

## **1996 Annual Lecture**

### ***Bush and Backwoods: Myths of Musical Identity in Australia and the United States***

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The idea for the title of this lecture came to me when I happened to glance at a small book I had read many years earlier: *Bush and Backwoods: A Comparison of the Frontier in Australia and the United States*,<sup>1</sup> by H.C. Allen, an American historian who was a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian National University in Canberra in 1953–54. The list of people to whom he extended his thanks on the publication of his extended essay in 1959, incidentally, includes past and present Fellows and Honorary Fellows of this Academy: L.F. Fitzhardinge, Sir Keith Hancock, Professor O.H.K. Spate, Russel Ward. Allen sought to test or amplify the American frontier thesis of the historian Frederick Jackson Turner in applying it, for comparative purposes, to Australian conditions. On the whole, I think it is fair to say that our country made a poor showing, by Allen's reckoning, in comparison with his homeland. Our soils were poorer, our deserts larger, our rivers spindly and lacking vigorous and reliable flow by comparison with the suitably get-up-and-go rivers encountered by American pioneers. Where the frontier in the United States had rolled confidently westwards and was helped over a final dry and rocky hurdle by the discovery of gold in California, our pioneers soon discovered that, in most cases, there was no better country further out. The American term 'back country', with its implication of land still waiting for full pioneering attention,<sup>2</sup> seemed, in Allen's opinion, a more dynamic augury of the process of settlement than our own 'outback', with its quasi-mystical vagueness, more expressive of a state of mind than of a geographical invitation. Allen concluded that Australia had never really had a frontier in the Turnerian sense or, if it had, only for brief periods and in several different locations.

All the same, I believe I can use Allen's symbolic words 'bush' and 'backwoods' to represent strains, not of music but of thinking, in Australian and American society in relation to music, noting apparent similarities and also obvious differences and doing so with reference to some aspects of the pioneering background discussed by Allen. One possible starting point is the belief in affinity voiced by Percy Grainger,

the most radical and original figure in Australian music by far:

Perhaps it is not unnatural [he wrote] that people living more or less lonely in vast virgin countries and struggling against natural and climatic hardships (rather than against the more actively and dramatically [sic] exciting counter wills of their fellow men, as in more thickly peopled lands) should run largely to that patiently yearning, inactive sentimental wistfulness that we find so touchingly expressed in much American art; for instance in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and in Stephen C. Foster's adorable songs, *My Old Kentucky Home*, *Old Folks at Home*, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Even if it appears from that statement that Grainger forgot about the American Civil War, there is something plausible in his observation. He reinforced his opinion with a set of variations on Foster's *De Camptown Races* [Musical example 1] under the title of *Tribute to Foster* and added to the text of the original song his own autobiographical testimony to its influence on himself: 'Deze songs they trabbel de worl' around, at las' dey come to Adelaide town. When I was a tot on me mammy's knee / She sung dat race-track song to me [. . .]' [Musical example 2].

The communal impulses for music-making in some settlements of pioneering America and in the first white settlements in Australia could hardly have been more different. The religious communities that landed at or near Massachusetts Bay were prompted by a united sense of destiny and a clear idea of the priorities of music for worship. Their history of psalm-singing and their later development of 'singing schools' and of itinerant music masters who trained choirs and congregations in the performance of religious part-music amplified a tradition that continued through the sight-singing social meliorism of Lowell Mason and the evangelical camp meetings of the later nineteenth century and remains an important part of American musical life in white and black congregations to the present day. Even the more southerly, commercially based settlements in Virginia and elsewhere brought together settlers with entrepreneurial instincts who had compatible views on music as entertainment (dances and soirées) and domestic accomplishment and in due course adopted for both white settlers and black slaves the enthusiasm for communal worship through song of their northern fellow-colonists. Some notion of the strength and relevance of the psalm-singing tradition in the eastern United States is provided by the presence in James Fenimore Cooper's frontier novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, of a major character in the

form of an itinerant singing-master equipped with a pitch-pipe and a 1744 Boston edition of metrical psalms.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, the majority of people brought to Australia from Britain in the early years of settlement, the transported convicts, had an entirely understandable tendency to be disaffected or at least indifferent in relation to the purposes of a much smaller number of masters and minders. The early colonial governors in New South Wales instituted church services and loyal and official parades at which attendance was compulsory. The drums of the garrison thundered disturbingly through the surrounding bush at Sydney Cove, determining the hours of waking, sleeping, working and eating.<sup>5</sup> The convicts were ready enough to sing, if given a chance. Peter Cunningham, a humane surgeon among the medical men in charge of health and hygiene on the convict transport ships, recalls in 1827 how the 'convicts [were] thoroughly clothed in new suits and ironed — [the convicts that is, not the suits] —, and it [was] curious to observe with what nonchalance some of these fellows will turn the jingling of their chains into music whereto they dance and sing'.<sup>6</sup> The diversity of background shared by the convicts ensured that they drew on a large repertory of traditional, popular and composed songs, some of them certainly scurrilous and dissident. Expediency, economic purpose and naval strategy were, it seems, some of the guiding principles of modern Australian settlement. These did not include religion or, except in a very few cases, the bonding agent of political rebellion.

