

**“We are Australian”: An ethnographic investigation of the convergence of community music and reconciliation.**

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community music and reconciliation.**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**  
The Australian National University  
Canberra



## **Statement of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work. This thesis contains no material previously published or written by myself or another person, except where reference is made in the thesis itself. This thesis has not previously been submitted towards a degree or diploma in any university or other higher education institution.

Julie Rickwood  
21 June 2013

This research project has received clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian National University: Protocol 2009/337

**Indigenous readers are advised that the thesis contains names and images of deceased individuals.**



*IN MEMORY OF JEANNETTE HENNESSY-WRIGHT, 1957-2011:  
A SINGER IN A COMMUNITY CHOIR,  
A LONG TERM FRIEND AND A DETERMINED WOMAN*

*And the first sound I heard in my heavens  
was the sound  
of moving air  
becoming the wind.*

**Richard Lewis 1991**

*The second sound I heard in my heavens  
was the sound  
of many voices  
blending into one.*

**Julie Rickwood 2013**





***IN RECOGNITION OF THE YOTHU YINDI FRONTMAN, 1956-2013:  
A MUSICAN, EDUCATOR AND CAMPAIGNER FOR RECONCILIATION***

*“On the last day of National Reconciliation Week (Mabo Day)  
we are extremely saddened to learn of the passing of  
Yothu Yindi frontman Dr Yunupingu,  
who died overnight at his home in Yirrkala, East Arnhem Land  
following a long battle with kidney disease.*

*Dr Yunupingu was an inspiration to all Australians;  
a passionate advocate for reconciliation between  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians,  
and was named 1992 Australian of the Year for his  
commitment to reconciliation and work as a musician and educator.”*

**Dr Tom Calma AO and Ms Melinda Cilento  
Co-Chairs of Reconciliation Australia 2013**



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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the convergence of the community music movement and the reconciliation movement in Australia. It analyses the contextualised, contested and complicated nature of the movements as well as the expression of the convergence in community choral events and choirs that bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous singers into the layered and textured lived experienced of 'singing in between'.

The community music movement in Australia reclaims music, making it accessible to everyone. It declares the individual and social benefits of making music, particularly with others. The reconciliation movement prompts cross-cultural engagement, recognition of Indigenous contributions to Australia, and, most recently, constitutional change. It seeks, of course, reconciliation between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Both these popular movements provide opportunities for engagement in social and cultural justice. Both movements, however, are embedded with rhetorical discourses and threaded with notions that cloud and clutter.

As a multi-sited ethnography the thesis provides a methodological and theoretical foundation that delivers a descriptive and interpretative analysis of the specific and localised expressions from case study choirs based in South East Australia, South West Australia and Central Australia. An interdisciplinary research project, the thesis also examines field research methodology and the creation of intimacy and knowledge, engaging with discussions within ethnomusicology and other disciplines about these aspects of ethnographic research.

The thesis engages with academic research from numerous disciplines: Ethnomusicology, Anthropology, Musicology, Popular Music Research, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Cultural Geography, Music Psychology, History and others. It draws on publications on and from within Community Music, Reconciliation, Arts, and Community Development. I incorporate the voices of the singers through conversations, comments and communication and through the publications and documents of choirs, choir leaders, and music organisations, including their online presence.

In this thesis I provide a snapshot of the way in which the community interactions explore, express and represent reconciliation through music making, and in so doing, how they prompt the reshaping of individual, local and national notions of identity, community and the practice of music.

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## Prelude

### Reflection on an ethnographic episode: The story of the 'Sorry Song'

One word, one word, one word, one word, one word, one word, one word

If we can now say that we're sorry to the people from this land  
They cry, they cry, their children were stolen  
They still wonder why

Sing, sing loud, break through the silence  
Sing sorry across this land

We cry, we cry, their children were stolen  
Now on-one know why

Sing, sing loud, break through the silence  
Sing sorry across this land

We sing with our hearts, respect for each and everyone  
Together, with hope burning strong

Sing, sing loud, we've broken the silence  
Let 'Sorry' start healing our land

#### **'Sorry Song', Kerry Fletcher 2008**

Perth was warm and sunny in early December 2011, after months of an unusually cool and cloudy spring. The Swan River and the foreshores of Matilda Bay provided a picturesque backdrop for the *Power of Music* Conference. The delightful setting would draw delegates out of the institution, to gather in groups to sit on the grass and talk, taking in the calm, inviting view; or to walk along the shoreline and paddle in the water. The focus of the conference was the exploration of the capacity of music to regulate moods and actions, of both self and other. The welcome from Jane Davidson, the Conference Director and the then President of the Musicological Society of Australia, included the comment that music's "'power' is experienced as a pervasive and crucial form of human communication and expression".<sup>1</sup> Delegates from Australia and abroad, from various disciplines and sub-disciplines, gathered to examine that capacity. This multi-disciplinary approach offered exposure to known, new, curious, and sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> Davidson, Jane (2011) MSA President's Welcome. *Power of Music: 34<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the Musicological Society of Australia and the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Music and Emotion*, The University of Western Australia, Perth, 30 November -3 December 2011:2.

bewildering, academic engagement with music. My colleague, Dr Katelyn Barney from the University of Queensland, had recognised a link in our research, the conference theme, and the location of the conference, so had invited me to contribute to a roundtable panel at the conference. Amongst her various research projects Katelyn had recently been exploring musical responses to the National Apology to the Stolen Generations<sup>2</sup> delivered by the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on behalf of the Parliament of Australia on 13 February 2008.<sup>3</sup> As part of that project she had interviewed Kerry Fletcher, the Perth-based singer-songwriter of the ‘Sorry Song’. My research had included spending some months in 2010 with the Perth-based community choir, *Madjiti Moorna, Noongar* for “magical sounds of the bush”.<sup>4</sup> ‘Sorry Song’ was included in their repertoire and, as a result, I had also interviewed Kerry.

Kerry had first composed the ‘Sorry Song’ in 1998.<sup>5</sup> It almost predicted and then echoed a moment in Australian history. The resonance of the ‘Sorry Song’ continues, performed

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<sup>2</sup> As Bamblett et al state, the “phenomena of the Stolen Generation was a specific racist and colonial practice with the aim of ‘whitening’ and removing Indigenous people from the landscape of Australia via assimilation. Tens of thousands of children were removed from their families and raised in institutions or fostered-out to non-Aboriginal children [...] The story of the Stolen Generation is full of examples of how ‘protection’ led to children being badly treated, economically exploited, unable to form meaningful relationships and alienated from their own culture but unable to fit into a white culture which they did not understand, had different values and was not accepting of them.” Bamblett, Muriel, Burke, Gabrielle, Hunter, Sue Anne and Lewis, Peter (2008) *Social Inclusion and the Dangers of Neo-colonialism: An Aboriginal Child and Family Services Perspective on Social Inclusion and Building Partnerships with Mainstream*, Melbourne: Partnerships for Social Inclusion – Conference Centre for Public Policy. University of Melbourne, 15-16 October: 6.

<sup>3</sup> Henceforth referred to as “The Apology”. The Apology to the Stolen Generations by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 13 February 2008 was an historical and symbolic moment that promised a new beginning for race relations in Australia. Various State Government laws had prescribed the removal of Indigenous children from their families over a significant time span, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and up to and including the 1970s. The children who were taken away are now referred to as the Stolen Generations. The Apology to the Stolen Generations was for many Australians a long time coming. The previous Government, led by John Howard, had refused to formally apologise, despite increasing pressure since *Sorry Day* in 1998. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss The Apology itself in further detail. For a greater treatment of the The Apology see Auguste, Isabelle (2010) On the significance of saying “sorry”: Apology and reconciliation in Australia, in Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys and John Docker Eds, *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia*, Canberra: epress.anu.edu: 309-324.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that *Noongar* is the common language across South West Western Australia with many dialects found throughout the region. This translation of the choir’s name is contested and is discussed further in Chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that on the youtube video on the Multimedia Component it is wrongly introduced as being written in 1997.

as it is by many choirs across Australia, included in a song book for children, and part of the content of the German school curriculum on Australian Studies.<sup>6</sup> The song has also been the subject of controversy. It was banned by a New South Wales (NSW) school because of its political positioning. Expressing similar sentiments to former Prime Minister John Howard's refusal to say sorry to the Stolen Generations, parents at the school successfully campaigned for its exclusion from curriculum.<sup>7</sup>

The conference provided a context within which to deeply explore the 'Sorry Song', building up from its composition and wider social thematic issues to an intersubjective space, bringing different views, personal perspectives, complementary experiences, and a blending of understandings. The lecture theatre held a dozen or so music researchers; colleagues and friends amongst the ethnomusicologists, as well as one of the keynote speakers at the conference. Most members of *Madjitol Moorna* had arrived early enough to warm up and rehearse, wearing their standard costume of black with yellow scarf and the odd ornament of red, black and gold.<sup>8</sup> Katelyn and I were there to welcome Kerry and the choir. The choir members appeared undaunted by the academic forum; there was much chatter and smiles during the rehearsal. Kerry had arrived armed with additional material which she displayed on a table by the door. To begin the panel session a welcome to country was delivered by "Aunty" Karl Mourach, the "significant senior"<sup>9</sup> of the choir who, though arriving at the last minute, graciously accepted the invitation to do so.

Drawing on ideas recently formulated in the writing of an article for *Perfect Beat* entitled "Sing Loud, Break Through the Silence": Musical Responses to the National Apology to the Stolen Generations,<sup>10</sup> Katelyn concentrated on how the 'Sorry Song' was being used as an educational tool, focussing on the notions of recognition, hope for

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<sup>6</sup> And, in the nature of songs and this research it was at the time of completing the thesis, that the 'Sorry Song' featured as "The Song of the Month" on the Natural Voice Practitioners Network, <http://www.naturalvoice.net/>, cited 9 June 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Fletcher, Kerry (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 20/05/10). See also <http://www.sorrysong.com.au> and Barney, Katelyn (2012) "'Sing loud, break through the silence': Musical Responses to the National Apology to the Stolen Generations', *Perfect Beat* 13.1: 69-94.

<sup>8</sup> The costume is strategically chosen to reflect the colours of the Australian Aboriginal flag.

<sup>9</sup> This notion of "significant senior" is discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>10</sup> Barney 2012.

justice, and the dialogue that it enabled. She highlighted the emotional power of the song to promote healing and break the silence about the history of the Stolen Generations. My paper followed Katelyn's, exploring harmony and healing in the 'Sorry Song' by concentrating on its performative aspects in regard to *Madjitol Moorna*. The membership of this community choir includes both Indigenous<sup>11</sup> and non-Indigenous singers. It is led musically by Aboriginal musical directors and administratively by a non-Indigenous coordinator. Within the paper, I teased out the shared knowledge and imaginings of reconciliation that the song made possible within this intercultural context and which are discussed below.<sup>12</sup>

Our papers had followed on from the initial performance of the 'Sorry Song' by Kerry and *Madjitol Moorna*. Like many others, Jo Randell, the choir's coordinator, has described the song as "beautifully simple and very moving".<sup>13</sup> Immediately following the singing, Kerry gave her personal contribution to the panel about the song's composition. She told the audience she had been encouraged by Robyn Slarke, a social justice activist, to write a song that expressed the need to say 'sorry' to the Stolen Generations.<sup>14</sup> In the 1990s Slarke, the Director of Cultural Events for the Western Australian Native Title Working Group had "formed the Coexistence Choir specifically to promote Aboriginal culture, indigenous rights and the principle of 'coexistence' enshrined in Native Title law".<sup>15</sup> Kerry was a member of the Coexistence Choir, performed with a number of *cappella* ensembles, including Hammer and Tongues, and has composed many songs. She spoke about her long term engagement with Indigenous people, the witnessing of the grief of separation and lasting pain caused by the process of the forced removal of children, and her strong empathy with those Aboriginal friends. Kerry commented that this strong emotional connection enabled the original composition of the 'Sorry Song' to

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<sup>11</sup> The Indigenous population of Australia includes Aborigines (from the continent of Australia) and Torres Strait Islanders (of Melanesian descent). I use the term Indigenous when referring to the population group as a whole. Accordingly, the term Aboriginal is used for that specific group within the Indigenous population, likewise Torres Strait Islanders. It should be noted that many Indigenous people identify primarily with their language group, which I also adopt in this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> See also Rickwood, Julie (2012) Reconciliation made sound: Madjitol Moorna's experience of harmony and healing, *Context: A Journal of Music Research*: 93-106.

<sup>13</sup> Randell, Jo (2012a) Personal communication (Email 25/05/12).

<sup>14</sup> The request was a general one to a number of composers as Slarke wanted a song to be written for the first National Sorry Day on 26 May 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Slarke, Robyn (2012) Personal communication (Email 6/08/12).

be achieved in one evening.<sup>16</sup> Following *The Apology*, Fletcher added a verse to reflect the changed circumstances and the ostinato was modified from “One Day” to “One Word”.

Directly after my paper, three members of *Madjiti! Moorna* spoke about their personal engagement with the ‘Sorry Song’. In preparation for the conference I had been in regular communication with Katelyn, Kerry and Jo. I had asked them to consider their emotional engagement with and the impact of performing the song. “Aunty” Karl, Jo, and Della Rae Morrison, one of the choir’s musical directors, did more than that. They took the conference space and, as one academic colleague remarked, made it their own intimate circle. The ‘Sorry Song’ became their story, one they wanted to share. Della Rae, and later “Aunty” Karl, told their personal stories of the repercussions of the forced removal of Aboriginal children on their lives. It became apparent that much of the detail of these moving accounts of family tragedy were being told for the first time - with the academic audience, with each other, and with the other members of the choir. Everyone in that room was witness to declarations of shame and pain, the heartache of family dysfunction, the generational affects, and the pervasiveness of those naively well-intentioned though innately racist practices on Indigenous lives. Between Della Rae and “Aunty” Karl, Jo revealed the depth of emotion that had accompanied her journey with the choir. She talked about the effect on her former understandings of the world, her growing realisation of the actual costs of Government practices on the lived experience of Indigenous people; a sense of being complicit and part of a collective guilt as her relationships with the choir members deepened, as they filled in the gaps and bridged the connections of her knowledge. The significance of these stories stimulated an emotional charge in themselves and their listeners. I felt a need to offer support – put my arm gently around each of them, stand beside them in moral support, be a friend. In that offering, in being in the moment, I was unable to concentrate solely on their words; I was unable to file their revealing texts in my memory for later consideration. I was not recording the session. I was unable to be the researcher. Yet as the researcher I was responsible for and had unwittingly encouraged the exposure of these very personal and moving stories.

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<sup>16</sup> Fletcher 2010.

Following these declarations, Kerry, supported by the choir, taught the final chorus to the academic audience and then the session was opened for comments and questions. Recognising the space was still theirs and with her own story to tell, another member of the choir, Tricia, recalled the steps her non-Indigenous father had taken to protect his children after her Aboriginal mother had died. Leaving Central Australia they moved to Sydney, her father making a financial sacrifice, and, in order to blend in with the general population, the children denying their Aboriginal heritage. A colleague from New Zealand commented:

The key word is 'sacrifice'. That sticks with me; in order for the family [to remain] together. I was really touched by the story as it highlighted the value of family to these women - and served to really emphasize the emotional impact of the other stories, which were about loss of family.<sup>17</sup>

Tricia's life had been changed by the forced removal laws but her family was kept together through the ingenuity of her father. She had not suffered the same level of pain through dislocation and dispossession that the Stolen Generations had, but she had lost connection to country and community. Her story reinforced the fact that all Indigenous lives have been affected by those laws.

Kerry then answered questions about some of the controversies surrounding the song and various other comments were made before she drew everyone back into her intangible embrace, leading us all to sing the 'Sorry Song' in order to close the session. Kerry once again situated herself in the storm of the debate surrounding reconciliation, publicly advocating through song the necessity to heal past wrong-doings. Everyone was part of the performance in that final circle; choir members and leaders, Kerry, Katelyn, myself and the academic audience, all in full voice, repeating the final verse and chorus over and over until Kerry brought it all to a harmonious conclusion.

The 'Sorry Song' plays a unique role in the choir's repertoire.<sup>18</sup> Madjital Moorna performed 'Sorry Song' on the day of The Apology, watched by thousands of people on a large television screen on the Perth Esplanade. As the choir sang, the audience was also drawn into the song, many people joining the final chorus which "was sung over and over [...] the concluding "SORRY" was met with rousing cheers. There were also

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<sup>17</sup> Wilson, Oli (2011) Personal communication (2/12/11).

<sup>18</sup> The repertoire of *Madjital Moorna* is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.



many tears”.<sup>19</sup> The official annual Sorry Day event in Wellington Park in the city of Perth is one of the key performances in *Madjitol Moorna*'s calendar, when the 'Sorry Song' and other songs from its repertoire are performed to mark the occasion. Unlike the majority of *Madjitol Moorna*'s songs, the "Sorry Song" is not an Indigenous composition, and the lyrics, including lines such as 'If we can now say that we're sorry, to the people from this land' and 'They cry, they cry, their children were stolen, they still wonder why', are words the non-Indigenous majority of Australia's population might wish to express to the Indigenous minority upon a conscious recognition of the impact of the forced removal of children. The acknowledgement of pain and sorrow is then made emotionally mutual: 'We cry, we cry, their children were stolen, now no-one knows why'. The collective endeavour of reconciliation is explicitly articulated in the final verse: 'We sing with our hearts, respect for each and everyone, together, with hope burning strong'. The chorus further invites a united journey: 'Sing, sing loud, break through the silence, sing sorry across this land', and, more potently, the final line written since The Apology: 'Sing, sing loud, we've broken the silence, let "sorry" start healing our land'.

Although Kerry is not a member of *Madjitol Moorna*, she has friendships with various members of its leadership and has often attended or taken part in the choir's performances of the 'Sorry Song'. The song was added to its repertoire in 2007 when Slarke brought it for consideration. The Apology performance, however, has become the affective anchor for repeat performances thereby setting up an "intertextual reference"<sup>20</sup> that subsequently generates layered associations or meanings. The 'Sorry Song' overtly speaks about and to the process of reconciliation. Its lyrics, its narrative, suggest that it should be a song performed by a non-Indigenous choir. Nevertheless, the Indigenous members of the choir appreciate the ability of the song to capture the acknowledgement of past wrong-doings, the need for recognition of ongoing effects, and the healing that is being sought. Some of its emotional intensity has been brought about by that 2008 performance. "Aunty" Karl has often retold the story of the effect of

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<sup>19</sup> Slarke, Robyn (2008) *A small but mighty choir sings "SORRY" and participates in Australia's National Apology*, unpublished document in possession of author. Emphasis in original.

<sup>20</sup> Rice, Timothy (2001) Reflections on Music and Meaning: Metaphor, Signification and Control in the Bulgarian Case, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10.1: 30.

singing the 'Sorry Song' in the rehearsal prior to The Apology, of how she and Della Rae had cried and clung to each other. Della Rae said that the performance itself prompted Indigenous singers and audience members to openly cry, engendering a "mass healing".<sup>21</sup> When the song is performed by *Madjtil Moora* emotion is amplified by the combined voices, the visual presentation of racial harmony, the direct reference to healing, and the shared imagining of a future where these all coexist. This emotion has become inherently incorporated into the choir as a whole. It is also reinforced through personal stories shared by the Indigenous members of the choir.

*Madjtil Moorna* dwells in the confluence of community music making and reconciliation. The choir has crafted harmony and healing, but this has not been without its challenges, which I discuss further in Chapter Five. *Madjtil Moorna's* performance of the 'Sorry Song' both describes and demonstrates a shared understanding of history, a shared experience of the present, and a shared imagining of the future. The choir's performance of the 'Sorry Song' idealises and enacts what is possible to one's individual identity and in the social world. It reveals that harmony and healing can only be achieved when emotion is present, when pre-existing and ongoing cross-cultural tensions are articulated and acted upon. These are issues explored in this thesis.

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<sup>21</sup> Morrison 2010.

## Introduction

### “We Are Australian”

*In Australia you [look] out and [see] the possible, the spaces,  
the maybes.*

**Tim Winton (1994) *The Riders*, Sydney: Pan MacMillian Publishers: 51.**

We want to keep culture and language strong so keep sending us good stories so government can learn we are truly good people.

***Family News, Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi***  
**Aboriginal Corporation, Alice Springs.**

I find [...] music to be both empowering and liberating. This is not a question of getting music to be what we think we want it to be, but rather, of making music in the hope that its embodiment of our desires and needs will inscribe them convincingly and effectively on ourselves, as individuals and societies.

**Helen Phelan (2008) *Practice, ritual and community music: doing as identity*, *International Journal of Community Music* 1.2: 159.**

### ***Preamble***

“We Are Australian” is a story of being and becoming Australian, via two popular contemporary movements which are brought together, embodied, and enacted in cross-cultural community choirs and choral events. I take the title of this thesis not from the lyrics of the iconic song written by Bruce Woodley and Dobe Newton which is frequently sung by community choirs in Australia, but from a story told to me by two Central Australian singers. That conversation closes the thesis.

This thesis is a comparative study of contemporary community music-making in South East Australia, South West Australia and Central Australia. It is a multi-sited ethnographic project that provides an opportunity to explore regional variations in the musical expression of reconciliation at the community level. The colonial histories of each region are the product of different environmental settings and cross-cultural relations. The sociomusical expressions therefore emerge from unique local situations and circumstances while, at the same time, are framed by two national movements:

reconciliation and community music, which are themselves supported by formal processes. The overlaying and intersecting of reconciliation and community music from specific and broader perspectives provide rich historical contexts and contemporary practices through which to interrogate the community interactions, the movements and the formal processes and, in so doing, make comment on national identity.

In this thesis I attempt to reinscribe the power of community music making; making a gesture that endeavours to determine and outline its potentials and limitations. Throughout this project I was aware of the specificity of the research and the contextualized nature of its ethnographic material. It does so, too, aware that some of the ideas not only critique numerous academic dialogues focused on music and wellbeing but may disturb community music practitioners, community music institutions, and funding bodies.

### ***Framing the research***

Social change is very often the outcome of “acting meaningfully in the world<sup>1</sup> but how exactly is that occurring within the context of community choirs? How is singing in a cross-cultural group regarded by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, within the environment of a shared musical experience? How does the encounter provide an active vehicle for reconciliation? Is there a possibility that in sharing and exchanging music singers “learn from and to listen to one another”<sup>2</sup> across social, cultural, historical and geographical perspectives? The community choirs and choral events included in my research project suggested that participants in these cross-cultural encounters were working through the past, acting in the present, and considering the future through the means of music-making. How then does the sense of community and action in making music affect understandings of our “other selves”?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Morphy, Howard (2009a) Acting in a community: Art and social cohesion in Indigenous Australia, *Humanities Research Journal*, XV.2: 117. See also Morphy, Howard (2009b) Art as a mode of action, *Journal of Material Culture* 14.1: 5-27.

<sup>2</sup> Duffy, Michelle (2007) The Possibilities of Music: "To Learn from and to Listen to One Another", in Ros Bandt, Michelle Duffy and Dolly MacKinnon, *Hearing Places: Sound, Place, Time and Culture*, Newcastle UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 319-332.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, Jon (2008) Listening to History: Some proposals for reclaiming the practice of live music, *Leonardo Music Journal* 18: 9-16.

When I first began research in the mid-1990s community music was receiving little academic attention. Ruth Finnegan's pioneering work on community music making in Milton Keynes<sup>4</sup> was influential and the circumstances of Australian community music at the time caught not only my attention but that of a few other researchers.<sup>5</sup> Since that time community music has received greater academic attention, particularly in the last few years as a result of the arts and health agenda and the interest of music psychologists.<sup>6</sup> With all this attention, however, community music making has received little ethnographic analysis, nor received much attention from popular music scholars. The shifts and changes within community music making in Australia since the mid-1990s have therefore gone somewhat unnoticed. This thesis is an attempt to address those gaps.

This analysis drew on Howard Morphy's assertions that art can be regarded as both action and community, and I was interested in contextualising those assertions in community music, and specifically choirs and choral events that appear at the convergence of community music and reconciliation.

### ***The Convergence of Community Music and Reconciliation***

This thesis is an exploration of the convergence of community music and reconciliation, two movements that merge in community interactions<sup>7</sup> of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Broadly, both movements are about mutual respect and make contribution to community building and human vitality. Over the past decade or so, the two movements have seen an increase in popular support and participation. Although not mutually exclusive and with observable similarities, these two movements have followed separate though parallel paths.

As well as being grassroots movements, both community music making and the reconciliation process have become potent to political, social, cultural and economic

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<sup>4</sup> Finnegan, Ruth (1989) *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English Town*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 2 for a thorough discussion of this research focus on music making.

<sup>7</sup> Community interaction is the term I use to describe the community choirs and/or community choral events of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians that utilise the concept of reconciliation as part of their framework. The interaction inherently is one that includes making music. The notion is more definitively explained in Chapter 3.

agendas. Numerous scholars have therefore shown interest in both the notions of reconciliation and community music. This thesis brings much of that research together with empirical evidence to enable an analysis of the convergence of reconciliation and music within the context of community interactions. The case studies in this research project reveal the opportunities in and challenges to community interactions.

### ***Chapter Structure and Content***

The thesis is uniquely constructed in order to separate detailed ethnographic episodes from the main body of the text. These are provided in the Prelude, which focused on the Western Australian community choir, *Madjitil Moorna*, the Interlude which focuses on a voice camp in Victoria, and the Coda which concentrates on a singing workshop in Central Australia. This introductory chapter outlines the scope, structure, aims and objectives of the thesis. The concluding chapter provides a comprehensive summary and makes comment on contributions to academic dialogue in regard to community music research, ethnography, and interdisciplinary studies.

The first three chapters are devoted to methodology and theory as well as a close examination of the two movements. Chapter One discusses ethnographic field research and methodology. Chapter Two closely examines community choral music in Australia since the 1980s and, in the process, provides an historical, cultural, social, political and economic account for the Community Music Movement.<sup>8</sup> Chapter Three undertakes a similar analysis of the Reconciliation Movement and, further, offers a theoretical construct to better understand the community interactions under investigation, that of 'singing in between'. The second half of the thesis focuses on the case studies. Chapter Four explores community interaction in Victoria focusing on one community choral event. Chapter Five concentrates on a single choir and its sociomusical project. Chapter Six investigates the encounter, exchange and collaboration of community choirs in Central Australia. Each of these case studies is unique in regard to place, history, and the

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<sup>8</sup> A brief overview of community music in Australia up to the early 1990s from the perspective of a community music worker was recently republished. See Harrison, Gillian (2010) Community music in Australia, *International Journal of Community Music* 3.3: 337-342. This was first presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> CMA seminar, *The Role of Community Music in a Changing World*, in Athens, Georgia, USA in 1994 and first published in M A Leglar (ed) (1996) *The Role of Community Music in a Changing World*, Georgia: University of Georgia.

ways and means of cross-cultural encounter, exchange and performance. As described in the Prelude, *Madjtil Moorna* is a community choir of Indigenous and non-Indigenous singers led by Indigenous musical directors. The Victorian case study is primarily based on a choral event in 2009; the “Our Land Our Home” Concert Series of the Melbourne Millennium Chorus. In Central Australia it is the drawing together of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous singers through workshops and performances that is the focus. Common interests of music making and a desire for cross-cultural encounter are readily located in each of the community interactions. Their differences enable a more nuanced analysis of the theoretical overviews and consideration of the literature developed in the first half of the thesis. The multimedia component accompanies the thesis in order to enrich the evidence from the case studies. This visual and auditory presentation relates directly to Chapters Four, Five and Six and the ethnographic moments of the Prelude, Interlude and Coda. It will better complement the written material after reading the thesis in full.

Each chapter is introduced with a poem and two other excerpts, either the lyrics from relevant songs that are regularly sung in community choirs in Australia, or extracts from relevant literature. The lyrics embed creative features into the written text of the thesis. The quotations from the literature highlight the discussion within each of the chapters. The main text of this study is supplemented by footnotes, appendices and the multimedia component.

Unlike the epic work *The Colony* by Grace Karskens,<sup>9</sup> this thesis cannot incorporate detailed archaeological, pre-colonial histories, topography or geographical descriptions as they are beyond its scope. However, brief relevant regional histories and geographies are included in order to frame the community interactions that are the focus of the thesis. In Chapters Four, Five and Six an opening section is devoted to history and place. There follows in each of the case study chapters discussion of the relevant material and associated issues under investigation.

I have modified established referencing formats to create one most appropriate for the narrative style of the thesis. I have constructed a hybrid referencing system that is based on the Harvard referencing system, but is footnoted for ease of reading. It uses the least

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<sup>9</sup> Karskens, Grace (2010) *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

amount of punctuation to erase unnecessary complexity. When first referenced in each chapter, the full bibliographical reference is given. Thereafter within the chapter, surname, year and page, if appropriate, is used. I have referred to the opening and closing sections of each chapter as the Preamble and Concluding Remarks, to avoid confusion with the chapters entitled Introduction and Conclusion. All interviews are referred to as “personal conversations”, a practice established during my first postgraduate research project which was prompted by Finnegan’s<sup>10</sup> regard that “interview” is too formal a word to describe the meandering conversations with others. Further, I use “personal communication” when referring to email or other means of communication, and “personal comment” for remarks made outside of the “personal conversations”. In the Prelude, Interlude and Coda first names are used to enhance the sense of intimacy. Surnames are used within the main body of the dissertation.

### ***What is music?***

It is not the intention of this thesis to construct a definition of ‘music’ or bring clarity to the question ‘What is music?’. As any literature review of music will show music can be defined in many different ways. At its simplest, music is considered to be the arrangement of sounds, “distinct pitches that are arranged into melodies and organized into patterns of rhythm”.<sup>11</sup> Music may or may not contain lyrics, it may or may not be an oral tradition, harmony may or may not be central. Importantly, “musical things are not always strictly musical, and that the expression of tonal relationships in patterns of sound may be secondary to extramusical relationships which the tones represent”.<sup>12</sup> As many ethnomusicologists emphasise music is the study of culture.

The work of many scholars and the words of musicians and the singers in community choirs inhabit this thesis and reinforce that music can be many things, simultaneously. It is mercurial. It can, for example, be “a commodity, an ideological text, a political tool, a

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<sup>10</sup> Finnegan 1989: 342-347.

<sup>11</sup> Leavy, Patricia (2009) *Method Meets Art: Arts-based research practice*, New York: The Guildford Press: 102. I refer to Leavy’s contemplations merely as a starting point. The academic endeavour exploring the question “What is music?” is, after all, beyond the capacity of the thesis. Nevertheless, many more music researchers and their work will be acknowledged and engaged with throughout the dissertation.

<sup>12</sup> Blacking, John (2000) On Musical Behaviour, in Derek B Scott (ed), *Music, Culture, and Society: a reader*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press: 97-99.



resistive tool, and an integral component of cultural rituals and daily social life”.<sup>13</sup> Being fluid ensures that music is lived experience, that it is a “‘happening’ that comes to be via performance”.<sup>14</sup>

Leavy’s contemplation on music serves as a checklist or a guideline for matters of concern to music research, particularly when it is a practice-based project. She notes that there are important considerations that emerge out of ethnomusicology about how music fits into culture when undertaking cross-cultural research. Leavy relies on a narrow source of ethnographic research, with many notable absences. Nevertheless, she is able to identify important dimensions that should be embedded into music research. These include the conceptual, the contextual, and the circumstantial of music making; the form, rhythm, dynamics, timbre, melody, polyphony and harmony of the music and the metaphorical use of those notions; and ideas about music, its social organisation, repertoire, and its material culture. Importantly, the hybridization of music and identity that can occur in cross-cultural platforms where social action is also taking place is paramount and demands attention, she argues, particularly in a “shifting global context”.<sup>15</sup>

In an exploration of contemporary Tibetan music in Dharamsala, Keila Diehl’s heavily referenced discourse examines many theoretical and methodological considerations to music research. Importantly, she, like ethnomusicologists Stephen Feld and Aaron Fox (together with many others) prefers a wide focus on forms of musical expression as “total social facts, saturated with messages about time, place, feeling, style, belonging, and identity”<sup>16</sup> as well as to lyrics and other musicological analysis.

