

A Counterpoint of Critical Voices: Travelling Musicians in Colonial New Zealand

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Helen Carr, writing on ‘Modernism and Travel,’ observes that in the period 1880–1940 a ‘remarkable number of novelists and poets were *travelling* writers, whether or not they were in addition actually *travel* writers.’¹ The same period saw a large number of travelling musicians trawling the furthestmost points of the globe who, as they went, enthusiastically wrote about their experiences. The music journals and daily press of the nineteenth century regularly published letters by travelling artists and critics on tour. While many critics, including well-known writers such as Théophile Gautier, were commissioned before embarking and given a brief by a newspaper to write up their travels, others approached the task in a more haphazard fashion. Some travelling musicians published the accounts of their travels years after their voyage, so the books perhaps lack the spontaneity and immediacy of contemporaneous articles sent to the press. Yet they were clearly based on diaries kept at the time. Lydia Wevers eloquently describes how writing became almost ‘an inevitable adjunct of travel ... a cultural duty and a framing intellectual habit ... as if mobility required a corresponding attempt at stability, at preservation in the form of a textual record.’² Often, the writings of travelling musicians provide

¹ Helen Carr, ‘Modernism and Travel (1880–1940),’ *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 73.

² Lydia Wevers, *Country of Writing* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2002), 5.

valuable primary source material that gives a different and at times unexpected perspective on cultural life in colonial and remote environments a long way from Europe.³

As well as their reception, the musicians usually document, at least in part, the musical life and customs of the places they visited, albeit interpreted through a personal prism. Their familiarity with the genre of travel literature saw them also focus on the natural landscape, the curiosities of local customs, and cultural contrasts. Although their accounts were usually written within the autobiographical genre and one can never ignore the subjective presence of the author, the personal element of their narrative is sometimes distanced in a more ethnographic manner. It is misleading to generalise, but there is a discernible continuum within the literature from empirical and straightforwardly 'realistic' description, including reportage, to more deliberate attempts at entertainment that were obviously fictionalised or exaggerated. It is clear that some artists deliberately sought out situations that they thought would make 'good copy.'

In this article I explore perceptions of New Zealand in 1892 as described in an intriguing counterpoint by the voices of two travelling musicians: Belgian violinist Ovide Musin (1854–1929) and French pianist Henri Kowalski (1841–1916). Musin's articles and published *Memories*, and Kowalski's criticism written for the Sydney-based French language newspaper *Le Courrier Australien*, alongside the New Zealand press reception of the visitors during their stay together provide a snapshot of a particular time and place seen through a number of different lenses.⁴ They illuminate and intermesh the perceptions and experiences of travelling musicians far from home with the observations of local critics about visitors from outside.

I shall start by hypothesising why these travel accounts were written, how they were constructed, and at whom they were aimed. Ovide Musin with his singer wife Anna Louise Tanner (?–1921) and German pianist Eduard Scharf (1857–1928), travelled to New Zealand in June 1892. They came from an extensive tour of North America, followed by Samoa and Hawai'i and after New Zealand continued on to Australia before returning to America at the end of the year. This party was more or less on the road for close to a decade.⁵ Musin was asked to write some articles on his voyage in the Antipodes for *La Meuse*, the daily newspaper of his hometown Liège.⁶ He later incorporated these articles into his more comprehensive, self-published memoirs covering his whole touring life in North and South America, Asia, and Oceania, written in English.⁷ These memoirs were published in 1920 in New York, where Musin had been living from 1908, running a Belgian School of Violin. The book has the subheading

³ For information on travellers to New Zealand during this time, see Wevers, *Country of Writing*; Paul Moon, *The Voyagers: Remarkable European Explorations of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2014); Paul Moon, *Encounters: The Creation of New Zealand. A History* (Auckland: Penguin, 2013).

⁴ Musin's articles in *La Meuse* were dated 3 & 4 Dec., 10 & 11 Dec., 29 Dec. 1892, and 15 Jan., 2 Feb., 4 & 5 Feb. and 15 & 16 Apr., 29 & 30 Apr. 1893; Ovide Musin, *My Memories* (New York: Musin Publishing Company, 1920). Kowalski's articles appeared from 30 Apr. to 17 Dec. 1892, approximately one a week. I also have copies of Scharf's letters (in German) in my personal possession as well as a copy of a dark brown leather Diary, 1891–1893 that covers his time in New Zealand, albeit in a telescopic fashion.

⁵ Musin's tour was managed by Robert R. Johnston, who had managed their American tour as well. Johnston, however, became sick in 1892 and his place was taken by Fabius Ferraud. See *Argonaut*, 9 May 1892. Articles in the American press suggest that Ferraud was also involved with Musin's American sejour.