The strong and continuing regulation of life and initiative by the Australian colonial governors forms one of the most striking contrasts, as Allen is not slow to point out in his essay, with the American habit of trusting to individual and communal impulses. It may have been true, as Allen believed, that the colonial regime effectively sapped the will of the Sydney settlement to break out of its geographical constraints for a generation.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, the Australian goldfields seem to have been far more thoroughly regulated by officialdom than their Californian counterparts.

Is the Australian musical experience, based at certain times on similar decisive regulation from above, able to record nothing more positive than timidity, inertia and bureaucratic fiat? I would suggest that the regime of Australian capital orchestras established by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (now the Australian Broadcasting Corporation) can be seen to have had points of superiority to the

development of the American symphony orchestra circuit, despite the fact that the ABC initiatives, which interpreted with the utmost freedom the implications of the organisation's charter, may well be described in retrospect as paternalistic. American orchestras, in most instances, began at the instance of private endowment and enthusiasm, strongly stimulated by the example of Austrian and German touring ensembles and, in many cases, the example and direction of German-speaking musicians.<sup>8</sup> Their dependence on private donation and the consequent influence of governing board members has made them, on the whole, excessively timid in dealing with new music, even or especially if it is by American composers, as Aaron Copland once complained.<sup>9</sup> The record of ABC orchestras in this regard was also spotty at one time, but since the later 1960s has been relatively good. Just at the time that a constant repetition of a small repertory by American orchestras is being blamed for a decline in the enthusiasm of audiences, the Australian position is much better, partly, in my opinion, because ABC programming has never been, in recent years, as limited in range as that of the major American orchestras (or, for that matter, the majority of independent and commercial orchestral managements in London). It is true that movements are now well under way to give the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, in particular, more independence of its quasi-governmental parent (but also more financial responsibility for its own survival); and the ABC's managing director, Brian Johns, only last week speculated on an imminent loosening of ties with all of the ABC orchestras.<sup>10</sup> What we must be careful about is any assumption that such moves, which are likely to give the orchestras an initial feeling of improved morale and well-being, will be artistically or economically beneficial to them in the long run. It may force them into the American mode of boring their audiences with over-repetition of a limited, though extremely well-played, popular repertory. It will mean, very likely, that the American gulf between the composers of the so-called university and experimental circuits and the programs of major symphony orchestras will be reproduced here, with loss to variety, experiment and the range of general music-making.

If we follow the course of the expanding frontier in the United States we see that its movement appears to leave behind traditional music of various kinds (usually learned by ear) as deposits in a series defined by date of occupation. The riches of English, lowland-Scottish

and Scots Irish song and dance,<sup>11</sup> laid down in the fastnesses of the Appalachian mountains in a period dating from the seventeenth century, bear witness to a long history of introduced settlement and to the part played by a difficult terrain in perpetuating the culture of isolated mountain communities. Changes in traditional repertoire further west tend to mirror, when circumstances for a continuing tradition are favourable, later admixtures of nationality, period and social circumstances. At the far end of American Westward expansion the goldrushes of 1849 onwards brought in a new and more recent repertory and one that seems to support the theory that the overwhelming dominance of single males in typical nineteenth-century goldrushes altered the balance of the traditional repertory, inclining it to the boasting and humorous songs characteristic of a predominantly male society and diminishing greatly the presence of those tragic or pathetic ballads evocative of disappointed or illicit love and its offspring.

