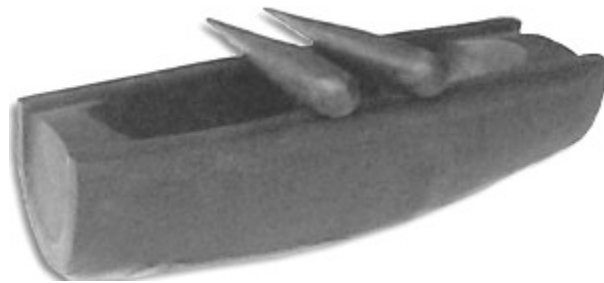


# Traditions in Transition

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A musical perspective in a changing, developing Samoa



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## **Abstract**

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This paper was compiled during November 2008. It was a research project that sought out the perspectives of various diverse musicians in Samoa at that time. These musicians included music school instructors, Peace Corps volunteers, Samoan orchestra composers and conductors, traditional Samoan composers, traveled Samoan musicians as well as contemporary Samoan artists. The paper examines how the purposes of music in Samoan society have shifted, altered or changed from traditional times to current-day Samoa in the face of development, a growing economy and increased contact with outside influences. Although the music of Samoa, its purposes, values, uses and aesthetics have changed, there is still a core “traditional” music of Samoa. Traditional Samoan music still has a purpose and a function in today’s society, but has partially given way to contemporary, externally-influenced Samoan music in the new age of development, greatly for the purpose of entertainment. At this time, Samoa is at a cultural crossroads, sandwiched between a way of life based on subsistence and its traditional cultural practices, and one based on a budding economy and fashioning itself to existing global cultures. Now, there are many issues in music tied to development such as education, technology and outside influence that factor greatly into the changes in Samoan music. With the shift towards economic development, there have been various changes in the cultural values of Samoa. One way to view the changes in Samoan culture is to look at the music of Samoa. This is the perspective of this paper.

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## Introduction

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Music is an innate and inherent trait found greatly all over Samoa. If one inquires as to why Samoa is such a musical place, a local will explain that Samoans are born surrounded by music—that they hear singing while people are working, fishing and going to church. Even if there are no formal instruments to play, people will find a cracker tin and two sticks to drum with. Anywhere, anytime and for any reason, Samoans find ways of making music.

Historically, as well, music has been an integral part of Samoan culture. Much of Samoa's oral histories were preserved and presented in a musical manner. Music was also very central to ceremonial purposes, whether for funerals, festivals, church openings, chiefly or community gatherings, weddings and many other important social events. Specific music pieces were composed just for some of those events every time they occurred. Music was utilized to highlight grand occasions.

Today, music in Samoa is quite different from traditional times. Generally one hears synthesizers, keyboards and drum machines blasting on buses, from houses and on the radio. Also, western music has taken its place in the contemporary Samoan music scene. Many people in Samoa now listen to contemporary popular western artists such as Chris Brown, Akon, 50 cent, etc. Today, many of the influences from the west tend to be either R&B, Reggae, Hip-hop or Pop. Music tends to be more oriented for entertainment, rather than for ceremony.

But this does not mean that traditional music does not exist today in Samoa. Composers still create music in traditional styles for events such as the Teuila and Independence Day

festivals, as well as for church openings, funerals and other events. However, it seems that these events are fewer and far between as Samoa moves more toward a global, economic culture that does not require, or even allow time for previous traditional ceremonies and events.

Attitudes toward this lessening of traditional musical events range from complacency to frustration and worry and opinions vary as to the quality and status of traditional and contemporary music practices today. However, the changes in the uses of Samoan music today from Samoan music of the traditional past seem to have one main cause—the introduction of economic development. The following sections highlight common issues of music and development in Samoa today.

## **Methodology**

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At first, this paper aimed to look at what was truly “traditional” Samoan music. However, this view of “traditional” was constraining for a few reasons. First, defining “traditional” Samoan music proved to be tricky. Questions like, “What is traditional music?”, “Is there only one type of music tradition in Samoa?”, “What if traditional music is performed with non-traditional instruments?”, “Is it still ‘traditional’?” arose and confounded the research process. Talks with Kuki Tuiasosopo, the music director for the American Samoa Community College, and ethnomusicologist for Samoa Richard Moyle helped define ‘traditional’: focus on the purposes, uses and values of the music rather than just the music itself. The focus that

evolved for a paper which looks at changes in purposes, uses and values of Samoan music from traditional times to current-day Samoa.

A small-scale survey was used to give an introductory impression of what people listen to today, as well as to give a hint as to what Samoans consider 'traditional' music. This actually cleared up some of those confounding questions of defining 'traditional' in the sense of Samoan music. People described traditional music in terms of instrumentation, purpose, context, as well as lyrical meanings. This variation of answers actually gave shape to a seemingly intangible definition of traditional Samoan music. It also gave insight to where this music is performed as well as what music is listened to today.