Given the circumstances of the community interactions in which I immersed myself during field research, I too have adopted a wide focus which embraces many of these concepts.

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<sup>13</sup> Leavy 2009: 101.

<sup>14</sup> Leavy 2009: 103.

<sup>15</sup> Leavy 2009: 117.

<sup>16</sup> Feld, Stephen and Fox, Aaron A (1994) Music and Language, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23: 38, cited in Diehl, Keila (2002) *Echoes from Dharamsala: Music in the Life of a Tibetan Refugee Community*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press: 211.

## **Music and Emotion**

As the Prelude clearly demonstrates affect and emotion can play a central role in music making. The emotional power of music has intrigued music researchers across many disciplines. Within Anthropology, for example, music and emotion have been embedded within specific ethnographic studies<sup>17</sup> or in broad analysis.<sup>18</sup> The papers at the Power of Music conference, for instance, were given from a vast array of disciplines and the discussions that followed attempted to tease out, for example, the difference between emotion and affect, the distinction between felt and perceived emotions, the apparent capability of music listening to generate both positive and negative emotions, the role of emotion in composition and performance, and the ability of music to affect lives and enable social change. Linking music and emotion can therefore hardly be a simple task.

As music psychologist, John Sloboda explains:

[Music] can suggest or resemble certain types of human gestures and actions. Given shared experience and understandings, it is easy to see how a group of people might be able to extrapolate specific emotions from such cues. It is equally easy to see how there is room for ambiguity and imprecision. Very often we feel that there is an emotion present, we know it is of one general type rather than of another, but we cannot quite tie it down. In such a state of ambiguity and cue-impoverishment we may well expect the profound and semi-mystical experiences that music seems to engender. Our own subconscious desires, memories, and preoccupations rise to flesh out the emotional contours that the music suggests. The so-called 'power' of music may very well be in its emotional cue-impoverishment. It is a kind of emotional Rorschach blob.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, he claims, music does possess some inherent characteristics which promote affective responses. These can arise partly because, he suggests, there will always be “a residual ineffable component”<sup>20</sup> in any conceivable representation of music. Citing Raffman’s poetic description that musical experience will always be characterised by “an evanescent corona shimmering around the structural frame of the

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Feld, Steven (1990) *Sound and sentiment: birds, weeping, poetics and song in Kaluli expression*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; and Magowan, Fiona (2007a) *Melodies of Mourning: Music and Emotion in Northern Australia*, Crawley: University of Western Australia Press.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Clayton, Martin, Herbert, Trevor and Middleton, Richard (eds) (2003) *The Cultural Study of Music*, New York and London: Routledge.

<sup>19</sup> Sloboda John A (2005) *Exploring the musical mind: cognition, emotion, ability, function*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 227.

<sup>20</sup> Sloboda 2005: 356.

piece”,<sup>21</sup> Sloboda proposes that the ineffability of musical experience encourages us to endow music with significance. In worship, for instance, “there are contemplative states in which tiny, usually ignored, details of experience are perceived in great clarity, as if for the first time. Musical experience may encourage such states”.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, he notes that:

music can only be used for effective communal worship where there is already an existing community, bound by common understandings and commitments, where trust and 'good works' underpin relationships. In this context music in worship deepens and strengthens mutual commitments. *Music cannot, in and of itself, create community.*<sup>23</sup>

Sloboda was able to identify the visceral and vicarious nature of the link between music and emotion, recognizing it as personally informed and individuated, and that the emotional response is one not duplicated. When music is shared, performed, and stories are intertwined, however, its emotion has much potential, even power. That musical experiences are infused with “thought, embodied affect, and personal creativity”<sup>24</sup> cannot be denied. The task to understanding the link, however, is challenging. As Finnegan has recognised sensitive critical attention needs to be given to:

ethnographic specificities with all their complications of multiple groups, roles, outlooks, senses, artifacts, and individuals – and without doubt, their controversial interpretations too. But [this] analysis of music to include such issues lays the foundation for both a more realistic appreciation of music and a richer model of human beings and human culture.<sup>25</sup>

These are important considerations within the context of community choirs and reconciliation and are explored further throughout the thesis.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

This thesis is an investigation of the convergence of community music making and reconciliation. It is my own work, with the voices of others echoing, supporting or refuting my arguments. I bring to it my own long term lived experience of community choirs and the reconciliation process. The community interactions which are the primary

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<sup>21</sup> Sloboda 2005: 354.

<sup>22</sup> Sloboda 2005: 354.

<sup>23</sup> Sloboda 2005: 358, emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> Finnegan, Ruth (2003) Music, Experience and the Anthropology of Emotion, in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (eds), *The Cultural Study of Music*, New York and London: Routledge: 191.

<sup>25</sup> Finnegan 2003:191.

focus of the investigation are contextualized expressions by a group of people singing together in the confluence of music making and reconciliation. The analysis therefore placed that music making within the local, regional and global planes of impact; had to ensure that broad historical, political, economic, social and cultural influences were not ignored even if aligning music with powerful forces has often been resisted.<sup>26</sup> But “as much as economics guides the interpretation of social life”,<sup>27</sup> so does aesthetics, emotion, representation and more.

Importantly, my research took account of differences amongst individuals: their personal histories, social circumstances, motivations and responses to their music making; commonalities and differences between the agendas of the choirs were also explored. The investigation sought to find and articulate the details, reasons for and processes of repertoire selection and musical pedagogy; the demonstrable increase in musical knowledge and practice; as well as the agency of the singers in their music making. It sought to understand the negotiation of aesthetics and representation. Succinctly, “We Are Australian” has captured the unfolding of the convergence of reconciliation and community music in Australia.

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<sup>26</sup> Adorno, Thomas (1973) *Philosophy of modern music*, London: Sheen and Ward.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, S J (1997) Beyond geography’s visible world: A cultural politics of music, *Progress in Human Geography* 21.4: 502, cited in Daykin, Norma (2009) *The Role of Music in an Arts-Based Qualitative Enquiry* in Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, New York: Guildford Press: 123.

## Chapter 1

### Intimacy and Knowledge in Ethnographic Field Research

There is so much I could write about in just the last 24 hours, let alone this whole field research journey, that I feel incapable of capturing it all, remembering it all. My conversations [...], the environment, the people, the songs, the history. Even historical moments in the now!

**Rickwood, Julie (2010) Field Notes, 7 September**

There is no substitute in ethnomusicological fieldwork for intimacy born of shared musical experiences. Learning to sing, dance, play in the field is good fun and good method. Being an appreciative audience is an especially important form of musical exchange.

**Myers, Helen (1992) Fieldwork and Field Technology. In Helen Myers Ed. *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*. New York: W W Norton: 3<sup>1</sup>**

*The world is not like a text to be read, he said  
but a musical performance to be experienced  
I bowed to his wisdom and agreed with my heart  
And my heart did agree with my head.  
The rational and emotional dance round and around  
The music and the friends become whole  
We sing with our voices of the choices we can make  
And a truth from our lives there is found.*

**"A little ditty in response to Titon", Julie Rickwood 2011©**

#### **Preamble**

This chapter explains and examines the methodological approach I applied to this research project. It outlines ethnographic field research from its broadest context, considers the ethics in gaining knowledge, ponders upon the ethics of intimacy, and includes two analyses of return field trips. I explore the academic terrain of ethnographic field research while also outlining and reflecting upon the personal stumbles in and thoroughfares through this landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Shelemay, Kay Kaufman (2008) *The Ethnomusicologist, Ethnographic Method, and the Transmission of Tradition*, in Gregory Barz and Timothy J Cooley (eds), *Shadows in the Field: New Perspective for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, New York: Oxford University Press: 152.

## ***Ethnographic field research***

Fieldwork took place between August 2009 and June 2012. In the preambles of Chapters Four, Five and Six I will outline specifically the periods of field research<sup>2</sup> spent in each of the case study areas: Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia. It was only in the latter two areas that I returned late in the project to gather more data. In the case of Central Australia it was because of important and unexpected developments; in the case of Western Australia it was prompted by the conference referred to in the Prelude.

The methodological approach to field research is of primary concern in ethnographic studies. For this evolving project I created a broad methodology, one that captured both conventional and innovative mechanisms. I drew on established ethnographic methods such as participant-observation, field notes, unstructured interviews, photography, audio and video recording. Documentation, scores, recorded music, communication technology, and arts-based methodological models were also incorporated and analysed. While these were the ethnographic tools I utilised, the epistemological concerns of field research and ethnography are equally paramount.

Within the broad dialogue that asks “what it is like for a person (including ourselves) to make and to know music as lived experience?”,<sup>3</sup> deliberations concerning the negotiation of the ethics of friendship and the ethics of research have become more common. This is especially so as music research increasingly includes the interrogation of music cultures “in our own communities, something that [is] both easier (it’s our turf) and harder (be ‘objective’ about one’s own family and friends?)”.<sup>4</sup> Yet Jonathan Stock and Chou Chiener suggest that ‘home’-based field research remains rare in English-language theoretical writing on ethnomusicological field research, providing very few

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term “field research” rather than “fieldwork”. I take my lead from other ethnographers who also prefer the term field research. See for example, Barz, Gregory F (2008) *Confronting the Field(note) In and Out of the Field*, in Barz and Cooley: 206-223.

<sup>3</sup> Titon, Jeff Todd (2008) *Knowing Fieldwork*, in Barz and Cooley: 25. See also Springwood, Charles Frueling and King, Richard C (2001) *Unsettling Engagements: On the Ends of Rapport in Critical Ethnography*, *Qualitative Inquiry* 7: 403-417; and Hellier-Tinoco, Ruth (2003) *Experiencing People: Relationships, Responsibility and reciprocity*, *British Forum for Ethnomusicology* 12.1: 19-34.

<sup>4</sup> Nettl, Bruno (2008). *Foreward*, in Barz and Cooley 2008: v.

explicit models for the home field researcher to draw on<sup>5</sup>. Home field research has not been totally absent, however. Community and popular music researchers have more frequently entered home turf. Ruth Finnegan's pioneering work in the late 1980s<sup>6</sup> revealed the musical pathways of an English town and many popular music researchers have also published on their work<sup>7</sup>. Popular music researcher Jodie Taylor argues that research encounters in a home-based field are "dependent on a great number of factors that cannot be prescribed, measured, calculated, estimated or anticipated prior to the engagement"<sup>8</sup>. I would add that these encounters therefore require the art of improvisation, the ability and flexibility to intuitively and professionally follow field research opportunities. Cooley and Barz suggest that as ethnomusicologists "interact with contemporary and historical field research models [they] define individual ways of interacting, often improvising and inventing new methods and theories in the field".<sup>9</sup> As a contemporary improvisational dancer I have become much better about explaining my practice in the face of puzzled enquiries; how I draw on established frameworks and structures of movement and choreography that are repeatedly reinforced and upon which improvisation is only made possible. I apply these principles to my field research methods.

This chapter enters into dialogues concerning ethnography, especially those that focus on field research in a home environment. It proposes some additional considerations, issues that specifically address intimacy and knowledge. Later in the chapter I focus on how the ethnographic episode prompted by the conference in Perth raised specific issues about, and engaged with, that expanding discourse. To begin, I discuss the acquiring of knowledge.

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<sup>5</sup> Stock, Jonathan P J and Chiener, Chou (2008) Fieldwork at Home: European and Asian Perspectives, in Barz and Cooley: 108.

<sup>6</sup> Finnegan, Ruth (1989) *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English Town*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also, Finnegan, Ruth (2007a) *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English Town*, Middleton CT: Wesleyan University Press.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Cohen, Sara (1993) Ethnography and Popular Music Studies, *Popular Music* 12.2: 123-138; Cohen, Sara (1994) Identity, Place and the 'Liverpool Sound', in Martin Stokes (ed), *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, Oxford: Berg Publishers: 117-134.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, Jodie (2011) The intimate insider: negotiating the ethics of friendship when doing insider research, *Qualitative Research* 11.1: 18.

<sup>9</sup> Cooley, Timothy J and Barz, Gregory (2008) Casting Shadows: Fieldwork is Dead! Long Live Fieldwork!, in Barz and Cooley: 21.

## ***On ethics and knowledge***

I first encountered the balancing act of ethical considerations in field research at home with the Australian a cappella scene in the mid-1990s.<sup>10</sup> I drew on (amongst others) Simon During's consideration that "a sense of shared values, identities, and purposes between the researcher and researched often elicits richer responses and transactions in the field".<sup>11</sup> He understood that the ambivalence or contradiction it generates is productive, but only if the researcher exposes their academic discourse to those being researched. The mutual review of my research writing in the 1990s became an "integral part of the research [which] yielded valuable data".<sup>12</sup> There were both constructive challenges and advantages in that approach, and, ultimately, benefits and costs to both the academic analysis and personal relationships.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, that earlier research strived to be based on the polyphony of voices to create a narrative description and interpretative analysis. That approach was the foundation upon which this current research project embarked.

Since then, the epistemological matters of ethnography within ethnomusicology have been more frequently addressed, particularly since the publication of the first edition of *Shadows in the Field*<sup>14</sup>. Previously, anthropologists and popular music theorists had also grappled with the "poetics and politics of ethnography".<sup>15</sup> As Sara Cohen stated "[t]he

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<sup>10</sup> Rickwood, Julie (1997) *Liberating Voices: Towards an ethnography of women's community a cappella choirs in Australia*, unpublished Masters thesis, Canberra: ANU.

<sup>11</sup> During, Simon (1993) Introduction, in Simon During (ed), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London and New York: Routledge: 22.

<sup>12</sup> Burnim, Mellonee (1985) Culture Bearer and Tradition Bearer: An Ethnomusicologist's Research on Gospel Music, *Ethnomusicology* 29.3: 442.

<sup>13</sup> See Rickwood 1997: 38.

<sup>14</sup> Barz, Gregory F and Cooley, Timothy J (eds) (1997) *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Clifford, James and Marcus, George (eds) (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press. See also Callaway, Helen (1992) Ethnography and Experience: Gender Implications in Fieldwork and Texts, in Judith Okley and Helen Callaway (eds), *Anthropology and Autobiography*. London and New York: Routledge: 29-49; Clifford, James (1986a) Introduction: Partial Truths, in Clifford and Marcus 1986: 1-26; Clifford, James (1986b) On Ethnographic Allegory. In Clifford and Marcus 1986: 98-121; Frith, Simon (1992) The Cultural Study of Popular Music, in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treicher (eds), *Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge: 174-186; Jackson, Michael (1989) *Paths toward a Clearing*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press; Jackson 1996; Marcus, George E (1995) Ethnography in/or the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95-117; Okley, Judith (1992) Anthropology and



ethnographer has come to be recognised as an active participant in the research process whose presence affects a version of reality created or concocted by the [researcher] in collaboration with her informants".<sup>16</sup> Significant feminist, 'native', postmodernist, sociological and postcolonial perspectives also entered into these deliberations.<sup>17</sup> The second edition of *Shadows in the Field*<sup>18</sup> brings these considerations amongst ethnomusicologists up-to-date. Jeff Todd Titon asserts that the consequence of studying people and music is to privilege understanding, rather than explanation, of the lived experience.<sup>19</sup> Other emphases involve reflexivity and "narrative representation that is descriptive, interpretive, and evocative [and one] sharing authority and authorship with 'informants'".<sup>20</sup> Titon includes many other nuanced details within this ethnographic endeavour but it is his emphasis on human relationships or human connectedness that is most striking. It is not that musical sounds and structures, or even documentation, are abandoned but that relationships are repositioned as 'texts' within the whole, subjects of interpretation in a hermeneutic circle.<sup>21</sup> Rice agrees but proposes an arc rather than a circle as the appropriate analogy: "In hermeneutic jargon, the unbridgeable gulf between subject and object is mediated as the subject becomes a self

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Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge, in Okley and Callaway 1992: 1-28; and Rice, Timothy (1994) *May It Fill Your Soul: Experiencing Bulgarian Music*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen 1993: 124.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Behar, Ruth (1993) Introduction: Women Writing Culture: Another Telling of the Story of American Anthropology, *Critique of Anthropology* 13.4: 307-325; Bourdieu, Pierre (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Richard Nice (Trans), London: Routledge; Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loic J C (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press; Gordon, Deborah A (1993) Worlds of Consequences: Feminist Ethnography as Social Action, *Critique of Anthropology* 13.4: 429-443; Herndon, Marcia (1993) Insiders, Outsiders: Knowing our Limits, Limiting our Knowledge, *The World of Music* 35.1: 63-80; Jones, Delmos J (1988) *Towards a Native Anthropology*, in Johnnetta B Cole (ed) *Anthropology for the Nineties*. New York: The Free Press. Also in *Human Organization* 29.4: 251-259; Mohanty, Satya P (1995) Epilogue. Colonial Legacies, Multicultural Futures: Relativism, Objectivity, and the Challenge of Otherness, *PMLA* 110.1: 108-118; Nakhleh, Khalil (1979) On Being a Native Anthropologist, in Gerrit Huizer and Bruce Mannheim (eds), *The Politics of Anthropology*, The Hague: Mouton Publishers: 343-352; and Wilson, Lynn (1988) Epistemology and Power: Rethinking Ethnography at Greenham, in Cole 1988: 42-48.

<sup>18</sup> Barz and Cooley 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Titon 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Titon 2008:30.

<sup>21</sup> Ricoeur, Paul (1981a) What Is A Text? Explanation and Understanding, in John B Thompson (Trans & Ed), *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 145-164, cited in Titon 2008: 30.

through temporal arcs of understanding and experience in the world".<sup>22</sup> Timothy Rice adds that this is especially attractive to ethnomusicologists who have frequent opportunities to observe that highly sophisticated nonverbal musical understanding that often exists in the absence of verbal explanation.<sup>23</sup>

Outlining a similarly strong case to Rice for a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to field research Titon maintains that musical 'being-in-the-world' is a peak embodied experience – or , in Csikszentmihalyi's terminology, an experience of 'flow'<sup>24</sup> - completed in a social group. He argues that musical knowing must be grounded in musical being or the practice of music, because it is a "special ontology and that knowing music requires that we start from musical being".<sup>25</sup> Field research, then, is an experience of the researcher in relation to other people; it is "intersubjective and personally transformative".<sup>26</sup> Subsequently, "knowledge is experiential and the intersubjective product of our social interactions".<sup>27</sup> In the same volume of work Michelle Kisliuk agrees:

ethnographers and the people among whom we learn come to share the same narratives (as Edward Bruner has noted, 1986:148; also Geertz 1988); the deeper our commitment in the field, the more our life stories intersect with our 'subject's', until Self-Other boundaries are blurred [...] The 'field' becomes a heightened microcosm of life. When we begin to participate in music and dance our very being merges with the 'field' through our bodies and voices, and another Self-Other boundary is dissolved.<sup>28</sup>

Michael Jackson takes that notion further. He believes that "anthropological knowledge is an outcome *both* of disinterested observation *and* the observer's struggle to allay his or her anxieties and get his or her bearings in a bewilderingly new environment".<sup>29</sup> As an ethnographer, he declares:

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<sup>22</sup> Rice, Timothy (2008) Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience, in Barz and Cooley 2008: 56.

<sup>23</sup> Rice 2008: 56.

<sup>24</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1995) Singing and the Self: Choral Music as 'Active Leisure', *Choral Journal* 35.7: 13-19.

<sup>25</sup> Titon 2008: 32.

<sup>26</sup> Titon 2008: 32.

<sup>27</sup> Titon 2008: 33.

<sup>28</sup> Kisliuk, Michelle (2008) (Un)doing Fieldwork: Sharing Songs, Sharing Lives, in Barz and Cooley: 193.

<sup>29</sup> Jackson, Michael (2007c) From Anxiety to Method: a reappraisal, in *Excursions*, Durham and London: Duke University Press: 152. Emphasis in original.

one's personal attempts to adjust to a strange new world may afford insights not only into that world but into the human condition itself. In this view, the hermeneutic circle encompasses *three* horizons: that of one's own world, that of the society one seeks to understand, and that of humanity.<sup>30</sup>

A central premise of J Lawrence Witzleben's article on ethnomusicological theory and practice recognises that "music and musical performance are indeed 'different' from everyday life in both experiential and physiological terms".<sup>31</sup> In an effort to promote the importance of performance he draws on Anthony Seeger's work to explain that this means music exists in the everyday world but with its own rules and parameters. Claiming also that field research is often intensified life, Kisliuk argues that it is inseparable from who one is and therefore demands the evocation of the experience fully in its interpretative writing. She asks how music researchers might integrate various creative and reflexive methods in order to create more effective strategies for "describing performative interaction, feeling, sound and movement".<sup>32</sup> Within field research, getting to know other people and being known to them is a continuous cycle that is "magnified, and the micro and macro politics of life are revealed".<sup>33</sup> The initial connections with people, the music making, and then the fieldnotes themselves are part of the overall research journey. Gregory Barz suggests that "fieldnotes are part of the process that informs both interpretation and representation, understanding and analysis of experience – *in* and *out* of the field".<sup>34</sup> Knowledge is further discovered, Kisliuk adds, in the actual writing of the ethnography because the writing is "also a process of identity formation",<sup>35</sup> as one sifts through the lived experiences and frames them ethnographically. Ultimately, she concludes, although we "imagine a 'centre' to our research area, the field is a broad conceptual zone united by a chain of inquiry. Time itself plays a role in shaping the field and the fieldworker".<sup>36</sup> Doing field research at home also means "that 'we' and 'they', the ethnomusicologists and those whom we

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<sup>30</sup> Jackson 2007c: 152.

<sup>31</sup> Witzleben, J Lawrence (2010) *Performing in the Shadows: Learning and Making Music as Ethnomusicological Practice and Theory*, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* XL11: 149.

<sup>32</sup> Kisliuk 2008: 184. See also Howes, David J (ed) (1991) *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Jackson 1989; and Stoller, Paul (1989) *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>33</sup> Kisliuk 2008: 187.

<sup>34</sup> Kisliuk 2008: 206, emphasis in original.

<sup>35</sup> Kisliuk 2008: 189.

<sup>36</sup> Kisliuk 2008: 189.

study, are not *normatively* separated by distance, language, wealth, or lifestyle.<sup>37</sup> Readily admitting that the ‘home’ is as constructed as the ‘field’, I would add that the vastness and diversity of the Australian environment and ways of being, as experienced in my field research, challenges those normative assumptions, as I discuss in later chapters.

Two other possible means of acquiring ethnographic knowledge are through recently emerging methods based in the arts and autoethnography and to which I now give attention. Autoethnography has become more popularly applied over the last decade in order to address some of the issues of authorship and voice. It has yet to become a stable term. It draws upon previous work in anthropology on participatory experience and embodied knowledge<sup>38</sup> and responds also to the challenge made to ethnographers by John Dorst in his 1989 publication *The Written Suburb*.<sup>39</sup> A decade after that challenge the edited volume by Deborah E Reed-Danahay<sup>40</sup> exposed autoethnography to be an “emerging subgenre of ethnography proper, challenging but not ultimately subverting the ethnographer’s position as writer of culture”.<sup>41</sup> Recognising that autoethnography is closely linked to autobiography, the ethnographer is placed within a social context, as a self-narrative. In that publication each of the contributors emphasised autoethnography as supplementary, taking an “ancillary position next to ethnography proper”.<sup>42</sup> Paul Atkinson adds a further note of caution in that both “the ethnographer and the field are both constituted through acts of interpretation, and that those interpretations or representations are dialectically related”.<sup>43</sup>

More recently, Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Carolyn Ellis have specifically drawn together a number of authors who explore the synergies between music and autoethnography,

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<sup>37</sup> Stock and Chiener 2008: 113, emphasis in original.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, Okley 1992 and Narayan, Kirin (1993) How Native is a “Native” Anthropologist?, *American Anthropologist* 95.3: 19-34.

<sup>39</sup> Dorst, John (1989) *The Written Suburb*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, cited in Gregory, Brian (2000) Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social, *Journal of American Folklore*, 113.449: 328-330.

<sup>40</sup> Reed-Danahay, Deborah E (ed) (1997) *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*, Oxford and New York: Berg.

<sup>41</sup> Barz 2000: 328.

<sup>42</sup> Barz 2000: 330.

<sup>43</sup> Atkinson, Paul (1999) Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5.1: 152.

exposing connections of the personal to the cultural, social and political.<sup>44</sup> In the introduction, Bartleet and Ellis give recognition to the embodied knowledge and experiences, or the corporeal nature of production, in both music and autoethnography. Nevertheless, in many of the contributions to that collection and in other works,<sup>45</sup> there can be too much focus on vulnerabilities, insecurities and anxieties. The overly confessional style undermines the aim of autoethnography which is meant to encourage innovative quality writing and to “illustrate alternative possibilities for ethnographic expression”.<sup>46</sup> The focus on transformational experiences can also weigh too heavily, weakening the intent to recognise the embedding and influence of “larger frameworks of meaning”<sup>47</sup> for one’s own understandings and experience. Other criticisms of autoethnography suggest that the measurements of good autoethnography are absent; it does not always address issues of justice; there is often a “ponderous welter of detail”<sup>48</sup> that borders on narcissism and self-indulgence; and it tries to be too many things at once.<sup>49</sup> Despite these criticisms and its limitations, autoethnography nevertheless provides for creative and reflexive accounts to be incorporated into ethnographic writing and these are important considerations when doing field research as an “intimate insider”.<sup>50</sup> As Higgins argued the dynamic of the borderline “between

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<sup>44</sup> Bartleet, Brydie-Leigh, and Ellis, Carolyn (eds) (2009) *Music Autoethnographies: Making Autoethnography Sing/Making Music Personal*, Bowen Hills: Australian Academic Press.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Ellis, Carolyn (2000) Creating Criteria: An Ethnographic Short Story, *Qualitative Inquiry* 6: 273-227; Ellis, Carolyn (2007) Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others, *Qualitative Inquiry* 13.1: 3-29; Ellis, Carolyn (2009) *Revision: Autoethnographic Reflections on Life and Work*, Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press; and Ellis, Carolyn and Bochner, A (2000) Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject, in N Denzin and Y Lincoln (eds), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage: 733-768.

<sup>46</sup> Sandstrom, Kent (1999) Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing, *Social Forces* 77.3: 1236.

<sup>47</sup> Sandstrom 1999: 1236.

<sup>48</sup> Kirin Narayan (2006) The Ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography, *American Anthropologist*, 108.1: 242.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Narayan 2006; and Pugh, Allison J (2006) The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography, by Carolyn Ellis. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004, *Contemporary Sociology* 35.3: 312-313.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor 2011.

notated evidence and life in general, has a particular force and mobile potency that activates the writing”.<sup>51</sup>

Equally influential to my approach to ethnographic writing have been creative arts approaches to social and cultural research and narrative inquiry. As a different form of knowledge creative writing can, for example, be “a way of producing vital, situated texts and a ‘way of knowing’”.<sup>52</sup> It is, according to Kirin Narayan:

[w]hen words gather together with energy, other places, other people, and other voices stir in a parallel life. The writer can feel more alive too, alert and connected to a welling inner source that flows outward toward other lives. This at least is the ideal.<sup>53</sup>

I have applied arts methodology to my field research, inviting my collaborators to respond to their music-making through a creative response of their choosing. The acceptances to that invitation were not as great as I had hoped but nonetheless they provided some very unique and poignant contributions to the research. Some of these have been included in the thesis. At the same time, I have applied various creative strategies in the formation of the thesis including poetry and other forms of creative writing and the production of the accompanying multimedia component. I was encouraged by established academics<sup>54</sup> who actively promote the integration of arts

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<sup>51</sup> Higgins, Lee (2006) *Boundary Walkers: Contexts and Concepts of Community Music*, PhD Thesis, Limerick: University of Limerick: 14.

<sup>52</sup> Daykin, Norma (2009) The Role of Music in Arts-Based Qualitative Inquiry, in Patricia Leavy (ed), *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, New York and London: Guildford Press: 123. See also Leavy’s contributions in Leavy 2009, especially the Preface, Chapter 1: Social Research and the Creative Arts: An Introduction, Chapter 2: Narrative Inquiry, and Chapter 4, Music and Qualitative Research; and Richardson, L (1998) Writing: A method of inquiry, in N K Denzin and Y S Lincoln (eds), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*, London: Sage: 345-371.

<sup>53</sup> Narayan, Kirin (2012) *Alive in the Writing: Crafting ethnography in the company of Chekhov*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press: ix. See also, for example Barrett, Estelle and Bolt, Barbara (2007) *Practice as Research: Approaches to creative arts enquiry*, London: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd; Bithell, Carolyn (2011) Desperately Seeking Impact, *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20.2: 233-244; Fitzpatrick, Katie (2012) “That’s How the Light Gets In”: Poetry, Self, and Representation in Ethnographic Research, *Cultural Studies->Critical Methodologies* 12(1): 8-14; King, Stephen (2000) *On Writing: A memoir of the craft*, New York: Scribner; Le Guin, Ursula (1998) *Steering the Craft: Exercises and discussions on story writing for the Lone Navigator or the Mutinous Crew*, Portland: Eighth Mountain Press; Rankin, Elizabeth (2001) *The Work of Writing*, San Francisco: Josey Bass; and Rinehart, Robert (1998) Fictional Methods in Ethnography: Believability, Specks of Glass and Chekhov, *Qualitative Inquiry* 4.2: 200-224.

<sup>54</sup> These include anthropologists Kirin Narayan and Kathryn Robinson, and arts academic Ruth Hadlow, whose creative writing workshops I attended during the period of my doctoral research.

methods or a generative approach with research and writing and an understanding that “minds work by digression and connection”.<sup>55</sup>

### ***On ethics and intimacy***

Given the circumstances of my research it is important to consider Jodie Taylor’s recent meditation on being an “intimate insider” and the negotiation of the ethics of friendship when doing “insider” research because it brings some curious and pertinent insights to my own project.<sup>56</sup> While Jeff Todd Titon’s “friendship model”<sup>57</sup> of ethnography is a valuable way of interpreting my own field experience, Taylor’s work adds another dimension. This is especially so because, similar to her own ethnographic research, my research projects have been based within a musical environment in which I have been active for more than twenty years. Over those years my singing, song-writing and leadership (music, administration and project management) skills were discovered and/or honed. At the same time, my feminist ideals and progressive views on social justice issues became performative when I joined a women’s choir in the late 1980s. Ensembles, other choirs and numerous singing events also contributed to the expression of my musical, cultural and political identities. My research was and remains very much interwoven into my own lived experience. A conversation with close friends in late 2011 highlighted this situation. We had all previously been members of the same women’s choir. We discussed its then present situation in search of a new musical director. We talked about its evolution. One of my friends spoke passionately about the way the choir had lost the political and musical edge it once had. This then led to a discussion about the increasing conservative nature of that choir in particular and then the growing normalisation of community singing over the last decade.