There is a case, I believe, for arguing that the Australian goldrushes of 1851 onwards, though of the greatest benefit economically to the country in the long run, cut short an interesting, if fragile cultural development that was coming to terms with life in a new country and was concerned to some extent in reconciling, if possible, the culture of the new settlers and that of the indigenous inhabitants. It is true that the period immediately preceding the Australian goldrushes included an economic slump; but there are signs, even if we limit them to music, that the late 1830s and 1840s represent a culmination of a sense of belonging that had its extremely precarious beginnings in 1788. The increasingly prominent share of music in hailing or celebrating public events, the performances of the first locally written ballad opera<sup>12</sup> and the first opera composed in Australia,<sup>13</sup> the collection and arrangement of Aboriginal melodies in well-meant but distorting versions, the sympathetic accounts beginning to be published of indigenous people, flora and fauna may have been representative of unusually enlightened individuals rather than of a wider community; but very little of this sense of wholeness is communicated in the years after the sudden arrival of relatively huge numbers of uncommitted newcomers. It was to be seventy or eighty years before any significant signs of a comparable sympathy for indigenous music and indigenous culture declared themselves in an artistic, rather than a scientific way.

The 1788–1850 period is the equivalent in Australian history of the approximately two centuries and more of European voluntary settlement

and African forced arrival in the area now occupied by the United States before the 1849 goldrushes. Had it been longer, the cultural developments of the Australian pre-goldrush period, including repertoires of traditional song and dance and a certain if limited maturation in the acceptance of the country and the possibilities of co-existence with its original inhabitants, might have survived in more intact and plentiful form. Some songs with new or adapted words unquestionably survive from this period, as did some songs in a state indistinguishable from their currency in the British Isles; music's opportunities for a civic and celebratory function actually increased in a new era of intercolonial exhibitions and accelerated economic vigour. The regimental bandmasters whose arrangements of popular theatre tunes and traditional airs in quadrille sets, waltzes and polkas had been a feature of Australian colonial society since at least the mid-1820s were now busier than ever in responding to public fashion and topicality. What was even more distinctively new was a far more vigorous, sometimes relatively coarse, entertainment industry in which travelling entertainers of many kinds (from goldfields song-parodists to instrumentalists and opera troupes) performed for money that was readier than ever before.

Some Australian colonists had travelled to California at the outset of the 1849 goldrushes, a few of them augmenting the reputation of the Sydney 'duck' or quick-fingered con-man in another continent. With the official discovery of gold in Australia two years later, vastly greater numbers of Californian gold-seekers, including some of the local colonists who had been drawn to California, crossed the Pacific to Australia. From this time onwards the history of public music, traditional music, opera, concert-giving and theatre performances in the two countries cannot be separated without distortion. The Hungarian-born but ethnically German violinist Miska Hauser tells us, in published letters chronicling his extended Australian tour of 1854 to 1858, how much he disliked appearing as a colleague of pushy or temperamental American singers.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Ryan, a founding member of the Mendelssohn Quintette [sic] Club of Boston, records how it was possible for his ensemble in 1881 to present concerts drawing on classical and light-classical repertory every night for a fortnight in Sydney, 'giving more classic music than we would then have dared to play at home', on seven occasions in Brisbane (with a population of thirty thousand), four in Maryborough, ten in Hobart

(population twenty thousand), five in Launceston, ten in Adelaide, and an unspecified 'many' in Melbourne.<sup>15</sup>

The traffic in entertainment between Australia and the United States continued in high gear for the rest of the nineteenth century, many musicians regarding the two countries as part of the same general touring circuit. Opera, sometimes with rickety casting and orchestral playing, was officially at the upper end of the artistic range; blackface minstrelsy, imported from the United States in partial and complete form from the 1830s — remarkably soon after the genre had been established as a white parody of black American music-making, conversation and physical movements — had a lower social status, even if it was often referred to as 'Ethiopian opera'; but its success, which did not disappear until the earlier years of television in the 1950s, was not only prodigious but also of surprisingly important consequences for music in Australia. It is impossible to believe that blackface minstrelsy, which in the later nineteenth century brought here troupes of black Americans wearing traditional blackface makeup so as to appear whites made up as blacks, was regarded as in any way a relevant commentary on the indigenous inhabitants of Australia. The international appeal of blackface minstrelsy is testified to by its vogue in Britain and by the fact that English entertainers in New York were involved in its development as a musical-theatrical genre. Quite separate from the exportable parodies of black American speech and behaviour, the appeal of the sentimental or rhythmically driving tunes of the blackface minstrel tradition left a deep impression here, going well beyond the impact recorded by Grainger's response to Stephen Foster's minstrel tune, *De Camptown Races*, and helped to shape some of the music by which we have taken possession, culturally speaking, of this country.