⁶ Musin's first letter in *La Meuse* appeared on the 3 & 4 Dec. 1892 some months after the date given in his *Memories* of 16 May 1892. The dates in the *Memories* have thus been altered.

⁷ Musin, *My Memories*.

'A Half-Century of Adventures and Experiences and Globe Travel Written by Himself.' In the introduction, Musin claims to be a 'raconteur with a pretty good memory' who desires to 'tell in an unpretentious way some of the phases of [his] ... artistic life ... of fifty years.' The intended audience is clearly English-speakers all over the world and the fact that the book is self-published suggests that Musin could not find a commercial publisher; it must have been an expensive enterprise, and a time-consuming one.

Musin's articles for *La Meuse* are very detailed and present more straightforward factual information than his *Memories*. He details all the French explorers to the southern hemisphere, and he gives information on New Zealand exports, including an extensive section on importing frozen lamb to London.⁸ None of this kind of detail is in the *Memories*. He also adopts a more critical stance in his journalism. A lecture by an agent extolling the virtues of New Zealand is described as a diatribe ('philippique') in *La Meuse*, and 'an enlightening discourse' in the *Memories*, although there is possibly an ironical edge here.⁹

Most significantly, in the press, Musin makes critical remarks about the British, which are not included in the *Memories*. He mocks the pomp and rigmarole associated with the Governor Lord Glasgow coming to one of their concerts,¹⁰ but more interestingly he suggests that what he calls the 'virgin soil' of New Zealand and its potential for offering a new way of life is not realised because of traditional customs and laws that chain the British settlers to the past.¹¹ Since his *Memories* was aimed at an English-speaking audience, he was perhaps cautious about being too critical of the British. Musin writes in a lively clear voice, his narrative is well structured, he seeks to inform but is also 'in search of things strange and picturesque.'¹² He is aware of the public interest in distant landscapes and customs and aware that the topic of cannibalism, to quote Peter Hulme, both 'unnerves and fascinates.'¹³

In 1892 Kowalski had been based in Sydney for six years, after spending many years as a travelling artist.¹⁴ His articles written for the *Courrier Australien*¹⁵ are serialised over the entire 1892, although he was in New Zealand only in the first few months of the year, on tour with a party of much younger musicians whom he had met in Australia: an Australian soprano and pianist, an Austrian violinist, and an American contralto.¹⁶ Although Kowalski was the star of the party and billed as such, all the other musicians were of a very high calibre. The young pianist Beatrice Griffiths, Kowalski's top student in Australia, did all the accompanying on tour, and she and Kowalski also played a number of duets, chiefly Kowalski's own music.

⁸ Musin, *La Meuse*, 2 Feb. 1893. New Zealand export of frozen lamb was a topic of fascination for many travellers at the time; see also Emile Wenz, *Mon Journal* (Paris: Plon, Nourrit, 1886).

⁹ Musin, *Memories*, 160.

¹⁰ Musin, *La Meuse*, 2 Feb. 1893. He comments ironically that it was as if they were 'playing by royal command!' ('jouer Par ordre royal!').

¹¹ Musin, *La Meuse*, 4/5 Feb. 1893: 'ce sol vierge ... enchainé au passé par des traditions surannées.'

¹² Musin, *Memories*, 166.

¹³ 'Introduction,' *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xiii.

¹⁴ He first visited Australia in 1881–1882. In September 1885 he returned and settled in Sydney for eleven years.

¹⁵ Running from 1892 to 2011, the paper was set up by the Messagers maritimes shipping company.

¹⁶ Beatrice Griffiths (dates unknown) pianist, Bertha Rossow (b.1867?) singer, Mme [Minnie] Vandever-Greene (dates unknown) contralto, and violinist Raimond Pechotsch (1867–1941). This tour was managed by Robert Sparrow Smythe (1833–1917) who some years later became famous as the manager of Mark Twain's tours to the Antipodes.

The first article is headed 'Notes et Impressions d'un musicien français en Nouvelle Zélande,' and the articles are clearly meant to be later assembled as a whole and published as a book. Kowalski inserts a copyright notice at the end of every article—something unusual for a newspaper. It appears that although he is apparently writing for a small French-speaking audience in Australia, he is in fact addressing an imagined global francophone audience.¹⁷ The same audience, one could presume, as that intended for his earlier publication *A travers l'Amérique*, mainly readers in France, but also the odd French speaker throughout the world. Although the French press in the late 1890s often refers to Kowalski's 'book' on his travels in New Zealand, it does not appear to have ever eventuated.