Overall, this paper was difficult to construct as it was based off of the varied, sometimes conflicting perspectives of those in music performance, music education and the music business. However, as more and more people were interviewed, some major recurring themes emerged. This was enough to shine a light on the current issues facing Samoa's music and culture.

One of the greatest difficulties of studying traditional music is that it has a context—a specific time and a place where the music is performed. During the compilation of this research, no traditionally performed Samoan music in its original context was witnessed, so the discussion of traditional music comes through the musicians who create, teach and are inspired by the traditional music of Samoa.

Another difficulty was the time constraints—three weeks to interview numerous people, as well as compose a cohesive paper. Were there more time allowed, a more insightful,

deeper analysis, as well as a longer, better developed body would most likely be possible. For now, an overview of the issues in the music of contemporary Samoa is the best that can be accomplished.

## **Traditions in Transition**

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### **The Karaoke Effect**

The impact of western music is made apparent all over Samoa. Walking through a village, sitting on the bus, listening to the radio or dancing in a night club, one most likely will hear a song from Akon, Chris Brown or various other contemporary western music artists. It is no secret that western music is highly popular in Samoa. Even contemporary Samoan artists often fashion their songs to Pop, Hip-hop or Reggae styles. However, this desire to emulate western sounds, images and ideals through music leads to a common practice of “stealing” music.

Many contemporary Samoan artists seem to make a practice of taking western songs, dub the originally English lyrics of the song in Samoan language over the original track, claim the rights of the song as their own and distribute it on compact disc and on air. Lifelong Samoan musician Jerome Grey describes this “karaoke” style of music as, “another lazy form of song. We are really losing out with our culture if we keep relying on karaoke. This karaoke music is all from America. And the Samoans, all they do is translate it from English to Samoan. And they call it their music. And they still keep the background” (Interview: Jerome Grey. 11/25/2008).

Not only is this practice of “stealing” music done in the music industry in Samoa, it is also done at song competitions. At Samoa’s Teuila and Independence Day festivals, villages, church groups or other groups of people compose songs and compete to win a sum of money.



There as well, they may take a Samoan composer's piece, change the words and claim the music as their own original composition.

Ueta Solomona, composer and conductor for the National Samoa Orchestra, believes that, "This practice of stealing needs to be discouraged and they need competitions based on original music" (Interview: Ueta & Susau Solomona. 11/16/2008).

June Ryan, owner of the June Ryan School of Music, also discourages this practice.

"It's obnoxious. You gotta be crazy to lay claim to what's not yours. But that's how it is. They say it's their music" (Interview: June Ryan. 11/12/2008).

Not only are these practices discouraged for stealing, but also for their impact on their impact on the future of Samoan music creation and the development of composition. "The whole melody [of competition compositions] sounds very similar to the other ones in the past. Hence there's been no growth" (Interview: June Ryan. 11/12/2008).

A great worry for Samoan music in the age of "karaoke-ism" is that overall, Samoa will lose its cultural songs, and with that, its musical, cultural identity. "Definitely [Samoans] will lose Samoan songs because all they hear is American music and all they do is translate it, but there's no Samoan songs. They change the lyrics, but that is not Samoan" (Interview: Jerome Grey. 11/25/2008).

Popular Samoan music tends to be shifting in this direction—relying on Samoan language to exemplify cultural identity, rather than on the music that traditionally was culturally distinct from other styles of music. This shift away from musical creativity toward musical copying seems to relate to a drop off in music education, music awareness and

musicianship in general. These drop offs are more and more apparently the result of the introduction of economic development.

### **Music Education and the Growth of Musical Creativity**

To many Samoans, one of the most prized facets of their culture is their music. From early ages, children grow up around music sung for work, church or many other occasions. However, today, children have a hard time accessing music in their education at school. Problems of insufficient teacher training, lack of teachers, lack of resources and lack of funding all hinder the ability for children to receive music education. It is this inaccessibility to music exposure that some musicians attribute to the growing “lack of creativity” in Samoa where some contemporary artists utilize technological means of music production rather than focusing on actual instrumentation.

The education system in Samoa can play an important role in teaching students music, however, currently, music education is not being taught widely. Currently, the music curriculum for primary and secondary schools in Samoa is being revised to include studies exploring traditional Samoan music. The four “strands” of studies put forth by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture include General Knowledge, Composition, Performance and History. An example exercise from the curriculum would be for the students to create a composition based on the actions of preparing food (Interview: Erik Martin. 11/12/2008). In Samoa, music like this is similar to the traditional dance of the *sāsā*, where performers might act out climbing a tree to get a coconut, husking the coconut and grating the coconut. So not only will the students be pushed to explore the history and knowledge of the music but they would also be composing and performing traditional Samoan music.