A first wave of creative opportunism occurred when blackface minstrel tunes were fitted with new words from Australian pastoral and mining activity, such as *Another Fall of Rain* [Musical example 3].<sup>16</sup> The traditional instrumentation of the minstrel show, consisting of the violin, the banjo and the bones, is commemorated in a comic Australian song fitted to a minstrel song tune.<sup>17</sup> If minstrelsy idioms helped to establish some of the best-known and most vigorously surviving songs in the Australian traditional repertoire, its second wave of influence, from around the period of World War I, was of equal or perhaps greater significance. This was the era in which a



vogue for Australian place-name songs,<sup>18</sup> embodying the nostalgia of the wanderer for his (it is usually his) birthplace, deliberately echoed an American minstrel genre best known to us from the historically early example of Stephen Foster's *Old Folks at Home*. Songs asserting the lure to the homesick traveller of many smaller country towns appeared in large numbers, borrowing the style of syncopated tunes (with an almost invariable touch of chromaticism) and characteristic harmonies from the United States and even some examples of typical verbal expression from American sources (including the use of 'mammy' and its — in this context — American overtones, and the occasional presence of property Aborigines, arranged like drapery in the texts of the songs in lieu of their American counterparts). One song of this type which had a wide and continuing currency in Australia was *Yarrawonga*, first published in 1919. It contained the significantly dismissive line 'You can have all your Tennessee and Caraline [sic]'; and when it adds 'France and Belgium thrown in' we may find a hint here that wartime experiences, renewed contact with American sources of minstrel music and the nostalgia of returning home after a dreadful war combined to produce a new and, for us, distinctive series of place-name songs. I suppose the most familiar examples of the genre, at least to some of us, are a group of songs by Jack O'Hagan, including his famous *Along the Road to Gundagai*, published in 1922.<sup>19</sup> It is, I believe, correct to claim that this and one or two related songs (not including *Where the Dog Sits on the Tucker Box*, which belongs to a quite different genre) were considered to be the most Australian songs extant in the period between the two world wars, even more so in that period than *Waltzing Matilda*. Other comparable songs, out of many that might be selected, are *By the Big Blue Billabong*, *Back to Croajingalong*, *Down Where the Murrumbidgee Flows*, *Bundaberg*, and *Snowy River* (in part a parody of the song, *Swanee*, made famous in blackface mode by Al Jolson). The striking fact is that this genre of place-name songs in minstrel style was taken to heart by Australians and regarded as quintessentially Australian while borrowing its musical idiom and much of its verbal form from the song styles of another country.<sup>20</sup>

Percy Grainger is the Australian figure most nearly comparable to Charles Ives in America. However, there is a complication which must be explained. Grainger, Australian-born, spent much of the early part of his career collecting traditional songs and dances in Britain and

Scandinavia, never in Australia. He became an American citizen and to this day tends to be regarded by people in Britain as a British composer and by people in the United States, where his scores for symphonic wind are immensely popular and respected on college campuses, as an American composer. Grainger's decisive answer to this is to be found everywhere in his letters. He wanted everything he had done in music to be put to the credit of the country of his birth, Australia. Apart from his belief that there might be an affinity between the two peoples of recent pioneering traditions, already referred to, his speculations on the possible nature of a truly Australian music included a belief that Australian music might be monotonous in a positive way, like the Australian terrain (and unlike, as he put it, the small, broken-up segments of European landscape), that climate might have something to do with a preference in the Italian manner for warm tone colours and amply developed crescendos and diminuendos (words he would not have used), that there ought to be a democratic equality of opportunity in the alteration of scoring ('elastic scoring', as he called it) to allow all kinds of singers and instrumentalists and even whistlers to take part in a piece for ensemble — an ideal, partly exemplified in his *Marching Song of Democracy*, that Australia should teach Aboriginal music in schools and that it should be a meeting-place for musics of Europe, Oceania and Asia. His resourceful adaptability in scoring might be compared with Ives's habit of tinkering with the details of his scores like a Yankee gadgeteer, and his fondness for using deliberately sentimental musical impulses and formed material such as traditional tunes might be compared, not inaptly, with Ives's preference for quoting popular march tunes and hymns to inventing themes wholly of his own. Despite Grainger's fondness for inflicting and receiving flagellation and his exuberant athleticism, his compositional and prescriptive nature was much less aggressive than that of Ives. Ives referred scornfully to people like his fictional 'Rollo', who preferred to hear music that was docile and behaved with good manners, and sometimes came out with Hemingwayesque statements in his suggestions that real music-lovers should have the equivalent of hair on their chests; Grainger, in contrast, seemed to want to accommodate the preferences of the community he was writing for and to prefer a mild tolerance to gritty wilfulness. If Ives is a grumbling American bear, Grainger has an almost absent-minded marsupial-like neutrality, the wary but usually friendly stance of a grazing kangaroo. Another

obvious difference is that Ives's homely materials were drawn directly from his childhood experiences in Danbury, Connecticut; Grainger's were more likely to be international than Australian. Yet Grainger teaches us, by example and by direct admonition, that he felt he was expressing an Australian view of the world even when he was dealing with the world in general.