So amongst my ‘informants’ are friends made prior to even my earlier research project, to varying degrees of intimacy. At the same time, my ability to blend in with and contribute to some of the choirs I sing with during my field research inevitably creates

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They provided inspiration by giving access to extracts from numerous writers including John Berger, Michel Taussig, Frank Kafka, Gay Bilson, Roland Bathes, Claude Levi-Strauss, WEH Stanner, Victor Turner and many other publications to motivate writing.

<sup>55</sup> Hadlow, Ruth (2011) Personal comment (Creative Writing Workshop 17/02/11).

<sup>56</sup> Taylor 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Titon 2008.

friendships amongst their membership and leadership. I can become invisible as a researcher as many invariably forget the reason I am amongst them. There is a:

sense of shared linguistic and interactive codes and emotional repertoires, possibly allowing (or requiring) certain assumptions to remain unstated or certain modes of humor to unfold; a recognition of commonly held cultural values, expressive norms, and local knowledge; a (re)turn to deep-rooted musical institutions and memories that predate any explicit research training or agenda; and awakened appreciation of mutual ownership, authority, political stance, and subjectivity; and the discovering of affinities based on variables such as age, gender, class, and taste.<sup>58</sup>

There are also the experiences where this is not the case and that removal from intimacy affects access to the experiences and knowledge of those people with whom a friendship does not develop. I have come to know that, like Marcia Herndon,<sup>59</sup> I am “neither fully insider nor outsider, neither fully emic nor fully etic”.<sup>60</sup> Stock and Chiener question this terminology suggesting that it risks “reducing the often shifting and multiple identities a researcher carries during fieldwork to a single valency or position”.<sup>61</sup> Further, Bruno Nettl asserts that as researchers we must be mindful of a third perspective. His solution to the dilemma was to “present myself in three voices: the traditional ethnomusicologist, the ‘native informant’, and an imaginary figure whom I named the ‘ethnomusicologist from Mars’, for the purpose of trying to imagine what an ultimate outsider ...would be struck by”.<sup>62</sup> Timothy Rice moves beyond all dissection, declaring it might be best simply to “speak as myself, [...] self formed, reconfigured, and changed by my encounters with and understandings”<sup>63</sup> of music making. My research approach was mindful of all these perspectives but leans most toward Rice’s approach for that seems to be all one can do.

Taylor recognises that as an ethnographer one writes truthful yet always partial accounts of friends. One abstracts friends from their own idea of selfhood and takes the bits that are “most interesting and relevant”<sup>64</sup> to our own research objectives. Taylor

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<sup>58</sup> Stock and Chiener 2008: 113.

<sup>59</sup> Rickwood 1997: 34.

<sup>60</sup> Herndon 1993: 77.

<sup>61</sup> Stock and Chiener 2008: 113.

<sup>62</sup> Nettl, Bruno (2005) *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 190-191.

<sup>63</sup> Rice 2008: 57.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor 2011: 4.



provides a thorough account of existing literature in order to distinguish between field-based friendships (informant-friendships) from friend-informants in what she defines as 'intimate insider' research.<sup>65</sup> She nonetheless recognises that insider views will "always be multiple and contestable, generating their own epistemological problems due to subject/object relationality".<sup>66</sup> Taylor adds that there is under-theorising of the way that friendships impact upon "the process of perception and interpretation within and of the field under investigation".<sup>67</sup> There is also, she argues, little "methodological guidance on how one goes about managing difference arising from intimacy and negotiating the ethics of friendship in a social research paradigm".<sup>68</sup> My field research experiences and considerations in this chapter and in other areas of the thesis address those same theoretical and methodological concerns.

Taylor suggests that 'intimate insider research' is distinguishable from 'insider research' when the researcher is working, at the deepest level, within their own 'backyard'; that is

[w]hen the self is so inextricably tied to one's informants and field of inquiry, the process of intimate insider research then involves a degree of, or may even be called a type of, autoethnography. [The researcher must] acknowledge the intertextuality that is part of both the data gathering and writing processes. Moreover, the researcher needs also to be aware of the limitations of reflexivity.<sup>69</sup>

Within Taylor's discussion of the advantages of intimacy she notes that her observation of a friend-informant's changing self-perceptions was "one of the greatest privileges and luxuries of being an intimate insider researcher. Moreover, it has also been a great privilege of friendship, in that my friend-informants have not objected to my writing

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<sup>65</sup> Taylor 2011: 5.

<sup>66</sup> Taylor 2011: 6. See also Bennett, Andy (2002) Researching Youth Culture and Popular Music: A Methodological Critique, *British Journal of Sociology* 53.2: 451-466; Bennett, Andy (2003) The Use of Insider Knowledge in Ethnographic Research on Contemporary Youth Music Scenes, in A Bennett, M Cieslik and S Miles (eds), *Researching Youth*, London: Palgrave: 186-200; Hodkinson, P (2005) "Insider Research" in the Study of Youth Cultures, *Journal of Youth Studies* 8.2: 131-149; Sprague, J (2005) *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*, Walnut Cree, CA: Altamira Press; and Wolcott, H (1999) *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing*, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

<sup>67</sup> Taylor 2011: 6.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor 2011: 8.

<sup>69</sup> Taylor 2011: 9. See also Adkins, L (2002) Reflexivity and the Politics of Qualitative Research, in T May (ed) *Qualitative Research in Action*, London: Sage: 332-348; Coffey, A (2002) *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representative of Identity*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Ellis, Carolyn and Bochner, A P (2006) Analysing Analytic Autoethnography, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35.4: 429-449.

about this”.<sup>70</sup> The use of language here is revealing. The careful construction of words to express appreciation for generosity in my relationships, whether friend-informant or informant-friend, is also one about which I am mindful. This is not unproblematic. The balancing act of “academic credibility and friend/community accountability”<sup>71</sup> is constant: omission is political but propriety necessary as “intimacy works both ways”.<sup>72</sup> My experience has suggested that although one is mindful of the choices made within this dilemma, the outcome of those choices is nevertheless unpredictable.

At the same time, when the field is forever evolving it is more complex, especially as mutual vulnerability, intersubjective relations and even power-dynamics are recognised between the “intimate insiders” and, similarly, the informant-friends and the researcher. When it becomes inherently apparent that the “fragmentations of self ...are multiple and the ethical negotiations complex”<sup>73</sup> one simply has to work consciously within that intricacy. Stock and Chiener recognise that “the researched form expectations of us as researchers [...] and can be particularly pointed in home fieldwork situations, for fieldworker and ‘fieldworked’ alike”.<sup>74</sup> They further recognise that when doing fieldwork at home “the intimacy... means that it may be particularly difficult to complete the study and leave a field which has become so integral”<sup>75</sup> to one’s life. But the task of distancing oneself intellectually, emotionally, even physically is absolutely necessary though challenging, argues Taylor, in order to bring “clarity to the research endeavour”.<sup>76</sup> Satya Mohanty would suggest that within “the tangled and oblique forms in which our own ethical concerns take shape, our scruples develop”.<sup>77</sup> Further, our methodological and moral scruples “refer beyond ourselves, beyond our immediate relationships, to the social world; in fact, those scruples are part of its fabric, its essential furniture”.<sup>78</sup> In the awareness of this “effective (moral) agency”<sup>79</sup> comes the

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<sup>70</sup> Taylor 2011: 12.

<sup>71</sup> Taylor 2011: 14.

<sup>72</sup> Taylor 2011: 15.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor 2011: 19.

<sup>74</sup> Stock and Chiener 2008: 122-123.

<sup>75</sup> Stock and Chiener 2008: 116.

<sup>76</sup> Labaree, R V (2002) The Risk of “Going Observational”: Negotiating the Hidden Dilemmas of being an Insider Participant Observer, *Qualitative Research* 2.1: 97-122, cited in Taylor 2011: 16.

<sup>77</sup> Mohanty, Satya P (1995) Epilogue. Colonial Legacies, Multicultural Futures: Relativism, Objectivity, and the Challenge of Otherness, *PMLA* 110.1: 109.

<sup>78</sup> Mohanty 1995: 115.

belief that other people and other cultures need to be approached with the presumption of equal worth. Beyond this starting point, Mohanty argues, lies the difficult but necessary job of specifying commonalities and articulating disagreements and of learning from one another.<sup>80</sup> These notions are teased out in the following discussions surrounding my return to Melbourne as a field site and both my introduction to *Madjitil Moorna* and the post conference dialogues that ensued after the panel presentation in Perth.

### ***Returning to Melbourne***

I first ventured into the Victorian world of a cappella music and community choirs for field research in 1995.<sup>81</sup> Familiarity suggested an easy re-entry in 2009, when The Boîte was holding its annual Melbourne Millennium Chorus concert series.<sup>82</sup> The Boîte, Community Music Victoria,<sup>83</sup> and the Brunswick Women's Choir had been instrumental contributors to my Masters project. All three organisations continue to play an important role in community music making in Victoria. They contribute to a state and national network of community music activism that includes numerous other organisations and individuals. I knew the people within these organisations. They were friends and acquaintances, familiar names and faces from a decade or more ago. As I would soon learn, however, familiarity does not necessarily provide a pathway to immediate access into the projects of others.

The Brunswick Women's Choir (BWC) from Melbourne had great potential to be included in my doctoral research project. It has been a highly successful choir since its beginnings.<sup>84</sup> Starting as an informal community choir in 1991 it sought to bring together women from the diverse cultures of multicultural Brunswick. It is proud of its achievements and the way it models a community choir. It has a sense of working both inwardly and outwardly; enacting community both within and beyond. The BWC has been proactive in documenting its sociomusical journey with both an oral history CD

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<sup>79</sup> Mohanty 1995: 116.

<sup>80</sup> Mohanty 1995: 116.

<sup>81</sup> This field research was undertaken for my MA thesis. See Rickwood 1997.

<sup>82</sup> This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>83</sup> See the earlier reference to CMV's musical activism in Chapter 2.

<sup>84</sup> See Appendix 2 for details of the choir.

entitled *Ten years on ... a history of the Brunswick Women's Choir* produced in 2001 and a book entitled *Seeking Harmony: Stories from the Brunswick Women's Choir*<sup>85</sup> published in 2006. By 2009 they had recorded three CDs, had received numerous awards, and were well known throughout Victoria and beyond. Tours of New Zealand and regional Victoria no doubt fostered a desire to tour further within Australia, to sing with 'other selves' previously unknown. The Beyond the Sunset Tour had been organised to start in late August 2009. The choir would tour from Adelaide to Darwin, ending with a visit to the Tiwi Islands. It would take them through a number of remote towns in South Australia and the Northern Territory and included making connections with Indigenous communities and community choirs.

Aboriginal singer-songwriter, musician and actor Lou Bennett had collaborated with the BWC in 2008. It was that particular collaboration that re-ignited my academic interest in the BWC, especially because of a comment made by Bennett: "It's through projects such as writing songs with these women, that we can truly see reconciliation in action".<sup>86</sup> The collaboration explored the concept of being a woman and the lullaby '*Manubak Garra*' emerged as representative of the shared role of nurturer across cultures through lullabies and motherhood. Other gendered connections were made too, but '*Manubak Garra*' has become the most robust song to result from the collaboration.<sup>87</sup> That the BWC planned to include '*Manubak Garra*' in their *Beyond the Sunset Tour* program took the song further afield. In fact the Beyond the Sunset Tour had been inspired by their collaboration with Bennett.

I had spent three months 'living' with the BWC in 1995 during previous field research and then performed with them at the National Folk Festival in 1996.<sup>88</sup> Choir members

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<sup>85</sup> Milne, Catriona, Bishop, Margaret, McKinnon, Diz, McMillan, Frances, Sharkey, Bec and Tehan, Sophie (2006) *Seeking Harmony*, Brunswick: Brunswick Women's Choir. Note that the CD *Ten years on* accompanies the 2006 publication.

<sup>86</sup> Lou Bennett, 2009, Personal comment, cited in a Top End Arts promotion: [http://www.topendarts.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_events&task=view\\_detail&agid=1522&Itemid=52](http://www.topendarts.com.au/index.php?option=com_events&task=view_detail&agid=1522&Itemid=52), accessed 12 September 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Since that time the BWC has created an online singing workshop, supported by a grant from VicHealth. In the video Lou Bennett joins the BWC members in the teaching of *Manubak Garra*, including giving the context of its creation and teaching the *Yorta Yorta* words and their meaning.

<sup>88</sup> I thoroughly enjoyed my membership of the choir and contributed in various ways during my period of field research and beyond. More importantly, the choir helped to develop my musical and performing skills and, through the field research I got to know each of the members

became friends and some I would meet annually at the National Folk Festival. Our lives had diverged since the mid-1990s but there remained a sense of connection. The Beyond the Sunset Tour touched upon my continuing interest in their musical pursuits, my current research interest in engagements of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community singers, and included a workshop and performance with another choir participating in my project, *Asante Sana*, based in Alice Springs.<sup>89</sup>

The excitement of discovering their tour quickly dissolved when they rejected my request to join them. There were good reasons. The Beyond the Sunset Tour project had been in development for over two years and delicate negotiations had been made both within and beyond the choir. Cathy Nixon, the Musical Director, had taken my request to the choir for consideration, saying that “all research that we can be involved in that furthers the cause of community choirs/cultural exchange etc, is a good thing. We can choose to put some parameters around it so it works for all concerned, if we feel that we want to do that”.<sup>90</sup> She added in a later email that I would need to do some work to gain the trust of the choir, even if simply attending the workshops and performances in Alice Springs and beyond. She suggested I communicate more directly to the whole choir about my intentions. I did so, but it was clear that my involvement was not desired. My presence would be a disruption to the carefully sculptured relationships and the long term logistical development, as well as a potential challenge, as these two responses to my request clearly indicate:

- So far we have put everything into organising this trip with those involved[...]and we would possibly have to “look after” Julie more than anyone else. (We have not prepared to play a host role to a visitor)[...] Further I feel that we don’t need to be “researched/observed” while we are *away without a lot of prior notice* and without that person having *seen* and *been aware* of the complex 2 years and the mountains of work, sensitivity and careful consideration it has taken to organise[...]Also we are going to do our own research together and documentation.

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somewhat better than they knew each other. It was inevitable that I made friends. For more detail see Rickwood 1997.

<sup>89</sup> *Asante Sana* will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>90</sup> Nixon, Cathy (2009) personal communication (Email 16/12/09).

- Personally, I don't want the tour to become a case study to be observed externally – I want it to be whatever it is, but primarily *ours*[...]I do think we need to keep a bit of an invisible circle around ourselves. So many processes and discussions have taken place to ensure we are all fundamentally in sympathy with each other.<sup>91</sup>

I appreciated their assertiveness. It was a clear indication of some of the choir members' needs to protect the delicate cross-cultural project in which they had devoted significant time and energy. The high regard for, and value of, their own work demanded respect. There was, however, another layer to their cool reception of my request. Their experience of my previous research project had not, from their perspective, been ideal. While the field research had been one of ease, some comments in my work had not matched their self-identification. My experience was not unique amongst ethnographers, some of whom have come to recognise that:

[...]the emotive and intellectual bonds facilitating rapport, trust, and identification have collapsed as ethnographers have increasingly studied up, returned home, and otherwise twisted the gaze [and when they have re-inserted themselves] they have disrupted the complacency of these bonds and the critical visions flowing from conventional understandings of ethnographic inquiry.<sup>92</sup>

Unable to be either participant or observer in the Beyond the Sunset Tour I was given access to its challenges and rewards through their website and email conversations with Cathy Nixon. Overall, it was another valuable lesson for me as an ethnographer. The potential of field research with the BWC and my eagerness for re-engagement with the choir highlighted a level of impatience, naivety and self-interest that blurred boundaries of, and expected benefits to, informant/friend or friend/informant. That experience revealed a possible misreading of the breakdown of rapport, trust, empathy, and mutual political interests that had resulted from my earlier ethnographic project. I had thought, through my extended interactions with many members of the choir over the years, we had moved beyond their disillusionment with my MA thesis and my disappointment with their response to a minor component of it. As Springwood and King summarise,

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<sup>91</sup> Nixon 2009, emphases in original.

<sup>92</sup> Springwood, Charles Frueling and King, Richard C (2001) Unsettling Engagements: On the Ends of Rapport in Critical Ethnography, *Qualitative Inquiry* 7: 404.

however, “ethnographers commonly complicate the very integrity of ‘rapport’”<sup>93</sup> simply by ignoring “the ramifications of claiming, in *hermeneutic* terms, to see things others miss, which represents a powerful knowledge claim in any case”.<sup>94</sup> With my request this time, members of the BWC were alert and very conscious agents, vocalising their own control of, power over, and resistance to the potential research encounter.

### ***Permission to Research: The Perth Experience 2009***

The element of trust and the decision making processes of *Madjitol Moorna* were important aspects to my being able to undertake research with them. Having established email communication with Jo Randell at the beginning of my project, I understood it would be important to meet with the choir in order for them to welcome my participation in, and observation of, their sociomusical project. An opportunity for preliminary field research in October 2009 meant that I could join the choir for a rehearsal, an informal performance, and also witness a presentation by some of its members at the Injury Control Council of Western Australia (ICWA) symposium. This visit provided a program of introduction and dialogue. Not unexpectedly, the Indigenous leaders were reluctant to the intrusion of research. One of its musical directors, George Walley, was a researcher and teacher in the tertiary sector, and I assumed he was wary about the potential challenges and impact of research. One of the choir’s members, Moira Lane, commented later, during a conversation in Kununurra in 2010, that “Aborigines are tired of people researching them”.<sup>95</sup> Later that same year the choir’s secretary, Pauline Vigus, suggested that Walley had been concerned “there’d be a host of researchers [following you] and we’re not about being researched”.<sup>96</sup>

Randell confirmed after the rehearsal I attended in October 2009 that it had been George Walley, one of the musical directors who had been unable to attend, who was most reticent about my presence. He was unsure of his capacity during the early stages of his co-directorship and the fragility of the choir generally. Randell values the choir’s uniqueness because of the insistence on Indigenous musical leadership and its

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<sup>93</sup> Springwood and King 2001: 405.

<sup>94</sup> Springwood and King 2001: 413.

<sup>95</sup> Lane, Moira (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 1/05/10).

<sup>96</sup> Vigus, Pauline (2010a) Personal conversation (Interview 17/05/10).

repertoire of Aboriginal songs. There was a strong pull on Randell's behalf to have my academic interest. The performance later in the week at Midland railway station for Mental Health Week would provide the opportunity to meet Walley. After the choir had performed its first bracket for the audience of commuters, it fell into a casual improvisational session. We all sang and chatted together. I would later be given the green light to join them. Well before the end of the period of concentrated field research in 2010, Walley, an affable singer-songwriter, and I became amicable companions.

### ***Returning to Perth***

The Perth based conference in 2011 had meant that I was able to return to spend time with members and a former member of the community choir, *Madjital Moorna*, with whom I had last spent time in 2010.<sup>97</sup> I stayed in their homes, as their guest, visited other homes, sharing meals and conversations that often focused on the journey of the choir since I had last been among them and the preparations for the conference. There was an ongoing sharing of regard, affection and ideas between us which contributed to the shaping and extension of the choir's project and our relationships. The conference session was an important occasion in my relations with Kerry Fletcher and, more importantly, *Madjital Moorna*. It gave me the first opportunity to invite them into an academic forum. Some choir members had previously read my draft papers for conferences and articles, but this was the first time so many had heard my "academic" understandings of their choir project. They had witnessed me singing amongst them and even occasionally my dance practice over the three months of continuous field research in 2010. We had rehearsed together, performed together, worked together; we had conversations over drinks and on long bus journeys, shared rooms in motels, partied (which invariably led to spontaneous singalongs) and on some of those occasions they were aware of my recorder, my camera, and my furtive note taking, but they had no idea what I would do with all that. At that time I only had vague musings and a trust in my professional training and past experience. I would only know what I knew after I made sense of the experiential, the intersubjective products of social and musical interactions, after I had time to reflect, to ponder, and to write.

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<sup>97</sup> This fieldwork is discussed in depth in Chapter 5.



Members of *Madjitil Moorna* had spoken about the choir's projects in other venues - in government, non-government and corporate meetings and conferences and at their own fundraising ventures. But this collaboration was inherently different. Together with Katelyn Barney, Kerry Fletcher and myself, the choir members were airing details to a story that had once been silenced, one that still remains of some discomfort within mainstream society, but one to which we were all committed – through music. Together, we examined a journey of healing through song, integrated and strengthened by the differences in text and style of each contribution. Some of the academic audience later commented that it had been a privilege to have the singers open up and share their personal stories. There was “a kind of ‘felt’ collective reconciliation”<sup>98</sup> in that lecture theatre. For all involved in that conference roundtable, there was the “struggle[s] against cultural distance and historical alienation”.<sup>99</sup> We each brought our own

interpretative symbols and symbolic behaviour in terms of the world or worlds [we] potentially reference[d], an understanding that is finite, changeable, multidimensional, forced to compete with other interpretations and limited by the expandable horizons of the individual.<sup>100</sup>

Yet, in the heightened state of musical synthesis at the closure of the session, the healing and social nature of reconciliation was given dominance; the personal and emotional over the political and academic, the connections made within this lived experience over individual histories. Fletcher, Randell, Morrison, Mourach and the other members of *Madjitil Moorna* not only gave the ‘gift’ of each of their moving contributions to the session, but that panel session also reinforced the notion that it is the centrality of relationships and connectedness in the ethnographic journey that engenders the most powerful experiences. I also benefitted from sharing this ethnographic episode with other ethnomusicologists.

The communications following the conference revealed the integration of my research with my lived experience of, and the relationships with the choir, which are vital to the central argument of this chapter. On the Monday after the conference I sent an email

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<sup>98</sup> Wilson, Oli (2011) Personal comment (2/12/11).

<sup>99</sup> Ricoeur, Paul (1981b) *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B Thompson (Eds and Trans), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, cited in Rice 2008: 57.

<sup>100</sup> Rice 2008: 57.

to Fletcher, Jo Randell, Della Rae Morrison and “Aunty” Karl Mourach thanking them again for their contributions to the roundtable panel. An extract reads:

[...] Thank you so much for being part of a powerfully moving session - such tangible proof of the whole theme of the conference: the power of music. I have received such wonderful comments from my colleagues who were present. I have such appreciation for you being so central to that session and especially the precious gifts that you gave.

Fletcher, Randell and Mourach responded immediately to my email. The responses were equally though variously gracious and reflected difference in personal styles and perspectives. I received these emails during the course of a day spent writing field notes on the conference session, following Barz’s advice to allow time for “reflection and change to assume greater roles in the mediation of knowing”.<sup>101</sup> Randell’s email, which had been received early in the day, became part of those field notes. The effect of the conference on her understanding of the uniqueness of the ‘Sorry Song’ within *Madjitil Moorna*’s repertoire was powerful. It prompted her to consider giving it more prominence in the future as it had been absent from many recent performances. I explained that was not my intention. I replied that the song was relevant to the conference theme and that Barney and I had utilised the circumstances to embed the practice of cross-cultural music-making within the panel session; to make a point that it was beyond mere theory. After the initial emails there was a flurry of conversation between us. Those conversations uncovered deeper layers to the culture of the choir, to the negotiation of power and the setting of agendas within it, and to my roles as researcher and friend.

The experience of that conference scenario showed distinctly how insights can emerge in the mutual dialogue between the researcher and the researched. Like the stories told by Fletcher, Morrison, Randell, Mourach and other members of *Madjitil Moorna* at the conference in Perth, this thesis is a narrative; one made more complex by the interweaving of theoretical and aesthetic themes and analyses<sup>102</sup>. However, in the context of that academic forum, was their story telling only different by degrees to an ethnography that requires “all the care, self-confrontational honesty, and detail that the

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<sup>101</sup> Barz 2008: 215.

<sup>102</sup> Kisliuk 2008: 193.

subject matter – people and their expressive lives – demands”?<sup>103</sup> Like their contributions, mine too will inevitably be partial and particularised by “time, place, personality and social circumstance”.<sup>104</sup> Importantly, the communications which immediately followed the conference session became pivotal, firmly embedding my experience of the temporal arcs between experience and interpretation, between experience and understanding, between experience and explanation, between experience and knowing.<sup>105</sup> That conference session shifted yet again the way I viewed and responded to my previous field research experiences with these singers, musical director, choir coordinator and composer, and also shifted perspectives within the choir. It provided a surprising lens to the experience of ethnography.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

The moments of insight that emerged from the privileged position of researcher and friend with diverse music-makers are what made this ethnographic journey so exciting. Yet, it is a journey not for the faint-hearted, as negotiations with the Brunswick Women’s Choir and *Madjital Moorna* indicate. Nettl remarks that “getting started in the field is actually a time of stress, the moment of entry sometimes one of great tension, self-searching, requiring courage, patience, wit”.<sup>106</sup> Even as an ‘insider’, even with the advantages of contemporary telecommunications and the ability to stay connected with family and friends who may be vast distances away, it can still be challenging. I have willingly experienced the journey a number of times and seemingly repeated the various moments of fear and anxiety, confidence and direction, confusion and isolation, clarity and genuine friendship, frustration and sadness, amazement and joy. There were times when I felt the divide and friction between friend and researcher. There were stretches of feeling overwhelmed and underskilled, others feeling bored or trapped. I periodically questioned why I wanted to investigate something that had once been so central to my being – that of singing with others. Inevitably, I have been academically and personally enriched by the research project. I have faced many “a fascinating and worthwhile

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<sup>103</sup> Kisliuk 2008: 193.

<sup>104</sup> Kisliuk 2009: 193.

<sup>105</sup> Barz 2008: 207.

<sup>106</sup> Nettl 1993: 249.

challenge”<sup>107</sup> to find contentment in the research journey, an acceptance of the responsibility of my privileged and contextualised perspective, and a resolve to respond to the diverse critiques of my analysis.

This research project allowed me to face my own lack of knowledge in numerous ways. My naïve understandings of Australian colonial history and its legacy were revealed but I was taught music and history and more by my informant-friends/friend-informants. Through my field research I came to appreciate too the embodied human being and the embedded human spirit within the many and varied musical collaborations within our communities. In this particular environment, it was one that embraced our history, told the contested stories, and journeyed toward a shared a view of a horizon beyond symbolic reconciliation. Likewise, my research project enabled me to more greatly engage with numerous researchers and writers to formulate its theoretical and methodological scaffold. Engagement with the work of music and other researchers in a variety of disciplines has enabled me to formulate a unique interdisciplinary approach to the interrogation of the convergence of the reconciliation and community music movements. The challenge is to ensure that the knowledge that has emerged from all the encounters and dialogues, whether in the field or in academic fora, is circulated appropriately, ensuring review and feedback. As Huxley Medallist Johannes Fabian has recently argued, circulation should be the “organising trope” of ethnographic disciplines.<sup>108</sup>

Well aware that I could be criticised for not adequately distancing myself from the research, I want to conclude with a return to the ‘Sorry Song’, the focus of the conference roundtable and the ethnographic episode that sparked the opening to this thesis. It is one of those songs that reflects current theoretical ideas about the power of music, especially because it is a song that, in this context had the potential to move the singers beyond a simple belief in an understanding of a situation to an emotionally-grounded knowledge. The performance by *Madjtil Moorna* of the ‘Sorry Song’ manifested reconciliation through the collaborative presentation of a shared sense of

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<sup>107</sup> Stock and Cheiner 2008: 123.

<sup>108</sup> Fabian, Johannes (2011) Cultural Anthropology and the Question of Knowledge, *The Huxley Memorial Lecture*. <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2011/02/johannes-fabian-cultural-anthropology-and-the-question-of-knowledge/>: accessed 9 February 2012.

history and the future. Within the specific milieu of that one song the choir members demonstrated social and intellectual flexibility<sup>109</sup> by unsettling and renegotiating Australia's postcolonial history and relations to each other. At the same time, *Madjtil Moorna* - and the other case studies of this project - highlight that merging "notions of cultural and racial difference with notions of interculturally emerging social practice and identities... is a paradox at the heart of the politicised landscape of ... reconciliation"<sup>110</sup> but that is exactly what those musical interactions needed to do. This is what I discuss in the following chapters.

In this thesis I have endeavoured to capture the "aliveness"<sup>111</sup> of community music-making from not only these particular singers and composers but the other singers and singing leaders from Australia and elsewhere with whom I deepened or developed friendships during the course of my research. Part of that "aliveness" requires my distinctive voice and that is why this chapter is essential. It is the clearly articulated autoethnographic contribution that declares my position within the polyphony of voices. Like some choral compositions my voice will undoubtedly demand much of the melodic line, taking a leading role, but others will provide harmonic and discordant support. Overall, even though I am the composer of this body of work, I hope that other voices are not diminished by my dominance and that its rhythms and rests, melody and stresses, capture the "we" that has made it possible.

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<sup>109</sup> Cross, Ian (2005-6) Music and Social Being, *Musicology Australia* 28: 124.

<sup>110</sup> Ottosson, Åse (2010) Aboriginal Music and Passion: Interculturality and Difference in Australian Desert Towns. *Ethnos* 75.3: 277.

<sup>111</sup> Kisliuk 2008: 204.



## Chapter 2

### The a cappella scene and the community music movement: From vibrant and vigorous to inclusive and in health.

I'm a woman who speaks in a voice, and I must be heard;  
At times I can be quite difficult I'll bow to no man's word.  
We who believe in freedom cannot rest,  
We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.  
**'Ella's Song', Bernice Johnson Reagon**

Music builds a bridge it can tear down a wall.  
Music is a language that can speak to one and all!  
This is why we sing, why we lift our voice,  
Why we stand as one in harmony.  
This is why we sing, why we lift our voice,  
Take my hand and sing with me.  
**'Why We Sing', Greg Gilpin**

*Hundreds of 'hippies' plait the unicorn's mane of harmony  
Away from the 'real' world of anger and violence  
Rainbows, double, triple, land in our field and a lunar bow glows on a full moon eve  
Mornings are blessed with chant and dance, yoga and chi kung  
On riverbanks, naked bodies bathe in the summer sun, and at  
Night time song and laughter fill the chilled air,  
layers of voices blending around warm hearths of the heart  
Yearning for this to be the way of all days, not just a snatch of time away from the world beyond  
Harmony in Dorset, Julie Rickwood 2011 ©*

#### **Preamble**

Soon after Independents Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott announced their alliance in 2010 with the Labor Party to form Australia's first minority federal government, Christopher Pyne, the Opposition's Manager of Business, broke the Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's pledge to a "kinder, gentler polity" with this comment: "This will not be a Parliament where all of its history is turned on its head and we all sit around smoking a peace pipe singing 'Kumbaya'".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Osborne, Paul (2010) Cracks appear in Labor deal says Opposition frontbencher Christopher Pyne, *The Australian*, September 8, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/breaking-news/cracks-appear-in-labor-deal-says-opposition-frontbencher-christopher-pyne/story-fn3dxity-1225915703680>, accessed 12 November 2010. 'Kumbaya' is translated as 'Come by Here'.