Erik Martin, a Peace Corps volunteer working on the Samoan music curriculum says that, “The biggest thing that I see being useful in that whole curriculum are the parts that talk about Samoan music and the culture and where that music came from” (Interview: Erik Martin. 11/12/2008).

However, currently, this curriculum is not being taught in Samoan schools. “Very few schools are following the curriculum. The only one that is doing the secondary schools curriculum started this year [2008] with Samoa College” (Interview: June Ryan. 11/12/2008).

The lack of funding, lack of teachers and training, and lack of resources all make music education unfeasible to do. It is economic pressures that are decreasing the access to proper music education in Samoa.

Even teachers being trained to instruct music courses in the schools are generally not knowledgeable enough about music in order to teach it. “With the new curriculum...no secondary school has ever tried it, because they don’t have the teachers with the skills to implement it” (Interview: June Ryan. 11/12/2008).

Once this curriculum is put into place and taught by well-trained music teachers, that music appreciation will grow and students will be able to explore and create their own music as well as learn their own cultural music of Samoa. At that point music education will relieve the current “lack of creativity” in Samoan popular music and will replace it with music that is created by musicians with interests more in instrumentation rather than relying on solely technological means of producing music.

## **The Dominance of Keyboards**

Much of the Samoan music that is created and played now on CD or on the radio is created with the help of electronic instruments such as keyboards and drum machines. These electronic instruments have the ability to create musical sound at the press of a button without any need for knowledge of musical composition. Since their introduction, musicians in Samoa have worried about their prevalence in the Samoan music scene as well as their effect on how people produce music in Samoa.

With keyboards, music artists can create many sounds. Today many Samoan artists use keyboards to replace a whole band or orchestra. “They play everything on a Casio keyboard from drums to piano to guitar to bass” (Interview: Shane Rivers. 11/18/2008). Before the keyboard was introduced in the 1980’s, to create the music of a full band there would need to be at least one person on each instrument in the band. But now, the advent of the keyboard in Samoa has drastically altered how people create music, how they play it, how people interact with each other musically as well as the quality and the sounds of the music itself.

Musicians worry that widespread prevalence of the keyboard and other music-producing technology in Samoa lessens or dilutes the quality of the sound of the music. “It’s great to use electronic instruments, but learn to use them well. It’s more for the ease of things and not so much about the quality and sound” (Interview: Erik Martin. 11/12/2008). “Even if they can get good sounds out of these things, to me, it’s not natural. Even a drum machine to me is not natural” (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008). Previously, sounds were produced by real instruments such as drums, guitars, ukulele and bass, but they can now all be replicated and replaced by keyboards, which seems to be a common practice in Samoa. Some musicians

still believe that, “Samoan music is most sweetest when it’s done with an ukulele and a guitar instead of electronic synthesizers” (Interview: Ben Vai. 11/22/2008).

Now, people who teach music, compose music and play music all around Samoa widely believe that the sustained popularity that keyboards and music-producing technology over human-played music-producing instruments, results in an overall decline in musicianship and musical abilities there.

[The keyboard] doesn’t improve the musicianship ability, because they are depending more on machines instead of their own ability. ... The ability of being a guitarist has been taken away by the machines. ... The difference in my time and now is we used to have musicians. Now you have engineers. They don’t know anything about music really, but they know a lot about keyboards and how to operate it, or a computer (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008).

Most importantly, many Samoans involved in music value non-technological, more traditionally used musical instruments because they exemplify an innate ‘Samoan sound’. This exemplification of Samoan sound is important to expose Samoan culture to the rest of the world, and more specifically for the important tourism industry in Samoa.

“When the tourists come here, they would like to hear what we have here to offer to the tourists. They want to hear Samoan music. They want to hear the instruments that we use” (Interview: Jerome Grey. 11/25/2008).

But beyond tourism, creating and playing Samoan music with traditional Samoan sounds are important for maintaining Samoan culture itself. “Using this technology would take away the importance, the true rhythm, the true sound and values of the Samoan’s music and singing” (Interview: LMS Gae’e. 11/27/2008).

The introduction of the keyboard, drum machines and other music-producing technology has greatly changed one of Samoa's greatest cultural facets—its production of music. It has changed how people interact with each other musically as sounds before were produced with multiple people, not just on a single keyboard. It has also greatly changed peoples' ability to play music, as technology seems to be the main route to producing music, not through actual instrumentation. This technology has also served to take away from the aesthetics of the true rhythm and sounds of Samoan cultural music. This introduction of western technology into Samoa, has indelibly left its mark on the music of Samoa.