Even before the goldrushes, events were taking place in Australia to lessen to some extent the difference between an ethically oriented United States and a pragmatic, improvising Australia. The Rev. John Dunmore Lang and his Scottish emigrants of the 1830s introduced into the Australian colonies an element of brisk industriousness and educational earnestness which brought Australia slightly closer to America in some of its attitudes to music during the nineteenth century. The founding of mechanics' institutes and schools of arts, which happened with surprising rapidity in the Australian colonies from 1833,<sup>21</sup> ensured that meliorist intentions on behalf of the working classes would have at least the focus of dedicated premises. The founding of choral societies, coupled with an evangelical but under-developed interest in sight-singing borrowed from Britain, made it inevitable that some of them would find in those dedicated premises suitable space for the rehearsal of larger-scaled choral works, many of them guaranteed by their biblical or moral subject-matter to be worthy of a society growing new and more ardent aspirations. In due course the articulation of serious or at least determined and ambitious music-making through the choral society, which retained some of its representative status during most of the nineteenth century and even to some extent in the 1920s and 1930s, would be replaced by the idea of the symphony orchestra on the Austrian and German model as the central agency for projecting music as a high, demanding and substantial art. There are parallels between the establishment of major American orchestras in the later nineteenth century and the gathering and focusing of opinion that went into the formation of the major Melbourne orchestral movements and their lesser counterparts in other cities. There are other parallels between American composers like Edward MacDowell, who seems to have been swamped by his musical education in Germany even when he was trying to discard it, and an Australian composer, Alfred Hill, who went on reproducing the idioms he had learned in late nineteenth-century Leipzig until halfway through the twentieth century.

The idea that composers should draw on indigenous or culturally dissimilar music in trying to produce a representative national music is expressed in the United States and Australia through interesting parallels and, more recently, by a striking divergence. The first half of the nineteenth century produced an awareness of indigenous music on the part of the new occupiers of the United States and Australia in approximate chronological tandem, despite the considerable disparity between their date of initial settlement. A.P. Heinrich, an amateur musician from Bohemia who left a career as a banker in Hamburg around 1818 and plunged straight into the wilderness of Kentucky, published his impression for solo singer, chorus and piano of an American Indian or native American war song, *The Sons of the Woods*, as part of a volume entitled *Dawning of Music in Kentucky, or the Pleasures of Harmony in the Solitudes of Nature* in 1820. George Catlin and others studied American Indian music in approximately the same period. At almost the same time, the writer Barron Field was noting down a still credible Aboriginal chant pattern as he crossed the Blue Mountains. Less than two decades later the Polish naturalist John Lhotsky was enlisting the aid of several 'musical gentlemen' in Melbourne in the task of putting European harmonies to a melancholy song of the women of the Menero [sic] region of Australia; and a few years after that, in the 1840s, Isaac Nathan in Sydney satisfied himself that he provided far more correct basses than Lhotsky's helpers to his arrangements of fragments of Aboriginal chant and of the upward-tending cooees of Aboriginals from the Melbourne region and the downward-tending cooees of the Sydney region [Musical example 4].

The next impetus to consideration of the use of indigenous music came from the famous Czech composer Anton Dvořák, when he arrived in New York in 1892 to take up the directorship of the privately-funded National Conservatory of Music. He advised American composers to study native American music and the spirituals adopted and reshaped by black Americans, not in a spirit of mere mimicry but as a means of distilling idioms in an original and representative way. His four leading composition pupils included a black American, H.T. Burleigh, whose use of the idioms of his own people was obviously appropriate from any point of view. Dvořák's advice, when translated into a recommendation for his white pupils or for the community of composers in the United States or North America, raises some difficult questions. Is it impertinence on the part

of composers of a quite different ethnic and cultural background to think that they are free to use the idioms of an indigenous people as they choose, to plunder them as some people might think? What is the view of indigenous people when they hear musicians of European origin or ancestry take hold of styles of music which have been produced by native communities? Of Dvořák's four leading pupils, William Arms Fisher took him at his word to a limited extent in fitting words to the slow movement of the composer's E minor symphony, subtitled *From the New World*, turning it into a pseudo-spiritual under the title *Goin' Home*. Harvey Worthington Loomis, another Dvořák pupil, followed his teacher's precepts much more literally in cultivating an interest in native American music, arranging Indian melodies under the title *Lyrics of the Red Men*, published in two books in 1903 and 1904. The creative results of this second wave of interest in native American music appeared quite quickly after Dvořák's expressed views on a plausible source for an American national music in the early 1890s and continued in the years leading up to World War I. The most active and thoroughgoing of American composers who followed up Dvořák's precepts was Arthur Farwell, who published many of his colleagues' compositions at the Wa-Wan Press (a name itself taken from an Omaha tribal ceremony) and practised a scrupulous humility in arranging not only American Indian and black American music but also the music of Hispanic communities, the characteristic songs of Western cowboys and the material of Anglo-American traditional singers.