The articles cover a variety of subjects and adopt a number of different strategies. They are autobiographical and sometimes very personal, but there is no coherent narrative. Some articles relate to his touring party, and some attempt an impressionistic poetic tone, maybe trying to establish his credentials as a poet and writer; these passages are clumsily inserted into the text and very self-conscious, for instance the following experience at sea, recounted on 7 May:

how many times ... have I forgotten 6 o'clock tea when contemplating the setting sun, where the vivid rays of the auriferous star burn the empty space with their enflamed tongues in incomparable dazzlement; I like to watch them melt and disappear in the sapphire blue of the liquid horizon.¹⁸

Other articles provide didactic, factual information on things such as population figures and amounts of primary produce exported per annum. Kowalski mentions that the French Consul in Wellington, M. de Lostalot, had given him a book about New Zealand, which he drew on for his factual information. He also frequently makes use of material from a book by the influential British historian and popular travel writer James Froude, *Oceana* (the first edition of *Oceana* sold 75,000 copies). Kowalski mentions the indigenous population rarely but is very taken by the wild, untamed beauties of the natural landscape, which by the 1890s were an established trope in writings about New Zealand. As Froude had written, 'the dullest intellect quickens into awe and reverence amidst volcanoes and boiling springs and the mighty forces of nature.'¹⁹

Kowalski and Musin were typical of nineteenth-century European travelling artists, they were cosmopolitan figures, 'Citizens of the World' who possessed not only musical talents but also highly-developed social skills, and the ability to operate easily in the public sphere. Yet Kowalski was also a 'cosmopolitan patriot'—to use Kwame Appiah's useful phrase—and he assumed the responsibility of nurturing 'the culture of his home,' spreading and instilling its values while at the same time documenting, both in words and music, his life as a cultural

¹⁷ He probably intended to later publish the volume with Lachaud, the Parisian publisher of his 1873 *A Travers l'Amérique: Impressions d'un musicien*. Three of the articles were actually translated by a Dr Davy in Sydney and sent to a newspaper in New Zealand while Kowalski was still there, see 'Travels of a French Pianist in New Zealand,' *New Zealand Herald*, 19 July 1892.

¹⁸ 'Combien de fois ... ai-je oublié le thé de six heures en contemplant un coucher de soleil, alors que les rayons éclatants de l'astre aurifère brûle la vague de leurs langues enflammées, dans cet éblouissement incomparable, j'aime à les voir se fondre et disparaître, dans le bleu saphiréen de l'horizon liquide,' *Courrier Australien*, 7 May 1892, 2.

¹⁹ James Anthony Froude, *Oceana, or, England and Her Colonies* (London: Longmans, Green, 1886), 206.

tourist.²⁰ Although Kowalski's writings seek to inform, he also tries to project a certain image of himself. With a broad French audience in mind, he also makes statements about the French, the French language, and the French abroad.

What could one have expected these francophone travellers to know about New Zealand? The number of French explorers, navigators, missionaries, and whalers early in the nineteenth century gave rise to many multi-volume government-sponsored publications. For instance Dumont D'Urville's twenty-two-volume account of his voyages in Australia, New Zealand, and Antarctica appeared over 1830–1835 and was extremely widely read throughout the century.²¹ Other more popular writings include the novels of Jules Verne such as *Les Enfants du capitaine Grant* (1867–1868) and *L'Île mystérieuse* (1874). Even though Verne never actually travelled to New Zealand himself, he drew on the early explorers' writings and also articles in the popular journals *L'Univers pittoresque* and *Le Tour du monde*.²² Verne portrayed Māori cannibalism as not only exotic but also 'as a comparative social model,' that showed 'how far civilization had progressed from its primitive and savage roots.'²³ After New Caledonia was declared a French colony in 1853, more travellers voyaged to the southern hemisphere and narrated their journey, often in *Le Tour du monde*.²⁴

Musin and Kowalski were possibly aware of some of this literature and also, since they were all Anglophone, English-language literature as well. Clearly, they used secondary sources for their factual information, and by the 1890s an extremely large corpus of literature about New Zealand was available for anglophone readers including detailed travel guides put out by Steam Ship Companies. These included the very popular *Maoriland, an Illustrated Handbook to New Zealand, Melbourne, etc.*, published by the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand in 1884. Thomas Cooke also had an agent in New Zealand from 1880.²⁵ It is unlikely that Musin or Kowalski were familiar with the New Zealand writers associated with a school of writing that came to be called 'Maoriland' (roughly from 1870 to the First World War) yet, as shall be shown, there are some similarities between their writings and the views expressed by writers connected to this group. 'Maoriland' writing generally presents a sentimentalised decorative portrait of the Māori as a race nevertheless on the point of extinction.²⁶

The map at Figure 1 illustrates where Musin's party travelled in New Zealand.

