

Oriori

by Ariana Tikao

People sing oriori to babies as the babies are growing inside their mothers. They also sing them during birth to help keep the mother and the baby relaxed. Later on, oriori can be used as lullabies. Oriori help pass on values and knowledge about te ao Māori. They do this through place names, whakapapa, and stories about the baby's whānau. Oriori often include the hopes and dreams of the whānau for the baby.

Many iwi have well-known oriori, such as “Pinepine te Kura” from Ngāti Kahungunu and “Pōpō” from Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki.

The arrival of Pākehā affected some aspects of Māori culture. Many whānau stopped singing oriori. Now, some people are singing them again, and others are writing new ones. I wrote an oriori for my babies when they were little to help them go to sleep. Their pāpā spoke one when they were born.

“Piki Kōtuku” (See pages 18–19)

This oriori is a tohu or sign for a special visitor. It talks about the kōtuku or white heron. Kōtuku are rare – there are not many in Aotearoa. “Piki kōtuku” are feathers worn in the hair. They are a mark of mana. Piki kōtuku can also mean “my darling”.

The first verse is about Rangiatea, a spiritual homeland for Māori people. The second verse is about the Māori tīpuna, who were very skilful navigators and explorers. It talks of qualities (momo) that can be passed down in families, such as a talent in music or sport. The third verse says the baby is like a pounamu treasure, made by the clever hands of the baby's tīpuna.

The last two verses talk about some of the things that will affect the baby in the future and my hope that they will be able to face those things. These verses are about our role as kaitiaki of the environment and our responsibilities towards our people.

The beginning and the end of this oriori link to a well-known whakataukī:

*E kore au e ngaro, he kākano i ruia mai i Rangiatea.
I will never be lost, as I am a seed sown in Rangiatea.*

This whakataukī is about the Pacific origins of Māori tamariki. When we understand our history and know about the strength and skills of our tīpuna, we understand more about our own potential. These gifts are passed on to us through our whakapapa.