### ***Tupe Troubles***

Moving towards developing an economy can change how a society interacts and exchanges within itself, and as a result, the values of that culture can change. In Samoa, this is exactly the case. As of right now, Samoa is slowly moving out of the United Nation's "Least Developed Country" economic bracket. The increased introduction of money goods, technology, and exposure to external cultures from this economic growth has changed the culture itself. Music is a facet of Samoan culture that gives a good perspective to these changes. Musical competitions, musical performances and even the values and messages of the music in Samoa have altered because of this shift towards a money-based society.

Before the economic system truly set in, music was played for enjoyment and ceremony, not for money. "In my days you don't think of money. You play because you love to play. In my days there was no such thing as a paid gig. We all do things because we love to play" (Interview: Jerome Grey. 11/25/2008). However, today in Samoa music has shifted to become

more of a commodity. There is a wider expectation now that performing music requires monetary payment.

Although there is this greater expectation for payment, there is currently not much work for musicians, much less venues to showcase their music. You can still find traditional string bands at the Aggie Grey's Hotel and Hotel Kitano in Apia, but outside of that and a few others there really are few venues to play at in Samoa. And even at those locations, the musicians are generally not paid very much for performing. At Aggie Grey's Hotel, many of those who dance and play music also work at the Hotel itself, which is where they would get most of their income. Money affects the ability for musicians to perform as well as limits their choices as to where they perform.

Another reason work is not good for musicians right now is because of technological advancements in music. Whereas before each person played an instrument in a band, it can all be done today with keyboards, drum machines and other music-producing technologies taking over those sounds. This is what takes work away from musicians today. "The more machines, the more unemployed. Like the musicians, in those days you'd have a nice 3-piece or 4-piece, now, just 1 guy with all these machines. They've taken away the drummer's job, the bass player's job and the keyboardist's job" (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008).

Ben Vai, a contemporary Samoan music artist also witnesses this trend of technology and economics taking away opportunities from music artists. "Its cheaper paying a DJ than it is paying a whole band. ... You have the musicians under pressure that they can live up to playing against a DJ and keep the crowd still interested" (Interview: Ben Vai. 11/22/2008).

Not only does music-producing technology affect opportunities for performing music artists, but so does imported, recorded music technology like CDs and MP3 players. “The economy...it’s affecting everything. A guy can get an mp3, mp4 or iPod and he just goes and buys a six-pack and he’s good instead of going out. You have a lot of individuals like that” (Interview: Ben Vai. 11/22/2008).

Another example of changing attitudes in music towards money are music competitions in Samoa. For the Teuila, Independence Day and Flag Day festivals, villages and church groups generally compete to create songs and perform them to win cash prizes. Previously, those competitions did not involve cash prizes. “They get paid now. They could get anything, maybe \$5-10,000 [tala]. In the old days, you get nothing. You get two pigs and 3 fine mats. You don’t get any cash in the old days” (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008).

A main reason for the switch to monetary rewards rather than gifts is because of economic factors like the cost of transportation.

Traditional music and the way the culture worked, it was never for money. But I can also see the reason why they have to use money now, because everything uses money. Those days you used to hop on a long boat and just row across to the other side. Now you go by plane and it costs you money. Gas costs you money. In those days it was muscle (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008).

Since this switch to money prizes, it appears that the competitors perform more for the cash rather than simply to represent their group and perform for the spirit of the competition.

The way people are getting money has changed the attitudes, changed the character of the people because they can respond to the government for Teuila to come because they know they will get something later on. ... There was a different spirit at that time. People would go and give and not think there would be something like [money] (Interview: Ueta Solomona. 11/20/2008).



So not only does money factor into people's abilities to perform music, it transforms their attitudes towards performing it as well. The reasons for performing music have now changed—it is greatly for money. "A lot of people now are playing and they want to be paid for it. Its money, money, money, money" (Interview: Jerome Grey. 11/25/2008).

Money affects not only what opportunities musicians have to play their music, it also affects how people view music. Once music is performed for money, it becomes like a commodity—a tradable good or service only to occur in response to a paid transaction. This inevitable shift in Samoa toward a growingly economic society has pushed music into this definition, as a money-making device. However, the economy also almost forces music into this category as it is becoming harder to live, travel, communicate and acquire necessary items in Samoa without relying on cash. As a response, these needs push musicians toward performing for economic reasons. Today, much of the music performed is for the purpose of making money. Very seldom nowadays is it like traditional times where music was performed for the purpose of events and ceremonies.

### **The Extinction of Events**

All traditional Samoan music has a context—a time, a place and a purpose for songs and chants. Historically, the traditional music of Samoa was performed for events and ceremonies special to the people. The openings of churches, funerals, weddings, working, opening schools, festivals, and performances for chiefs are all events that called for traditional music to be composed and performed. Although today, it is hard to find the presence of traditional Samoan music. The one place you will hear Samoan music exists is in front of the government building in Apia, and only for the Teuila and Independence Day festivals, where they hold their

composition competitions for competing village choirs. Other than that, rarely does one hear traditional Samoan music. The main reason why this traditional music is becoming so rare to hear today is that the events that traditional music was composed for are becoming less and less frequent.