Just prior to Pyne's comments, I joined about ninety people at the Ross River Resort, approximately 80 kilometres east of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory (NT), to sing in harmony. We had gathered for a workshop that brought Aboriginal and non-Indigenous singers together to share music and stories over three days. The Big Sing in the Desert was reputed to be the first of its kind. One of the songs from that weekend was indeed '*Kumbaya*', but with a difference. This African-American spiritual from the 1930s, which enjoyed newfound popularity during the folk revival of the 1960s, has been sung in numerous circumstances ever since. Gathered around a campfire one night at The Big Sing in the Desert, the predominantly English, *Pitjantjatjara* and *Arrernte*<sup>2</sup> speaking Australians sang '*Ikaarta Pitjai*'.<sup>3</sup>

Years earlier, on a Saturday morning in July 1989, some twenty women clustered on a sunny verandah at the Gorman House markets in Canberra singing in harmony; songs delivered with joy and passion. A musical director led their performance but they sang without accompaniment. Dressed in black clothes, each woman wore a colourful scarf in a medley of tying techniques that reflected individual flair. A variety of songs was performed, including a song of liberation and a feminist anthem. 'Ella's Song' (above) entered its repertoire some little while later. The repertoire had a very definite political agenda – one based on feminism and social justice - so '*Kumbaya*' was highly unlikely in this particular expression of community music making. At the end of the performance a spokeswoman announced they were the Cyrenes of Asherah, a choir open to any woman who wanted to sing. I joined shortly after and was an active member for most of the next two decades. With that first deliberate step I encountered the beginnings of unaccompanied harmony singing as an identifiable popular music scene<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Pitjantjatjara* and *Arrernte* are Central Australian Aboriginal languages. There is greater discussion of this regional music making in Chapter 6 and the Coda.

<sup>3</sup> '*Kumbaya*' in *Arrernte*, translated by L Mocketarinja.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to clarify terminology. In previous research I referred to the popular take up of unaccompanied harmony singing as the "a cappella scene". Although Downie and Smith used the term "movement" I felt that Straw's understandings of a music scene better described the articulated sense of purpose, the building of alliances, and the drawing of music boundaries that were not defined simply by genre. Any musical genre could enter the scene, what was important to its performance style. While the influence of the a cappella scene can still be traced in the community music movement, in effect a continuum, I have decided to make the distinction to allow for greater clarity in the discussions that follow. See Rickwood, Julie (1997) *Liberating*



Pyne is well known for his cutting political commentary (and his discomfort with physical expressions of bonding). His sarcastic reference to the singing of 'Kumbaya' suggests he might adopt a rather cynical view regarding the advocacy of community choirs to effect social change. Pyne's parliamentary rhetoric sits neatly with his oppositional positioning so he might therefore be tempted to question government investment in such a community music phenomenon. This chapter obliquely addresses government and institutional investment in community music making by undertaking an exploration of the growth in community choirs.

Together with the other musical interactions discussed in following chapters, The Big Sing in the Desert highlights the specificity of the connections, relations, actions, and musical choices that frame and enable meaningful community music making. Each of the ethnographic chapters in this thesis examines different moments that "generate, shape, and sustain new collectivities"<sup>5</sup> of community singers. Like The Big Sing in the Desert, the various other community interactions analysed in this thesis have also been fashioned and sustained by broader social contexts that facilitated their genesis and which are explored here and in later chapters.<sup>6</sup> After a brief examination of community music as a discipline, the rest of the chapter will describe the landscape of community music making, examining some of the cultural, social, political and economic formations that have shaped community choirs since the emergence of the a cappella scene in the 1980s.

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*Voices: Towards an ethnography of women's community a cappella choirs in Australia*, MA thesis, Canberra: Australian National University; Rickwood, Julie (1998) Embodied Acappella: The experience of singing a displaced eclectic repertoire, *Perfect Beat*, 3: 68-84; Downie Ellaine (1995) Why acappella? Why women? Why now? *Musicological Society of Australia Conference*, 6 December Melbourne: Monash University; Downie, Ellaine (1996) *Why a cappella? Why Women? Why Now?: The a cappella movement and popular music in Australia from 1987-1995*, MA thesis, Melbourne: Monash University; Smith, Graeme (2003) Folk music revival, in John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell (eds), *Currency companion to music and dance in Australia*. Sydney: Currency House: 286-289; Smith, Graeme (2005) *Singing Australia: A History of Folk and Country Music*, North Melbourne: Pluto Press Australia; Smith, Graeme (2008) Folk Music: Movements, scenes and styles, in Shane Homan and Tony Mitchell (eds), *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now*, Hobart: ACYS: 151-166; Straw, Will (1991) Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music, *Cultural Studies* 5: 368-388.

<sup>5</sup> Shelemay, Kay Kaufman (2011) Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64.2: 349-390.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

## **Community Music**

The notion of community music has attracted academic attention because of its diversity, plurality and difficulty to define. Community music practitioner and scholar Lee Higgins noted that the paramount concern at an international seminar to seek a definition of community music frustrated and disrupted the progress of community music. Higgins therefore set about undertaking research in order to provide a theoretical framework for community music practice.<sup>7</sup> Kari Veblen closely examined the concept of 'community music'.<sup>8</sup> She emphasised the inherent diversity of community music programs, their situated natures, and the fluidity of this global phenomenon. In an overview of community music in Australia, Huib Schippers identified a number of general tendencies, noting that the "diversity is not necessarily a sign of weakness or lack of focus, but may well reflect the vibrancy and flexibility of the phenomenon".<sup>9</sup> More recently, Steve Dillon, Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Samuel Leong reminded community music scholars that "notions of what community music is and its social and educational functions are always fluid and varied depending on where you are in the world".<sup>10</sup> This latest publication on community music "'threads' the many ways of community music into a tapestry of voices – each singing a celebratory song of people, participants, places, equality of opportunity, and diversity".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Higgins, Lee David (2006) *Boundary Walkers: Contexts and Concepts of Community Music*, PhD Thesis, Limerick: University of Limerick. This thesis is significantly designed to provide community music practitioners – the musicians who facilitate community music – a theoretical understanding of their discipline. He declares theory as community music's inadequate dimension and draws on philosophy, ethnography and history to generate a theory that threads together the traits of practice: identity, context, community, participation and pedagogy. While recognising the value of this project it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in a dialogue with much of its content.

<sup>8</sup> Veblen, Kari K (2007) *The Ways of Community Music*, *International Journal of Community Music* 1.1: 5-24.

<sup>9</sup> Schippers, Huib (2008) *Briefing Paper: Communities, Contexts and Constructs*, Australian Musical Futures: Towards 2020, Music Council of Australia.  
[http://www.mca.org.au/web/index2.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=279&po](http://www.mca.org.au/web/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=279&po), accessed 30 April 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Dillon, Steve, Bartleet, Brydie-Leigh, and Leong, Samuel (2012) Editorial, *International Journal of Community Music* 5.1: 3.

<sup>11</sup> Higgins, Lee (2013) Foreword, in Kari K Veblen, Stephen J Messenger, Marissa Silverman, and David J Elliott (eds), *Community Music Today*, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Education: viii. It should be noted that this edited publication explores community music from a global context,

While recognising the thousands of musical styles the notion of community music embraced, Veblen also noted that the very concept of 'community' was "both an ideal and a reality".<sup>12</sup> Investigating the proliferation of theories of community Veblen argued that those working in the community music field would need to tackle the diverse meanings concerning community, such as "geographically situated, culturally based, artistically concerned, re-created, virtual, imagined, or otherwise".<sup>13</sup> These ideas were reinforced by Dillon et al who noted that "the concept of community is always contextual, contingent and contested".<sup>14</sup>

James Arvanitakis makes a strong case against the organic emergence of a community, arguing that "an authentic community is composed of different individuals who might not understand each other's subjectivity but rather possess *reciprocal desires* to establish and maintain community".<sup>15</sup> Adopting Lietaer's position that proximity, common language, religion, culture or even blood are secondary factors to the highly dynamic phenomenon of community, Arvanitakis suggests that community should be viewed through "the looking glass of reciprocity and desire".<sup>16</sup> Like others, he notes that community can be built across time and space, but, importantly that communities are not only offers of "friendship [,] but also the desire to share hope, trust and a sense of safety";<sup>17</sup> one that is reciprocated.

Recognising its ready use in the everyday Howard Morphy suggests that a "term that is used so often as community and that indeed is thought by its users to have a degree of moral force that implies commitment is likely to signify something important to human society".<sup>18</sup> He therefore considered the notion of 'community' from two perspectives: of place and of being. Seeking to find a distinction in its use for the sake of clarity, he

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highlighting the ways it is interpreted in different places. Much of the material draws on previous publications, a number of which are referenced in this and other chapters.

<sup>12</sup> Veblen 2007: 8.

<sup>13</sup> Veblen 2007: 8.

<sup>14</sup> Dillon et al 2012:3.

<sup>15</sup> Arvanitakis, James (2008) Staging Maralinga and desiring community: (Or why there is no such thing as a 'natural' community), *Community Develop Journal* 44.4: 448-459. In some ways, this is similar to Ian Cross' notion of "shared intentionality" which is discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>16</sup> Arvanitakis 2008: 457.

<sup>17</sup> Arvanitakis 2008: 453.

<sup>18</sup> Morphy, Howard (2009) Acting in a community: Art and social cohesion in Indigenous Australia, *Humanities Research Journal* xv.2: 115-131.

proposes that one form of community refers “to a group of people who interact, who occupy the same space or are a part of a collective entity: the community of people who live in a particular suburb”.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it can also refer “to a sense of shared identity that people have – for example, by having certain interests in common or sharing a similar sense of being in the world: the artistic community”.<sup>20</sup> While ambiguity is innate in complex societies, he argues, both senses of community are likely to have a moral dimension. The social cohesion of a community, nonetheless, “requires a complex balancing act between moral forces that encourage people to act together and interests that separate people from one another”; and, at the national level, “is a more abstract concept since it must link groups and individuals with vastly different and often opposed interests”.<sup>21</sup>

Community music operates across and within these dimensions of action or abstract ideas of community depending on whether it is shared music-making that emerges from within a community, or is the vehicle used for an interventionist project in order to generate a sense of community. There can be notable and important differences between musical expressions that are symbolic choral events of imaginative collective identity and the deeper relationships that can be engendered by the sociomusical environment of a choir.

Numerous scholars working in community music fields have therefore attempted to grapple with the notion of ‘community’ or ‘musical communities’. Kay Kaufman Shelemay’s significant contribution to these concerns provides a thorough review of the literature in an attempt to shift the focus in musical scholarship toward music’s role in community formation, rather than limiting it to expression or symbol of a given social grouping.<sup>22</sup> She touches on the work of a range of scholars<sup>23</sup> to survey numerous

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<sup>19</sup> Morphy 2009: 115.

<sup>20</sup> Morphy 2009: 115.

<sup>21</sup> Morphy 2009: 116.

<sup>22</sup> Shelemay 2011: 350. See also Rickwood 1997.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Turino, Thomas (2008) *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press; Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. London: Verso, 1991; Hebdige, Dick (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Methuen; Hebdige, Dick (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London: Methuen; Finnegan,

approaches to examine the notion of community and its alternatives. Ultimately, Shelemay proposed the translational terms of descent, dissent and affinity. This approach serves well as an analytical tool, she argues, expanding the terminological domain of 'community'. She suggests that the use of this "continuum of communities has the additional potential for tracking changes in scale or size over the course of time"<sup>24</sup> and across cultural boundaries. Crosscutting factors are identified such as agency, technology, and "the role of music as a potential force for cohesion and as a source of cultural ferment".<sup>25</sup> She notes that musical communities retain the traces of dual musical and social processes that provide music scholars with the ability to "sketch with greater clarity the ways in which these collectivities arise, as well as the varying manners in which they seek to affirm common causes or to articulate deeply felt differences".<sup>26</sup> In conclusion, she warns against totally discarding the notion of community and advocates rather for a greater understanding of why the notion "unsettles" in order not to forfeit scholarship's future engagement.<sup>27</sup>

Others have variously wrestled with the definition, noting that definitions "can be confining and limiting; they can also provide clarity and a universal meaning".<sup>28</sup> Drawing on Bell's exposition of practice and practice theory, Helen Phelan situates the *activity* of music-making at the heart of the enterprise of community music, "taking place primarily through *embodied behavior*, not conceptualized thought".<sup>29</sup> She argues that this expressive form can simply be a matter of self-identification, but suggests that it has the potential to influence and contest socio-cultural realities. Phelan claims that the ability to produce a sense of identity resides both in community music's "intrinsic capability for strategic behavior as well as its situational ability to generate meaning within a social/cultural/political context".<sup>30</sup> I take up these ideas of action or embodied behavior

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Ruth (1989) *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Straw 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Shelemay 2011: 376.

<sup>25</sup> Shelemay 2011: 378.

<sup>26</sup> Shelemay 2011: 379.

<sup>27</sup> Shelemay 2011: 381.

<sup>28</sup> Bell, Cindy (2008) Toward a definition of a community choir, *International Journal of Community Music* 1.2: 230.

<sup>29</sup> Phelan, Helen (2008) Practice, ritual and community music: doing as identity, *International Journal of community Music* 1.2: 156. Emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> Phelan 2008:150.

in the following chapter, in order to better define the term “interaction” to describe the cross-cultural musical engagements that are the focus of this study.

For the purposes of this discussion, community music can, at its most fundamental level, be described as the immediate experience of collective identity through music making. As “vernacular” music, it cannot be identified in terms of genre, but by “its relationship to the community that produces it”<sup>31</sup>. A community can be, as always, dynamic, alive, responding to and changing the world of which they are a part<sup>32</sup>, or alternatively, constructed for specific socio-political purposes. That collective identity is idyllic and real, transitory and stable, an abstract concept and one grounded in action, means that the broad claims about community music’s ability to make social change need to be interrogated, particularly in relation to the notions of social inclusion and wellbeing circulating within the community music movement in Australia.

To some degree, the history and practice of Australian community music parallels that outlined recently by McKay and Higham in regard to the United Kingdom (UK).<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in Australia there are interconnections and similar trajectories in regard to philosophy, pedagogy, and funding prospects. Bithell’s research of community choirs in the UK influenced by the Natural Voice Practitioners Network (NVPN) reveals even closer similarities with the practices and philosophies within the Australian a cappella scene: the NVPN’s central mission to help people reclaim their birthright to sing, the highlighting of the potential for building or sustaining community, the opportunity to experience a sense of transcendence or the sacred, the global exploration of folk musics, and a leaning towards a political and humanistic motivation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Johnson, Bruce (2008) Review of Finnegan, R (2007) *The Hidden Musicians: music-making in an English Town*, (2nd Edition), Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, *Prefect Beat* 8.4: 87.

<sup>32</sup> Jorgensen, E R (1995) Music Education as Community, *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 29.3: 71-84, cited in Bell 2008: 238.

<sup>33</sup> McKay, George and Higham, Ben (2012) Community music: History and current practice, its constructions of ‘community’, digital turns and future soundings, an Arts and Humanities Research Council research review, *International Journal of Community Music* 5.1: 91-103.

<sup>34</sup> Bithell, Caroline (2010) Polyphony in the global village: Motives and meanings, in R Tsurtsunia and J. Jordania (eds), *The Fourth International Symposium on Traditional Polyphony*, Tbilisi: V Saradjishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire: 563-71; with Georgian translation: 553-562. See also

In 1985, Australian community musician Linsey Pollak invited British folk singer and 'natural voice' exponent Frankie Armstrong to Australia to work with leaders and singers in the nascent a cappella scene. In order to personally assess the strength of connection, in 2011 I joined an annual singing camp held in the fields of an organic farm in Dorset, UK. The Unicorn Natural Voice Camp was dominated by singing leaders who were members of the NVPN. I spent ten days making music with a closed community of approximately 300 singers. Rich harmonies were the norm of the everyday. I was deeply enmeshed in the creation, "if only for the space of a few days, [of] a multicultural, transnational extended family".<sup>35</sup> Although subtle cultural differences existed, I was witness to the strong resonance in philosophy, discourse and practice of group harmony singing and even some shared repertoire circulating within both the UK and Australian networks.

### ***The Australian a cappella scene***

In the mid to late 1980s a music scene emerged in Australia that adopted the term *a cappella*<sup>36</sup> to describe its practice of unaccompanied harmony singing. It predominantly developed within the urban middle class and was overwhelmingly performed by women.<sup>37</sup> The profile of the women at the centre of the a cappella scene in the 1990s were described by Smith as "almost entirely left progressive, with a high degree of commitment to cultural pluralism, indigenous rights and feminism"<sup>38</sup> and previous research focused on this dominance.<sup>39</sup> Although there were influential leaders and particular social, cultural, political and economic stimuli, the scene emerged from an

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Bithell, Caroline (2012) Personal comment, <http://www.naturalvoice.net/choirs>, accessed 20 October 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Bithell 2010: 570. See also Bithell, Caroline (2009b) *The Natural Voice, Community Choirs and World Song*, IMR Paper: 1-19.

<sup>36</sup> As discussed in my previous research project, the scene adopted the musical term *a cappella* to describe its practice and this raised numerous debates about the definition. The term *a cappella* has variously been defined as music of the chapel, unaccompanied music and "polyphonic vocal music without independent instrumental accompaniment" (Backhouse, Tony [1995] *A Cappella: rehearSING for Heaven*, Chatswood: Redback Press: 3). For this reason I do not italicise the term when referring to the a cappella scene. See Rickwood 1997, 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Rickwood 1997, 1998; Downie 1995, 1996; Smith 2005; Backhouse, Tony (2003) A cappella singing, in John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell (eds), *Currency Companion to Music & Dance in Australia*, Sydney: Currency House Inc: 15-16.

<sup>38</sup> Smith 2005: 152.

<sup>39</sup> Downie 1995, 1996; Rickwood 1996, 1997, 1998.

independent convergence.<sup>40</sup> It was an informal network of musicians who explored various genres such as gospel, doo wop, folk, and world music<sup>41</sup> in the *a cappella* style. There was some support from metropolitan based organisations, some of which emerged from within the scene itself. Personal connections were made across local, regional, state, national and international levels but it operated without a national coordinating body. The *a cappella* scene was characterised by its “ad hoc, disorganised, even chaotic” nature, according to the 2010 Folk Fellow, Christina Mimmochi, an *a cappella* performer and community music leader.<sup>42</sup>

The *a cappella* scene provided performance opportunities for professional quartets and ensembles.<sup>43</sup> Promoted as accessible music-making, community choirs also quickly materialised, giving opportunities to both formally music trained and untrained individuals to sing with others. The choirs provided musical skill development, possible performance opportunities, and other arts training or experiences for their members.<sup>44</sup> The *a cappella* scene developed into a vigorously organised amateur music movement

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<sup>40</sup> Downie 1996, Rickwood 1997, Smith 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Rickwood 1997. Mitchell described community music in the 1980s as “the dominant local variant of world music” (1996:213). While not denying the *a cappella* scene did indeed embrace world music, as has been argued elsewhere (Rickwood 1997 and 1998), the adoption of global musics was not merely through the ‘world music’ market but was also mediated through musicians living in or visiting Australia at the time. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail the extensive dialogue relating to world music. See Mitchell, Tony (1996) *Real Wild Child: Australian popular music and national identity*, in Tony Mitchell (ed), *Popular music and local identity: Rock, pop and rap in Europe and Oceania*, London: Leicester University Press: 173-213; as well as Bohlman, Phillip V (2002) *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Feld, Steven (1988) Notes on World Beat, *Public Culture Bulletin* 1.1: 31-37; Feld, Steven (1991) Voices of the Rainforest, *Public Culture Bulletin* 4.1: 131-140; and Feld, Steven (2000) A Sweet Lullaby for World Music, *Public Culture* 12.1: 145-171; Frith, Simon (2000) The Discourse of World Music, in Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: 305-322; Guillbault, Jocelyne (2006) On Redefining the “Local” through World Music, in Jennifer C Post (ed), *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, New York: Routledge: 137-146; and Toner, Peter G and Wild, Stephen A (2004) Introduction - World Music: Politics, Production and Pedagogy, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 5.2: 1-10.

<sup>42</sup> Mimmochi, Christina (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 30/10/ 09).

<sup>43</sup> Downie 1995, 1996; Backhouse 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Rickwood 1997, 1998; Backhouse 2003.



that drew on a global musics repertory which was regarded as 'alternative'.<sup>45</sup> Once described by Community Music Victoria's Stephen Costello as "the voice liberation front"<sup>46</sup> the Australian a cappella scene reshaped the landscape of community choral singing by creating a fresh, open approach that had broad secular appeal and operated outside institutional choral traditions. It was driven by a desire to democratise singing and to create a contemporary 'hip' engagement with unaccompanied harmony singing. Like the community arts movement in the UK during the 1960s, the a cappella scene "sought to challenge the prevalent standards and assumptions"<sup>47</sup> of community choirs, wanting "participation and relevance for the people as a whole".<sup>48</sup> The a cappella scene critiqued the capitalist driven consumption of music and the entrenched institutional narrowing of legitimate musical practice. It set itself apart from other choral traditions as a strategy, not a fact. It saw community singing as a means to effect both musical and social change. This approach echoed overseas practices that saw contemporary 'western' society as devoid of community and creativity. For example, community music projects in the UK were set up in response to "logocentric attitudes towards the nature of music [that] had diminished participatory opportunities and had reduced the potential richness of the human musical experience".<sup>49</sup> There was a perceived need to promote singing as a normalised part of the everyday in cultures where dominant discourses and practices left many people vulnerable to the silencing of their musicality.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Rickwood 1997, 1998. See also Downie 1995, 1996 and Smith 2003, 2005, 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Rickwood 1997: 49.

<sup>47</sup> White, Vicky (nd) Assigning value to the experience of a community music session, Conference Paper, King Alfred's College, Winchester, UK: 2, cited in Veblen, Kari K (2007) *The Ways of Community Music*, *International Journal of Community Music* 1.1: 9. Also see Higgins, Lee (2006) *Boundary-walkers: Contexts and concepts of community music*, PhD thesis, University of Limerick, Ireland, who refers to this work being undertaken by Vicky Wight (sic).

<sup>48</sup> White nd: 2.

<sup>49</sup> Higgins 2006: 2.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Joyce, Victoria Moon (1993) *"Singing for Our Lives": Women creating home through singing*, PhD thesis, Toronto: University of Toronto; Joyce, Victoria Moon (2001) *Bodies that Sing: The formation of singing subjects*, *Sharing the Voices: The phenomenon of singing international symposium II*, July 2-5; Joyce, Victoria Moon (2003) *The 'Subject' is Singing: Singing as Social Practice*, *Music and Lifelong Learning Conference and Celebration*, May 8-10.

The Australian a cappella scene aligned strongly with the multicultural movement of the 1980s-1990s.<sup>51</sup> It developed, Graeme Smith suggests, “as an alternative mode for Anglo-Australians to represent multicultural Australia in sound”.<sup>52</sup> Not only did it enable much wider participation than the polyethnic fusion bands that emerged beforehand but it “built an image of social harmony on the emotional power of group singing”.<sup>53</sup> It strategically accessed the publicly funded sector of community arts at the time, engaging with government initiatives that financially supported the promotion of a tolerant and vibrant multicultural Australia which it could musically represent. Importantly too, the scene united with the folk movement where “oral tradition, social commentary, participation, cultural democracy, and communal [...] expression” underpin identity.<sup>54</sup> Both the repertoire and practice of the a cappella scene mirrored the folk movement’s sense of authenticity, shared the same left political leaning, and also stressed participation, activism and community spirit.<sup>55</sup> Folk festivals promoted both professional and community performances. The appeal and accessibility of the music also reinvigorated singing sessions at folk festivals, creating an atmosphere not dissimilar to the once popular shanty song sessions of earlier folk festivals. The incorporation of a cappella performances with the multicultural and folk movements of the time enabled the construction of a cosmopolitan identity, one that embraced progressive activism that included the musical expression of political concerns and empathy with the struggles of others.<sup>56</sup>

Many community choirs promoted their music-making within political frameworks. Some embraced the politics of ethnicity and cultural pluralism of the time; many of the women’s community choirs and professional ensembles that dominated the scene in the 1980s and 1990s declared their feminist agenda<sup>57</sup>. The experience of women’s choirs expanded “the multifaceted character of self because the women’s own sense of identity [was] strengthened by their broadened experience of gender and musical

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<sup>51</sup> Rickwood 1997, Smith 2005.

<sup>52</sup> Smith 2005: 151.

<sup>53</sup> Smith 2005: 151.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, Graeme (2008) Folk Music: Movements, Scenes and Styles, in *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now*, Shane Homan & Tony Mitchell (eds), Hobart: ACYS: 151-166.

<sup>55</sup> Smith 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Downie 1995, 1996, Rickwood 1997, 1998, Smith 2003, 2005, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Downie 1996, Rickwood 1997.

experience”.<sup>58</sup> Other choirs formed that musically engaged with a range of issues such as gay and labour rights and social justice concerns. The repertoire performed was carefully scored or selected to express these various political agendas. As Smith articulated, “the direct somatic and emotional address of the music [gave] performers access to a transformative experience within a complex relationship to the material’s manifest cultural and political context”.<sup>59</sup> The symbolism of the songs allowed participants to invest the music “with great social and personal significance”.<sup>60</sup>

The discourse within the acappella scene constructed singing as a fun and personally satisfying way to produce “beautiful sounds and beautiful harmony”.<sup>61</sup> A range of needs were identified as being met: creative expression, social and community requirements, personal challenge and growth. The benefits that were claimed varied. They could be experienced as musical, social, educational, historical, spiritual, physical, mental, multicultural and recreational.<sup>62</sup> The personal relationships and aural sensitivity created were well promoted. Newsletters and workshop flyers repeatedly articulated the possibilities.<sup>63</sup> ‘Everyone could sing’ was its mantra and it made that seem possible with open, accessible, predominantly aurally taught singing experiences. Like the human potential or New Age movements of the time, the a cappella scene stressed the “experience of transcendence, a commonness of purpose and motive, and group support”<sup>64</sup> but with the additional dimension of musical authenticity through the unmediated expression of self. Capturing the sense of spirit was often more important than technique. As Smith declared:

The experience of singing, combined with the social interactions of the a cappella group and the sociomusical content of the repertoire, create[d] a package that exemplifies the integration of the individual and society.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Rickwood 1997: 170.

<sup>59</sup> Smith 2005: 153.

<sup>60</sup> Smith 2005: 152.

<sup>61</sup> Rickwood 1997: 46.

<sup>62</sup> Rickwood 1997.

<sup>63</sup> See, for instance, *Oral Majority* and *Not the OM*, the Newsletters of the Sydney a cappella Association (SAA).

<sup>64</sup> York, Michael (1995) *The Emerging Network: A sociology of the New Age and Neo Pagan Movements*, London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc: 4, cited in Rickwood 1997: 49.

<sup>65</sup> Smith 2005: 155.

The now more ordinary occurrence of community choirs was not so evident in the 1990s, although the scene sought out and created performance opportunities. Performances became popular at folk festivals and a cappella festivals emerged, particularly supported by urban based organisations such as The Boite and Community Music Victoria in Melbourne, the Sydney a cappella Association, and VoiceMoves in Perth. These associations provided training and performance opportunities and created newsletters that engaged in discussions that helped to define and enrich the scene as it evolved. In 1995 a cappella festivals were held consecutively in four cities – Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.<sup>66</sup> By the year 2000 the a cappella festivals had been generally replaced by broader opportunities for performance, and some organisations, such as the Sydney a cappella Association, no longer existed.

As discussed below, the a cappella scene has been absorbed into the community music movement. Over the last decade, as the community music movement aligned with the arts and health agenda, community choirs have increased in number, a greater diversity of delivery styles now operate, and their performances are more commonplace. Within this evolution, community choirs have increasingly been created to address health and social needs. Issues of inequity and isolation, injustice and disadvantage, discrimination and conflict, mental and physical health are being given a musical treatment. Within these contexts the musical content often matters less or is selected from an expanding repertory that can flatten the points of political action. The scene's alternative edge has therefore been somewhat muted. The global musics that dominated the a cappella scene are some of the identifiable threads that continue within the community music movement, as well as songs written and arranged by many of the scene's prominent composers and choir leaders. Many of its songs continue to circulate widely. The inclusion of Indigenous musics fits within this schema because the songs likewise provoke investment of great social and personal significance, particularly given the shifts prompted by the agenda of reconciliation and an evolving national identity.<sup>67</sup> Although *a cappella* choirs and arrangements continue to exist, the community music movement also includes many accompanied choirs. Of course, many people simply enjoy a good communal sing and so, as always, for many choirs singing simply for pleasure or to

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<sup>66</sup> Rickwood 1997: 42-43.

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 3.

attain musical finesse is the primary focus, without necessarily communicating any political, social or health agendas.

Tony Backhouse, one of the a cappella scene's founding leaders, declared that the intent of the scene to promote harmonised unaccompanied group singing as a viable musical option in Australia has been successful.<sup>68</sup> He suggested that it is now simply a stylistic choice for professional musicians, and one which remains readily accessible to community singers. There have been recent attempts to revive the 'scene' with an a cappella festival in Sydney in 2008 and the development of 'A cappella Central',<sup>69</sup> a website promoting performances, workshops and choirs. The inclusion of beat, hip hop and other emerging musical genres are attempts to capture the interest of the younger generation in harmony singing. These efforts, however, pale in comparison with the passionate, almost global investment by community festivals, music institutions, arts bodies, and government agencies in community singing in Australia. Consequently, although the a cappella scene's contributions to Australian community music making are readily identifiable and an informal network continues, the changes to community music making over the last decade have made it difficult to definitively locate one particular 'scene' that holds a shared sense of purpose, strong alliances, and distinct musical boundaries within this broader musical field. There is a continuum of choral singing. A binary between classical and a cappella choirs, or barbershop and a cappella choirs, or Colin Slater's Sing Australia and a cappella choirs, or any other sort of choir and a cappella choirs does not exist. Similarities can occur across these artificial binaries of community music-making, but it is both the real and the perceived differences that enabled the a cappella scene to once separate itself as an identifiable community.

### ***The community music movement***

It would be difficult for anyone to have missed seeing or hearing a community choir over recent years. Community choirs are part of popular culture. Radio, television, book chapters, newspaper articles and film have promoted positive stories about community choirs. The 2004 Swedish film *As it is in Heaven*,<sup>70</sup> which traces the return of a conductor

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<sup>68</sup> Backhouse, Tony (2010) Personal communication (3/09/10).

<sup>69</sup> See [www.acappellacentral.com.au](http://www.acappellacentral.com.au). A new website was launched in May 2013.

<sup>70</sup> *As it is in Heaven* (2004) Director: Kay Pollock, Sonet Film.

to his home town to run a choir, was a successful ‘sleeper’, playing for more than two years in Australian cinemas<sup>71</sup> and more recently the film *Song for Marion*<sup>72</sup> kept alive the life-affirming experience of singing with others. In late 2010 The Sweet Monas, a gospel choir from Bendigo, was featured on the Australian Broadcasting Commission’s Television station (ABC TV), providing a narrative of musical growth, community, and intergenerational continuity. A UK series screened on ABC TV in the same year followed the effect of choral singing in a boys’ school. In recent years, choral competitions have, not uncritically, been created by commercial television and the ABC has screened documentaries on choirs such as The Choir of Hard Knocks whose membership was drawn from homeless people in Melbourne. Popular Australian writer, Amanda Lohrey, chronicled her early involvement in a community choir in Hobart with her contribution “The clear voice suddenly singing” in the collected volume of *Secrets*.<sup>73</sup> More recently, Kate Lawson’s *Keeping Mum* followed the dramas and triumphs of a choir at an international choral competition in Cyprus.<sup>74</sup> Community choirs also feature in multi-artform, community, voice and folk festivals around the country. The demand on the National Folk Festival for performance opportunities by community choirs has led to the establishment of a “Street Choirs” Program. Choirs perform at conferences, representative of creative communities or social inclusion, or to enable the display of corporate social responsibility. Choirs are established in workplaces. Indeed, it is now clearly evident that community choirs are part of the social norm, indicative of a social ideal. Popular discourse has joined the arts industry, government policy, and academic research in linking community choirs with social cohesion and wellbeing, an association often passionately articulated and reinforced in the media.