A second wave of interest in the study and creative use of Australian Aboriginal music occurred, it would seem, as a result of more than one influence. The first of these influences was the nationalist literary movement centred on Bernard O'Dowd and his colleagues and born in the period of Irish-influenced objections to conscription and to blind support for an imperial cause in World War I. Henry Tate, a professional critic, poet and occasional composer, was the musician most closely associated with this movement. In his pamphlet of 1917, *Australian Musical Resources: Some Suggestions*, and his slightly larger monograph of 1924, *Australian Musical Possibilities* (which has a foreword by O'Dowd), Tate recommends serious attention to Australian birdsong. He has a special commendation for the magpie and its relative, the butcher bird, and for what he calls the 'persistence' of the major third in Australian birdsongs: with its implication of leaning

towards the major scale, Tate takes this reputed preference for major thirds in conjunction with 'our broad open landscapes, our climate of sun and air and far-sweeping winds, and the fearless, liberty-loving aspirations of our citizens' as influences that seem to 'turn us away from scale modes and harmony that depend for their appeal on the poignancy of striving minor thirds' and 'diatonic discords wandering far from the free air of resolution'.<sup>22</sup> He is not, however, asking for the use of birdsong melodies in a spirit of 'paltry imitation', so his statement anticipates the principle but not necessarily the practice of a major twentieth-century composer, Olivier Messiaen. He suggests that our composers should listen to the sound of breezes in bush foliage and recommends creative interaction with notated and recorded examples of Australian Aboriginal music.<sup>23</sup>

During Grainger's tour of 1934–35 his broadcasts for the young ABC, grouped under the heading *A Commonsense View of ALL Music*, emphasised the need to conserve and study Aboriginal music and presumably helped to reawaken in a few people the desire to listen to and come to terms with Aboriginal culture in general, including its music. At exactly this time a new wave of literary nationalism was gathering force in the minds of Rex Ingamells, Ian Mudie and a number of other writers. This movement found its focus in 1938 as the Jindyworobak Club: from an Aboriginal word, Jindyworobak, reputedly meaning to annex or join. The view of at least some of the people involved was that an identification with the land of Australia might require a passionately sympathetic shortcut to be taken through Aboriginal culture, including the use of tribal words, an adaptation or annexation of the Aboriginal idea of the dreaming and a distaste for things European or foreign. Ian Mudie's poem, *As Are the Gums*, recalls a time when 'alien dreams, Odin, Osiris, Pan, / came crowding in upon our entering heels'. Mudie at this time<sup>24</sup> called on the mystical properties of the land not merely to help Australians ignore these foreign deities and spirits but to destroy them: 'Kill them, oh land; free us, and let us be / of you, and of your totem-dreams of stone and tree'. This was a more violent and intolerant view of what Mudie called the 'blindness ship-fed seas bring us'.<sup>25</sup> It found an echo, if a paler one, in the works with Aboriginal titles and avowed subject-matter written by Clive Douglas between 1941 and 1957, in symphonic movements and works by Alfred Hill and Mirrie Hill and, most notably, in John Antill's vivid and rhythmically and instrumentally resourceful ballet

score *Corroboree*, on which its composer seems to have worked from the mid-1930s until just after the end of World War II. If much of this music was romantic impressionism, providing a Western view of the mood and milieu of Australian Aboriginal music, it was not so far distant from the style and method of some of the poets in the Jindyworobak movement and signalled the beginnings of a new willingness to regard Aboriginal music as artistically interesting and not merely as a part of anthropological data. The coloured decorations Antill incorporated in the manuscript score of *Corroboree* might seem to be an argument for an interest on the part of the composer in Aboriginal culture going well beyond the fickle preoccupations of many musicians; and they may reflect the long period, perhaps up to twenty years, spent by the composer in absorbing scientific and anecdotal studies of the Aborigines before he began work on the score (though they can be viewed also as typical of Antill's visual-musical-theatrical approach to the documentation of any score intended for the theatre).

