

History of our anthem uncovers dubious past and unclear lyrics

by Marcus Stickley

God Defend New Zealand was penned by a man who left his wife and son destitute because of a love of drink.

Thomas Bracken was a charming but tragic Irish immigrant who became a colonial journalist, poet and legislator. His wife and child sold his poetry door-to-door to feed themselves after his death.

"He was dissolute — he couldn't handle money. His sense of responsibility to his family was not strong. But he was very, very charming," says Max Cryer, author of *Hear Our Voices, We Entreat*, a history of New

Zealand's national anthems.

Bracken also rallied against the women's suffrage movement in an 1890 poem *Women's Rights*.

Associate arts, culture and heritage minister Judith Tizard says this is irrelevant to the status of *God Defend New Zealand*.

"*God Save the Queen* was written about George I, and he's not necessarily a model of society," she says.

God Defend New Zealand and *God Save the Queen* share equal standing as the country's national anthems.

Cryer has attempted to clarify other points of contention surrounding the history of the

national anthem.

There has been ongoing debate about the meaning of Bracken's metaphor 'Pacific's triple star'.

Arguments have centred on whether the triple star represented the three islands of New Zealand — the North Island, South Island and Stewart Island — or the three baskets of knowledge from Maori legend.

Bracken was to be an admirer of Maori culture and the original anthem manuscript, printed in 1877, featured both the 1834 flag of the United Tribes and Queen Victoria's insignia.

A Government-commissioned Maori translation in 1878 by a retired Maori Land Court judge changed "guard Pacific's triple star, from the shafts of strife and war," to "let goodness flourish, let blessings flow".

This has been used as evidence that Bracken wrote the hymn as a pro-Maori call for unity.

Despite two years researching the subject, Cryer has not found a definite answer to the phrase's meaning, and declines to offer an opinion.

"We simply don't know the answer," he says.

He did find the piano that John Joseph Woods composed the hymn's score on in July 1876.

Cryer traced the piano's owners from a letter "written by someone by the name of Smith" to the *Otago Daily Times*.

After Woods' death, the German-made Lipp piano was sold to the Dominican priory in Dunedin. Cryer found the piano in the possession of a former priory student.

Cryer says the instrument's

owner did not wish to have his name or whereabouts disclosed.

God Defend New Zealand was made the national hymn in 1940, and Queen Elizabeth II declared it the national anthem in 1977.



MAX CRYER

Cryer says that a song reaching the status of a national anthem is an evolutionary process.

"An anthem has to grow from the grass roots, then we know where to look for a new anthem," he says.

Returned servicemen were known to sing *Broke My Dentures* as their song of choice, and in the 1960s young people sang the television jingle for Chesdale cheese.

In a 2002 survey of New Zealand Australasia Performing Rights Association members, Wayne Mason's *Nature* topped their list of favourite or most significant New Zealand songs of all time.

During the 2002-2003 America's Cup, Dave Dobbyn's

Loyal reached near anthem status.

The suitability of the national anthem, along with the national flag, has been a long-standing source of debate.

Playwright and TV presenter Oscar Kightley says that *God Defend New Zealand* is passive and meek.

"The Australians have *Advance Australia Fair* which is about going forward. Our anthem could be a bit more staunch. I think the passiveness reflects the national character though."

Silver Fern Irene Van Dyk likes to sing the anthem in Maori because it reflects the character of the country.

"When I sing it before a game it gets me psyched up and makes my heart pound. It makes me feel like I'm not on a mission on my own. I think its bloody brilliant," she says.

Musician and cartoonist Chris Knox does not like *God Defend New Zealand* as a national anthem.

"It has antediluvian lyrics. The tune is abysmal. It says nothing about the country."

Tizard says she does not think national anthems reflect the character of a country. They are there to serve a purpose.

Cryer says: "If something grows into the brain, like *Loyal*, it does take over."

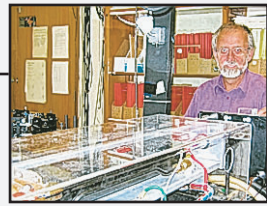
He says *God Defend New Zealand* will remain suited to the character of the country until someone comes up with something better. He offers his alternative:

"New Zealand is a very, very good country. Aotearoa, ka pai, ka pai, ka pai — it's about the country. It has both languages. "Everything is there."

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The Editor's Pen

Well we made it! This is the fourth edition of *Te Waha Nui* we have produced in 10 weeks and it has been a wondrous journey of sorts. It was certainly a tough ask for the production team and I am proud to have been editor of such a dedicated group of young journalists.

A special thank you to our thought-provoking columnists and to all the students from AUT's journalism school who have contributed excellent copy, photos and ideas.

The layout and design and photo production in *Te Waha Nui* have been particularly strong and the extensive range of stories we covered offered a fresh perspective for our readers.

And we did make a difference.

Our last edition's front page lead story on the racially-biased music contest in Tauranga led to the event being cancelled, after the story was picked up by other media outlets and reached a wider audience.

So what now? It is an interesting time to be entering the jour-

nalism industry with a new Sunday newspaper, new magazine titles appearing every month, and record advertising dollars producing bigger and brighter editions.

But is the standard of journalism in this country on a similar rise?

It seems not, as the demand from foreign owners of our newspapers for higher profits has seen a decline in investigative journalism and a predilection for celebrity reporting.

The magazines in our weekend papers are opportunities to investigate issues in depth and showcase the best writing talent — sadly they are mostly full of celebrity reporting and gossip.

Ironically, a major newspaper with a magazine dedicated to investigative journalism is the privately-owned *Otago Daily Times*.

The challenge for our industry is to regain the public's trust and belief that a newspaper is the place to find quality news.

Let's hope that *Te Waha Nui* and future newspapers from

other journalism schools can get commercial support and publish on a consistent basis to keep the mainstream titles honest.



Peter White