The a cappella scene sold its message of accessible music making so well it prompted the involvement of more professional musicians and arts practitioners to work within community and invigorated various institutions to generate ambitious social and cultural programs. The community music movement has therefore strategically

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<sup>71</sup> Pitt, Helen (2011) With a song in their heart, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 22-23: 25.

<sup>72</sup> *Song for Marion* (2012) Directed by Paul Andrew Williams Steel Mill Pictures, Coolmore Productions, Egoli Tossell Film and Film House Germany.

<sup>73</sup> Lohrey, Amanda (1997) The clear voice suddenly singing, in *Secrets*, Sydney: Pan MacMillan Australia Pty Ltd: 175-273.

<sup>74</sup> Lawson, Kate (2009) *Keeping Mum*, London: Harper Collins.

accessed funding opportunities during the last decade, providing significant investment in some community singing projects. Publicly-funded singing interventions have been made possible by accessing health funding to seed community projects, or accessing arts grants to support wellbeing initiatives. Arguably choirs that emerge from within a community or through a transformational approach to community cultural development can be agents of change. However, an instrumental or interventionist approach which helps implement government policy by using the arts, or more relevantly by creating choirs, can engineer a more complex relationship to music-making based on a “morally valued, self-responsible notion of citizenship”.<sup>75</sup> Community choral singing in the UK has attracted similar funding in the 21st century. Simone Fullagar argues that this can mean that the objectives aimed at measuring wellbeing, for example, sit uneasily with the notions of pleasure and choice, notions that are vital to community music-making. And there is little public distinction between instrumental and transformational approaches to community cultural development. While the arts are well recognised as an effective ‘tool’ for education and raising awareness of particular issues, the arts processes that challenge government policy and decision-making are less well known,<sup>76</sup> and it seems, now less promoted.

Although there are demographic shifts within community music making, community choirs remain generally dominated by the middle class and women. There has been an increase in male participation, attempts to increase younger participation, efforts to facilitate intergenerational, cross-cultural, and other broad based gatherings, and specific programs recruiting identified participants. Interventions to encourage community singing are now common. The repertory has also changed to some degree. It includes more popular music than the a cappella scene and increasingly adds original compositions written to reach target choirs; songs that speak directly to the joy of singing in harmony, singing books that bond regional alliances, or songs written in response to a shared experience such as mental ill health.

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<sup>75</sup> Fullagar, Simone (2002) *Governing the Healthy Body: Discourses of leisure and lifestyle within Australian Health Policy*, *Health (London)* 6.69: 70.

<sup>76</sup> Mills, Deborah and Brown, Paul (2004) *Art and Wellbeing: A guide to the connections between Community Cultural Development and Health, Ecologically Sustainable Development, Public House and Place, Rural Revitalisation, Community Strengthening, Active Citizenship, Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity*, Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts, Commonwealth of Australia.

Positive claims of involvement are repeated and reinforced through individual declarations, institutional promotions, cultural and arts industry workers and academic research. The discourse can, at times, appear utopian or numinous but the clear message is that community group singing can be a powerful agent of change. As a result, membership drives can overstate the health and other benefits of group singing, with sometimes grand unsubstantiated claims in the promotions:

Sing your heart out in Frankston with HeartSong... Coordinated by Arts Access Victoria and supported by mental health service IMPACT, HeartSong is a local, fun, friendly and informal singing group that meets every week in Frankston. Come and lift your spirits and release your voice with a wide variety of simple songs. No musical skills or experience is required. HeartSong provides a safe place to foster confidence and companionship in singing together. It focuses on the development of creativity and expression, and to inspire everyone to sing and keep on singing. Singing increases your fitness and has been scientifically proven to reduce stress levels by up to 40%.<sup>77</sup>

With the community singing movement's rhetoric biased towards the specific effects of singing on individual and social health and wellbeing, singing for sheer pleasure, or, at the other end of the spectrum, musical excellence, tends to be glossed over. Community choirs are, rather, regarded as 'safe' settings for individual and social need. They are conceived in attempts to address difficult issues that have profound health and wellbeing implications, even for vulnerable groups. It is thought that this safety comes through the employment of metaphor and expressive forms.<sup>78</sup> Research by Mary Ann Hunter, however, has more thoroughly interrogated the cultivation of a 'safe space'.<sup>79</sup> She recognises that its common use holds conventional connotations of protection and guardedness. Hunter alternatively suggests it can be "a space of messy negotiations that allow individual and group actions of representation to occur, as well as opportunities for 'utopian performatives' [because it can be] mobilised in a broader grassroots agenda for social change".<sup>80</sup> She reviews significant literature and dramatic practice to move beyond the censorship of frictional dialogue that can tend to dominate. Hunter

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<sup>77</sup> See [www.artsaccess.com.au/heartsong](http://www.artsaccess.com.au/heartsong), accessed 12 November 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Putland, Christine (2012) *Arts and Health – A guide to the evidence*, Background document prepared for the Arts and Health Foundation Australia, <http://ps3beta.com/story/26824>, accessed 17 October 2012.

<sup>79</sup> Hunter, Mary Ann (2008) Cultivating the art of safe space, *Research in Drama Education* 13.1: 5-21.

<sup>80</sup> Hunter 2008: 5.



concludes that creating a 'safe space', defined as a processual act of ever-becoming, allows for the tension between appropriate rules of engagement and the creation of new work that invites a degree of aesthetic risk. As I discuss in later chapters, describing choirs as 'safe' is readily adopted. However, within some of those musical interactions there is recognition of this robust but 'messy ever-becoming-ness' identified by Hunter.

While the community music movement is perceived as "self driven",<sup>81</sup> it has increasingly been receiving institutional and government support. The Music Council of Australia (MCA),<sup>82</sup> a national body that advocates for music widely, actively supports community music making. An Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project with Griffith University resulted in the publication of *Sound Links: Community Music in Australia* in 2009.<sup>83</sup> This report, based on an examination of six musical communities in Australia, provided a blueprint for sustainable community music-making. Importantly, community choirs are featured in that publication. The MCA claims that music making fosters an ability to engage in community life, to enhance community identity, to break down barriers, and promote cultural awareness and cultural exchange.<sup>84</sup> The organisation also created the first national Music in Communities Network<sup>85</sup> which was launched in 2009. The updated website, launched in 2010, sustains community music making, including updating and revising *The Community Music Handbook* by Anne Cahill which was first published in 1998. Designed to connect community music workers and volunteers online, the network has also organised regional meetings in Wollongong, Brisbane, Melbourne, as well as other centres, and has plans for future meetings. Over the last few years it has rewarded community music making through an award scheme. Community choirs have been among the nominees and the winners. The award scheme has celebrated the role of community music in individual and social wellbeing, in creating local links, in creative ageing, and has given recognition to community music's

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<sup>81</sup> Coker, Jane (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 13/01/10).

<sup>82</sup> See <http://www.mca.org.au/>. Last accessed 13 March 2013.

<sup>83</sup> Bartleet, Brydie-Leigh, Dunbar-Hall, Peter, Letts, Richard, and Schippers, Huib (2009) *Sound Links: Community Music in Australia*, Brisbane: Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre, Griffith University.

<sup>84</sup> Wolfe, Jocelyn (2009) Winning Goals in Community Music, *MCA Music Forum*, Feb-April: 53-54.

<sup>85</sup> See <http://musicincommunities.org.au/>. Last accessed 13 March 2013.

inspirational leaders.<sup>86</sup> Other programs within the MCA also resonate with these ideals, such as Making Music/Being Well<sup>87</sup> and Music: Play for Life.<sup>88</sup> Overall, the “belief in the power of music-making to strengthen people’s self-image, personal skills and relationships with others”<sup>89</sup> is highly endorsed.<sup>90</sup> State based organisations also support community music making.

The Boîte, VoiceMoves and other similar organisations that exist at state or regional level contribute significantly to community music making however it is Community Music Victoria (CMV)<sup>91</sup> which is recognised by the MCA as an outstanding model for support, promotion and facilitation. CMV is a not-for-profit, membership-based association which supports, promotes and facilitates music-making among Victorian communities. It has been operating under various guises since the late 1970s. CMV has developed goals and strategies to achieve a ‘State of Singing’. It has been proactive in facilitating community singing through its ‘Victoria Sings’ program. The program develops and supports singing leadership within communities through the production of resource materials and training. Initially well-funded through VicHealth and other government sources, it is now a mostly voluntary program. The CMV e-newsletter displays the vitality of the community music movement in Victoria and even adopts the term ‘activist’,<sup>92</sup> as Jane Coker from CMV described:

[W]e think of the people in it as movement activists, and I think that’s the reason it lives. It’s not just community music, but why people think it is important to do. People’s reasons for thinking it is important range from personal empowerment to community empowerment and on a spectrum that’s from arts through to health and stopping at community development on the way. Belief being, that if people have a voice and are participating in community activity, then communities will be strengthened as a result of that.

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<sup>86</sup> See <http://musicincommunities.org.au/awards16/mic-awards-2012>: Last accessed 3 March 2013.

<sup>87</sup> See <http://www.makingmusicbeingwell.org.au/>. Last accessed 3 March 2013.

<sup>88</sup> See <http://www.musicplayforlife.org/>. Last accessed 3 March 2013.

<sup>89</sup> Wolfe 2009: 53-54

<sup>90</sup> Another national body that supports choral music is the Australian National Choral Association (ANCA). This organisation, however, was set up to support more traditional and formal choirs although some choirs emerging from the a cappella scene have also drifted into the organisation’s orbit. See <http://www.anca.org.au/>. Last accessed 4 June 2013.

<sup>91</sup> <http://cmv.customer.netspace.net.au>. Last accessed 20 October 2012.

<sup>92</sup> Chapter 3 contains a more detailed focus on community singing in Victoria.

And music making together is like a living example of cooperation and working in harmony. Which sounds a bit twee but that's what it is.<sup>93</sup>

As Jane Coker's statement suggests, within the community music discourse 'harmony' is often employed both musically and metaphorically. It is used to describe the power of combined voices to give a musical representation of social inclusion and cohesion, demonstrated in this statement:

When we sing part songs in a group, we are creating harmonies through the sound; but in a deeper sense we are also creating and demonstrating a social harmony in which people are working together to produce a whole that is 'greater than the sum of its parts'.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the increasing investment in community choirs, there is a long way to go before realising the vision of a universal involvement in singing. According to recent research from the Australia Council for the Arts only a third of the 15% of Australians actively participating in music do so by singing.<sup>95</sup> But the vision of a nation where singing is part of the everyday is not so much a numerical ambition as it is an ideological agenda.

As discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, community choirs are regarded as potent sites of embodied harmony which can be measured and evaluated to provide scientific evidence of the benefits of participation. While scientific evidence is physiologically crucial in a full understanding of the connection between singing and wellbeing<sup>96</sup> these sets of data overwhelmingly lack the colour that gives voice to the human stories and complexities behind the singing, behind the choirs. In a paper that questions the validity of some research on mental health and wellbeing, for example, Guerin et al argue that social analysts and scientists are entrenched in the need to identify "a general pathway that causes or creates the benefits from engaging in a

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<sup>93</sup> Coker 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Bithell 2012.

<sup>95</sup> Instinct and Reason (2010) *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the Arts Research Summary*, Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts/Creative Commons.

<sup>96</sup> See also Swijghuisen Reigersberg, Muriel (2011) Conference Report: 'Striking a Chord'; Music, Health and Wellbeing: Current Developments in Research and Practice, *Approaches* 3.2: 122, <http://approaches.primarymusic.gr>, accessed 22 February 2012.

[music] activity”.<sup>97</sup> The authors propose that engaging in music actually changes the social context and therefore attention should be given to the complex elements related to an individual’s musical participation and the apparent social and individual benefits. The “delicate and detailed descriptions of social, historical, economic and cultural contexts”<sup>98</sup> of people involved in community choirs, therefore, need to be part of the framework of research examining the relationship between music and wellbeing.

The purchase of the notion of harmony within the community music discourse can also mean that the tensions generated by the diversity and particularity of personal histories and expectations are often overlooked. Negotiations are needed to achieve vocal and social harmony within a group; the out of tune and the out of time need to be worked through; the friction of and grappling with difference needs to be attended to; internal politics and dissonant moments need to find a way to resolve into harmony, both musically and socially. Nevertheless, the adoption of ‘harmony’ as a trope is common practice. Its use as a way to describe the ideal of vocal, social and psycho-physiological resonance and vitality is based on the assumptions of the universality, connectivity and transformative qualities of music. Patricia Campbell’s research, however, has shown these assumptions can be false. Patricia Leavy agrees, arguing that “music only unites people within certain contexts”.<sup>99</sup> Campbell undertook a significant survey of literature to examine claims to the truth inherent in the statement ‘music, the universal language’.<sup>100</sup> She was concerned that romantic notions and politically-correct directives were driving this belief. Ultimately, she called not for music’s universality but a more complex understanding of “the meaning and value of a musical expression to the people who have thought it, produced it, and performed it [and to better know]... the plurality

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<sup>97</sup> Guerin, Pauline, Guerin, Bernard, Tedmanson, Deirdre and Clark, Yvonne (2011) How can country, spirituality, music and arts contribute to Indigenous mental health and wellbeing, *Australasian Psychiatry* 19.1: S39.

<sup>98</sup> Guerin et al 2011: S40.

<sup>99</sup> Leavy, Patricia (2009) *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, New York and London: The Guildford Press: 102. See also Elliott, D J (1989) Key concepts in multicultural music education, *International Journal of Music Education* 13: 11-18; and Jordan, J (1992) Handbook of research on music teaching and learning, in R Caldwell (ed). *Multicultural music education in a pluralistic society*, New York: Schirmer Books: 735-748.

<sup>100</sup> Campbell, Patricia Sheehan (1997) Music, the universal language: fact or fallacy?, *International Journal of Music Education*, 29: 32-39.

of musical expressions”.<sup>101</sup> This subsequently informed much ethnomusicological research. Åse Ottosson likewise has noted that “music is a fundamentally social practice and experience through which multiple modes of identifying can be simultaneously reflected, mediated and continually constituted”.<sup>102</sup> She argues that “we experience musical experiences through layers of prior engagements with a range of global and local musical and extra-musical ideas, imagery, values, practices and aesthetic traditions”.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the notions of connection and transformation are equally contextual and complex.

The language articulated within the discourse surrounding community music making illustrates the power of nebulous concepts. In addition to ‘harmony’, the concepts of ‘spirituality, ‘social inclusion’ and ‘wellbeing’ are often declared though indistinctly applied and rarely defined in the context of public discourse. ‘Spirituality’, for example, was often ascribed to the experience of group singing in the a cappella scene and the term continues to circulate in the community music movement. Overseas music research also articulates the link between singing and spirituality, suggesting ways this is achieved. Nicola Oddy, for instance, draws on the Latin definition of spirit as breath to explore diverse literature that fundamentally views the voice as spiritual.<sup>104</sup> Among others, she cites Sokolov who wrote that “breath is the life force that feeds the spiritual fire of the musical self”.<sup>105</sup> As Fiona Magowan has noted, however:

...the terms spirit and ‘spirituality’ are often vague and poorly defined in an age when the West is searching for a new spirituality from eco-spirituality to feminist spirituality, Celtic spirituality, New Age spirituality, eastern spirituality and Aboriginal spirituality where anything can be regarded as spiritual.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Campbell 1997: 39.

<sup>102</sup> Ottosson, Åse (2006) *Making Aboriginal Men and Music in Central Australia*. PhD. Canberra: Australian National University: 23.

<sup>103</sup> Ottosson 2006: 23.

<sup>104</sup> Oddy, Nicola (2002) Vocal Improvisation – A pathway to deeper understanding of the self, *Canadian Association for Music Therapy Conference*, <http://www.musictherapy.ca/docs/confproc/2002/NicolaOddy-VocalImprovisation>, accessed: 29 December 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Sokolov, L (1987) Vocal Improvisation Therapy, in K Bruscia (ed), *Improvisational models of music therapy*, Illinois: Barcelona Publishers: 357.

<sup>106</sup> Magowan, Fiona (2007c) Spirit, Place and Power in Arnhem Land Traditional and Christian Music, in Fiona Richards (ed), *The Soundscapes of Australia: Music, Place and Spirituality*, Aldershot: Ashgate: 282.

The concepts of 'wellbeing' and 'social inclusion' are similarly vaguely applied. Social inclusion is discussed briefly below. The notion of 'wellbeing' will be given a greater analysis because it is a concept that holds much currency in the community music movement and upon which community music's validity is often now claimed and funded. The health and wellbeing agenda has to some extent created boundaries around what kinds of community choral work is legitimate and the research that measures it.

### *Social Inclusion*

Jonathon Welch, who has been engaged with community music making for some time, is the founder of 'Social Inclusion Week'.<sup>107</sup> He is well recognised for his role as the creator and director of the Sydney Street Choir and the Choir of Hard Knocks, and in an ABC television series that followed his attempts to use singing in a women's prison as a mechanism for self-development. Welch is often an 'inspirational speaker' at the Music in Communities Network regional meetings and other community singing initiatives. He has a reputation for a long-standing passion for social justice and an overarching commitment to the community. Welch's Social Inclusion Week campaign encourages the creation of celebratory events as awareness generating tools for governments, councils, educational institutions and other community bodies.

The Australian Government's own vision of a socially inclusive society is "one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society".<sup>108</sup> Philip Mendes, however, suggests that 'social inclusion' is just a new 'buzzword', claiming that "there is certainly no evidence of any major plan to tackle the structural causes of inequality or poverty".<sup>109</sup> The government's agenda proposes that social inclusion is possible through learning, working, engaging and having a voice but it does not indicate how this is actually achieved. The website scrolls with the statistics that must, by inference, define the socially excluded; or the categories of social exclusion which are "defined by the excluded's deficit relationship to economic

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<sup>107</sup> <http://www.socialinclusionweek.com.au/index.cfm?contentID=1>, accessed 28 June 2012.

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au>, accessed 28 June 2012.

<sup>109</sup> Mendes, Philip (2009) Is social inclusion just a new buzzword?: A half time report card on the social welfare policies of the Rudd Government, *Practice Reflexions* 4.1: 27.

productivity”.<sup>110</sup> The Australian Social Inclusion Board engages with the community, business, the not-for-profit sector, academics, advisory groups, and all levels of government to connect better policy with the knowledge and experience of the research, business and community sectors.<sup>111</sup> How board membership is decided, how the decisions of who constitutes the socially excluded are made, and how the board might influence policy is beyond the scope of this thesis. While the notion of social inclusion is “laudable on the surface”,<sup>112</sup> critiques suggest that there needs to be a change to the way government works to enable it to contribute to the welfare of so called vulnerable Australians<sup>113</sup> and that it is built on systemic racism and other forms of exclusion. As Bamblett et al point out, in the context of a colonised country there is a “potential danger that ‘inclusion’ becomes another word for ‘assimilation’ if the dynamics of power are ignored”.<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, the discourse circulating within the community music movement often constructs group singing as an act of social inclusion. Musical interventions are claimed to address social disharmony, or the perceived needs of the ‘marginalised’, the ‘disadvantaged’, the ‘other’. Government policies, funding systems and agency programs appear to assume that deeply entrenched politics of difference can be “resolved simply by a beaming smile and a shared [song]”.<sup>115</sup> Fiona Kumari Campbell asserts that the “quest for social inclusion ... [contains]... a commendable ethos [but it] holds a number of uncertain paradoxes”.<sup>116</sup> It masks, she claims, the fact that the ‘other’ is already among us and becomes a borderline concept to ascertain the outermost sphere of territory, obligation and indeed humanness. Social inclusion “becomes an

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<sup>110</sup> Bamblett, Muriel, Burke, Gabrielle, Hunter, Sue Ann and Lewis, Peter (2008) Social Inclusion and the Dangers of Neo-colonialism: An Aboriginal Child and Family Services Perspective on Social Inclusion and Building Partnerships with Mainstream. Refereed paper presented to the *Partnerships for Social Inclusion Conference*, Centre for Public Policy, Melbourne, 15-16 October, <http://www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/conference08/>, accessed 28 June 2012.

<sup>111</sup> <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au>, accessed 28 June 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Bamblett et al 2008: 3.

<sup>113</sup> Chiam, Nicholas (2008) Enabling or constraining governance?: The implications of institutional path dependency for realising social inclusion. Refereed paper presented to the *Partnerships for Social Inclusion Conference*, Centre for Public Policy, Melbourne, 15-16 October. <http://www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/conference08/>, accessed: 28 June 2012.

<sup>114</sup> Bamblett et al 2008: 3.

<sup>115</sup> Firth, Simon (1999) Introduction: Mr Smith draws a map, *Critical Quarterly* 41.1: 3-8.

<sup>116</sup> Kumari Campbell, Fiona (2010) “Crippin’ the Flaneur”: Cosmopolitanism and Landscapes of Tolerance, *Journal of Social Inclusion* 1.1: 75-89.

immunization against the guilt of a singular or particularised inclusion".<sup>117</sup> Kumari Campbell also notes that a successful crossing over from being the 'excluded', or 'other', or 'remainder' to the 'included' might involve "some kind of alterity disavowal, a purging of difference and a submission to a hegemonic ethos".<sup>118</sup> Social inclusion therefore should not be a vision imposed from above but a practice that emerges from within community so that boundary crossings can agitate not only one's own understandings of identity and agency but can, at the same time, provide some "insight into the complexity and contradictions of discourses of social inclusion".<sup>119</sup> Bec Cole makes comment on the notion of wellbeing that also underscores one of the paradoxes within social inclusion. She argues that "the rhetoric of inclusivity that permeates cultural and well-being discourse serves to highlight distinctions between people, as if this were the best way to engage them".<sup>120</sup>

### ***The Wellbeing Phenomenon***

Like 'harmony' and 'social inclusion', 'wellbeing' is commonly mobilised by the discourse of the community music movement. Similarly, it is a problematic notion. Cole notes that many community cultural development projects such as community music interventions:

...believe a deep-seated power relationship between health and illness, conformity and true diversity. Projects are hijacked in a sense by what I term *the cult of well-being* [sic]. *Well-being* is a politically determined construction of the meaning of health, and is reflected in the language of policy.<sup>121</sup>

I will not attempt to provide an authoritative definition of wellbeing. The World Health Organisation (WHO), governments at all levels, and numerous health organisations have all variously attempted to do so and the concept continues to be pliable, used broadly, or refined for specific purposes. For example, as Arabena notes, WHO defines health as

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<sup>117</sup> Kumari Campbell 2010: 83.

<sup>118</sup> Kumari Campbell 2010: 83.

<sup>119</sup> Kumari Campbell 2010: 86.

<sup>120</sup> Cole, Bec (2011) The cult of well-being: implications for a sustainable CCD (Community Cultural Development), *Children of Freire: New Writings in CCD*, Victorian College of the Arts: University of Melbourne, <http://www.vcam.melb.edu.au/assets/ccp-student-assignment/Cole-Cult-of-Wellbeing.pdf>, accessed 1 November 2011.

<sup>121</sup> Cole 2011: emphasis in original.



a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, not merely an absence of disease or infirmity, but she adds, it could also be described as:

...a state of wellbeing that results from a people's success in collectively and individually managing the interactions between their physical, spiritual, biological, economic and social environments. Health then, is the state of wellbeing that results from people living in balance with their finite biological and physical ecosystems.<sup>122</sup>

With a focus on mental health, VicHealth states that health is “[...] the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Mental health provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living, to achieve goals and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just” .<sup>123</sup>

The diverse definitions in use provide enormous fluidity.<sup>124</sup> Like the attainment of harmony, achieving and maintaining individual and social wellbeing through music making is a challenging task, especially given the notion's equally ephemeral nature:

...[w]ellbeing is a quality in demand in today's society. Wellbeing is a virtue that is much desired, much promoted [...] Yet, as an ideal, wellbeing is not a concept set in stone. Rather, conceptualisations and experiences of wellbeing are produced in and through wider social perceptions and practices... ideas of wellbeing capture and reproduce important social norms.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Arabena, Kerry (2008) *Indigenous Epistemology and Wellbeing: Universe reference citizenship, AIATSIS Research Discussion Paper Number 22*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

<sup>123</sup> Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (1999) *Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999-2002*, Carlton South: VicHealth, cited in Gridley, Heather, Astbury, Jill, Sharples, Jenny & Aguire, Carolina (2011) *Benefits of group singing for community mental health and wellbeing: survey and literature review*, Carlton: VicHealth: 4. This recent document by Gridley et al attempts to identify the main gaps in the literature. Much of this literature includes those listed in Footnote 134. Although Gridley et al to some extent identify problems in the parameters of the research the review does not fully address the overall inadequacies that are critiqued here. Interestingly, this review suffers from some of the same problems as much of the research it has critiqued, including research questions that are framed by the need to maintain the interest of the funding body in group singing. Gridley et al conclude that “the weight of findings in the available evidence base does suggest that group singing is a powerful personal and social health promotion activity”. They regard the research as “strong and consistent” despite the limitations they have identified: 51.

<sup>124</sup> Others have also recognised the inherent difficulties of the notion of wellbeing. See, for example, Russell, Andrew (2011) Review of “Pursuits of Happiness: Well-Being in Anthropological Perspective. Gordon Mathews and Carolina Izquierdo (eds) New York: Berghahn, 2009; x +278 pp”, in *Medical Anthropology Journal* 25.4: 546-548.

<sup>125</sup> Sointu, Eeva (2005) The rise of an ideal: tracing changing discourses of wellbeing, *The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review*: 255.

How does one measure virtue, quality or an ideal? That wellbeing includes both subjective as well as conventional objective measures complicates even further its links to music making. Music, Sloboda argues, is encountered as a unique and highly personal cultural communication which has the power to speak at many levels; to teach, inspire, to become deeply known. If people can be encouraged, in subtle ways, to believe that these key variables are not the 'main story', he argues, but rather peripheries to music, then they will be much more susceptible to indiscriminate consumption of musical products.<sup>126</sup> The most clear, and bizarre, example of this process in recent years, he suggests, is the commercialisation of the 'Mozart effect'<sup>127</sup> as a kind of auditory vitamin pill:

...whereby a small series of exploratory and rather inconclusive experiments were seized on by commercial interests bent on persuading anxious parents that they could improve their child's chance of economic success [...] if they played Mozart to their child.<sup>128</sup>

While this example is extreme in its commercial intent, the practice of linking music making and wellbeing broadly is nonetheless similarly problematic. Government policies seem intent on addressing the perceived decrease in measures of life satisfaction as well as physical and mental health in many developed nations, including Australia. Government interventions, however, can have much greater control of individual actions and lives, threatening the autonomy and empowerment that are seen as foundational for individual and social wellbeing.<sup>129</sup> In addition, appropriate initial engagement and personal capacity building in socially and economically vulnerable

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<sup>126</sup> Sloboda 2005: 379.

<sup>127</sup> Rauscher, F H, Shaw, G L and Ky, K N (1995) Listening to Mozart Enhances Spatial-Temporal Reasoning: Towards a Neurophysical Basis, *Neuroscience Letters* 185: 44-47, cited in Sloboda 2005: 379.

<sup>128</sup> Sloboda 2005: 379.

<sup>129</sup> See, for instance, Tsey, Komla, Harvey, Desley, Gibson, Teresa and Pearson, Liz (2009) The role of empowerment in setting a foundation for social and emotional wellbeing, *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health (AeJAMH)* 8.1, [www.auseinet.com/journal/vol8iss1/tsey.pdf](http://www.auseinet.com/journal/vol8iss1/tsey.pdf). Accessed: 28 June 2012; and Saturday Extra, 2012, *The Wellbeing Debate*, 3 March, ABC Radio National, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/saturdayextra/well-beingdebate>, accessed 28 June 2012.

communities where people experience relative powerlessness are seen as critical underpinnings for improving community wellbeing.<sup>130</sup> Eeva Sointu points out that:

...the increasing popularity of the ideal of wellbeing appears to reflect shifts in perceptions and experiences of individual agency and responsibility. In particular, dominant discourses of wellbeing relate to changes in subjectivity; they manifest a move from subject as citizens to subjects as consumers. In a consumer society, wellbeing emerges as a normative obligation choice and sought after by individual agents.<sup>131</sup>

Because of its ubiquity, wellbeing has “infiltrated our collective sense of community”.<sup>132</sup> Cole suggests that it is driven by the understanding that health is the most important determinant of community success or failure, allowing the limits of what is healthy and what is not to be arbitrarily set by powerful lobby groups. The wellbeing discourse “presents a clean and conformed face of health [that has an] inability to engage with illness on its own terms”.<sup>133</sup> This is highly problematic. When health and wellbeing dialogues encourage the belief that health is good and illness is bad, or start to inform lived cultural expression, dichotomies of inclusion and exclusion are created. Cole adds “[a]ttaching well-being to the construction of community is instrumental in what I would term a *false empowerment of access*”.<sup>134</sup> As she notes, funding community expression in terms of wellbeing maintains the idea that if specific target groups are given access to cultural expression that experience will necessarily be positive and health promoting. This is not necessarily the case. Clearly, “the relationship between people, art and their health is a complicated one”.<sup>135</sup>

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, community choirs are increasingly case studies for scientific research, adding data to the anecdotal evidence - “serious personal testimony”<sup>136</sup> - to support the claims of positive contributions to individual and social

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<sup>130</sup> Tsey et al 2009.

<sup>131</sup> Sointu 2005: 270

<sup>132</sup> Cole 2011: 1-2.

<sup>133</sup> Cole 2011: 2.

<sup>134</sup> Cole 2011: 4, emphasis in original.

<sup>135</sup> Cole 2011: 4.

<sup>136</sup> Putland, Christine (2012) *Arts and Health – A Guide to the Evidence*, Background document prepared for the Arts and Health Foundation Australia.

health and wellbeing.<sup>137</sup> Embodiment within this scientific context is “translated into biological markers, statistical information, and graphs”<sup>138</sup> and some ethnomusicologists:

[...] are slightly bamboozled by the scientific jargon in music psychology texts  
[...] The terms of scientific reference used are very different to ethnomusicological texts, which often do not use numerical surveys or statistical analyses. Ethnomusicologists can also be slightly suspicious of terms such as ‘data collection’, ‘investigation’ and ‘experimentation’ as this type of language is closely tied to colonial discourses and unequal distribution of power.<sup>139</sup>

The limitations in this current body of scientific research are rarely discussed in public dialogues or the community music movement’s discourse, possibly because “it remains relatively inaccessible and hard to synthesise”.<sup>140</sup> Christine Putland notes the diversity inherent in both the applied and basic research being undertaken.<sup>141</sup> Much of the

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<sup>137</sup> See, for instance, Clift, Stephen (2010) *Amateur group singing for wellbeing and health* <http://www.savetodisc.net>. Accessed on 14 April 2010; Clift, S, Hancox, G, Morrison, I, Hess, B, Kreutz, G and Stewart, D (2010) Choral singing and psychological wellbeing: Quantitative and qualitative findings from English choirs in a cross-national survey, *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* 1.1: 19-34; Clift, S, Hancox, G, Morrison, I, Hess, B, Stewart, D and Kreutz, G (2010) *Choral Singing, Wellbeing and Health: Findings from a cross-national Survey*, Folkestone: Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, Canterbury Christ Church University, University Centre Folkestone, UK; Davidson, Jane (2008) Singing for self-healing, health and wellbeing, *Music Council of Australia Forum*, Music Council of Australia; Dillon, Steve (2006) Assessing the positive influence of music activities in community development programs, *Music Education Research* 8.2: 267-280; Gridley, Heather (2008) Community Art and Health Promotion, *Anima, Indonesian Psychological Journal* 23.4: 301-306; Hawkes, Jon (2001) *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture’s essential role in public planning*, Melbourne: Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd in association with the Cultural Development Network (Vic); Joseph, Dawn (2009) Sharing music and culture through singing in Australia, *International Journal of Community Music* 2.2-3: 169-181; Lally, Ellaine (2009) “The power to heal us with a smile and a song”: Senior wellbeing, music-based participatory arts and the value of qualitative evidence, *Journal of Arts and Communities* 1(1): 25-44; Langston, Thomas W and Barrett, Margaret S (2008) Capitalizing on community music: a case study of the manifestation of social capital in a community choir, *Research in Music Education* 3.2: 118-138; Shipton, Matthew and Himonides, Evangelos (2011) *Proceedings SEMPRES Conference ‘Striking a Chord’: Music Health and Wellbeing*, Folkestone: Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, Canterbury Christ Church University, University Centre Folkestone, UK; Sun, Jing and Buys, Nicholas (2012) Effectiveness of Participative Community Singing Intervention Program on Promoting Resilience and Mental Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Australia, *Essential Notes in Psychiatry*: 245-252. [www.intechopen.com](http://www.intechopen.com), accessed 30 November 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg, 2011, Conference Report: ‘Striking a Chord’; Music, Health and Wellbeing: Current Developments in Research and Practice, *Approaches* 3.2: 122. <http://approaches.primarymusic.gr>, accessed 28 June 2012.

