

Objective: To become familiar with the Fijian tradition of Meke music.

Opening activity: Open-ended questions

- What would you do with your own island?
- What comes to mind when you think of the Pacific Islands?

Fun Facts:

- First American Chickens from Polynesia
- Kava kava beverage

Introduction to Polynesia (Map!)

- Greek: “Many islands”
- Geography—Triangle
 - Hawa’ii
 - Easter Island (Rapa Nui)
 - New Zealand (Aotearoa in Māori)
- West Polynesia
 - 1400–1600 dominated by Tonga (Tongan empire)
 - Fiji blurs cultural lines with Melanesia
 - 1874–1970 put selves under British colonial rule to be free of Tongan rule
 - Christian influence appears
 - Travel, infrastructure improves
 - Economy changed
 - Population ~50% Asian Indian
 - Vocalists may sing Hindustani text, qawwali style
- First Chickens in the Americas
 - Probably brought from Tonga or American Samoa

Kava Kava

- Plant
- Root used in a drink
 - Used to be only for chiefs, now for everyone
 - 20th C. democratization
- Relaxant
 - Non-alcoholic “alcohol”

Polynesian Music in general

- Storytelling, poetry
 - Primary Importance in Polynesian music
- Instruments
 - Polynesian nose flute
 - W. Polynesia
 - Hollow log idiophones (lali) **play example: lali.mp3**
 - Stamped bamboo tubes
 - Struck wooden plaques
 - Mat idiophones
 - Nose flutes
 - Conch trumpets (davui) **play video: Fijian log drumming**
- Dance
 - Upper body: enhances story
 - Lower body: aesthetic only
- Has adopted some intervals/influences from Western/European music

Fijian Music

- Indigenous Music
 - *Meke*
 - Sung narrative texts w/ instr. And dance accompaniment
 - Instr:
 - Lali = slit gong drum
 - Rhymes on penultimate syllable
 - Genre by gender, position (sitting/standing), movements, “props”
 - Men’s dance w/ spear = *meke wesi*
 - Men’s dance w/ club = *meke i wau*
 - w/ fans = *meke iri*
 - standing women’s dance = *sea sea*
 - standing men’s dances = *ruasa, liga*
 - seated men or women = *vakamalolo*
 - Ritual/social functions
 - Meke before going to war
 - Meke in religious ceremonies

- Social gatherings
 - Music
 - Composer is important!
 - Teaches song to others, may lead performance
 - Meke Form
 - (*Ucu* = prelude w/o dancing)
 - *Matana* = *meke* proper
 - Stanzas
 - Refrain (*taletale*)
 - **3 Examples: Youtube clips (see ppt)**
 - *Vucu*
 - Meke style singing w/o dance
 - 3 vocal parts
 - text about events, praise of people or deeds, lament death
 - Sung by men for relaxation at night
 - *Vakalutuivoce* “dropping the oar”
 - Ancient singing style
 - Accompanies canoeing/rafting
- Christian Religious Music
 - *Same* = “psalms”
 - Sung in Methodist churches by mature women
 - Musically very similar to *meke*
 - Biblical stories, themes (psalms, Song of Songs)
 - *Taro* = catechism, responsorial style
 - *Polotu* = singing with triangle, struck plate or beaten rod accompaniment
 - Vocal improvisation
 - Choral polyphonic arrangements
 - Western harmonies
- Popular Music
 - Dance music
 - *Sere ni cumu*
 - Western style popular songs
 - Guitar, ukulele, soon and/or 1-str. Bass
 - Women can only play it in private; men anywhere
 - *Taralala*

- Duple meter, lively tempo
- Cheerful text
- Mixed couples

Questions

1. Which of the following is a kind of *meke* performed by standing women?
a. vakamalolo b. sere c. meke wesi **d. seasea**
2. Which of the following allows for opportunities for dancing in mixed-sex pairs?
a. vucu **b. taralala** c. vakamalolo d. meke i wau
3. What are the names of the two main islands of Fiji? (pick two)
a. Viti Levu b. Maui c. Aotearoa **d. Vanua Levu**
4. Explain how Fijian peoples categorize different kinds of meke.
5. Describe the contexts in which one may find a meke performance.

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