If this period of creative interest in Aboriginal music in Australia had ended without any sequel, we might well have viewed it as simply comparable with the flurry of interest of American composers in native American music in the early years of this century. Actual musicians of indigenous race insist on taking their own courses of musical action, naturally enough: The rise to prominence of rock-style Aboriginal groups such as Yothu Yindi is paralleled by the rock groups to be found, for example, among musicians of the Navajo nation in the United States. Taking the American experience as a precedent, the Australian creative interest in Aboriginal music might have been expected to end damply and to seem irrelevant within the stylistic variety of more recent music. After all, the argument that most composers of European or other imported ancestry are unlikely to arrive at a deep identification with the music of a people so different from them in customs and assumptions is hard to fault, in the abstract. It is only when we recall that, in art, the actual validity of opinions and attitudes is less potent than the degree of conviction with which they are held that we may be inclined to accept that a coolly logical assessment of the prospects of using Aboriginal music in non-Aboriginal works could be misleading. As it happens, a number of Australian composers have shown a consistent interest in recent years in paying the sincerest form of flattery to Aboriginal melody and rhythm. They include, among younger figures, Colin Bright, and a

senior musician, Peter Sculthorpe, who also happens to be the most widely heard Australian composer of concert-hall music. Sculthorpe's earliest acknowledged works include some with Aboriginal titles and a few hints of attempts to arrive in passing at the equivalent of an Aboriginal aesthetic in sound. His most prominent and consistent use of Aboriginal themes or of themes adapted or constructed with an Aboriginal affinity has occurred in very recent years, mostly in the 1980s and 1990s, as in this excerpt from a piece entitled *Port Essington* [Musical example 5]. It is interesting that Sculthorpe's personal and sympathetic use of this material does not seem to have attracted strong criticism from Australian Aboriginals or from his professional colleagues in Western-style music. He — and the same is true of Bright — seems to have persuaded his hearers that his use and adaptation of indigenous material is neither an attempt at producing a glib Australianism nor an insensitive affront to Aboriginal ownership of tribal material. This is especially remarkable in that it is a notable element in the career of a truly prominent composer.

How, then, do we account for the apparent truth that, in this respect, some Australian musicians have travelled a path not taken by their American counterparts? I advance two reasons for this, the first of them fairly confidently, the second with some reticence. The reason why this third period of creative sympathy with Aboriginal music is not paralleled in the United States seems to me to be related to the development of jazz and other hybrid musics. Jazz and its related genres established a genuine and unselfconscious currency for itself, quite independent of theories of multicultural assimilation or the sharing of landscape. It brought forward a potent and lively music which added to African elements a number of European idioms and influences. From the beginning white musicians showed a determination to share the genre with their black colleagues. Jazz travelled overseas with greater or at least more instantaneous acceptance, if anything, than its initial welcome by the broad American public in the United States. There was no further need to look for a popular, widely shared music which could be regarded as indigenous, even if its joint progenitors had all arrived, willingly or unwillingly, in the United States within the last three hundred years. Some mannerisms of jazz served American composers as diverse in style as Gershwin and Copland as a means of inflecting their music in a way distinctive of no other country.



Jazz was an important addition to the musical vocabulary of many Australians. It caught on rapidly here from late in World War I through the 1920s and 1930s. The number of jazz ensembles formed locally in that period, even if some of them were of brief duration, is always surprising. That jazz in Australia produced not only some internationally accepted soloists and ensembles but possessed distinctive, sometimes quirkish deviations from an international norm has been argued by historians of jazz and of popular culture such as Bruce Johnson<sup>26</sup> and Peter Spearitt. Yet its popularity and the aptitude displayed in it by many locally born or based musicians cannot alter the fact that it is not, and probably never can be, representative of Australian music in the way that jazz in the United States can stand for a vital and influential strand of American music. (The same is true, despite some original local features, of the significant Australian country-music industry because of its obvious relationship with the American origins of the genre.) That is one likely reason why jazz, however enthusiastically adopted here, did not close off the desire to look for deeper, more specific roots for Australian musical expression. Another — and this is the theory I put forward with appropriate reticence — is related to a certain stubbornness or cross-grainedness in Australian artistic sensibilities. It may be true that logic questions the relevance of Aboriginal music to people of quite different cultural origins; but that does not mean that Australian artists, writers and composers are going to be denied the use of its themes if they have a mind to use them. This act of cultural borrowing, in the third phase of its manifestation, may be our most original achievement in the production of Australian music so far.