Although it is becoming more uncommon to hear traditional music in Samoa, it has not altogether disappeared. And even though its presence is lessened, its purpose still remains the same today. “The purpose for Samoan music hasn’t changed. It’s events” (Interview: June Ryan. 11/12/2008).

However, these events seem to be occurring less and less frequently due to a shift toward more western mentalities. An example would be the lessening of the ritual of the *nunu*. The *nunu* is the procession of the *a’iga*, or ‘family’ of the *manaia*, or high chief’s son, when they make their walk to the *taupou*, the village virgin of a high chief, to propose a marriage. In order to start leading the procession, the high chief father of the *manaia* must begin a chant about the joining of the man and woman to which everyone joins in and follows him. “In the old days this was the practice of the wedding” (Interview: Ueta Solomona. 11/20/2008). But today, “They are doing it today the very Christian way” (Interview: Lofipo Faletolu. 11/20/2008). With the introduction of and widespread devotion to the church, that ritual was lost and replaced, as well as the music and chant that accompanied it. Looking at these kinds musical losses shows that shifting toward western, external cultural customs and values sometimes leads to an abandonment of traditional Samoan ones, and therefore the music that accompanies it.

Another possible cause of losing cultural music and songs is the shift toward a more economically based society. As more and more people subscribe to the growing economic

system, they become more dependent on goods purchased with money. In order to make that money, a lot of time is spent working—at plantations, or in Apia—and not for much money. “This culture is in a hard place between trying to be westernized, so you could live *fa’a Samoa* [‘the Samoan way of living’] fine off of your plantation and not need any money. But it’s westernized enough that you do really need money, but there’s not a lot of places to make money” (Interview: Erik Martin. 11/12/2008).

Dave Parker, a local musician posits that, “They’re getting busier with daily work ... and other commitments to church things and village things cut down their time” (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008).

He also notes the amount of time it takes to organize traditional choir ensembles. “It takes a lot of time to get together. One choir, you’re looking at 50-100 people or more. So they’re all gonna get together and start learning the words and the actions” (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008). The amount of time and effort spent on creating these events could be displaced by the time and energy these composers, conductors and singers spend working as many people begin to rely on a monetary economic system.

Despite the hardships of continuing traditional Samoan music in an age of global exchange and economy, traditional music in Samoa still exists. For certain funerals, as in those of high chiefs, people perform traditional funeral chants. This kind of music still has a role today, and continues to fulfill traditional roles. Traditional music is still alive when it is performed where it needs to be performed.

Although it is still alive today, numbers of musicians believe that if Samoa is not careful, it could lose its cultural songs within a few generations.

“I think they should [bring back traditional music] because it will just disappear. After the next two generations, it will be gone” (Interview: Luna Paul. 11/17/2008).

“These occasions [where traditional music is played] are now rare. We are fearing now that 50% [of the traditional music] is lost because that kind of occasion is now lost” (Interview: Ueta Solomona. 11/20/2008).

However, others maintain that Samoan traditional music will never cease to exist:

“I don’t think Samoa will ever let go of what they call the authentic, the traditional” (Interview: June Ryan. 11/12/2008).

“I don’t think [traditional music] is disappearing, and I don’t think it will ever disappear. But it’s less now. A lot less now than what it used to be” (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008).

“The [western influences] do not really take away the feeling of the Samoan dances and music. It will never, ever, take away, or make the people forget about all this Samoan stuff” (Interview: LMS Gae’e. 11/27/2008).

Some people believe that Samoan music is in jeopardy, and while others calmly believe that the music itself is not endangered. It is apparent that traditional Samoan music is lessening and the occasions for the music are also lessening as more external influences are adopted and also as the economic structure takes its toll on the people who make the music.

### **Bringing Back Tradition**

Despite a decline in the prevalence of traditional music as a result of an increase in economic growth, traditional music can still be found hidden in various aspects of Samoan culture today if one listens carefully enough. Traditional music in Samoa can be performed at hotels for tourists, it can be rearranged into other forms of music, it can be used to generate cultural pride at special national occasions and it can also serve as a way to preserve the past. Today, many musicians are finding ways to revive, renew and regenerate the traditional music of Samoa and in many ways.

Current artists find ways of reaching back to traditional music, whether in lyrical texts or in instrumentation. Eni Faleomavaega is the longstanding congressman from American Samoa, but he is also a musician that focuses on traditional music.

Our congressman from American Samoa, Eni Faleomavaega, he does all the traditional things. ... He's using the modern instruments, but all the traditional songs. [He uses] guitar, keyboard, but you also hear the little *pātē* [wooden slit drum traditionally used in Samoa] in the back. ... He's another one that's bringing back the old traditional. Oh no, he's not just a politician, he's a musician (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008).

