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# (Re)Constructing the Kōauau:

## Traditional and Modern Methods in the Making of Kōauau Rākau

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# Abstract

Until recently written work on the kōauau has remained hidden within ethnographic accounts and anthropological analyses of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Descriptions regarding the traditional construction methods of the wooden kōauau, a traditional, short, open-ended, tube flute played using the oblique embouchure, are often brief and second-hand, usually describing the object as it is physically rather than the process by which it was made. As yet, very little has been done academically on the process of construction: the *making* of kōauau. Interest in taonga pūoro (traditional Māori musical instruments) within academic discussion has been increasing alongside the pragmatic revival of a musical practice motivated by a small group of high-profile, respected exponents. By collecting oral tradition and combining ethnographic evidence with structural knowledge from existing museum artefacts for purposes of reconstruction and re-enactment, these people have been revitalising and reviving the traditional practice of taonga pūoro. Situated within an ethnomusicological framework of fieldwork-based research this thesis incorporates interviews, practical reconstruction, the study of museum artefacts, and a thorough survey of ethnography in a comparative analysis that considers the possibility, validity and probability of different techniques. Focussed specifically on traditional methods, one technique in particular, that of using a hot coal to burn the central bore that runs through the length of the shaft of the flute was central to the research. In total eighteen instruments are presented that were created during the research by methods that included cord drill, gouging of pith woods, 'found sound', tunnels made by moth grubs, and fire.

*E tū e te Tari Māori, ki te wehenga o ngā ora,*

*Tirohia atu ngā ara tawhito o namata.*

*Uia ki te wāhi ngaro, "Kei hea tō wāhi pai?"*

*Haere rā reira ka kitea rā e koe,*

*Te tānga manawa mō te iwi – mō te rahi, mō te iti*

*Hoea tō waka kia mārō te haere…*

*Arise Māori house and seek out life,*

*Study the ancient pathways of long ago.*

*Ask of the hidden reality, "Where should I go?"*

*Go there, and you shall see*

*The beating heart of your people, of the great and the small.*

*Row your canoe and be committed to your journey…*

*(Marsden, 2003: xv-xvi)*

# Acknowledgements

*I stand upon the shoulders of giants. From the lofty heights that these greats have already achieved I have viewed a vast beautiful land with a deep perspective, the horizon for which I have not yet seen. Whano, whano! Haramai te toki! Haumi ē! Hui ē! Tāiki ē!*

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