In other respects, the matching of musical expression to identity may well be taking place in a manner that is difficult to notice as it happens and despite the lack of interest in the idea of a distinctively Australian music expressed by many composers, young and not-so-young. Barbara Tischler<sup>27</sup> has defended the thesis that American composition began to take its now unassailable place in international estimation and allegiance at the very time when its composers ceased, in quasi-colonial style, to imitate the musical styles of the day before yesterday and, instead, immersed themselves in the latest developments of international music. When this activity was allied to sufficient talent in the individual concerned, his or her music became sufficiently interesting to be remembered and recognised, the argument goes. This

happened among American composers of concert-hall music and opera from the 1920s onwards. My own belief is that a similar process occurred in Australia in the 1960s, when Meale, Sculthorpe and Butterley and a number of other composers revised their initially conservative styles and either chose to enrol themselves directly in internationally current styles and techniques or, in rejecting such whole-hearted allegiance, revealed even in their rejection their awareness of what was happening and their personal selection of the elements in it that appealed to them. Once this happens, theories of national identity may be attached to composers who disclaim them, simply because their achievements are distinctive enough to create a label for at least one way of making music in Australia or, for creators who live and work overseas, within an Australian allegiance. Talent of sufficient magnitude, in other words, creates an identity that spills over from the personal to the national.

### Notes

- 1 H.C. Allen, *Bush and Backwoods: A Comparison of the Frontier in Australia and the United States* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1959).
- 2 Allen, p. 6.
- 3 P. Grainger, note attached to his *Colonial Song*, composed between 1911 and 1914.
- 4 Cooper introduces this character at the beginning of the book's adventures, places him in scenes of affectionate comedy in the middle of the military actions between French, English and Indians, and keeps him in view until the end of the novel.
- 5 Watkin Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, in New South Wales* (London, 1793), republished as *Sydney's First Four Years* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson with RAHS, 1979), pp. 39, 157.
- 6 P. Cunningham, *Two Years in New South Wales*, 2 vols (London, 1827), reissued in one volume, ed. by D.S. Macmillan (Sydney: Angus and Robertson with RAHS, 1961), p. 290.
- 7 Allen, p. 83.
- 8 See Thomas Ryan, *Recollections of an Old Musician* (London: Sands, 1899), for accounts of this influence of German ensembles and individual musicians on decisive phases of the growth of the culture of instrumental music in nineteenth-century Boston.
- 9 Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St Martin's, 1984), p. 125.

- 10 Brian Johns was reported to this effect in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 November 1996, p. 3.
- 11 See Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, ed. by Maud Karpeles (London, 1907), rev. 4th edn (London: Mercury, 1965), pp. xii–xiii, 67, for an account of the documentation of this tradition from 1917, and M. Karpeles, *An Introduction to English Folk Song* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 94, 96–8.
- 12 Edward Geoghegan's *The Currency Lass*, ed. by and arr. by R. Covell (Sydney: Currency, 1976).
- 13 Isaac Nathan's *Don John of Austria* (1846).
- 14 Miska Hauser, *Letters from Australia 1854–1858*, trans. by C. Roderick, ed. by C. Roderick and H. Anderson (Sydney: Red Rooster, 1988), pp. 13–14.
- 15 Ryan, pp. 213–33.
- 16 The melody is a variant of the American minstrel tune, *The Little Old Log Cabin in the Dell*.
- 17 See J. Manifold, *The Violin, the Banjo and the Bones*, The Blackbull Chapbooks No. 6 (Ferntree Gully: Rams Skull Press, 1957), pp. 10–13.
- 18 See R. Covell, 'Winding Back along the Track', *Quadrant*, August 1977, 27–32.
- 19 That O'Hagan was prompted by an impulse akin to parody is confirmed in a personal interview with him drawn on by Dianne Naphthali for her forthcoming PhD thesis on Australian film music.
- 20 The genre was itself parodied in the Nick Enright/Terence Clarke Goldoni-based musical, *The Venetian Twins* (1990), in the song significantly titled, with a small variant in spelling, *Jindyworoback*: 'I'm going back on the track to Jindyworoback [. . .]'
- 21 G. Nadel, *Australia's Colonial Culture: Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-nineteenth Century Eastern Australia* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1957), pp. 115–16.
- 22 H. Tate, *Australian Musical Possibilities* (Melbourne: Vidler, 1924), p. 42.
- 23 Tate, pp. 32–5.
- 24 I. Mudie, *Poems: 1934–1944* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1945), p. 20.
- 25 Mudie, p. 13.
- 26 B. Johnson, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 8 ff.
- 27 Barbara L. Tischler, *An American Music: The Search for an American Musical Identity* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).