²⁰ See Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Cosmopolitan Patriots,' *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Spring 1997): 618.

²¹ Jules Sebastian César Dumont D'Urville, *Voyage de la corvette l'Astrolabe exécuté par ordre du roi, pendant les années 1826–1827–1828–1829*, 22 volumes [comprising engraved plates, maps, charts and extensive text descriptions and explanations] (Paris: Tastu, 1830–1835).

²² *L'Île mystérieuse* was apparently based on a story published in a mid-1860s *Tour du monde*, 'Les Naufragés, ou vingt mois dans les Îles Auckland.' See Christiane Motelier, 'La Source immédiate de *L'île mystérieuse* de Jules Verne,' *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 4 (1997): 589–98.

²³ *The Kip Brothers*, trans. Stanford L. Luce, ed. Arthur B. Evans, introd. & notes Jean-Michel Margot (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 2007), 406n.

²⁴ Two other sources they might have known are Anne Vickers, *Voyage en Australie et en Nouvelle-Zélande* (Paris: Delagrave, 1883) and Emile Wenz, *Mon Journal* (Paris: Plon, Nourrit, 1886).

²⁵ Wevers, *Country of Writing*, 169.

²⁶ This school of writing has recently been reevaluated by Jane Stafford and Mark Williams in *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872–1914* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006), which shows how such literature, for the most part written during a period of progressive social legislation in New Zealand, also presents the first literary evidence of a national consciousness.

Figure 1. Map of Musin's voyage



Kowalski went on a similar route, but virtually entirely by sea. He had an absolute passion for the sea, and sea travel stating, 'I love the sea at night, by day, all the time. Oily, rolling, horrible, I always find it beautiful.'²⁷ Musin's sea travel was complicated by his wife's claustrophobia, and he described in his *Memories* how, 'Mrs Musin had a horror of the cramped close cabins, and said she would rather remain out even in a storm.'²⁸ She slept on deck on a specially designed cane chaise longue, which they always transported with them. I shall examine Musin and Kowalski's accounts from a few perspectives. Firstly, the extent to which they engage with and in some cases challenge some of the expectations of travel writers of the time. Secondly, what they reveal about musical life in New Zealand.

Having been in the southern hemisphere for six years already, Kowalski anticipates the physical beauty and grandeur of New Zealand. In contrast, Musin comes to New Zealand for the first time, and from tropical weather conditions. He was clearly wary of the dangers of succumbing to the laziness and lethargy perceived to be induced by tropical weather and recounts how, before they left the hot temperatures, he daily enclosed himself in his cabin, dressed in flannel pyjamas with a pitcher of hot water to drink, and practised for the whole morning. He claimed to be conquering, even controlling, the tropics and using them to his advantage, because by the time he arrived in colder climes not only were his

²⁷ 'J'aime la mer. Je l'aime la nuit, le jour, à tout instant. Huileuse, houleuse ou horrible, je m'obstine à trouver ça beau,' *Le Courrier Australien*, 7 May 1892, 2.

²⁸ Musin, *Memories*, 177.

muscles relaxed and flexible, but he had shed the extra weight he had gained through lack of exercise on board ship.²⁹

Both travellers were reassured by aspects of New Zealand that recalled Europe—mountains and lakes that reminded them of Switzerland, Norway, and Austria. Kowalski, clearly conscious of the stereotyped chauvinism of some French travellers, cracks jokes about a fellow Frenchman who climbed the spectacular Mount Eden in Auckland with him and compared it favourably with the Buttes Chaumont in Paris.³⁰ Kowalski also laments the lack of a little café at the top of Mount Eden, as might have been found in France, again mocking the French domestication of natural scenery.³¹ He does, however, ponder whether the spectacular landscape of New Zealand could not stimulate a whole new genre of literature as he states:

The more we progressed in our voyage in New Zealand, the more we felt overwhelmed by this thought: which was that beyond all the material richness, this country could be called upon to produce a new school of poets, in placing inspiration back to its true base, that all those sensitive souls with dreamy imagination feel when they contemplate the pure and marvellous beauties of nature.³²

Kowalski is here echoing sentiments expressed by some of the 'Maoriland' school of writers who were concerned with a sense both of the 'landscape's sublimity and the problems of forging a literary relationship with that sublimity.'³³

The trope of cannibalism was a central preoccupation in much European travel writing and indeed had been discussed as early as 1492 in Christopher Columbus's journal.³⁴ Musin may well have been aware of Berlioz's chapter in his *Soirées d'orchestre*, where he describes Vincent Wallace's imagined near escape from cannibals in New Zealand.³⁵ Musin keenly anticipates his first encounters with the Māori people, but not with any fear. He states that by 'contact with civilization' (one assumes he means the European colonisers and missionaries) the custom of cannibalism had practically disappeared. He accepts the theory, commonly held at the time, that the Māoris were forced into cannibalism by the lack of animal life in the country.³⁶ Recently, writer Paul Moon, in the first scholarly monograph to be written on Māori cannibalism argues that cannibalism, rather than being a food issue, was associated with a sort of post-battle rage.³⁷

²⁹ Musin, *Memories*, 158. He concludes, 'an artist who respects himself and his art will never be caught napping.'