Another way that artists and composers are using traditional music is by arranging it into different formats and genres. Ueta Solomona is the composer and conductor of the National Samoa Orchestra. He has recently composed a number of traditional Samoan children's game songs into standard European orchestral form to be performed by the National Samoa Orchestra. He put these songs into orchestral form as a way to preserve the sounds of traditional Samoan music as the music was traditionally not notated and recorded. "I fear that if it isn't done, school children will grow up without a cultural understanding of music" (Interview: Ueta Solomona. 11/16/2008). He also took up this notation into orchestral form in order to share traditional Samoan music with new generations of Samoans as well as with composers,

conductors and other musicians around the world. He also says that that notation and written recording of the music helps to contrast changes in later music that may come about from traditional music. By notating and recording music, even if it is in a different format, helps preserve and continues traditions of Samoan music.

Traditional music is also used today for certain industries in Samoa. Tourism is one of Samoa's biggest industries, and a large focus of that business is highlighting and showcasing Samoan culture. One way for hotels and beach fale accommodations to exhibit Samoan culture to tourists is through music and dance. Aggie Grey's Hotel, Hotel Kitano, Taufua Beach Fales and many other accommodation-oriented places have *fiafia* shows, which are traditional Samoan occasions where dancing and music are performed. At those shows traditional music plays behind the dances such as the *sāsā* and *fa'ataupati* [men's percussive slap dance]. Although this music is performed at these resorts every week if not more so, it is important to note that this music is performed in villages rarely as often. This practice of *fiafia* is used today mostly to exemplify Samoan music, dance and culture to tourists. Nonetheless, it is still one way of continuing traditional practices of music and dance.

Being a culturally proud place, Samoa even finds ways of integrating Samoan music into their governing structure. In Samoan parliament, every time before a session starts, a specified chanter begin a chant. The chanting is to announce the beginning of the session as well as to chant on behalf of those of a higher status, such as parliament members (Interview: Ueta Solomona. 11/16/2008).

Even in the Catholic Church, which is historically known for prohibiting the native culture in Samoa, they are beginning to use traditional music in their church services in order to

bring back traditional culture. “In the Catholic church they’re using a lot of traditional tunes. They just put in the church and bible words and we sing it. But that tune that you will hear in the Catholic mostly is traditional music” (Interview: Silao Kasiano. 11/21/2008). This shift toward traditional culture in the Catholic churches began occurring, “in the past 12 years” (Interview: Silao Kasiano. 11/21/2008). Now it seems as if the church is no longer repressing the Samoan culture, but embracing it to fit Samoan culture and compliment it since Samoa is a highly religious nation. This trend toward cultural pride seems to be popular and increasingly accepted by the churches and their members.

“If other churches would do the same thing then it seems like we’re appreciating our culture. The culture should go together with the church. The music is the one that actually reinforces it. Because once they sing the music, then not just our culture, but god is there. We’re praying to god using our traditional style” (Interview: Silao Kasiano. 11/21/2008).

Pride for the Samoan culture through music is also found at celebrations and festivals such as the Teuila festival and Independence Day festival. These both happen once a year and usually contain a portion where there is a song composition competition. “Every year at independence, the government invites the villages, they choose some villages to come and entertain” (Interview: June Ryan. 11/12/2008). Although these competitions are supposed to represent what is truly ‘traditional’ in Samoa, there is a myriad of controversies as to how ‘traditional’ the music truly is. “They want to maintain this old thing and at the same time, when it’s presented, they use everything that is available with technology to present it” (Interview: June Ryan. 11/12/2008). Although the aesthetics may have changed, the competition still maintains one main aspect of Samoan music tradition—event-based compositions. Each village composes a mostly original piece for the festival itself. This composition for the sake of events is a highly traditional practice in Samoa. “Samoan music hasn’t changed. It’s events” (Interview: June

Ryan. 11/12/2008). So even though the event has grown away from its aesthetic roots, it still maintains the traditional spirit of event-based song creation.

A group that represents and propagates Samoan culture through music is the Teachers Cultural Group. The group's music and dance section led by LMS Gae'e focuses on maintaining the traditional song and dance of Samoa.

My instructor during those days was looking at the cultural activities to be maintained because there were those western ideas of dancing were coming in and that instructor during our time was really looking at the cultural activities being maintained so we could pass it along to our generation (Interview: LMS Gae'e. 11/27/2008)

The founding of the cultural music and dance group was started in response to the influx of contemporary influences on the culture as the nation began to develop. In order to maintain a sense of the traditional culture, LMS and her colleagues felt they had to begin this group as music was a key component to understanding and passing on Samoan values and Samoan culture.