<sup>139</sup> Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2011: 122.

<sup>140</sup> Putland 2012: 2.

<sup>141</sup> Putland 2012: 2-3.

research is unable to make definitive statements, only intimating that direct involvement by communities in an arts activity *may* contribute to individual and community wellbeing. According to Heather Stuckey and Jeremy Nobel, from a public health perspective the weaknesses in the research include, but are not limited to, the lack of randomized control groups, the absence of longitudinal data, the dominance of observational methods, some limitation to pre-intervention and post-intervention comparisons, small numbers which make statistical validity much more difficult and, a general lack of effective evaluation and research protocols that would introduce greater rigor.<sup>142</sup> As Hallam et al acknowledge the “research has limitations”.<sup>143</sup> Gridley et al agree, noting that the “jury remains out on the most appropriate ways of capturing and measuring indicators of community wellbeing as potential outcomes of arts activities”.<sup>144</sup> As a result, ongoing research is being done that attempts to address the limitations and is being transmitted through specific journals such as the *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*, which makes an important distinction between arts and applied arts, the latter used when arts are applied to a purpose outside of their usual context.<sup>145</sup>

Arlene Goldbard calls the health and wellbeing approach to community music research “the metrics syndrome”.<sup>146</sup> She lobbies against it, arguing that “scientism means taking methods and ways of thinking that work very well in the physical science and misapplying them to highly complex human endeavors, where they don’t work”.<sup>147</sup> McKay and Higham have identified other gaps in much of this community music

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<sup>142</sup> Stuckey, Heather L and Nobel, Jeremy (2010) The connection between art, healing, and public health: A review of current literature, *Framing Health Matters: American Journal of Public Health* 100.2: 254-263; and Wolf, Lea and Wolf, Thomas (2011) *Music and Health Care: A Paper Commissioned by the Musical Connections Program of Carnegie Hall’s Weill Music Institute*, New York: Carnegie Hall and WolfBrown.

<sup>143</sup> Hallam, Susan, Creech, Andrea, Varvarigou, Maria and McQueen, Hilary (2012) Perceived benefits of active engagement with making music in community settings. *International Journal of Community Music* 5.2: 155-174.

<sup>144</sup> Gridley, Heather, Astbury, Jill, Sharples, Jenny and Aguirre, Carolina (2011) *Benefits of group singing for community mental health and wellbeing: Survey and literature review*. Carlton: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth): 5.

<sup>145</sup> Prior, Ross W. (2010) Editorial, *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* 1.1: 3.

<sup>146</sup> Goldbard, Arlene (2008) The Metrics Syndrome, *Community Arts Network Reading Room*. See also [www.arlenegoldbard.com/wp-content/uploads/2005/12/Metrics-Syndrome](http://www.arlenegoldbard.com/wp-content/uploads/2005/12/Metrics-Syndrome), accessed 3 March 2013.

<sup>147</sup> Goldbard 2008.

research including the need to consider repertoire, to examine its relationship with other music practice, and to better articulate the evidence of impact and value<sup>148</sup>. The research tends to neglect the disclosure of “anything about what exactly the choirs were singing (and why) or how the songs were taught (and why)”.<sup>149</sup> At the same time, much of this research lacks engagement with, for instance, cultural theory, social theory, political science, popular music studies or ethnomusicology. Kay Kaufman Shelemay, for example, recognises that the psychologists and neuroscientists who are now examining music as a generative force in human development and human bonding could deepen their ability to more fully incorporate musical data from the “nuanced ethnographic data based on sophisticated musical knowledge”<sup>150</sup> drawn from historical and ethnographic investigations.

Interestingly too, from the perspective of attempting to measure the effects of group singing on individual and social health and wellbeing, some of the projects involve groups of people who are hardly marginalised or disadvantaged such as relatively wealthy and healthy senior members of societies in the UK, Australia and elsewhere, and/or indeed, existing community singing groups whose members reflect the general demography mentioned earlier and have an established engagement with singing. The results of the scientific research, therefore, are limited in their application. Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg’s research with an Aboriginal choir in Hopevale revealed that many of the wellbeing benefits were small, albeit numerous.<sup>151</sup> The ethnographic methodology adopted by Swijghuisen Reigersberg enabled her to conclude that the enjoyment, temporary relief from social burdens, facilitation of cross-cultural fellowship, pride, connection to country, spiritual expression, sense of identity, and

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<sup>148</sup> McKay and Higham 2012.

<sup>149</sup> Bithell, Caroline (2011) The Benefits of Singing: Research and Practice: Reflections on the conference ‘Striking a Chord’, *Natural Voice Practitioners Network Newsletter* 22: 6.

<sup>150</sup> Shelemay 2011: 381.

<sup>151</sup> Swijghuisen Reigersberg, Muriel (2009a) *Choral singing and the construction of Australian Aboriginal identities: an applied ethnomusicological study in Hopevale, Northern Queensland, Australia*, PhD thesis, Roehampton University: 297. It should be noted that such a call for greater collaborative research is an increasingly shared concern. In October 2013 Goldsmiths College in London will be holding a conference entitled *Rethinking Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Towards New Ethical Paradigms in Music and Health Research*. Noting that as yet there has been little regular collaboration between disciplines because of different methodologies, epistemologies and practices, the conference seeks to explore the nature of research into the relationship between music, health and wellbeing in the hope of encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration.

enhanced self-esteem that choral singing brought were evidence of wellbeing.<sup>152</sup> Notably, she argued that these effects were historically and locally contextual and could not be readily replicated. Swijghuisen Reigersberg suggests that scientific scholars “would do well to consider future collaborations because there is much yet to learn about how music is able to benefit health and wellbeing or how, if used inappropriately, it might be detrimental to health and wellbeing”.<sup>153</sup> Sloboda adds other considerations:

In doing music science we may indeed be pushing at the limits of what science can tackle or achieve ... [O]ur attempts to deconstruct need to be constantly held up against the richness of everyday (and peak) musical experience to ensure that it is the full experience we are attempting to explain, and not some conveniently simplified portion of it.<sup>154</sup>

The scientific focus of the project design, the research methodology and the ‘tools’ used to analyse the results in many of the quantitative and even so-called ‘interdisciplinary’ studies “can lead to the deconstruction of the richness of [...] music into a set of ‘effects’ whose impact on health, economic success, consumer behaviour, etc. can be measured, predicted, and controlled”.<sup>155</sup> On the other hand, Caroline Bithell suggests that cross-cultural studies could reveal how singers outside of the ‘western’ world “know how singing works, they can also explain it in quite sophisticated terms”.<sup>156</sup> I would add that singers inside the ‘western’ world can also explain how singing works, in quite sophisticated terms, as the case studies in this thesis illustrate. In particular, Indigenous worldviews and perspectives of wellbeing might highlight the normative assumptions<sup>157</sup> of music and health interventions.

In the contemporary Australian Indigenous context, the notion of ‘healing’ is often linked to wellbeing. According to Tamara Mackean, The Apology in 2008 created a climate appropriate for a ‘healing’ journey which would not only deliver better lives for

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<sup>152</sup> Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2009a: 297-298.

<sup>153</sup> Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2011: 121.

<sup>154</sup> Sloboda 2005: 392.

<sup>155</sup> Sloboda 2005: 390.

<sup>156</sup> Bithell 2011: 7.

<sup>157</sup> Jordan, Kirrily, Bulloch, Hannah and Buchanan, Geoff (2010) Statistical equality and cultural difference in Indigenous wellbeing frameworks: A new expression of an enduring debate, *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 45.3: 333-362.

Indigenous peoples, but “is essential for the wellbeing of Australia as a nation”.<sup>158</sup> Mackean recognised that healing means different things to different people, but succinctly suggests that healing is mostly about renewal. Renewal, she argues, must include the resolution of the impact on health of cultural dislocation, dispossession, loss of autonomy, social exclusion, racism and marginalisation. Renewal requires not just the physical wellbeing of the individual but the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. For Indigenous peoples in particular this includes cultural and spiritual elements and a connection or re-connection with family, culture and country. Mackean argues that these multiple determinants of health must be addressed in order to achieve wellbeing.<sup>159</sup> Other research suggests that real health outcomes for Indigenous people cannot eventuate without attention to economic circumstances<sup>160</sup> and that Indigenous engagement with health maintenance is complicated by social constructions, relationships, and place.<sup>161</sup> As Brooks states of the Indigenous inhabitants of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in the Western Desert:

This is no sleepy hollow that the world has passed by. Nganyatjarra life is about today, and it is busy. There is substance and complexity to its internal affairs, enough to satisfy the most enquiring and energetic of personalities. No one dreams of a more interesting life elsewhere. The people are poor by national standards, but they have their own type of prosperity. *Ngaanyatjarra well-being arises from, is sustained by, and feeds back into one great wellspring – connectedness to Country.*<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Mackean, Tamara (2009) A healed and healthy country: understanding healing for Indigenous Australians, *Medical Journal of Australia* 190.10: 522.

<sup>159</sup> Mackean 2009: 523.

<sup>160</sup> Langton, Marcia (2011) Anthropology, Politics and the Changing World of Aboriginal Australians, *Anthropological Forum: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Comparative Sociology*: 18.

<sup>161</sup> See for instance, Heil, Daniela and Macdonald, Gaynor (2008) “Tomorrow comes when tomorrow comes”: Managing Aboriginal Health within an Ontology of Life-as-Contingent, *Oceania* 78: 299-319; Biddle, Nicholas (2011) *Measures of Indigenous wellbeing and their determinants across the lifecourse*, Centre for Aboriginal Economics Policy Research (CAEPR) Online Lecture Series, <http://caepr.anu.edu.au/population/lectures2011.php>, accessed 30 June 2012.

<sup>162</sup> Brooks, David (2012) An emerging present: a short history of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, in Tim Acker and John Carty (eds), *Ngaanyatjarra: Art of the lands*, Cawley: UWA Publishing: 1. Emphasis added.



Provoked by the complex issues inherent in considerations about Indigenous health, the limitations within the current body of research on community singing and wellbeing, and the diversity in definitions and use of the ideas that circulate in the discourse of community music I interrogate the way in which harmony and wellbeing can be far too readily, simplistically and broadly applied in the various discourses surrounding community music-making. Intricate and intimate threads are necessary to weave harmony and wellbeing together; threads that include the sharing of stories, emotional connection, songs that embody meaning, a 'shared intentionality', and longevity. The musical interactions analysed in later chapters are my attempt to explicate the contextualised and complex nature of harmony and wellbeing.

### ***Hyping up Harmony: Inclusive and in health***

Community music operates within the arts industry which articulates a connection between 'wellbeing' and 'creative communities'. There is an increasing frenzy about the links between the arts and health. Over the last twelve months initiatives have been made to generate greater discussion and to better influence governments.<sup>163</sup> Most recent was the National Arts Summit held at the School of Music at the Australian National University. A small squadron of luminaries each spoke for five minutes, followed by a showcase of music performers and a question session. It was meant to be a national networking opportunity but apart from the keynote speakers very few attended the summit from outside the ACT arts community. The presentations fundamentally reinforced the rhetoric outlined above, as social researcher Hugh Mackay's concluding statements articulate:

[...] the greatest value of the arts – to individuals and to local communities – is through participation in them, rather than merely being exposed to them as spectators... The more you look at the ills of contemporary society – alienation, fragmentation, isolation, depression – the more compelling the need for community participation in the arts seems. What better way to fostering a

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<sup>163</sup> These include the Arts and Health Foundation which facilitated a "call to action" of industry workers to have input to a National Policy Framework. The Foundation organised a National Arts and Health Policy Forum at Parliament House, Canberra, on 27 June 2012. Around 60 invited representatives from across Australia gathered to develop recommendations to inform a national arts and health policy framework. The forum was said to provide an opportunity to strengthen links between members of the arts and health community and government agencies responsible for the development of the policy framework. See [www.artshealthfoundation.org.au](http://www.artshealthfoundation.org.au) Last accessed 4 March 2013.

sense of community, promoting mental health and wellbeing, and reducing the pressures of a competitive, materialistic society than by encouraging widespread participation in the arts?

In Australia, lobbying governments to increase arts funding is an ongoing mission and it is essential to strategically access available opportunities. Many arts organisations have programs which run parallel or link to the developments within government departments and agencies, and which, the Australia Council claims, “have driven forward the arts health and wellbeing agenda over the last decade”.<sup>164</sup> The Australia Council adds an important element to the results of the research:

Australian and overseas research shows that direct involvement by communities in arts activity can contribute significantly to individual and community wellbeing and can *enhance the efforts of government agencies in realising their policies for community wellbeing and ecologically sustainable communities*.<sup>165</sup>

The publication, *Art and Wellbeing*, presents case studies grouped under seven themes which represent key priorities for governments in Australia in achieving community wellbeing: health, ecologically sustainable development, public housing and place, rural revitalisation, community strengthening, active citizenship, and social inclusion and diversity. The document suggests that when community cultural development projects actually facilitate a re-evaluation of perceived reality and collective habits to thinking and acting, they can expose communities to previously unimaginable ideas which challenge values and may lead to change.<sup>166</sup> While government investment in community is to be commended and encouraged, it should be recognised that although these projects might persuade some politicians or bureaucrats to advocate on behalf of supporting the arts, they are not frequently designed to “encourage fundamental shifts in policy processes, agency structures, modes of decision-making and attitude”.<sup>167</sup>

### ***The Shifting Discourse***

Over the last two decades there has been a dialogic process occurring that has shifted the discourse of community singing to align with contemporary social, cultural, political

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<sup>164</sup> Mills and Brown 2004: 18.

<sup>165</sup> Mills and Brown 2004: 18, my emphasis.

<sup>166</sup> Mills and Brown 2004.

<sup>167</sup> Mills and Brown 2004: 9.

and economic agendas. The re-articulation of the discourse surrounding community music making highlights the fluid constructions which take place, as well as the rarely contested notions which circulate within them. The a cappella scene's endeavour was to democratise singing, releasing it from the polarities of, on the one hand, the formal choral traditions and institutions that alienated many singers and, on the other, the popularised notion that singing was only for the talented few which was promoted by the music industry. It focused on being a diverse, grassroots, vibrant and vigorous sociomusical endeavour.

The community music movement draws upon many of the dialogues that existed within the a cappella scene. More significantly, it has developed an agenda and discourse to fit with later social movements and government initiatives. Placed within the broad arts and health sector, the community music movement has both influenced and absorbed the notions of 'wellbeing', 'social inclusion' and 'creative communities', contributing to wide social, political and economic agendas. The movement's discourse has therefore more often opted for the promotion of group singing's contributions to health and social inclusion. It could therefore be argued that institutions within government and industry have colonised the 'progressive' ideals of the a cappella scene and shifted community singing into a potential means of social control through a politics of the body informed by inclusion and wellbeing.

Unlike other Australian popular musics, the community music movement does not dramatically turn history on its head, nor rattle "the foundations of Australian social life"<sup>168</sup> like some popular musics are claimed to have done. On the whole, the movement sits comfortably within mainstream agendas, which are not "amorphous and nebulous [but rather] specific and particular".<sup>169</sup> The community music movement encourages community participation in music making and some organisations do make submissions to government on matters of music education and cultural policy. Its discourse can at times be overly passionate about links between music and individual

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<sup>168</sup> Homan and Mitchell 2008: 5.

<sup>169</sup> Huber, Alison (2007) What's in a Mainstream?: Critical Possibilities, *'Popular Music: practices, formations and change – Australian perspectives'*, *Altitude: An e-journal of emerging humanities work*: 8. [http://www.api-network.com/altitude/pdf/8/2\\_Huber\\_final\\_completeEP.pdf](http://www.api-network.com/altitude/pdf/8/2_Huber_final_completeEP.pdf), accessed 30 June 2012.

and social gains. The statement that community choirs inherently make a contribution to individual and social health and wellbeing is a generous claim, one which is often tempered in the fine print of research. Nevertheless, there is some evidence of the community wellbeing and cultural vitality that is necessary to identify successful arts projects.<sup>170</sup> These can be found within particular nodes of musical interaction.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Being integrated into the arts industry discourse, community choirs are now situated within the nexus of creativity and wellbeing. The dialogues surrounding community choirs promote them as sites of cultural vibrancy and social harmony that also includes the chorus of inclusion and a heralding of wellbeing. This positive image of community choirs can be directed to inspire, subscribe and reinforce social cohesion, to engender creative industrialisation, and to promote self-responsible maintenance of health and wellbeing. Within this climate, however, there is a possibility that the relationship between self and nation is understood in terms of duty, obligation and moral responsibility, through a discourse of lifestyle change motivated by the fear, for instance, of becoming ill in a failing health system.<sup>171</sup> This allows for community choirs to be construed as ‘cures’ prescribed by medical practitioners for improvements to health with little understanding of the dose or duration necessary. The underlying imperative is “the potential cost savings to the health budget”.<sup>172</sup> Echoing some of my concerns, Vicky White has suggested that in the UK community singing is in danger of being used and abused by institutional and government bodies as a ‘quick fix’ solution to society’s problems.<sup>173</sup>

Within the environment of highly publicised ‘success’ stories of community choirs, the challenging aspects to community choirs are little discussed, constrained by the need to access the funding opportunities that now frame community music making. That a

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<sup>170</sup> See, for example, Jackson, Maria and Herranz, Joaquin (2002) *Culture Counts in Communities: A Framework for Measurement*, Washington DC: The Urban Institute, who proposed a “systems approach” to identify the social impact of arts projects.

<sup>171</sup> Fullagar 2002: 75.

<sup>172</sup> Mills, Deborah (2011) *Joining the policy dots: Strengthening the contribution of the arts to individual and community health and wellbeing*, Submission to the National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper on behalf of The Arts and Health Foundation: 5.

<sup>173</sup> White nd: 2.

community choir can be a dynamic and complex sociomusical interaction that “challenges, enrages, frustrates and burdens each and every member at times”<sup>174</sup> is not such common knowledge. The romantic language promoted by choirs, the movement, and industry representatives is rarely critiqued. That members of choirs leave disgruntled because of personal politics, disinterest in the musical focus, the limits to musical skill development, the commercial drive or personality of the choir leader, a sense of exclusion (either socially or musically) is muted. That choirs can be merely transitory, contrived as symbolic constructions of community for specific events, and/or that there are significant challenges to sustainability are treated as taboo subjects, only analysed in private conversations, covered by left radical papers, and, occasionally, content in academic and arts industry conference papers.

Despite the foregoing critique, I do not want to dismiss the positive outcomes that community choirs can provide for many individuals and their communities. The a cappella scene and the community singing movement have made a significant contribution to vernacular music-making in Australia and, in some specific situations, to affirmative individual and social change. However, it concerns me that the arts and health agenda that now heavily informs the community music movement means that community choirs are too readily constructed as an authentic expression of our social bonds, a tonic for our individual and social healing, and a badge of honour for the arts industry. Indeed, the discourse is often silent on the spontaneously generated community music that does exist.<sup>175</sup> The sites of community music making where people are agents in the determination, construction and maintenance of “ties within a community [that] helps resolve important political and social issues”<sup>176</sup> can be made virtually invisible within the grand expanse of gross generalisations.

The experience of meaningful engagement with music can prompt an expansion of human being, doing and knowledge; re-inscribing an inherent creative and artistic practice and expression which is too often absent or undernourished in many lives. What is missing in many of the interventionist projects and in much of the current

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<sup>174</sup> Rickwood 1997: 172.

<sup>175</sup> As Linsey Pollak commented in 1993. Cited in Breen, Marcus (1993) Constructing the popular from public funding of community music: notes from Australia, *Popular Music* 13.3: 313-326.

<sup>176</sup> Morphy 2009: 117.

research that informs the discourse of the community music movement is the demonstrable increase in musical knowledge and practice; the details, reasons for and processes of repertoire selection and musical pedagogy; as well as the agency of the singers in their music making. In the following chapters I present more nuanced analyses of how community singers actively travel ‘musical pathways’,<sup>177</sup> in a musical practice that can lead to a continuous series of ‘border crossings’,<sup>178</sup> collaborating in the development of meaning, connection, relation, knowledge and expression.

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<sup>177</sup> Finnegan, Ruth (1989) *Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English town*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. See also 2007 edition.

<sup>178</sup> Higgins, Lee (2002) Towards community music conceptualizations, in H Schippers and N Kors (eds), *Proceedings of the 2002 ISME Commission on Community Music Activity*, Rotterdam, NK, <http://www.cdime-network.com>, cited in Veblen 2007. See also Higgins 2006.

## Chapter 3

### Harmonising community interaction: Reconciliation and community choirs

I sing for the black and the people of this land  
I sing for the red and the blood that's been shed  
Now I'm singing for the gold  
And a new year for young and old  
Yil Lull, Yil Lull, Yil Lull  
Now I'm singing for the black  
I am singing for the red and the gold  
This story is told for young and old  
**'Yil Lull'<sup>1</sup> by Joe Geia**

Six years I've been in the desert  
And every night I dream of the sea  
They say home is where you find it  
But will this place ever satisfy me  
For I come from the saltwater people  
We always lived by the sea  
Now I'm out here west of Alice Springs  
With a wife and a family  
And my Island Home  
My Island Home  
My Island Home is a waiting for me  
**'My Island Home' by Neil Murray**

*If you have come here to help me,  
You are wasting your time...  
But if you have come because your liberation  
is bound up with mine,  
then let us work together.*

**Lilla Watson, Brisbane-based Aboriginal Educator and Activist**

#### **Preamble**

This chapter further shapes the foundation for the ethnographic chapters that follow; the distinctive particularities of the sociomusical spaces of community (inter)action in South East Australia, South West Australia, and Central Australia. I provide a brief outline of the reconciliation process in Australia and its representation in Australian music. I then formulate a theoretical framework for the exploration of how reconciliation is made manifest at the grass-roots level through community music-

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<sup>1</sup> "Yil Lull" means "sing" in [Guugu Yuimithirr](#), a language group based in far north Queensland.

making, including a meditation on the notion of 'singing-in-between'. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the convergence of reconciliation and community music not only exposes the active negotiations or 'boundary crossings' inherent in creating harmony, intent, and representation, but also uncovers the elements of discord intrinsic in both musical merging and the reconciliation project.

Below are two juxtaposing statements that frame my analysis of reconciliation and community choirs. The first is an excerpt from the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations. The second quote is from popular music researcher Simon Frith. They offer entry to understanding the harmonising of 'community interaction', a phrase to describe the agency of Indigenous and non-Indigenous singers in the reconciliation process.

There comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time. And that is why the parliament is today here assembled: to deal with this unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great stain from the nation's soul and, in a true spirit of reconciliation, to open a new chapter in the history of this great land, Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Music both articulates and offers the immediate experience of collective identity [...] In responding to a song, to a sound, we are drawn into affective and emotional alliances [...] Music is especially important for our sense of ourselves because of its unique emotional intensity – we absorb songs into our own lives and rhythm into our own bodies [...] Identity is always an ideal, what we would like to be, not what we are [...] What makes music special is that musical identity is both fantastic – idealizing not just oneself but also the social world one inhabits – and real: it is enacted in activity [...] music gives us a real experience of what the ideal could be.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rudd, Kevin (2008) *Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples*, Canberra, ACT: House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia.

<sup>3</sup> Frith, Simon (1996) *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press: 273–274.



When Kevin Rudd made The Apology I wonder how he thought that it might produce the “true spirit of reconciliation”. How did he envisage the writing of this “new chapter” in Australian history? These questions are, of course, rhetorical but they do suggest some of the considerations necessary in order to explore how reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians might shift the ‘intercultural’ “from an emphasis on an ‘interface’ between separately conceived domains and towards an approach that considers Indigenous and non-Indigenous social forms to be necessarily relational, and to occupy a single sociocultural field”.<sup>4</sup>

Simon Frith captures the link between music and identity with reference to music’s ability to craft affective and emotional alliances but he does not explicitly describe how this might come about, particularly in relation to cross-cultural engagements that address social inequities. In an essay on music and social being, Ian Cross argued that social justice was not produced by musicality in itself, but is made manifest through music-making’s capacity for shared intentionality; that is, musicality provides “space for the emergence of concepts that bear on how humans can, and ultimately perhaps should, interact”.<sup>5</sup> In his conclusion, Cross makes reference to Inga Clendinnen’s *Dancing with Strangers: Europeans and Australians at First Contact*.<sup>6</sup> He notes Clendinnen’s comment that culture is a dynamic system of shared meanings that are rarely made explicit, and, in cross-cultural engagements “understanding another culture’s meanings is and will always be a hazardous enterprise”.<sup>7</sup> But, remarks Cross, that engagement of dance at first contact enabled members of two cultures to “believe that they could begin to know”<sup>8</sup> something of each other. Some 220 years later, in a very different social, cultural, economic and political climate to that of first contact, understanding across the cultures of settler and Indigenous Australia remains a hazardous enterprise.

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<sup>4</sup> Hinkson, Melinda and Smith, Brendon (2005) Introduction - conceptual moves towards an intercultural analysis, in *Figuring the Intercultural in Aboriginal Australia*, M. Hinkson and B. Smith, (eds), *Oceania*, 75/3: 158.

<sup>5</sup> Cross, Ian (2005-6) Music and Social Being, *Musicology Australia* 28: 124.

<sup>6</sup> Clendinnen, Inga (2005) *Dancing with Strangers: Europeans and Australians at First Contact*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Cross 2005-6: 124.

<sup>8</sup> Cross 2005-6: 125.

Returning to the field as often as I did reinforced my understanding that strengthening relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is a journey still in the making, more challenging than a symbolic reconciliation with our past. The latest version of the 'Sorry Song' included in the Prelude, for example, captures the more attainable sense of reconciliation; its lyrics inscribe a way of emotional engagement to our past, gather in the gesture of The Apology, and offer the hopeful image of a reconciled nation. With words and melody it reflects the potential and, at the same time, mirrors much of the progressive desire of reconciliation. It is, however, the impetus for its composition, the responses to it, and the dynamics surrounding practice and performance that reveal deeper realities. Practice and performance are the lived experience of 'sociability';<sup>9</sup> they are the communicative processes that allow for shifts of intimacy and knowledge, power and agenda, within the sociomusical environment of *Madjtil Moorna* – born from the telling of stories and a joint endeavour to sing and to heal. As an emergent structure, the choir explores and expresses the primacy of personal relations in a space of encounter; a singing across and between and within cultural difference. I describe this space as 'singing-in-between', a construct that attempts to capture the liminal space in which a 'shared intentionality' can be fashioned in the sociomusical spaces of cross-cultural choirs and choral events. It leans towards Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of the zone of cultural contact as the 'third space',<sup>10</sup> the cutting edge of translation and negotiation which can facilitate the creation of hybrid possibilities.

### ***The reconciliation process in Australia***

The Apology was regarded as a critical moment in the process of reconciliation, generating a "great potential for the nation" .<sup>11</sup> Prior to The Apology, reconciliation might have put an end to the "great Australian silence, but no words were spoken for

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<sup>9</sup> Frith 1996: 204.

<sup>10</sup> Bhabha, Homi (1994) *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Bamblett, Muriel, Burke, Gabrielle, Hunter, Sue Anne and Lewis, Peter (2008) *Social Inclusion and the Dangers Neo-colonialism: An Aboriginal Child and Family Services Perspective on Social Inclusion and Building Partnerships with Mainstream*, Melbourne: Partnerships for Social Inclusion – Conference Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, 15-16 October: 18.

the future”.<sup>12</sup> The Apology therefore promised a new beginning for race relations and, like past opportunities, it seemed like “a moment when [...] Australia might recast its national identity through a full acknowledgement of the wrongs that had been done in the past”.<sup>13</sup> As in the past, however, this hope remains incompletely realised. While the promise of The Apology has yet to be fulfilled by government, at the grassroots level relationships continue to consolidate the inter-relationship of settler and Indigenous Australians<sup>14</sup> in order “to achieve a better future together”.<sup>15</sup>

The reconciliation process between Indigenous and settler Australians is a political and social movement at government, institutional and community levels. In her examination of Indigenous movements in Australia, Francesca Merlan notes successful Indigenous protests were often the product of focused collaborations between Indigenous social actors and others who supported their struggles. Merlan includes reconciliation among these movements<sup>16</sup>. The government sponsored reconciliation project saw the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1991, and subsequently a non-government foundation, to educate the community on cross-cultural relations. The focus moved from investigation of a social history of disadvantage and reform to a mobilisation of change in national attitudes or “a change from hostility and conflict to mutual acceptance, respect, and future cooperation”.<sup>17</sup> The reconciliation project endeavours to capture and involve a broad spectrum of the Australian community. This has included the adoption of Reconciliation Action Plans by government, institutions

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<sup>12</sup> Castejon, Vanessa (2002) Aboriginal affairs: monologue or dialogue?, *Journal of Australian Studies* 75: 27-32, cited in Slater, Lisa (2007) My Island Home is Waiting for Me: the Dreaming Festival and Archipelago Australia, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 21/4: 579.

<sup>13</sup> Maddison, Sarah (2012) Postcolonial guilt and national identity: Historical injustice and the Australian settler state, *Social Identities* 18.6: 707.

<sup>14</sup> Sullivan, Patrick. 2011. *Belonging Together: Dealing with the politics of disenchantment in Australian Indigenous affairs policy*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press. See also, Newbury, Paul W. 2011. *Review of 'Belonging Together: Dealing with the politics of disenchantment in Australian Indigenous affairs policy*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press', *Bonzer On-line Monthly, November*, [http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/aspbooks/documents/Bonzer\\_PNewbury\\_November2011.pdf](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/aspbooks/documents/Bonzer_PNewbury_November2011.pdf), accessed 12 December 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Subasic and Reynolds 2009: 263.

