

II

Hill began work on *Hinemoa* in late 1895, with Arthur H. Adams as librettist (see Figure 1). Despite an initial lack of interest in Māori subjects, Hill professed a long-standing desire to work on the Hinemoa legend. He later recalled that Adams had conceived the idea of ‘writing Hinemoa as a legend’.⁸

Arthur wrote the legend, and I decided to set it to music. The citizens of Wellington rather laughed at the idea that we could get anything from the dirty lazy Maori. At that time of course they lived so near to the Maoris, and there were so many of them about, that they didn’t think much of them, especially artistically. ‘You wait and see’ I said.⁹

Hill’s status as an authority on Māori music is still largely unchallenged, and may be ripe for re-examination: while his interest in Māori music was no doubt sincere, it was also expedient and opportunistic. His introduction to Māori music had come via Wellington journalist E. D. Hoben. Hill remembered that Hoben had ‘lived among the Maoris all his life and he sang me a song, and I said “By Jove! Here’s something novel. If I can’t make a success any other way I might make it by this idea of developing Maori music”’.¹⁰ This ‘song’ formed the basis of Tutanekai’s flute motif, which opens *Hinemoa*. The melody was later found to be (ostensibly) Rarotongan in origin:

The Maori air which runs through this work, was obtained many years ago from a white man, Mr E. D. Hoban [sic]. Years later a half-caste Maori, Wi Duncan, asserted that it was a Raratongan [sic] melody. Others claimed that the Rev. Williams of Hawkes Bay wrote the words and a Maori friend the tune. Finally, Hari Hongi, a Government Interpreter and author of the well-known Maori Grammar etc. verified Wi Duncan’s assertion that the air came from Raratonga. It appears that a Chief who came from Raratonga in 1868 to visit the Maori Chief Tawhio, first brought the air to New Zealand. The Maoris quickly appropriated it and turned it into a Hymn.¹¹

Despite this long and complex chain of transmission, the tonality, range, and metric structure of the tune point to its European origins. Hill’s contemporaries nevertheless remarked on the ‘weird, romantic’ nature of the music, and made special mention of the opening flute motif’s origin: ‘The *leitmotif* of “Hinemoa” is a genuine Maori melody, a lament which is sung by one of the Native tribes of the Poverty Bay district’.¹²

Hinemoa was first performed on 18 November 1896, to mark the opening of the Wellington Industrial Exhibition. The entire concert was performed by Mr Maughan