Our generation started to turn toward the contemporary but we were just trying to get them to understand that they have to maintain, they have to stick to the traditional dances because the culture is there. The Samoan values are there. It has to be maintained and passed on to our generation (Interview: LMS Gae'e. 11/27/2008).

Although traditional music appears to be on the decline in the face of modern entertainment music, it still finds its way into the modern day in new areas unexplored by traditional music. The traditional still seeps into the contemporary in unexpected ways. People still find ways of reaching back to the traditional of the past and using it practically with



renewed meaning in the present. These examples are testaments to the belief held by many musicians that “traditional” music will never truly cease to exist.

## **Analysis**

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In writing this paper, two main themes tied to development emerged as large forces in changing the culture of Samoa as well as its music—the economy and the influences from outside. These parallel forces change the cultural interactions of Samoa and can be seen in the music itself through the many issues that those involved with music face today.

It was discovered that there is a widespread practice of “stealing” music in Samoa through the practice of “karaoke-ing”. The accessibility of western music through modern conventions of internet, radio, CD and MP3 have changed what music people listen to in Samoa, and how they listen to it. Because of this accessibility of the music listened to today, as well as growing cultural interest in it, it is seen that Samoan musicians greatly abandon their own culturally distinct forms of music for more western forms. The advent of these forms of music from the west has drastically altered the music scene in Samoa where emphasis on the cultural identity of the music is stressed on the language of the lyrics. This shift in musical trends shows that cultural identity is being displaced by the introduction of new forms of technology as well as external influences as Samoa changes to become a more developed nation.

Education and accessibility to learn music is also an important issue in Samoa today. Where children learn music, especially for more modern forms of instrumental music has changed because teachers, their training and learning materials are not being funded or supplied. The economic pressures on education have stymied efforts to implement a serious music education within the school systems. Again, the economic struggles in Samoa overall translate to struggles in music.

Technological imports such as the keyboard and drum machine affect not only the aesthetics of music, but the way people interact musically—as a full band with instruments, or as one man orchestrating a song with all digital materials. It also affects the ability for budding musicians to learn their craft. This technology makes it possible to produce music without having prior instrumental knowledge, only the knowledge of working the computer-driven devices. Therefore it is feared that the skills in making, creating and producing music for Samoans are widely being lost to the advent of music-producing technology. Also, many hold the belief that the timbres of the sounds produced by the technology do not represent true Samoan sounds, rhythms and melodies, taking voice away from what many still believe is the essence of traditional Samoan music. The influence of imported technology from external sources affects music in a socio-cultural setting, lessening relationships between people and each other, their abilities and their “sonic” identities.

Leaning more toward an economically-based society also affects how music is performed and also the reason it is performed for. Relying on the monetary system for subsistence means people look to make money for what they do in order to survive. Music has been thrown into the realm of money and is not greatly viewed as a commodity to be

performed for cash exchanges. This turns the traditional purposes for ceremony now to be more entertainment-oriented. Money also limits the abilities for musicians to perform their craft with transportation and equipment costs. In general, the introduction of the economic structure changes the purposes of the music in Samoa and limits the abilities for performers to continue their craft.

These themes of economy and external pressures also lessen the opportunities for traditional music to be practiced anymore. Traditional music was previously based heavily on events such as weddings, funerals, chief meetings, etc. However now, many of these events are “Christianized” and adapted to western conventions of ceremony. Also the ability to gather people who now more greatly base their subsistence off of monetary labor to perform traditional music has been altered greatly with the growing economy. The abilities and opportunities for the traditional music of Samoa seem to be fading.

In the face of development, it appears that traditional as well as modern music are on the decline. The abilities of performing music are now being taken away by technology. Also, the cultural identity of the music is being replaced with external music identities. Lastly, the events where traditional music is performed are now very infrequent. In general, these swift changes to become more developed as a nation, as a society and as a people change cultural practices and interactions. For a place that prides itself greatly on its cultural music, Samoa is in a cultural rough spot trying to pull itself up to be economically sustaining and independent. With music and culture being so intertwined, it can be very apparent that music flexes greatly to the contour of the bending culture of Samoa. It is not only the lessening of the traditional music that needs to be focused on, it is also the cultural identity of the music of the present as

well. Both are in jeopardy of losing face to economic and external pressures. Not unless musicianship and appreciation of the native culture are re-cultivated, in balance with new cultural-economic structures, will Samoa maintain its cultural identity through its music.