<sup>16</sup> Merlan, Francesca (2005) 'Indigenous Movements in Australia', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34: 486. See also Maddison 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Subasic, Emina and Reynolds, Katherine J (2009) Beyond 'Practical' Reconciliation: Intergroup Inequality and the meaning of non-Indigenous identity, *Political Psychology*, 30.2: 243-267.

and business, and public marches and other actions such as reconciliation meetings. In recent public addresses the idea of reconciliation has been broadened to include climate change action and the role that Indigenous knowledge could have in addressing the effects of climate change on the Australian landscape.<sup>18</sup> The evolution of the reconciliation project exposes the fluidity of the concept and accounts for much of the uncertainty surrounding its meaning and the critical discourse that it attracts.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, many Indigenous leaders argue that the process of reconciliation will not truly begin until a treaty and constitutional change have been negotiated which establish “appropriate protocols and relationships – both cultural and legal – through which Indigenous culture and dominant culture can engage with each other”.<sup>20</sup> Others claim that land justice is also essential.<sup>21</sup>

The concern with the relationship between the Indigenous Australian minority<sup>22</sup> and the non-Indigenous majority has been highly prominent in Australian politics during the last

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<sup>18</sup> Arabena, Kerry (2010) *Post-Normal Reconciliation – Using Science to reframe the Reconciliation Agenda*, Annual Reconciliation Lecture, Canberra: ANU/NFSA; Dodson, Patrick (2010) *How Reconciliation can help combat climate change*, Keynote address at Indigenous Policy and Dialogue Conference, Sydney: University of NSW, 19 November, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/stories/2011/03/08/3155719.htm>, accessed 12 December 2011. Indigenous epistemologies and practices as a solution to environmental destruction in Australia have also been addressed in Arabena, Kerry (2008) “Indigenous Epistemology and Wellbeing: Universe referent citizenship”, *AIATSIS Research Discussion Paper Number 22*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Altman, Jon and Kerins, Sean (2012) *People on Country: Vital Landscapes, Indigenous Futures*, Annandale: The Federation Press.

<sup>19</sup> To some extent the current movement around Constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians carries the reconciliation process forward. However, like the reconciliation process itself, Constitutional recognition also provides purchase for political debate and contestation about Indigenous rights. Some might argue it is another example of the ‘cunning of recognition’ that is typical of settler societies (see, for example, Povinelli, Elizabeth (2002) *The cunning of recognition: Indigenous alterities and the making of Australian multiculturalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, cited in Maddison 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Bamblett et al 2008: 18.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Atkinson, Wayne (2004) Reconciliation & Land Justice: You Can’t Have One without the Other, *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* 7.2: June.

<sup>22</sup> Australia’s Indigenous population is a small percentage of the 21.5 million Australians counted in the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2011) *Census of Population and Housing - Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/data> (accessed 12 November 2012). The figure of 2.5% of the population is little different from previous census data despite a growth in the actual number of Australians identifying as Indigenous.

two decades.<sup>23</sup> The structural violence, dispossession and injustice that began with the colonial project and the continuing disadvantage and suffering in some Indigenous lives has prompted disillusionment, disenchantment and cynicism regarding government policies and practices, and the project of reconciliation itself.<sup>24</sup> The Apology therefore created a “seismic shift in the body politic of the nation and a dramatic incursion of the resistance and resilience of Australia’s First Peoples into the national narrative”.<sup>25</sup> The colonisation process was said to be similarly felt throughout Indigenous Australia, “from its rapacious resource-grabbing form through to a more contemporary welfare variant, while struggling to maintain a sense of culture and identity and control of local land and politics”.<sup>26</sup> Bamblett et al describe the process as one where “‘others’ transformed the land and waters of Australia from places of spiritual and economic fulfilment to places of struggle and starvation”.<sup>27</sup> They further suggest that the colonial process in Australia, as elsewhere, was based on “[e]nlightenment philosophy and scientific ideologies premised on doubt and a capitalist ideology premised on scarcity”.<sup>28</sup> While this statement could be dismissed as a simplification of a complex triad of ideologies, their central concern with the impacts of colonisation on Indigenous lives is echoed by other voices. Broome, for example, states that:

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<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Altman Jon, and Hinkson, Melinda (eds.) (2007) *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, normalise, exit Aboriginal Australia*, North Carlton: Arena Publications Australia; Altman Jon, and Hinkson, Melinda (eds.) (2010) *Culture Crisis: Anthropology and politics in Aboriginal Australia*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press; Ingamells, Ann (2010) ‘Closing the Gap: some unsettling assumptions’, *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 1.1: 7-22; Short, Damien (2003) ‘Reconciliation, Assimilation, and the Indigenous Peoples of Australia’, *International Political Science Review*, 24.4: 491-513; Young, Graham (2000) ‘Reconciliation to a European Dreaming?’, *ON LINE opinion - Australia's e-journal of social and political debate*, accessed 10 November 2009, <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/print.asp?article=3133>.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Maddison 2012; Maddison, Sarah (2011) *Beyond white guilt: The real challenge for Black-White relations in Australia*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin; Maddison, Sarah and Brigg, Morgan (eds) (2011) *Unsettling the settler state: Creativity and resistance in Indigenous settler-state governance*, Sydney: Federation Press. See also, Subasic and Reynolds; Sullivan; Greer, Germaine (2008) Strictly Fanciful, *The Age*, December 17.

<sup>25</sup> Bamblett et al 2005: 2.

<sup>26</sup> Connell, John (1999) “My Island Home”: The politics and poetics of the Torres Strait, in R. King and J. Connell Eds. *Small Worlds, Global Lives: Islands and Migration*, London: Pinter: 209.

<sup>27</sup> Bamblett et al 2005: 6.

<sup>28</sup> Bamblett et al 2005: 6, who draw on notions from Descartes, Rene (1637/1968) *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, Translated by F E Sutcliffe, London: Penguin, where he begins his scientific method from the principle of universal doubt; and Smith, Adam (1776/1972) *The Wealth of Nations*, London: Penguin, where the key premise of his exposition of capitalism is the concept of scarcity.

Settlers desired [land] for sustenance, independence, wealth and status. For Aboriginal people it was their bodily sustenance, their identity, their spirituality, and the very life essence itself. It was not easily surrendered or forgotten by Aboriginal people, and assumed new meanings in the post-conquest Aboriginal world.<sup>29</sup>

While there is a general pattern to the colonial process, the impacts of contact and later incursions of settlement and settler governments<sup>30</sup> on Indigenous lives were not uniform. The change and disruption to Indigenous lives are now more commonly heard from Indigenous and other perspectives.<sup>31</sup> Merlan notes that many accounts reveal the social complexity and creativity of Indigenous responses to colonisation, challenging simple views of societal collapse or unchanging social orders.<sup>32</sup> They were, she argues, adaptive and imaginative.

The legacy of colonisation is said to permeate every aspect of contemporary Indigenous life,<sup>33</sup> which is often ambiguously understood by and promoted within the dominant culture. Jennifer Newsome argues that mainstream media “delivers a confused and confusing public message of unrelenting dysfunction within Indigenous affairs

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<sup>29</sup> Broome, Richard (2006) “There were vegetables every year Mr Green was here”: Right behaviour and the struggle for autonomy at Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve, *History Australia* 3.2: 43.2. See also Goodall, Heather (1996) *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

<sup>30</sup> These later impacts include current legislation and policies. The Northern Territory Intervention and the Stronger Futures legislation are examples of this ongoing process. The Northern Territory Intervention was established by the Howard Government on 21 June 2007 in response to the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle Little Children are Sacred Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse* (Anderson, P, and Wild, R, 2007, Darwin: Northern Territory Government). The Intervention was, and continues to be, controversial, with many contested perspectives on whether it was appropriate policy and whether it has, indeed, had the desired impact. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in any detail. See, for example, Bamblett et al 2005, Altman and Hinkson 2007.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Austin –Broos, Diane (2009) *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press; Bradley, John, with Yanyuwa families (2010) *Singing Saltwater Country: Journey of the Songlines of Carpentaria*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin; Egan, Richard (2012) *Neither Amity nor Kindness: Government policy towards Aboriginal people of NSW from 1788 to 1969*, Paddington: Richard Egan Publishing; Gammage, Bill (2011) *The Greatest Estate of Earth: How Aborigines made Australia*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin; Karskens, Grace (2010) *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin; McGregor, Russell (2011) *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press; Sullivan, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Merlan 2005: 486.

<sup>33</sup> Newsome, Jennifer K (2008) From Researched to Centrestage: A Case Study, *Musicological Annual* XLIV.1: 31-49.

contrasted with positive images of a strong and vibrant Indigenous community embodying a living culture worthy of national celebration”.<sup>34</sup> These divergent images do nothing to quell the uncertainty held by many non-Indigenous Australians about the role they might play in improving race relations. The mindset of the Howard Government (1996-2007) remains dominant for many non-Indigenous Australians<sup>35</sup> and many have felt some anguish or grief about the impacts of multiculturalism in the 1990s, and the more recent calls for recognition of our complex history, on their attachment to a positive image of settler nationhood. This is importantly “epitomized in the long-standing debate about whether or not the current inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians should be seen as a legacy of past injustice”.<sup>36</sup> Sarah Maddison argues that the retreat from the “challenge of acknowledging historical collective guilt [and] ignoring the accountability that gives individual lives and the lives of the nation ‘moral gravity’”<sup>37</sup> is counterintuitive. She states that recognition of historical injustice must be “integrated into a contemporary understanding of the nation”.<sup>38</sup> Importantly, Subasic and Reynolds claim that the more non-Indigenous Australians see “inequality in terms of the intergroup relationship, where their group identity is inextricably linked to the experiences of Indigenous people, the more they will see [inequality] as illegitimate and the greater the impetus for social change in solidarity with Indigenous people”.<sup>39</sup> They add, “when [Indigenous] disadvantage shapes

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<sup>34</sup> Newsome 2008:32. See also Barney, Katelyn (2005) Celebration or Cover up?: “My Island Home”, Australian nation identity and the spectacle of Sydney 2000, in E. Mackinlay, D. Collins and S. Owens (eds), *Aesthetics and Experience in Music Performance*, Buckinghamshire: Cambridge Scholars Press: 141-150.

<sup>35</sup> The impact of the Howard Government on Indigenous policy and the divergent reading of history that emerged during that time is beyond the scope of this thesis. See, for example, Clark, Anna (2002) History in Black and White: a critical analysis of the Black Armband debate, Richard Nile (ed), *Country: Journal of Australian Studies* 75, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press; MacIntyre, Stuart, and Clark, Anna (2004) *The History Wars*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press; Manne, Robert (ed) (2003) *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle’s Fabrications of Aboriginal History*, Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda; Taylor, Tony (2012) Howard’s history repeating: curriculum complaints nothing new, *The Conversation*, 4 October, <http://theconversation.edu.au/howards-history-repeating-curriculum.htm>, accessed 9 October 2012; Windschuttle, Keith (2001) The fabrication of Aboriginal history, *New Criterion*, September 1.

<sup>36</sup> Subasic and Reynolds 2009: 244.

<sup>37</sup> Maddison 2012: 25. See also Subasic and Reynolds 2009: 249.

<sup>38</sup> Maddison 2012: 26.

<sup>39</sup> Subasic and Reynolds 2009: 251.

who 'we' are [we are all] willing to engage in the change process"<sup>40</sup> or, more simply, we are "belonging together".<sup>41</sup>

The concept of reconciliation, therefore, is somewhat nebulous. It provides purchase for political debate and contestation about Indigenous rights, as well as operating as a focus for action and agency in the development of cross-cultural relations. It is, of course, the latter which defines many community music collaborations. This is especially noteworthy, as not unlike music making's capacity for shared intentionality, the reconciliation process has the capacity to shift norms, values and beliefs, "defining both 'who we are' [...], how groups should relate to each other , [and] what the *intergroup relations* should be like in a given social context".<sup>42</sup> It is therefore interesting that the positive promotion of race relations which are intrinsic to the musical practice and repertoire of community (inter)actions are understood by many of the singers as taking place outside of the political arena of reconciliation.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Reconciliation and Australian Music***

The overall intensification of Indigenous activism since the 1970s has nurtured more assertive Indigenous consciousness in music, drama, film, and other art forms. This diverse arts media often presents a sometimes confronting interpretation of Australian history to the 'dominant culture' while, at the same time, representing the spiritual and cultural survival of Indigenous cultures.<sup>44</sup> Within that body of artistic work, contemporary music has become an important vehicle. As Jill Stubington notes, by the 1980s many Indigenous Australians were highly competent in Western musical forms and "had recovered a pride in their Aboriginality".<sup>45</sup> They also received assistance from a number of institutions set up to promote Aboriginal music such as the Centre for

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<sup>40</sup> Subasic and Reynolds 2009: 251.

<sup>41</sup> Sullivan 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Subasic and Reynolds 2009: 245.

<sup>43</sup> This will be further discussed in the following three chapters.

<sup>44</sup> Dunbar-Hall, Peter (2006) "We have survived": popular music as a representation of Australian Aboriginal cultural loss and reclamation. In *The Resisting Muse: Popular music and social protest*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company: 119-131.

<sup>45</sup> Stubington, Jill (2007) *Singing the land: The power of performance in Aboriginal life*, Strawberry Hills: Sydney: 133.



Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) in Adelaide and the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) in Alice Springs.

Robin Ryan argues that contemporary Indigenous music has often been the vehicle “for the expression of [...] anger and pride, political protest and profound optimism”<sup>46</sup> and suggests “[s]ongs are not divided from contemporary Aboriginal life; they just bleed out of it as a creative response to more than two centuries of powerlessness” .<sup>47</sup> They can, of course, just as likely emerge from a sense of joy or hope that balances the adversity. Some music flows from pain but that cannot be attributed to an overall motivation for Indigenous songwriting. The dialogue of much contemporary Indigenous music swings between sorrow and joy, which has synergies with ‘traditional’ mortuary rituals.<sup>48</sup> As others argue, land, the dreaming, health, lifestyle, and languages were present in classical or pre-colonial musical traditions and those themes continue to run through contemporary Indigenous music.<sup>49</sup>

Recorded contemporary music by Indigenous artists has been commercially promoted to mainstream Australia, especially since the late 1980s-1990s. The Folk Movement has

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<sup>46</sup> Prior, Sian (2006) *From Little Things Big Things Grow: A compendium of contemporary Indigenous music*, Perth: International Arts Festival *murundak* House Program: 1.

<sup>47</sup> Ryan, Robin (2001) Educational Perspectives on Indigenous Country Music: Review Article of Clinton Walker’s *Buried Country: The Story of Aboriginal Country Music* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 2000) and associated multimedia resources, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 29.1: 43.

<sup>48</sup> Morphy, Howard (2011) Personal comment (1/12/10).

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Breen, Marcus (ed) (1989) *Our Place Our Music*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press; Dunbar-Hall, Peter & Gibson, Chris, 2004, *Deadly sounds, deadly places: contemporary Aboriginal music in Australia*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press Ltd; Gibson, Chris & Dunbar-Hall, Peter (2008) *Contemporary Aboriginal Music, in Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now*, Shane Homan & Tony Mitchell (eds), Hobart (ACYS): 253-270; Homan, Shane, & Mitchell, Tony (2008) Introduction: Locating Australian Popular Music”, in *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now*, Hobart (ACYS): ix-xx; Mitchell, Tony (2009) *Music and the production of place: Introduction, Transforming Cultures eJournal*, 4.1: i-vii, <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/TfC>; Magowan, Fiona and Neuenfeldt, Karl eds. (2005) *Landscapes of Indigenous Performance: Music, Song and Dance of the Torres Strait and Arnhem Land*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press; Magowan, Fiona (2007a) *Melodies of Mourning: Music and Emotion in Northern Australia*, Crawley: University of Western Australia Press; White, Cameron (2009) “*Rapper on a Rampage*”: *Theorising the Political Significance of Aboriginal Australian Hip Hop and Reggae*, 4.1: , <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/TfC>, accessed 11 November 2010. See other publications by the above authors as well as publications by Australian ethnomusicologists Linda Barwick, Aaron Corn, Catherine Ellis, Trevor Jones, Margaret Kartomi, Allan Marrett, Alice Moyle, Richard Moyle, Peter Toner, Stephen Wild, and others listed in this thesis.

been instrumental in the transfer of Indigenous artistic expressions from silence to celebration.<sup>50</sup> Contemporary and traditional Indigenous music is promoted through festivals such as Garma, Laura, The Dreaming and Milpirri. Some musicians allow their music to be the vehicle for their Indigenous voice by singing in Indigenous languages, such as Geoffrey Gurumul Yunupingu who won the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) Award for World Music in 2008 and 2011. His music no doubt falls in line with other Yolgnu performers who have used music as a conscious strategy to inform Australians, and others in the global music market, that the Yolgnu of the Eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, are a distinct people and culture in coexistence with Indigenous and other cultures in Australia.<sup>51</sup> Others more assertively promote their cultural politics as does the Black Arm Band, some of whose members were in influential bands or were prominent soloists in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>52</sup> Dunbar-Hall argues all Indigenous music makes a statement of identity and a “reminder of Aboriginal presences”,<sup>53</sup> and popular music is one means through which Indigenous voices demand the acknowledgement of both their histories and the revitalisation that is present today.

Projects in a variety of genres have arisen that are framed by both this contemporary musical environment and by the “dominant rhetoric of reconciliation”.<sup>54</sup> The well-known ‘From Little Things, Big Things Grow’,<sup>55</sup> written by Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly in 1991, is

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<sup>50</sup> Neuenfeldt, Karl (2002) From silence to celebration: Indigenous Australian performers at the Woodford Folk Festival, *World of Music*, 43.2-3, cited in Smith, Graeme, 2005: 70.

<sup>51</sup> Dunbar-Hall (2006: 122) discusses this conscious strategy in relation to the Wirrinyga Band.

<sup>52</sup> The members of the Black Arm Band include or have included: Archie Roach (Ruby Hunter), Bart Willoughby (No Fixed Address, Mixed Relations, Coloured Stone, Yothu Yindi), Dan Sultan, Dave Arden (Hard Times, Koori Youth Band, Mixed Relations), Emma Donovan (Stiff Gins), George Rurrumbu (Warumpi Band; recently deceased, 2009), Gapanbulu Yunupingu (Yothu Yindi), Jimmy Little (recently deceased, 2012), Joe Geia (No Fixed Address), Kutcha Edwards (Watbalimba, Blackfire), Lou Bennett (Tiddas), Mark Atkins, Peter Rotumah (Hard Times, Djaambi, Strayblacks, Breakaway), Rachael Maza Long, Ruby Hunter (Archie Roach; recently deceased, 2009), Shane Howard (Goanna), Shellie Morris, Stephen Pigram (Kuckles, Scrap Metal, Pigram Brothers), Ursula Yovich (Black Arm Band, <http://www.blackarmband.com.au/>, accessed 7 June 2009).

<sup>53</sup> Dunbar-Hall 2006: 120.

<sup>54</sup> MacNeill, Kate (2010) Identity and the Political (Im)Possibilities of Collaboration, *Third Text* 24.3: 319.

<sup>55</sup> This song captures “the Gurindji’s famed walk-off at Wave Hill. Its joyful, optimistic chorus offsets the potency of the story it tells of Vincent Lingiari’s campaign for land rights for his people. ‘Vincent said uh-uh, we’re not talking about wages, We’re sitting right here til we get our land’ [...]It was a powerful history lesson wrapped up in twelve wonderful verses” (Hutchison 2008).

an example of a song claimed to show “respectful collaborations between black and white artists: [an authentic example] of reconciliation in action”.<sup>56</sup> This and other songs engage with Indigenous resistance to oppression.<sup>57</sup> ‘From Little Things Big Things Grow’ has been subsequently covered by other musicians such as The Herd,<sup>58</sup> the Get Up Stand Up Reconciliation/Australian Musicians Group<sup>59</sup> and The Black Arm Band. Carmody makes important comments about the song and the power of music:

In my opinion music rarely changes the listener’s perception, what it can do is make the person aware. They have to change their individual consciousness themselves. Personally, I never perceived it to be a popular song. To me it was just part of our ancient oral history tradition where stories were passed from generation to generation in forms of dance, storytelling, songs, art etc.<sup>60</sup>

Kelly reflects on his first nervous performance of the song and its longevity:

The first time I sang the song in public was at a concert on Bondi Beach put on by Building Bridges, an organisation dedicated to reconciliation between Aboriginal and white Australians. I thought reconciliation was an odd choice of word – when was the original conciliation? – but they seemed like good people [...] It’s a creaky song with a Sunday-school melody that makes me cringe sometimes. But it just keeps on going, like an old buggy bumping on down the road.<sup>61</sup>

The Black Arm Band promotes its music as emerging from the Australian Indigenous experience. Its members are seen to be “a generation of Aboriginal musicians [...]building up a songbook of hope, heart, humour and immense pride – a songbook that is both a cry from the nation’s black soul and a celebration of its powerful, resilient spirit”.<sup>62</sup> Members are predominantly established Indigenous musicians and some rising Indigenous performers who are supported by non-Indigenous musicians including Shane

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<sup>56</sup> Prior 2006: 1.

<sup>57</sup> Other songs could include Ted Egan’s *Gurindji Blues* recorded in 1971 by Galarrwuy Yunupingu, Joe Geia’s 1988 song *Kwanji*, Paul Kelly’s *Pigeon/Jundamurra* written in 1989, and Kev Carmody’s 1991 song *Cannot Buy My Soul* (Prior 2006: 1).

<sup>58</sup> The Herd, from Adelaide, used it in a hip hop version following The Apology.

<sup>59</sup> This version was also released after The Apology. Carmody said that “this version of the song transforms us from a negative concept of the past into a positive concept of the future... It’s going to stick in people’s heads” (quoted in Higson, R (2008) Rudd, Keating Grow Big in Hip-hop, *The Australian*, 21 April, cited in Barney, Katelyn (2012) “Sing Loud, Break Through the Silence”: Musical Responses to the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, *Perfect Beat* 13/1: 69-94.

<sup>60</sup> Koretgast, Maddy (2010) *Kev Carmody on Paul Kelly and Little Thing*, <http://aso.gov.au/news/2010/11/5/Kev-Carmody/>, accessed on 5 January 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Kelly, Paul (2010) *How to make gravy*, Camberwell: Hamish Hamilton Penguin Group (Australia). <http://aso.gov.au/titles/music/from-little-things-big-things/filmmakers/>, accessed on 5 January 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Hutchison, Tracee (2008) *A Hidden Republic of Hope*, Melbourne: Arts House.

Howard and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: “the peak western whitefella orchestra in the nation, side by side with trusted musical mavericks from Melbourne’s vibrant [music] scene”.<sup>63</sup> The band’s projects aim to “develop, perform, promote and celebrate contemporary Australian Indigenous music as a symbol of resilience and hope in the spirit and action of reconciliation”.<sup>64</sup> They have created three major projects: *murundak*<sup>65</sup> in 2006, which focused on Indigenous protest music: “songs of struggle, resistance and freedom sing up the country’s troubled past through [...] stories of sorrow, anger and hope”.<sup>66</sup> *Hidden Republic* in 2008 turned “the gaze forward to a reconciled Australia”.<sup>67</sup> The project used the fortieth anniversary of Oodgeroo’s<sup>68</sup> poem *Song of Hope* as a “compelling way to locate this project historically”.<sup>69</sup> Performed predominantly in Aboriginal languages, *dirtsong* in 2009 was:

...presented in five episodes with songs and music inspired by the words of Alexis Wright. Many of the pieces are structured as musical “conversations” between the collaborating artists reflecting on *country*, conjuring not only a sense of geographical place but encounters, memories, obligations, community and nature. *dirtsong* is drawn from Aboriginal Australia mixing traditional approaches and contemporary songs, existing repertoire and newly commissioned music, performed in 13 Indigenous Australian languages. [T]he inspiration for *dirtsong* has been to awaken some sleeping Australian Indigenous languages and to work in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.<sup>70</sup>

Other collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous musicians are emerging in a variety of musical genres. Some recent collaborative jazz projects include the Australian Art Orchestra and the Young Wagilak Group from Ngukurr in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, to create a collaborative project called *Crossing Roper Bar*: “a

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<sup>63</sup> <http://www.blackarmband.com.au/about-hidden-republic/>, accessed 7 June 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Black Arm Band, <http://www.blackarmband.com.au/>, accessed 7 June 2009.

<sup>65</sup> The word “*murundak*” means “alive” in *Woiwurrung*.

<sup>66</sup> Daybreak Films, Screen Australia and Film Victoria (2011) *murundak* songs of freedom: A journey into the heart of Aboriginal protest music, <http://www.antidotefilms.com.au/files/presskit/4405.pdf>, accessed 12 April 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Hutchison 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Born Kathleen Jean Mary Walker, Oodgeroo Noonuccal was instrumental in winning the vote for Indigenous people. She is one of Australia’s most respected poets and a noted educator and political activist, who fought to improve conditions for her people. [http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/worth\\_fighting/2.html](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/worth_fighting/2.html), accessed 30 April 2012.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.blackarmband.com.au/about-dirtsong/>, accessed 8 November 2012. See also Perry, David (2009) *dirtsong: The Black Arm Band*. Melbourne International Arts Festival. Online at [http://www.melbournefestival.com.au/assets/education/MelbFest\\_dirtsong\\_EdPack.pdf](http://www.melbournefestival.com.au/assets/education/MelbFest_dirtsong_EdPack.pdf), accessed 8 November 2012.

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.blackarmband.com.au/about-dirtsong/>, accessed 8 November 2012.

celebration of country, of ceremony, and of the power of music to build enduring bridges across cultures, time and space".<sup>71</sup> Another project is *Ngarukuruwala* which brings together six Sydney-based jazz musicians and the *Wangatunga* or Tiwi Strong Women's Group from the Tiwi Islands in the Northern Territory.<sup>72</sup> Children's choirs have been established whose members are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous such as Moorambilla Voices which is made up with students from forty-five schools across the far west of New South Wales, and the Gondwana National Indigenous Children's Choir based in far north Queensland.<sup>73</sup> Although not strictly musical performances, the collaborations between BighART and the *Pitjantjatjara* people for *Ngapartji! Ngapartji!*, and with the Namatjira family for *Namatjira*, are other collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, with music an important feature in both productions.<sup>74</sup> In *Namatjira*, for example, the songs and voices of the Ntaria Ladies Choir<sup>75</sup> add important sonic elements that are extended into the performance by Trevor Jamieson and Derik Lynch. These collaborations are seen as contributions to reconciliation, as Paul Grabowsky of the Australian Art Orchestra noted about *Crossing Roper Bar*:

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<sup>71</sup> Australian Art Orchestra, *Crossing Roper Bar Program Notes*, <http://aao.com.au/projects/program/crossing-roper-bar/>, accessed 21 November 2012. See also <http://aao.com.au/photos/galleries/crossing-roper-bar/>, accessed 21 November 2012; Curkpatrick, Sam (2012) *Old masters: creative articulations, Goree: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander News from the National Museum of Australia* 9.2, [http://www.nma.gov.au/goree/current\\_issue/november\\_2012](http://www.nma.gov.au/goree/current_issue/november_2012), accessed 2 April 2013; and Curkpatrick, Sam (2012) *Singing a painting in the NMA, Goree: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander News from the National Museum of Australia* 9.2, [http://www.nma.gov.au/goree/current\\_issue/november\\_2012](http://www.nma.gov.au/goree/current_issue/november_2012), accessed 2 April 2013.

<sup>72</sup> See <http://www.ngarukuruwala.org/>, accessed 21 November 2012. See also Campbell, Genevieve (2012) Ngariwanajirri, The Tiwi Strong Kids Song: Using Repatriated Song Recordings in a Contemporary Music Project, *Yearbook for Traditional* 4: 1-23.

<sup>73</sup> The Gondwana National Indigenous Children's Choir (GNICC) gives "talented Indigenous children the opportunity to share the voice of their generation with the nation and the world. Under the direction of Artistic Director & Founder Lyn Williams, OAM, the GNICC developed out of a successful collaboration between the Sydney Children's Choir and children in communities across the Torres Strait Islands during 2008 – 2009. Their inaugural performance in 2008 was with Gondwana Voices and Sydney Children's Choir at the Papal Welcome for World Youth Day in Sydney: <http://www.gondwanachoirs.com.au/indigenous.htm>. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to include children's choirs as they operate differently to the community choirs that are its focus.

<sup>74</sup> See <http://www.bighart.org/public/?p=90>, last accessed 2 April 2013.

<sup>75</sup> The choir is based in Hermannsburg, or Ntaria, the home of Albert Namatjira, upon whose story the theatre production is based.

Obviously there are things which are specific to black Australia, particularly in terms of their traditions and beliefs and the very sacred relationship they have with their land, which is deep and binding. But they are very generous people and they are always happy to share whatever knowledge they're able to share with us, and through that willingness to share I've learned that there are many, many opportunities for black and white Australians to come to understand much more about each other. I think that if we spent more time working with these people and trying to understand their lives in a more meaningful way, then it could make all kinds of difference both to white and black Australia.<sup>76</sup>

The full breadth and depth of the trajectory of Indigenous and collaborative musics – traditional, popular, rock, country, hip hop, classical, jazz and fusion of any of these or other types of music – is beyond the scope of my thesis. As noted earlier, many researchers have contributed to our knowledge of this diverse and prolific music-making; some have also interrogated the continuity and change to Indigenous music throughout Australia. Without doubt Indigenous music has contributed significantly to Australian music as a whole and is an essential ingredient of cross-cultural collaborations.

Importantly cross-cultural musical collaborations in the community music environment also exist. In the following section I examine community music making and reconciliation and also outline the concept of 'singing in between' as a theoretical foundation for the following three chapters which more thoroughly describe and analyse community interactions.

### ***Reconciliation and community music***

The convergence of community music-making and reconciliation is ripe for research. The specifics of community interactions reveal both the tangible and intangible components of a sociomusical space that provides diverse possibilities and complexities in the making of signification and meaning; they highlight the role of emotion and the negotiation of aesthetics and representation.

Community music projects feature as grassroots contributions to the reconciliation "process involving the wider Australian community".<sup>77</sup> Some community choral events

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<sup>76</sup> Hiller, Tony (2009) Crossing Musical Boundaries, *Rhythms*, February 26. <http://www.rhythms.com.au/news,id,8442.aspx>, accessed 7 June 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Augoustinos, Martha and Penny, Sharon Lee (2001) Reconciliation: The genesis of a new social representation, *Papers on Social Representations*, 10: 4.2.

can be seen as largely symbolic, but not all projects can be regarded as inauthentic acts of ideological celebration “devoid of pleasure, meaning or significance”.<sup>78</sup> Certain community choral projects represent a musical and social exploration and demonstration of the “shared knowledge and imaginings of ‘reconciliation’”.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, the choral projects can also serve to “solidify indigeneity as a distinct identity but inevitably do so in terms that are grounded within a wider national – and, increasingly, international – public sphere”.<sup>80</sup> Indigenous identity is therefore both contextual and contentious, separated from but increasingly merged with a national identity, producing a dual narrative of celebration and anxiety about Indigenous Australian identity and its relationship to mainstream Australia.<sup>81</sup> But within the context of musical interactions, the “shared terms of reference [might also] serve to highlight inequalities that persist in indigenous-nonindigenous relations”.<sup>82</sup>

Community choral leaders can be motivated by a desire to improve cross-cultural relations, to promote Indigenous musical cultures, and to present social cohesion through community music-making. Some community choral projects create a social and musical environment that invites Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians into an overt act of reconciliation. Through that musical interaction, they make possible the opportunities for singers to experience the ‘cultural inter-relatedness’ that Langton<sup>83</sup> argues is necessary in order for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to overcome the assumption of the undifferentiated ‘other’. Constructions of the ‘other’ are dynamic, developed through a process of dialogue, imagination, representation and interpretation. While Langton’s discourse is specific to the construction of ‘Aboriginality’, her concern with intersubjectivity resonates with the musical interactions that are the focus of this study. Community choirs can be ideal

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<sup>78</sup> Stokes, Martin (2004) Music and the Global Order, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33: 6.