³⁰ *Courrier Australien*, 4 June 1892, 2. The park Buttes Chaumont in Paris had a hill of around 50 metres high, as opposed to the 196 metres of Mount Eden,

³¹ *Courrier Australien*, 28 May 1892, 2.

³² 'Plus nous avançons dans notre voyage en Nouvelle-Zélande, plus nous nous sentons envahis par cette pensée: c'est qu'en dehors de la richesse matérielle, ce pays est appelé à produire une nouvelle école de poètes, en replaçant l'inspiration sur ses vraies bases, celles que tout être sensible et à imagination rêveuse ressent, quand il peut contempler les saines et merveilleuses beautés de la nature,' *Courrier Australien*, 3 Sept. 1892, 2.

³³ Stafford and Williams, *Maoriland*, 11.

³⁴ *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, trans. Cecil Jane, rev. L.A. Vigneras (London: Hakluyt Society, 1968), 68–9.

³⁵ See 2nd Epilogue of *Les Soirées de l'orchestre* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1852). It has recently been shown by Inge van Rij that Berlioz draws on Dumont D'Urville, *Voyage de la corvette l'Astrolabe* (see fn 21, above) for his description of New Zealand. See Rij, *The Other Worlds of Hector Berlioz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 22.

³⁶ Description of Māoris is in Musin, *Memories*, 163–4.

³⁷ Paul Moon, *This Horrid Practice* (New Zealand: Penguin, 2008).

'Maoriland' authors could alternatively describe the Māori in terms of the 'colonial sublime' or as 'cannibals or monkeys.'³⁸ Musin at times uses the words Māori and cannibal interchangeably and his overall desire to embrace the Māori as 'noble savage' is sometimes conflicted by disgust, for instance, his horror at a Māori dance performed at a funeral that he calls a 'dance of horrible bestiality,' a 'bestial orgy.'³⁹

Yet Musin clearly has great respect for the Māori people, and in particular for how he imagined them to have been before European civilisation, drawing again on tropes familiar from the 'Maoriland' literature with its mythologised view of the Māori past and 'exaltation of the primitive.'⁴⁰ He describes poetically what he has been told about the Māori arrival in New Zealand, 'in fifteen immense canoes of war which held four or five hundred people. These boats were constructed with the greatest art, and would hold as many as a hundred warriors each, and they were capable of outriding the worst storms.'⁴¹ Musin continues his description of the Māori: 'their temples, store-houses and council-chambers were constructed with science and art and their sculptures indicate a high degree of artistic sentiment.' He also expresses distress at what he sees as their current plight. As he wrote,

The Maoris were great warriors and before the British conquered them, they showed their knowledge of tactics and engineering to be remarkable. But contact with civilization is tending to the disintegration of this valiant race, and it seems to me a pity that a deeper study of their language and origin has not been made.⁴²

Clearly, the Māori population was fully aware of European titillation in regard to the subject of cannibalism. When Musin asks a Māori elder about cannibalism, the man tells him that the most succulent spot on the body is the fat cheek on the palm of the hand, and that he does not like white men since they are too salty.⁴³ The Māori elder was playing to the expectations of his European visitor, but then again, Musin, by relating this story, is also playing to his intended audience, and their fascination with cannibalism.⁴⁴

In New Zealand at this time there were few professional musicians and musical cultural life relied heavily on touring artists, although there were many extremely proficient amateur choral groups, church choirs, orchestras, musical societies and brass bands.⁴⁵ The piano also occupied a central role in the 'private, social and cultural lives of many New Zealanders.'⁴⁶ Kirstine Moffat notes that although the piano's role in society harked back to its cultural origins in the United Kingdom, there were differences: men played as well as women, many women

³⁸ Stafford and Williams, *Maoriland*, 86.

³⁹ Musin, *Memories*, 165–6.

⁴⁰ Stafford and Williams, *Maoriland*, 20.

⁴¹ Musin, *Memories*, 163. The awe for Māori canoes was widespread amongst other contemporary writers, see, for example, William Pember Reeves, *The Great White Cloud* (London: Horace Marshall & Sons, 1889).

⁴² Musin, *Memories*, 164.

⁴³ Musin, *Memories*, 164.

