





Clockwise from above: Markham Galut from Papua New Guinea; Alena Murang from Borneo and Charles Maimarosia from the Solomon Islands

Cole selected musicians from across the vast region and asked them to suggest a song “which they are proud to represent their cultural heritage with” and suggest a location to record and film it, “a place which has a meaning to them and their culture.” Then with overdubs these soon became collaborative songs with musicians from across Austronesia. “Over three years we visited 16 island nations, recorded around 50 sessions, working with well over 100 musicians, which I edited and produced into one soundtrack of 18 songs – a living album and we plan to keep adding to it and updating it.”

The album begins, appropriately enough with the sound of the ocean in Taiwan and a Taiwanese aboriginal song saying ‘Sing, relax and let’s sing together, I’m happy you are with me. I heard your call.’ The following two songs come from Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Madagascar marking the furthest reaches of the Austronesian travels. Some of the songs are stripped down with minimal accompaniment or just sounds from the natural environment, like the Maori song ‘Manu Koroki’, which involves just vocals, birdsong and the sound of the indigenous Aotearoa forest plus the delicate plucking of a sapé from Sarawak. Others involve many of the artists in a complicated mix, such as ‘Ka Va’Ai Mai Koe’ (Give Me Your Hand), composed by Yoyo Tuki, which has become a sort of anthemic song for the project. “For me it goes beyond the music,” he says. “Our ancestors came from somewhere

and we have all sat together and shared common words in our native languages from Taiwan to Easter Island to Madagascar to Borneo.” All the musicians around him nod in agreement.

Every track has its natural sound: of forest, beach, river, volcano, baobabs, mangrove swamp. The latter is the background for ‘Alie Sike’ (the track on the covermount CD) on Bougainville, the main island of Papua New Guinea. Composed by Koyawa, the son of a tribal chief, with Ben Hakalitz, the drummer with Yothu Yindi, the song is backed by the slapping bass bamboo tubes of the Yumi Yet Bamboo Band, plus the intricate plucked lines of the Malagasy *valiha* – a feast of bamboo music. Cole vetoed guitars as they are not native to the Austronesian people, so the *valiha*, ukulele and other plucked instruments take that role on the album.

What’s interesting to hear from the musicians is how the indigenous populations are regarded in different locations. The word *maori* actually means ‘natural’ or ‘ordinary’ as opposed to *pakeha*, which denotes non-Maori, European people. In New Zealand they comprise about 15% of the population and these days there’s a pride in the indigenous culture and the language is widely taught in schools, even to non-Maori. The Maori *haka* (war-chant) has become an iconic symbol of pride, sung before All Blacks’ international rugby matches since 1905. The half-Maori musician, Jerome Kavanagh sings a *haka*, ‘Stand Strong! Stand True!’ on the Taiwanese song ‘Uyas Gerakun’ (Welcome to Join My Family), backed by massed percussion and drums.

But in Taiwan the singer Ado Kaliting Pacidal (of the Amis, or Pangcah, people) tells how as a child she wanted to hide her identity and ▶

