [for gathering pearl shells]" ... So they can relate to the words: *maalu* means ocean, *butaw* means boats or whatever. But it will be more; this is how we explain to families that it's just like a bridge now linking what our value system [is] about how we saw our world. And young people are now seeing today's society the way they live ... We're very different but the song would be one of the key vehicles to actually make that link and continue that link I suppose.<sup>7</sup>

With his own son Daniel [Danny Bani] he says: "Daniel's songs are like [pop group]

Boyz II Men [songs], how he sings ... But I teach him language so he puts language in his songs as well. So he sings the language first, *Kala Lagaw Ya*, [and then the rest is] Rhythm and Blues”.

Overall the response in the wider Mabuyag community to blending new and old traditions has been encouraging:

The general feeling [was] they were excited because they heard these songs coming through this new medium now. And people were [asking], “Can I get a copy please? We want to [have one]”. And all the aunties, the uncles and people they could hear the stuff that they were all on about and songs that they sing, but now coming through with keyboards, guitar, percussions and all them things. But still keeping that [cultural tradition], the song is still there.

As to the importance of music to maintain those links, even for children who are much more urbanised than his generation, Gabriel states:

[It is] very important. I can't emphasise it [enough] ... Music is really important for educational purpose, for preserving the language. And that's one thing that I picked up and people talk about it. That you sang all those songs when you were young way back then, years and years and years ago. [So] you know when that song comes out today you going to sing it word for word. You know it is because of the music. You will remember, yeah. Even if you forget some parts you will get those words, but music it makes that [connection].

For Gabriel and his paternal and maternal extended families, one impetus for rehearsing, recording and revitalising some Mabuyag

songs was to prepare for the 1 October 2011 Tombstone Unveiling, the final funerary rite, for his late father, Ephraim.<sup>8</sup>

That was the reason why Dimple and I we went full on into recording. Some of the recent CDs that we've done here at home now have some old, old chants in it. And we've got permission from our maternal uncles for that. That was part of this educational process that I'm talking about because dad's Tombstone [Unveiling] is happening next year [2011]. Some of the songs that they're going to be doing is going to be really old songs never seen before. Like dances for the Tombstone [Unveiling]. So we've taken two or three of those songs and just sung them with no English but, as they are, the chants ... We put music to them and it's like the families they've got their CDs now [and] they listen to those songs all the time and then when the time comes for our practices [they have them].

Thus there exists a double mandate: preserving the past but also adapting to contemporary socio-cultural life and the reality of changes such as reduced traditional language use and a widely dispersed population of Mabuyag people. To address the former, Gabriel states:

I would very much like to preserve the old songs as they are. And we've spoken a few times now about, especially about our family, about getting all the family together and we just have a recording. You know maybe with us just one week or maybe [it] begins with a weekend. We just record all the songs to do with ... whether it's just immediate family or also the extended family. But Erris

Eseli and I have been talking some time now about [it] because there is just so many [songs]. [Not just] his songs and our other uncles' songs, but even the grandfathers' ... songs.

To address the latter part of the mandate, managing change, he says:

The songs changed from the [era of the pearling] luggers. Before [themes were] the wind, the island, the seasons. They changed to luggers, pearl, pearl diving. Then we changed to Kuri Bay [pearl farming in Western Australia]. Big movement of people going to Kuri Bay, songs about Broome and Kuri Bay. Maternal uncles moving over to the mainland now [NPA]. So songs about [their work there] ... they work with the [transport] department there now. They're singing about trucks and bulldozers. So you can see the difference in the [themes], but the songs are about their lifestyle. It was the society that they were in. Describing their work, you know they sing about it.

To document such new changes and conserve the old traditions, Gabriel sees that it is important to get 'all of that stuff down [recorded], the old things and the recent ones and then today's.' Therefore he sees the role of himself and other community leaders as being catalysts not only for documentation and preservation but also revitalisation:

my role is that we really are concerned and serious about the current status at the moment of especially our community. And we've been speaking with Cygnet [Repu] and then Terrence [Whap] and Keith [Fell] about us just sitting down and writing stuff up for the community. Our protocols and, really get things [organised]. Stop everybody coming

in: no film crews, no research, no [government] department. We just close shop, six months, twelve months and then we just put our knowledge together. Get all the existing elders there now and mum and them others there and we just all sit down and talk about things. What dances do we [do]? There are even dances, together with the songs and the chants that only belong to Mabuyag. That can't be performed here on T.I. or anywhere else. But document everything: what stays there, what can be done on T.I., down south, what can be filmed, what can't be filmed and really do all of that stuff. That's where I see myself with trying to help the community and then preserve [and] archive all the old materials somewhere, so it can be preserved for the later generations.

Finally, Gabriel Bani suggests that the new and the old are not necessarily incompatible but rather they can be complementary:

We can have a mixture of modern and then still have that tradition. Then you can have that learning occurring, all the different generations ... but still making that link that we still need to make the best of both worlds.