⁴⁴ See discussion of Māori subversive humour in Stafford and Williams, *Maoriland*, 112.

⁴⁵ See John Mansfield Thomson, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991); Angela Annabell, 'An Introduction to Colonial Music-Making,' *Early Music New Zealand* 2/3 (Sept. 1986): 25–9; Henry Johnson, ed. *Many Voices: Music and National Identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).

⁴⁶ Kirstine Moffat, *Piano Forte: Stories and Soundscapes from Colonial New Zealand* (Dunedin, NZ: Otago University Press, 2011), 13.

played professionally, and the piano was popular with people of all classes and backgrounds.⁴⁷ Musin's party gave some joint concerts in June with the Auckland Choral Society's Orchestra and Kowalski performed a Mendelssohn piano concerto in February with the Wellington Orchestral Society.⁴⁸

Musin's comments on musical life form part of his free-flowing narrative. He narrates incidents that he imagines will intrigue or amuse his audience. When his party arrived in New Zealand they were told they were giving forty concerts and the first one, that very night, had already been advertised—the agent had simply copied the programme for the last concert they gave in San Francisco. Despite protests, the show went on, with Musin grumbling,

here we were in for forty concerts in New Zealand, a country which we imagined to be inhabited principally by cannibals whose ideas of music must be very primitive, for I had been told that their flutes were generally made from the tibias of their enemies.⁴⁹

The first incident that Musin highlights is a concert in Napier:

We arrived in a terrible storm. Torrents of rain rendered the streets almost impassable. It cleared up a little at the hour of the concert, so that the hall was filled as by magic, but during the evening the tempest began again and the ocean broke over the promenade and flooded the city. But this did not seem to worry the audience, which applauded each number of the program with gusto, without bothering themselves as to how they were to get home. The ladies were in evening dress too! After the concert was over, we had to stay in the hall. We thought of telephoning the captain of the port to send assistance with a boat to take us to our domiciles, but the audience decided to make a night of it.

Their audience cheerfully turned the concert into a ball for the rest of the night, and they all went home in the morning when the tide turned and the water subsided.⁵⁰ Musin was both intrigued and enchanted.

The second incident was in Oamaru—a large country town 120km north of Dunedin. Musin narrated this story with a great deal of irony. He was overcome at seeing the concert hall packed to the rafters, but on questioning discovered that there was a full moon that night and given the 'rudimentary state of the streets and poor lighting' a full moon was the occasion for everyone to venture into town. Young people used the concert as a pretext to go 'courting.' Musin comments:

Alas! what a disillusion to us! who thought ourselves to be the promoters of all that enthusiasm, when in fact we were merely the pretext. The remark of the prophetic impresario of Christchurch came back to me: 'You will play to packed houses, sir'; but, joined to it, was the response, 'Packed houses which we owed to the moon, sir, to the moon.'⁵¹

Expectations of the number of music lovers in what was seen as the furthest point possible from Europe were not, as already mentioned, high; however, Musin is impressed by the enthusiastic reception of his concerts and a little surprised to find 'the audiences as cultured

⁴⁷ Moffat, *Piano Forte*, 216.

⁴⁸ See *Evening Post* [Wellington], 5 Feb. 1892, 3.

⁴⁹ Musin, *Memories*, 158–9.

⁵⁰ Musin, *Memories*, 163.

⁵¹ Musin, *Memories*, 173–4.

in their taste for music as any you would find in New York or the capitals of Europe.⁵² The pianist of his party, Eduard Scharf, also echoes this surprise in his letters to his mother stating, 'the people here are quite smitten with music.'⁵³ Scharf was regularly sending his mother money while on tour and often discusses finances; he reveals to his mother that they were doing so well financially in New Zealand that they had cancelled their proposed trip to China and Japan, which they had intended to do after Australia.⁵⁴

Kowalski provides his readers with detailed information about his touring party, and about the seven-and-a-half-octave Pleyel grand piano that he was travelling with, in particular the care needed in its transportation.⁵⁵ French or German pianos were not so common in New Zealand at this time.⁵⁶ Throughout his tour, Kowalski performed only on his Pleyel, although the company rented another piano for their duets, and extensive advertisements in the New Zealand press show that they used pianos from the Dresden Pianoforte Manufacturing & Agency Company, based in Dresden but with branches in Christchurch, Timaro and Wellington.⁵⁷ Kowalski endorsed their instruments in the press, as did Musin and Scharf.