## **Conclusion**

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At times cultural changes can be so swift and seamless that it may be hard to see what is happening at the moment. With the perspectives of musicians young and old, it is possible to see where music in Samoa has been, where it is going and why. Older generations have a history and a strong connection to the past, the traditional. But younger generations also shed light on where the modern and the future is headed. These musical perspectives give insight to how Samoa has changed as a result of colonization, religious conversion, monetary systems, external influences as well as technology. Samoa is a highly musical place, where work, church, celebration and ceremony all call for the embellishment of song. Being such a strong musical area, Samoa is also a very rich place to study the culture as both music and culture are so inherently intertwined with each other here. The transition of the cultures from traditional to modern can be greatly examined by the effect the cultural changes have had on the music itself, where it is performed and what it is performed for. The purposes of the music define their place within the culture. With the altered purposes, we are able to view the issues of the changing society of Samoa.

Samoa is definitely in a stage of growth—economically, culturally and otherwise. This is part of a process through which Samoa must get through. But during this process, one can witness struggles of education, struggles with external forces, struggles with economic forces,

struggles of culture and many other issues come to light when you look at Samoan society with a musical lens. Sometimes, all one has to do is sit back and listen to hear these issues.

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## **Conclusion**

Development may not be necessarily a bad thing, but more just a process of a cycle

(cite ben vai)

Make quote from erik that its just “growing pains” of developing a country

It seems that once education and culture catch up with development, only then will Samoa flourish again as the cultural utopia it may once have been.

However, development is the key reason for the change in culture and therefore the music. With the introduction of cash, the way people interact and exchange goods changes cultural attitudes and practices. When that is changed, the times where the previous cultures were practiced, change, morph, or even lessen. The introduction of money, and the drive for development are inherently tied to Samoan music. Music is but one perspective to look at the social changes here in Samoa. If you compare the contemporary to the traditional customs, you will see a vast change in how society was structured.

Dave parker quote: Traditional Music has not changed. it cannot change. But commercial samoan music has changed. Its all reggae and hip hop.

## **The Importance of Lyrics and Music**

(importance of lyrics, show examples. then add in importance of music to carry those messages, what the messages are and how they relate to todays economically driven society and culture. show examples how language trumps music and music is now of western identity [hiphop])

Choir festivals – teuila, independence day

Starsearch competitions

“I think the reason why is that kids don’t know any better, because there’s nobody with an idea to try to get the kids to play the music, play the guitars, play the ukulele, so they go the easy way.”

“No one is doing karaoke of Samoan songs.”

“The tourists, when they come, they say ‘this sounds like Whitney Houston!’”

“It is not Samoan. Definitely not Samoan.”

(Interview: Jerome Grey. 11/25/2008)

“The majority of the music coming through...[Samoan artists] take the white man’s music and melody and they change the words and they say it is their composition.”

June Ryan: reason now is also setting – perform on a big malae where they need a sound system to amplify. Need keyboard for that.

*“It hasn’t got the feel. It can’t feel. You can’t feel a piece of metal. The feeling of playing the drums has gotta come from inside, you gotta play with somebody in front of you leading and the guy who is doing the singing can feel you too cause you kinda work together. And same as a bass player. But all these things that are keyboards...one guy doing a one man band with a whole orchestra behind him and they’re all just buttons. It’s artificial. There’s no feeling in it. That’s what it is. In fact, that’s the correct term for it. There’s no feeling in that kind of music. No feeling at all.”* (Interview: Dave Parker. 11/14/2008)

New generations fascinated not by heritage, history and culture, but by western lifestyles

“They take fish and pigs as a reward of their coming.” – Lofipo

“Often now people are starting to look at the money side.”

“Nobody had money. They still don’t have money.” (Jerome Grey)

(how money has changed teuila festival, other events. role of money in music. how it has pushed music to be more entertainment oriented.)

“Somebody’s about to celebrate a new church building; they write music for that. Work, you come up with some music while you’re doing chores. Sports—they still do their music cheering for that.”

“All Samoan music has a purpose. ... The uses [of Samoan music] are the same, but not as effective as it probably was used in the past.

It may be a perception that traditional music is dying as popular music is a more frequent and prevalent form of music in Samoa, but traditional music is still being used to this day in traditional contexts. ueta)

“Words are very important. They come from the occasion.” –Ueta

"These are the activities now that are not as often as they occurred in the past." –Ueta

(reasons why traditional music is not played as often now. lack of events. Events nowadays, don't give same meaning. show events where it IS still happening)

"Love songs, poetry, describing another girl like a flower or a bird" –Ben

(a look at what is being done today to salvage traditional music, why it is important to these artists and how they feel about music today)

~~Eni Faleomavaega (Dave Parker)~~

~~Aggie's and Kitano and Taufua~~

~~Ueta (children's game songs orchestrated)~~

~~In parliament, chanting before session (ueta)~~

~~Catholic church bringing traditional back into lotu.~~

~~Teuila Festival and Independence Day~~

Artists who use chants in their songs (king kapisi, etc)

~~Teacher's Cultural Group~~

Worry about losing meaning in modern music, out of context (ueta)

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