## CONCLUSION

Because of their cultural, musical and linguistic skills, Dimple Bani and Gabriel Bani have taken on roles as culture brokers not only between local, regional and national Mabuyag Islander communities but also between Mabuyag Islanders and the wider Australian community. Coming as they do from culturally-engaged extended families, they have proactively used music to preserve the past but also to innovate ways of

ensuring that future generations have access to Mabuyag's rich musical heritage. Their own engagement with modern technology, such as digital recording and film, provides a model of how traditional cultural practices can be successfully documented. It is just such a blending of traditional Indigenous knowledge with modern means of preservation and dissemination that bodes well for the on-going vitality of Mabuyag's musical heritage.<sup>9</sup>

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## □ ENDNOTES

1. The following songs (with tracks numbers) are credited on *Traditional Songs of the Western Torres Straits, South Pacific* by Laade (1977) as originating from Mabuayag: '1. War Song (MABUIAG) Singer: Bana Kris. 3. Kawaladi, Kuiam's war dance song (MABUIAG). Singers: Kame Paipai & Jimmy Luffman. This is one of the old war or head-hunting dance songs whose origin is ascribed to Kuiam, Mabuayag's legendary war hero. 4. *Kawaladi*, another war dance song (MABUIAG). Singer: Missi MacFarlane Mam. The text of this song is only made up of boasting. 8. Song from the folk tale of *dogai* Saurkeke (MABUIAG). Singers: Jimmy Luffman and Manesse Bani, with drum. 13. *Krarau sagul* song for *Baiag tim*, a fish mask [MABUIAG]. Singers: Jimmie Luffman and Manesse Bani, with drum. 14. *Kulai kuiku kab*, Crocodile dance (MABUIAG). Singer: Jimmie Luffman with drum. 15. *Kulai kuiku kab*, second dance song (MABUIAG). Singer: Bob Lee. 16. *Kulai kuiku kab*, third dance song (MABUIAG). Singer: Jimmie Luffman. 17. *Kulai kuiku kab*, fourth (final) dance song (MABUIAG). Singers: Bob Lee, Kame Paipai, Refu Dugui. With drum. 19. *Kab* chant (MABUIAG). Singer: Missi MacFarlane. This is the first song of *Baiwan sagul*, the waterspout dance. 22. *Kab* song (MABUIAG). Singers: Kame Paipai, Jimmie Luffman. The song describes the cutting of bamboo for the building of a house. 26. Dance song from the South Pacific, probably Rotuma (MABUIAG). Singers: Mrs. Kelam Wop, Jimmie Luffman and Manesse Bani. 27. Dance song from the South Pacific, probably Rotuma (MABUIAG). Singers: as in No. 26 [Mrs. Kelam Wop, Jimmie Luffman and Manesse Bani]: Spellings and punctuation as in original.
2. Participants in the *Mabuayag Awgadhaw Nawul: Traditional and Contemporary Music and Dance of Mabuayag Island, Torres Strait* CD included: Kingdom Choir of Mabuayag Island members Lency Bani, Elsie Gizu, Pele Mooka, Cygnet Repu, Elsie Repu, John Repu, Aaron Whap, Crystal Whap, Kelsie Whap, Norma Whap, Sainy Whap and Terrance Whap; and soloists Lency Bani, Cygnet Repu, Aaron Whap and Kelsie Whap. Interviewees and performers for the DVD included Cygnet Repu, Father Frank Whap and student dancers, community singers and musicians and staff from Tagai State College, Mabuayag Campus.
3. Members of the Wongai Family Warriors performing on *Strike Em!* included: Agnes Bani, Dimple Bani, Gabriel Bani, Michael Bon, Sarah Bon, George Pedro and Lency Pedro.
4. Gab Titui Cultural Centre can be contacted at the Torres Strait Regional Authority c/o PO Box 261, Thursday Island QLD 4875 (61-(0)7-4069-0888).
5. On initiation see Ephraim Bani (2004).
6. For a description of a *kod* see Haddon (1904: 3).
7. *My Father's Time (Nowes Sanbaink)* (Composers–Authors, Dimple Bani, Gabriel Bani, George Pedro and Cygnet Repu) My father's time, so we are told/The days of their prime, this story unfolds/From the murky waters of the old pearling ground/The pearling fleet sets sail, 'til clear water is found/'Til clear water is found/Ina naki okiw maalu ugu puidhanu/Ngoelmun butaw matha kalas tidai uzari/Kutaw yabagararia/Ngoedhe uruin naga gima manu gar e/Maalu dhadh paganu ya gar/Nawopa pawpa nowes sanbaink ka/Maluya dhadhia Wainetta, Wayola/P.P.L. Company ya gar mudhadh thamaik e/Nowes sanbaink gar e. (Near Mabuayag and Badu Islands in Torres Strait is the *Nowes Sainbaink*, the northwest sandbank. Two 'company' boats operated by Torres Strait Islanders were the *Wainetta* and *Wayola*.) In 2013 *My Father's Time* was included in an exhibition at the Oceanic Museum in Okinawa, Japan as a tribute to the historical role of Japanese and Okinawan pearl shell divers in the Torres Strait region's maritime economy.
8. See Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1981) for a description and analysis of Tombstone Unveilings in Torres Strait Islander culture. See Calvert (2012) for a film on the Tombstone Opening of the late Ephraim Bani.
9. A group made up of members of the Bani extended family, appropriately named The Custodians, was awarded second prize in the Band Category at the Battle of the Bands on Thursday Island, 13 September 2014.