Kowalski's articles, although intended to be made into a book, are often self-promotional, and at times self-congratulatory. Throughout he stresses the esteem in which he is held: his photo is prominent in the music shops and he is heralded as the 'Chopin of the South.'⁵⁸ He writes an entire article describing how anxious he is about his reviews, pacing the streets in the early morning, and what a pleasant relief they usually are.⁵⁹ Kowalski writes rather poignantly about the death of the Duke of Clarence in England—commemorated in pomp in New Zealand—and describes how he wrote a commemorative funeral march based on 'Rule Britannia' and 'God Save the King' which became extremely popular with his New Zealand audiences.⁶⁰ He details how in the composition 'the first of the tunes was transposed into the minor key and by a harmonic progression, in which the second tune was heard, the finale brought back "Rule Britannia" in the major key and by finishing it in a major key brought about a triumphal note that painted the idea that whatever the setbacks of destiny, the Nation stayed immutable in its force and power.'⁶¹ Kowalski comments innocently that for so many great

⁵² Musin, *Memories*, 163.

⁵³ Eduard Scharf, letter to his mother, Auckland, New Zealand, 26 June 1892. Letter in author's personal possession, see fn 4.

⁵⁴ Scharf, letter to his mother, 26 June 1892.

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Thames Star*, 2 Jan. 1892, 2.

⁵⁶ Kirstine Moffat, 'The Piano as Cultural Symbol in Colonial New Zealand,' *History Compass* 7 (2009): 722.

⁵⁷ The Dresden Pianoforte Manufacturing & Agency Company's manager at this time was J.A.X. Reidle, and they also had agency arrangements with other premises across New Zealand, managed some concerts, and were active in music publishing. See Elizabeth Nichol, 'The Dresden Pianoforte Manufacturing and Agency Company Limited—A Pioneer of New Zealand Music Publishing,' *Crescendo* 74 (August 2006): 10–15. Their most formidable competitor was Charles Begg and Co., see Clare Gleeson, *Meet Me at Begg's* (Wellington NZ: Ngaio Press 2012), 50.

⁵⁸ *Courrier Australien*, 28 May 1892, 2.

⁵⁹ *Courrier Australien*, 2 July 1892, 2.

⁶⁰ *Courrier Australien*, 17 Sep. 1892, 2.

⁶¹ 'Le premier de ces airs était transformé en mineur et par une progression harmonique, dans laquelle le second air était entendu, le final ramenait le «Rule Britannia» dans son ton majeur et se terminait dans un ton triomphal que devait dépendre cette idée que, quels que fussent les coups de la destinée, la Nation restait immuable dans sa force et son pouvoir, dans son marche vers le progrès et la civilisation!' *Courrier Australien*, 17 Sep. 1892, 2.

composers, their best music is inspired by sad events: 'we enter the world crying and leave it the same way. The majority of great musicians have a sad soul ... and ... owe their greatest successes to pathetic feelings.'⁶² This is particularly poignant because although Kowalski's salon piano pieces were extremely popular at the time, he obviously aspired to higher things and wanted to be seen as a serious composer and, I believe, a serious writer, although neither aspiration was realised.

Kowalski was also a great promoter of what he saw as the values of his country and is sad that the French presence in New Zealand is not stronger. He is angered at the French Consulate's lack of staff, and feels that French embassies generally (not just in New Zealand) should be doing more to encourage the spread of the French language. He writes eloquently about the beauty of the French language, the language of the heart, of logic, law, and equal rights, that inspires courtesy and tolerance. To capture the affection and heart of foreign countries one need only teach French to the citizens.⁶³

I will now look briefly at the reviews of Kowalski and Musin's tours and set them alongside their own commentary. Although the critics are unanimously enthusiastic about Kowalski's concerts, they are also embarrassed by the at times distressingly small numbers of attendees (something, perhaps understandably, never mentioned by Kowalski). They also question the timing of the tour. This is indeed odd—Kowalski had been living in the southern hemisphere long enough to know that he was touring in the major summer holiday period. Maybe the party was combining the tour with holidays. He does mention that they climb mountains, visit volcanoes and hot springs, and he also mentions the extremely luxurious hotels they are staying in—hotels that he claimed matched any in Europe. The reviews also show that Kowalski's music was well-known in New Zealand before his arrival, and audiences appreciated his music as much as his playing. Thus, the amount of his own music he programmes is clearly by popular demand, and not just self-promotion. As Moffat writes, 'the story of the piano in New Zealand ... demonstrate[s] the cultural connectedness of the colony to Australia and America, both in terms of trade and in terms of musical performance and repertoire.'⁶⁴

The critics also admire Kowalski for his promotion of the young artists in his party, who would not have been able to tour in this way without his support. This mentoring role is not something that can be gleaned from Kowalski's articles where he portrays his associates as equals.

