



## Kapa Haka Performance (Maori Chants CD)

**Kapa Haka** translates to Maori Performing Arts. Kapa Haka is the term used for the Traditional Maori Performing Arts. Unlike other indigenous dance forms, kapa haka is unique in the fact that the performers must sing, dance, have expression as well as movement all combined into each item. Kapa Haka could be seen as sign language, as each action has a meaning, which ties in with the words. For example, if the hand is by the ear, this would probably tie in with the word whakarongo which means to listen.

Not all Māori performance types are used by kapa haka. Below are brief descriptions of the ones that usually appear.

**Waiata tira** are choral pieces used to warm up the vocal cords and introduce the group to the audience. Through a waiata tira the group announces its arrival in a manner that is generally light and positive.

**Whakaeke** are also choral pieces. They are frequently used to comment on a social issue of the day or to commemorate an individual or some element of Māoridom. They may also simply be used as the entrance song to announce the group's arrival.

**Haka** are best described as challenges. They are used to make a point and to vent anger. They are performed by both men and women, with the focus on the men in the front and support from the women behind. They are vocal performances involving rhythmic declamation in triple metre and aggressive or challenging facial expressions (pūkana, literally "glaring"), body movements and demeanour. The men make heavy use of foot stamping, body percussion, and grimace in an attempt to appear as menacing as possible. Haka are often described as traditional war dances but in fact had many other uses as well in precolonial Māori society, and have many peaceful uses today.

**Waiata-ā-ringa** (literally "song of hands or arms") are "action songs", which means that they display the typical Polynesian practice of embellishing and reinforcing the sung poetry with arm and hand actions. They are performed by men and women with women in the front and men in the back. Some use melodies from common English-language songs with new lyrics in Māori, while others are newly-composed, treating a wide variety of topics. They feature the wiri or trembling of the hands to indicate the interface between the mind and the body.

**Poi** are women's dances involving the swinging of balls attached to cords. Poi were traditionally used by women on long Waka voyages as a means of keeping the timing of the male paddlers, in the style of a coxwain. This is the reason for the emphasis of the sound of the poi striking the hand. Performers swing the balls in variety of figures, shapes and rhythms whilst simultaneously singing a song (**a waiata poi**). Formerly the balls were made of raupo and the cords of flax but today they tend to be made of plastic shopping-bag material and yarn. The sound of poi striking the hands is an important part of the musical accompaniment.

**Ītī tōrea** are occasionally used by kapa haka. Ītī tōrea are pairs of carved thin sticks about shoulder width manipulated with dextrous wrist and arm work, often simultaneously passed between performers. Like poi, Ītī tōrea figures are performed in synchrony and to music (and like poi, their sounds, especially that of the ends hitting the floor together, form a percussive accompaniment).

**Pou or mōteatea** are unison songs performed in a style reminiscent of precolonial Māori singing. They are an important genre within Maorid culture because they tell stories in which historical, genealogical and cultural information is preserved and thus link Māori with their past. Mōteatea come in a variety of forms including laments, lullabies, and songs about revenge, anger, and love.

**Whakawātea** are choral pieces used to farewell the audience or make a final point before departing the stage. They may pick up on themes raised in the whakaeke or comment on the event at hand. Performers are often at the side or back of the stage