The reviews of Musin's concerts show that he was understating the success of his tour. He was a phenomenal success. Reviews bulge with superlatives: 'sensational,' a 'galaxy of talent,' 'never to be forgotten,' by 'spellbound' audiences. Concerts were not only packed but sold out, audiences could not fit, extra chairs were dragged in, and people sent away. The press reported that Musin was continually evaluating people's old violins, he put on matinee concerts for children, he offered extra concerts at cheaper prices, and he was, as the *Wanganui Herald* stated, 'ever buoyant of expectation and happy in the present.'⁶⁵ The party was also

⁶² 'nous entrons dans la vie en pleurant, nous en sortons de même. La majorité des grands musiciens ont toujours un fond triste, et ont dû leurs grands succès aux sentiments poignants,' *Courrier Australien*, 17 Sep. 1892, 2.

⁶³ *Courrier Australien*, 10 Sep. 1892, 2.

⁶⁴ Moffat, *Piano Forte*, 217.

⁶⁵ *Wanganui Herald*, 23 June 1892, 2.

making a great deal of money; one paper reports takings of roughly £100 a day for two days in Christchurch.⁶⁶ This is roughly £26,000 today.

Reviews described both Musin and Kowalski as charismatic personalities in real life and this contributed to their success. Both aspired to literary recognition, but where Musin had the gift of expression, Kowalski labours to reveal his poetic soul. New Zealanders' enthusiasm for music surprised them and they both found New Zealand a land of potential, a land where something new and exciting could happen. Both also found the same in Australia, indeed Kowalski settled in Sydney for twelve years from 1885.⁶⁷

It is revealing to mesh our travellers' accounts with New Zealanders' accounts of them. Musin resists the temptation to revel in his success; he is understated and although his narrative is autobiographical, he is able to remove himself to the extent of providing a personal tale that is also amusing, informative, and reflective. Kowalski is more self-promotional both of himself and of his country. He does not have a coherent narrative, his story is disjointed and he clearly wants to project a certain image of himself to the world—that of the educated artist with a poetic soul. He understandably does not let his readers know about the lack of attendance at his concerts, but he also underplays his role as mentor for his young artists and he selflessly promotes them as equals. He also underplays the popularity of his own music with the audiences.

These intrepid travelling musicians are remarkable figures. Travel was not easy, although apart from some vivid descriptions of serious storms, they rarely complain. They enlivened the cultural life of the countries they travelled to, and through their critical writings provide vivid snapshots of their journeys. There is something unique in their critical writings. Other francophone travellers to New Zealand during this time are mainly intent on conveying their encounters with the wild landscape and native peoples. Young French traveller Anna Vickers, for example, is dismayed on her arrival in Auckland, at the monuments, wide streets and shops: 'we landed into full civilization.'⁶⁸ This was not what she was in search of. Although the travelling musicians under examination do, to varying degrees, inform their readers about the customs and landscape of the country they are visiting, they are also recounting their travels as artists in an urban environment. This provides another perspective to their picture. As Wevers comments, by publishing their travel accounts, 'transform[ing] them into a meaningful narrative,' they 'lay claim to the figure of the traveller as adventurer, explorer and hero and ... fix the travel experience in a printed text available ... to history.'⁶⁹

Travelling artists played an important part in the dissemination of Western music around the world at a time when recordings were in their infancy. The writings of travellers provide information that would otherwise be difficult to find about the daily existence of a travelling musician, with its hardships but also its drama and excitement. Musin's low cultural expectations were confounded by encountering highly informed audiences. The enthusiasm for Kowalski's music reveals not only that it was well known, but also that his musical activities in Australia were regularly detailed in the New Zealand press. Indeed it has been claimed

⁶⁶ *Press*, 22 June 1892, 4.

⁶⁷ See Kerry Murphy, 'Ovide Musin in the Antipodes,' *Revue belge de musicologie* 66 (2012): 191–201; Murphy, 'Henri Kowalski (1841–1916): A French Musician in Colonial Australia,' *Australian Historical Studies* 48.3 (2017): 346–61.

⁶⁸ 'Nous tombons là en pleine civilisation,' Vickers, *Voyage en Australie*, 303. See fn 24.

⁶⁹ Wevers, *Country of Writing*, 159.

that there was 'more literary contact between Australia and New Zealand in the late colonial period than there has been since.'⁷⁰

The travelling artists' documentation of musical life as they travel often highlights concerts and concert practices that otherwise might have been lost to history. As personal accounts they, of course, reveal much about the individuals as well. If, in this synchronic case study of 1892 New Zealand, we mesh travellers' accounts with critical reviews of their concerts, an even more nuanced and complex picture emerges that puts into perspective the travellers' tales at 'the farthest end of the world.'

About the Author

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⁷⁰ Stafford and Williams, *Maoriland*, 15.