<sup>79</sup> Augoustinos & Penny 2001: 4.16.

<sup>80</sup> Merlan 2005: 489.

<sup>81</sup> Barney, Katelyn (2005) ‘Celebration or Cover up?: “My Island Home”, Australian nation identity and the spectacle of Sydney 2000, in E. Mackinlay, D. Collins and S. Owens Eds. *Aesthetics and Experience in Music Performance*, Buckinghamshire: Cambridge Scholars Press: 141.

<sup>82</sup> Merlan 2005: 489.

<sup>83</sup> Langton, Marcia (1993) *‘Well I Heard it on the Radio and I saw it on the Television...’: An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and things*, Sydney: Australian Film Commission

opportunities to engender the ‘cultural interface’ identified by Martin Nakata<sup>84</sup> that might interrogate reconciliation. Music is a potent vehicle in this choral ‘common ground’,<sup>85</sup> one where the “histories, politics, economics, multiple and interconnected discourses, social practices and knowledge”<sup>86</sup> that operate in diverse daily lives can become relational. As Peter Dunbar-Hall and Chris Gibson argue, “[u]nlike other forms of knowledge, music emphasises what is fluid and inchoate, and thus has the capacity to break down boundaries and to forge new agendas, alliances and exchanges”.<sup>87</sup>

These community interactions then enter upon the “unfinished”<sup>88</sup> journey of reconciliation through singing. While political instruments of reconciliation are things that ordinary people have limited capacity to influence, “personal instruments of reconciliation are potent and within the realm of influence”.<sup>89</sup> The potency of community interaction is enhanced by “[t]he power of relationships - the intangibles that lie between us, that connect us, that form our creativity”.<sup>90</sup> Intangibles connect, argues community music commentator Jon Hawkes, enabling relationships where meaning is made and shared “so that we are made more than individuals”.<sup>91</sup> Hawkes comments further:

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<sup>84</sup> Nakata, Martin (2002) Indigenous Knowledge and the Cultural Interface: Underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems, *IFLA Journal* 28.5/6: 280-291; Nakata, Martin (2007) The Cultural Interface, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 36/Supplement: 7-14. See also Dillon, Steve (2006) Accessing the positive influence of music activities in community development programs, *Music Education Research* 8/2: 267-280; Dillon, Steve (2007a) *Music, Meaning and Transformation*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing; Dillon, Steve (2007b) Maybe we can find some common ground: Indigenous perspectives, a music teachers’ story’, *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 3/ Supplement: 59-65.

<sup>85</sup> Nakata 2002; 2007.

<sup>86</sup> Nakata 2007: 9.

<sup>87</sup> Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004: 84.

<sup>88</sup> Dodson, Patrick (2007) Whatever happened to reconciliation?, in Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson (eds), *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, normalise, exit Aboriginal Australia*, North Carlton: Arena Publications Australia: 21-29

<sup>89</sup> Dodson 2007: 27.

<sup>90</sup> Kerr, Tamsin (2011) personal comment (14/06/12). See also <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cooroora-Institute/132023510149803>, last accessed 1 April 2013.

<sup>91</sup> Hawkes, Jon (2001) *The fourth pillar of sustainability: Culture’s essential role in public planning*, Melbourne: Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd in association with the Cultural Development Network (Vic). Online at <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/community/Downloads/HawkesJon%282001%29TheFourthPillarOfSustainability.pdf>.



We've been doing it since we relaxed around the fire after a hard day of hunting and gathering. Although our societies have changed since those prehistorical days, it's unlikely that humans have - perhaps singing and dancing around the campfire is not just a metaphor for the peak cultural experience - it may still be the foundation of social formation.<sup>92</sup>

While disregarding the historical evolution of economies or indulgence of primitivism Hawke endorses, he and Kerr do make generous claims for the intangibilities inherent in connection and the meanings that are made and shared. These are important considerations. However, as Anne Doggett argues while musical meaning can be found in relationships, cultural differences matter.<sup>93</sup> She notes that:

People make complex connections to their world through music, and in any person's background lie a multiplicity of culturally and personally established associations constituting certain signs and sounds as representative of particular emotions and concepts. Using music to achieve any form of cross-cultural understanding is fraught with problems [...] Cultural background, current emotional and physical state, and the total environment in which the music is heard [or sung], all have a bearing on the meaning of any particular musical event.<sup>94</sup>

Facilitating successful cross-cultural choral events must be mindful of the intangibles and nuanced differences in order for music to be exchanged, to break down the boundaries, and to forge new agendas and alliances as suggested by Dunbar-Hall and Gibson.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, I argue that the tangibles framing that process are similarly not to be ignored; the symbol, text, art, social behaviour and commodification that coexist in a complex relationship around the music making play a pivotal role. As Rice succinctly argues, "musical signification is always constructed".<sup>96</sup> Music can also bear many meanings simultaneously as well as the potential for new meanings to be assigned to it. These are part of the power of music. But musical production and meaning can be influenced by "music's affective power and therefore the emotion that goes along with its interpretation".<sup>97</sup> Rice concludes:

[M]usic always means something to someone, and therefore its meanings are inevitably multiple and contested and, in some instances, controllable. Music

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<sup>92</sup> Hawkes 2001: 4.

<sup>93</sup> Doggett, Anne (2008) "Strains from Flowery Land": Responses to Chinese Musical Activity in Mid-nineteenth century Ballarat. *Context: A Journal of Music Research* 33: 107-120.

<sup>94</sup> Doggett 2008: 118-119.

<sup>95</sup> Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004: 84.

<sup>96</sup> Rice, Timothy (2001) Reflections on Music and Meaning: Metaphor, Signification and Control in the Bulgarian Case, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 10.1: 19-38.

<sup>97</sup> Rice 2001: 34.

and meaning appears to be an especially rich area of research, partly because of the multiple stories people and institutions operating from vastly different social, historical and geographical positions tell about it and partly because its essence escapes every attempt to corral and control either its significance or its signification.<sup>98</sup>

One of the identifiers of community interactions is that they often consciously perform 'Indigenous songs' within a broader selection of songs that has an increasingly distinctive Australian flavor.<sup>99</sup> This body of songs is circulated by community choral leaders - in singing workshops, festival workshops, or in choral events throughout the country. The 'Indigenous songs' are the elements often employed to signify reconciliation within the 'community choral canon'.<sup>100</sup> The term 'Indigenous songs' is artificial, but I draw on the stated project of one choir whose repertoire is described as 'Aboriginal songs'. The term embraces a wide scope of music but overall it draws on Aboriginal social context, Aboriginal experiences and Aboriginal history. For example, 'My Island Home' was written by Neil Murray, a non-Indigenous member of the Warumpi band in 1985. He wrote it in response to a personal experience which he framed within the context of the band's lead singer, George Rurrumbu<sup>101</sup> who later recorded a version in *Gumatj*<sup>102</sup> on his album *Nerbu Message*. A decade after its initial composition it was a national hit when rewritten with Christine Anu and was awarded the Song of the Year by the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) in 1995. It was also included in the best 30 Australian songs for APRA's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007. That community choirs throughout Australia would take up the song was not what Murray might have expected when he first composed it. 'Indigenous songs' is therefore a term adopted to distinguish songs from Indigenous sources or containing Indigenous

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<sup>98</sup> Rice 2001: 36.

<sup>99</sup> For example the songbook *Vox Tasmanica* includes original material by Tasmanian composers, much of which makes reference to 'place'; the unique environment of Tasmania.

<sup>100</sup> I adopt the term 'canon' in a loose way to describe the songs that most circulate within and between community choirs. The canon, as such, is just 'an idea' that tries to capture and make coherent songs that circulate within and between community choirs (Jones, Carys Wyn [2008] *Defining the Canon*, in *The Rock Canon: Canonical values in the reception of rock albums*, Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate: 5-24). It is impossible to actually create a definitive list. Like Jones, who references Joseph Kerman's earlier work, I also regard the repertory of the choirs as a 'plan of action'.

<sup>101</sup> Also known as G R Burarrawanga or Djilaynga.

<sup>102</sup> A language from his Arnhem Land home.

elements from the other songs that operate within the broad repertory.<sup>103</sup> More importantly, the 'Indigenous songs' operate as important tangible elements, providing both symbol and text and, to a lesser extent, commodity. But they also draw on and extend emotion.

At the same time, the transfer of the songs means that inaccuracies and misinformation often accompany the circulation of the material.<sup>104</sup> This is unfortunate but not infrequent, and not unique to the Indigenous elements alone. It is supported by an attitude that community singing is fundamentally an aural tradition and that while it is preferable to know as much about the material as possible it is not absolute. The songs themselves are the focus:

The music of various folk traditions is a large part of the Australian a cappella circuit (music from Africa or the Balkans and to Fiji). Much of this cannot be traced to the songwriter or arranger. Australian practice is simply to perform it anyway, and bring some awareness to the great music of these cultures and traditions, and to highlight to the audience their plight, as often the lyrics deal with ethnic, religious, or political issues.<sup>105</sup>

The 'Indigenous songs' are taken from accessible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musical traditions and practices, contemporary songs that express an Indigenous experience of colonialism and change, as well as songs about Indigenous survival and its celebration. They are often arranged for polyphonic performance. Original songs by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous composers are also emerging, drawing on common themes found within Indigenous musics or that address issues relating to historical legacies or politically significant moments.<sup>106</sup> In addition, Indigenous musical influences are embraced, although these vary from location to location: they can include the tonal qualities; the use of clap sticks and other Indigenous instruments; the integration of music that circulates within and between Indigenous communities; the use of guitar and voice; the references to country; the use of language.

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<sup>103</sup> See Appendix 1 for a brief discussion on some of the other 'Indigenous songs' within the 'community choral canon'.

<sup>104</sup> This is discussed in greater depth in Rickwood, Julie (forthcoming) *Harmonising Indigeneity?: 'My Island Home', 'Baba Waiar' and 'Kulba Yaday'* in the Community Choral Canon, *Perfect Beat*.

<sup>105</sup> Sainsbury, Chris (2006) *Singing you singing me: Running a community choir (or being in one)*, self-published.

<sup>106</sup> See discussions in following three chapters for examples of this material.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Australian a cappella scene played an important role in the evolution of the community music movement which is now actively supported by institutions, industry and government. Interestingly, Australian Indigenous influence on the repertoire within the a cappella scene was less apparent.<sup>107</sup> The integration of musics from more accessible ‘others’ - the new settler Australians – or the attractive harmonies and arrangements of gospel music from African-American traditions or the songs of South Africa, were more musically comfortable and less politically fraught.<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, it was clear that the repertoire of a number of women’s community choirs was influenced by the Melbourne based group, *Tiddas*.<sup>109</sup> Though the vocal trio were apparently reluctant to see their creativity in terms of any given agenda<sup>110</sup> their repertoire contributed to both the nature of Aboriginal and feminist politics which circulated within the a cappella scene at the time. *Tiddas* captured a desired possibility:

The sisters: Amy, Lou & Sal – Gunditjmarra, Yorta Yorta and white-girl from the suburbs respectively [...] And for a while there, for a decade in actual fact, they rode a hell of a wave. They sang their way into the hearts and minds of a new generation of fans who listened first and saw skin colour second. There was something about those three sisters’ voices when they blended that seemed to shout that anything was possible for our country.<sup>111</sup>

*Tiddas* songs such as ‘*Inanay*’, ‘*Tiddas*’, and ‘Happy Earth’ were performed by many women’s community choirs during the 1990s.<sup>112</sup> ‘*Inanay*’ has since become part of the ‘canon’. Songs such as ‘*Yil Lull*’ by Joe Geia, ‘My Island Home’ by Neil Murray, ‘*Baba Waiar*’ by Miseron Levi and ‘*Kulba Yaday*’ are also included. Some of the motivation for the inclusion of ‘Indigenous songs’ can be traced then to the a cappella scene which placed global musics central both musically and ideologically. As was argued in the

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<sup>107</sup> The independent nature and breadth of community choirs makes it difficult to determine this definitively.

<sup>108</sup> Although not necessarily easy to embody, as argued in Rickwood, Julie (1998) *Embodied Acappella – The Experience of Singing a Displaced Eclectic Repertoire*, *Perfect Beat* 3.4: 68-84.

<sup>109</sup> Lou Bennett, Sally Dastey and Amy Saunders were “*Tiddas*” which is *Yorta Yorta* for “sisters”. “It is one of the great pieces of music folklore that it was Ruby Hunter who gave those *Tiddas* their name” (Hutchison 2008). *Yorta Yorta* country is in Victoria. See also Rickwood 1996 and 1997 which discusses the influence of *Tiddas* on women’s community choirs in Melbourne and Canberra.

<sup>110</sup> Gibson and Dunbar-Hall 2008: 265.

<sup>111</sup> Hutchison 2008.

<sup>112</sup> Rickwood 1996; 1997.

previous chapter, the same investment of great social and personal significance can be given to Indigenous music for, as Smith has described:

...the direct somatic and emotional address of the music may give performers access to a transformative experience within a complex relationship to the material's manifest cultural and political context.<sup>113</sup>

### ***'Singing in between' and community interaction***

'Singing in between' is a theoretical construction of the third space of the community interactions that are the subject of this thesis. Cross-cultural community music-making operates on the belief that singing is safe action; a 'soft' form of communication that brings people together and can mobilise change. The case studies of my thesis are socio-musical spaces where Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians come together to share songs and stories in order to sing with 'other selves'.<sup>114</sup> 'Singing in between' occurs in a physical, metaphorical and constructed space that explores ways to create a music practice and performance that attempts to bridge and bond cultural difference. The idea draws upon Bhabha's:

...'in-between' spaces [which] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular and communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.<sup>115</sup>

Various ways to theoretically imagine cross-cultural encounters have been developed and include concepts such as border work and contact zone. Margaret Somerville and Tony Perkins declare that it is in the discomfort of cultural contact where the actual work of collaboration is achieved.<sup>116</sup> They acknowledge that risk, tension, emotion, and pain are present in this "contextually and temporally situated coalition work".<sup>117</sup> The border is in fact maintained, they argue, by a transformation that involves "recognising

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<sup>113</sup> Smith 2005: 153.

<sup>114</sup> Rose, Jon (2007) Listening to History: Some Proposals for Reclaiming the Practice of Live Music, *Leonardo Music Journal* 18: 9-16.

<sup>115</sup> Bhabha 1994: 2.

<sup>116</sup> Somerville, Margaret, and Perkins, Tony (2003) Border Work in the Contact Zone: thinking Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaboration spatially. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 24.3: 265.

<sup>117</sup> Haig-Brown, Celia (2001) Continuing collaborative knowledge production: knowing when where why and how. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 22.1: 31, cited in Somerville and Perkins 2003: 257.

and re-conceptualising the categories"<sup>118</sup> of difference that allows for boundary crossings. These concepts are important in the development and maintenance of coexistence and relations within community interactions.

'Singing-in-between' leans towards what Cross suggests is made possible through musicality; to both underwrite social flexibility and facilitate intellectual flexibility.<sup>119</sup> This complementary flexibility is necessary in order to explore, define and perform 'reconciliation'. Singing with 'other selves' changes the circumstance of relations: it can shift preconceived or limited constructions of the 'other'. The plural experiences of historical impact and musical development frame the relationships which are then represented in the production and circulation of the community interaction itself – a sociomusical action jointly forged. 'Singing-in-between' can therefore nurture a 'shared intentionality' to the practice and performance of reconciliation through the dynamic relations inherent in the sociomusical space of community interaction. When 'singing in between' all singers are "acutely sensitive, in different ways, to the issues surrounding white 'invasion'"<sup>120</sup> and, at the same time, they bring significantly varied musical skills and knowledge.

'Singing in between' is multiframe and multilayered. Aesthetics and representation at least need to be negotiated. These negotiations are made possible partly because of the structures and processes that are familiar to all involved. There are commonalities, such as the shared love of singing, a familiarity with or a desire to sing in harmony, an engagement with the opportunity to learn new repertoire, and the desire to explore beyond known musical boundaries. Difference and variation in the repertoire and in the approach to learning and teaching music are evident. Technique and repertoire is

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<sup>118</sup> Haig-Brown 2001. See also, hooks, bell (1990) *Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics*. Boston: South End Press; Anzaldúa, Gloria (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute; Pratt, Geraldine (1990) Geographies of identity and difference. In D Massey et al Eds. *Human Geography Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Haig-Brown, Celia and Archibald, Jo-anne (1996) Transforming First Nations research with respect and power. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 9.3: 245-267; Pratt, Louise (1992) *Imperial Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge; Carter, Paul (1992) Making contact: history and performance. In Paul Carter, *Living in a new Country: history, travelling and language*. London: Faber and Faber. Cited in Somerville and Perkins 2003: 255-257.

<sup>119</sup> Cross 2005-6.

<sup>120</sup> Boyd, Anne (2007) Landscape, spirit and music: An Australian story. In Fiona Richards (ed), *The Soundscapes of Australia*, Hampshire & Burlington: Ashgate: 11-34.

exchanged and incorporated. Cross-fertilisation takes place within the context of a musical space where there has been a conscious decision to include Indigenous musics and other musics that are compelling to the collaborations, particularly within the framework of reconciliation. There is a “potential point of articulation between Indigenous bodies of knowledge [...] and the broader Australian society”.<sup>121</sup> ‘Singing in between’ is a musical interaction that “exists as a distinct and distinctive entity”.<sup>122</sup>

There is a tension in all this however. ‘Singing in between’ is a type of musical hybridity. As Stokes argues hybridity can be motivated by the “romance of resistance”.<sup>123</sup> As a result, there can be a risk that “important and necessary aesthetic, political, and social distinctions”<sup>124</sup> are eroded. ‘Singing in between’ necessitates decisions about what genres, instruments, styles, elements, etc are foregrounded. Does the binary of cultural difference remain? What is included to mark cultural difference? What is used to represent the blend, the bonds? Is enough attention given “to the diverse positions of power, prestige, and influence from which people make musical alliances and forge [musical] selves”?<sup>125</sup> That these community (inter)actions are more often than not facilitated by non-Indigenous community music activists cannot be ignored. Hybridising strategies “often have an elite, rather than subaltern, dynamic”.<sup>126</sup> Is this the case when ‘singing-in-between’?

### ***The action of community (inter)actions***

I have intentionally bracketed (inter) within this discussion of the conceptual framework in order to concentrate on the concept of ‘action’ itself. Similar to Howard Morphy’s thesis about art, music making “can enable people to be active as agents in determining their own futures”.<sup>127</sup> Music is essential, a primary component of the action itself. When ‘singing in between’, music is seen to mediate between cultural difference, constructing a contextualised and localised experience of reconciliation. The music also operates as

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<sup>121</sup> Morphy 2009a: 124.

<sup>122</sup> Green, Charles (2004) Group Soul: Who owns the artist fusion?, *Third Text* 18.6.71: 596.

<sup>123</sup> Stokes 2004: 61.

<sup>124</sup> Stokes 2004: 61.

<sup>125</sup> Stokes 2004: 61.

<sup>126</sup> Stokes 2004: 61.

<sup>127</sup> Morphy, Howard (2009a) Acting in a community: art and social cohesion in Indigenous Australia, *Humanities Research* XV.2: 117.

the vehicle to express associated “emotions in aesthetically powerful ways”,<sup>128</sup> driving both the political and social processes which inevitably inhabit the space, despite the general self-regard that this musical practice is above politics or apolitical. The often fraught public politics of reconciliation are backgrounded, even silenced, so that the community singers can fashion their own understanding of reconciliation. The shared musicality “implies forms and processes of embodied social interaction”<sup>129</sup> that utilise the “submerged repertoires of fantasy, play, and pleasure [which] facilitates [the music’s] cultural mobility”.<sup>130</sup> Importantly these ‘singing in between’ spaces exist because of the community of singers, story tellers, other musicians and audiences that create it, and, who, in turn, help “build communities”.<sup>131</sup> As Morphy asserts:

...[a]rt both enables the creation of local identities and contributes to the building of a cohesive nation by enabling people to communicate to different audiences and thereby helps create a national discourse.<sup>132</sup>

Deborah Wong argues that amongst social justice activists there is an understanding about the interconnectedness of any society’s structures and populations and, therefore, how even small changes can have significant effects.<sup>133</sup> Central to this activism is the notion of hope which she does not define. Ben Anderson has suggested that hope “anticipates that something indeterminate has *not-yet-become*”<sup>134</sup> and is enacted when it is sensed; felt through emotion, affect and feeling which dwell in the region of the “not-yet” described in Ernst Bloch’s philosophy. This philosophical engagement with the notion of hope provides some clarity about its nature as a desire for a better way of being. Referencing Paulo Freire, however, Wong highlights the political action that hope can engender. She concludes that “hope must be grounded in

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<sup>128</sup> Morphy 2009a: 117.

<sup>129</sup> Stokes 2004: 68.

<sup>130</sup> Stokes 2004: 68.

<sup>131</sup> Morphy 2009a: 117.

<sup>132</sup> Morphy 2009a: 117.

<sup>133</sup> Wong, Deborah (2009) An Ethnomusicology of Hope in a Time of Trauma, in Elizabeth Mackinlay, Brydie-Lee Bartleet and Katelyn Barney (eds), *Musical Islands: Exploring connections between music, place and research*, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 3-19.

<sup>134</sup> Anderson, Ben (2006) Becoming and being hopeful: towards a theory of affect, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24: 773. Emphasis in the original. See also Anderson, Ben (2002) A Principle of Hope: Recorded music, listening practices and the immanence of utopia, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 84.3/4: 211-227.



a politics of motion and a commitment to action”.<sup>135</sup> ‘Singing in between’ is a commitment to action, addressing issues of social justice through music making. It is, using Wong’s phrase a ‘politics of motion’ and therefore embodies the hope that Wong argues is embedded in progressive projects which:

...are by definition a politics of hope because they envision a future defined by the democratic principles of participation, access, equity, and tolerance. Progressive hope is focused not only on the need for social transformation but the ability to strategise about how to get there<sup>136</sup>.

Swijghuisen Reigersberg’s action research project with a community choir in Hopevale, Queensland, demonstrated music’s involvement in a national and international discourse.<sup>137</sup> She argues that Aboriginal social disadvantage and Indigenous history can be successfully communicated through performance, while at the same time educating audiences about the complexities inherent in that disadvantage and history. The Hopevale choir members were able to demonstrate their unique sense of humour, style of story narrative, choral performance aesthetic, and vocal timbre within the diversity of Aboriginality. At the same time, they were able to show how Indigenous cosmology, concepts of country, and musical representation incorporates the impact of colonisation, hardship and diverse forms of spirituality.

A recent Reconciliation Australia survey indicated that many Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are unaware of each other’s values and ways of life<sup>138</sup> and hence that “our commonalities and divergences are unknown”.<sup>139</sup> In the practice of ‘singing in between’, this lack of awareness is revealed and confronted. While social and affective distance can be present, over time the distance can be more easily traversed. Some non-Indigenous singers knowingly engage with Indigenous people for the first time. For others, who have lived or worked in communities with Indigenous people, these musical interactions are an opportunity to associate in an often different context. For the

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<sup>135</sup> Freire, Paulo (1994) *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*, (With notes by A M Araújo Freire; trans R R Barr), New York: Continuum: 8-9, cited in Wong 2009: 7.

<sup>136</sup> Wong 2009: 5.

<sup>137</sup> Swijghuisen Reigersberg, Muriel (2009a) *Choral singing and the construction of Australian Aboriginal identities: an applied ethnomusicological study in Hopevale, Northern Queensland, Australia*, Roehampton University: PhD thesis: 324.

<sup>138</sup> <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/resources/australian-reconciliation-barometer>

<sup>139</sup> Dodson, Michael (2009) How well do we know each other?, *ANU Reconciliation Lecture* at the National Film and Sound Archive, June

Indigenous singers it can likewise provide a unique engagement with non-Indigenous singers or can provide the first opportunities to unite with Indigenous people from elsewhere. For urban based Indigenous singers this is often their first experience of remote Australia, where Indigenous cultures are seemingly more continuous, where ways of life are different from their urban experiences; and, of course, where remote living Indigenous people are exposed to urban expressions of Indigeneity.

Within these (inter)actions the legacy of colonisation which permeates almost every aspect of contemporary Indigenous life can become more apparent. Jennifer Newsome notes that the dominant culture's understandings are caught between the media image of unrelenting dysfunction and a strong and vibrant culture worthy of national celebration.<sup>140</sup> The reality is not so polarised, as many a community singer discovers when singing with 'other selves'.

While I understand that the legacy of colonisation profoundly affects Indigenous Australians, my case studies reveal the process of colonisation has also affected non-Indigenous Australians. Through these (inter)actions they can be confronted with the discovery of their own limited historical understanding of the immediate and ongoing impact of British settlement and government policies and practices continue to control Indigenous lives. Viewed from a contemporary perspective past colonial practices seem unnecessarily ignorant and violent and even contemporary policies and practices are complex. Recognising one's own historical connections to those practices can be painful. The process of making music across the "Indigenous/non-Indigenous divide"<sup>141</sup> therefore demands that the wider political, social, economic and musical explanations be explored<sup>142</sup>.

### ***Negotiating aesthetics***

As discussed in Chapter Two, the community music movement advocates for greater music-making in Australia. Much research suggests that Australia has a non-singing or

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<sup>140</sup> Newsome, Jennifer K (2008) From Researched to Centrestage: A Cast Study, *Muzikoloski Zbornik Musicological Annual XLIV(1)* : 31-32

<sup>141</sup> Stuart, Morris (2008) Who is Asante Sana?, <http://asantesana.wikispaces.com?Introducing+Asante+Sana>, accessed 4 June 2009.

<sup>142</sup> And which is the intent of this thesis.

vocally silenced majority. 'Singing in between' exposes finer shades. While many community singers may have previously had little experience of music-making, it is evident that singing was always a common experience for others. Many singers come from musical families, or were in school or church choirs, or had formal musical training. And while singing as a normal occurrence crosses over many cultural backgrounds in Australia, within Indigenous communities, singing continues to be more often a part of the everyday; part of the lived experience of country, relationships, spirituality and law; part of the lived experience of Indigenous Christianity, as well as the expression of contemporary Indigenous lives.

Typical of community singing, aural transmission of songs is standard practice. Many of the non-Indigenous singers in these collaborations had learnt music informally through their involvement in community choirs. Some are therefore highly dependent on the musical direction that gives starting notes and clear indication of rhythm and changes in melodic lines for each part. Repetition is often necessary to embody the material. Practice CDs are often produced. Other singers are more familiar with creating harmonies, even in an improvisational manner, and mastering new material relatively quickly. Vocal timbres are distinguishable, especially those at the extreme ends of the spectrum; the formally trained singers and the Aboriginal singers from remote Australia. Community singers based in urban environments are generally familiar with popular, folk and world musics common within the a cappella scene and tend to reproduce the popular natural voice timbre. As a consequence, the blend can be quite unique when all come together and adjustments are necessary (or ignored).

Indigenous influences in urban based choral environments are readily identifiable in the specific repertoire selected and also in the use of guitar accompaniment. The use of Indigenous languages in urban environments can be a recovery of language project. Lou Bennett suggests this clearly when she said the motivation to compose one song in language was:

...after hearing my great grandmother, Priscilla McCray speaking Yorta Yorta language on tape. The importance of this song is 'retrieval' of the Yorta Yorta

language. Language is the blood of a culture – it's like gold. Without it our culture is weaker, that's the sentiment behind the song.<sup>143</sup>

In remote Australia the Aboriginal singers reflect their strong musical cultures, deeply embedded and carried through from their mission based childhood. Martin Stokes notes that mission choirs:

[...] in the colonized world contributed to the extraordinary spread of a variety of practices and habits associated with Western art music by the mid-twentieth century: functional harmony; counterpoint; regular metric structures; equally tempered scales; clean instrumental and vocal timbres [...] and discrete, single-authored works, pieces, or songs.<sup>144</sup>

Much of that music was incorporated into Indigenous musical expression. The Aboriginal women who participate in the choral events of Central Australia, for example, grew up learning harmonies while at church, in school and in the casual singing sessions that were often held in the afternoons or the evenings,<sup>145</sup> singing Lutheran hymns translated into language and other gospel songs. Contemporary gospel songs and hymns are composed by some of the choirs' members. Singing is regarded as very much a part of both their culture and their Christianity. The approach to group singing is fluid: someone begins and others join in, bringing the harmonies with them. Their tonalities are evocative of traditional aesthetics. They have therefore molded this 'western art' practice into their own.<sup>146</sup>

In the times of cross-cultural singing in Central Australia, most of the non-Indigenous singers exhibit an eagerness to sing in language and also attempt the "timbre-rich"<sup>147</sup> tonalities when singing the songs from the repertoire shared by Aboriginal women's choirs. Most have little previous exposure to Indigenous languages and despite seeking the novel experience it can be challenging. While access to language is an attraction for the non-Indigenous singers, for the Indigenous singers these songs can often be vital to the maintenance of language. There is a reverse flow but one seemingly not so daunting to the Indigenous singers. When the *a cappella* repertoire is sung, language is not an

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<sup>143</sup> Bennett, Lou (2004) 'Waka Nini Yana', liner notes on *Rongo: Voices of Australasia and Oceania*, The Boite.

<sup>144</sup> Stokes 2004: 66.

<sup>145</sup> Lee, Nicole (2008b) *Areyonga Choir*, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/09/10>, accessed 5 October 2010.

<sup>146</sup> See Chapter 6 and the Coda for more details.

<sup>147</sup> Stokes 2004: 67.

issue for the Aboriginal singers as most are at least bi-lingual and they have a sense of or familiarity with the timbre present in most of that repertoire which they choose to adopt or not.<sup>148</sup>

### ***Negotiating representation***

These collaborations also negotiate the representation of their musical relationships, the community (inter)action. The repertoire seeks to strategically capture a spirit of reconciliation. Songs are brought to exchange and others are included to reflect the perceived shared values of the group. They act as both the vehicles for and the representation of music's capacity to bring diverse people together. Some songs are taken from accessible Aboriginal musical traditions and practices. This music choice can be seen to consciously encourage Aboriginal involvement through its strategic inclusion of their musical traditions and expressions. It is an invitation for engagement. Not surprisingly, while these musical representations are valued and valuable to the process of cross-cultural collaborations, they can be confronting or unsettling. For example, non-Indigenous singers who do not share the Christian beliefs of the Aboriginal singers can find the music overly religious in content; Indigenous singers brought into urban singing spaces can feel out-of-place in this *wetjella's*<sup>149</sup> style of music making, unfamiliar with the well-intentioned means of engagement.

At the same time, the lived experience of the community (inter)actions brings the realities of colonial legacy into stark relief: the gap in health status, the differences in education and wealth, the diversity in belief systems. Some non-Indigenous singers also comment upon the surprising integration of Christianity into Indigenous belief systems, the loss of culture that paradoxically sits together with a strength in traditional ways of being, knowing; and comment on the ability of Indigenous singers to operate in different cultural settings and the resilience in Indigenous contemporary lives despite their complex demands. Expectations are unsettled. But through the process of music making, connections are made, and stories are shared in moments of both structured

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<sup>148</sup> The introduction of the world musics from cultures with distinctive timbres and tones such as from Georgia and other Eastern European countries is yet to be a common occurrence in Central Australia.

<sup>149</sup> "Whitefella' in *Noongar*.

and unstructured community when “[b]oth *Anangu* and white people [are] living, eating, singing in harmony”.<sup>150</sup>

The ‘participatory discrepancies’<sup>151</sup> of music-making are experienced differently when ‘singing in between’, and while imperfections and negotiations are constant in order to get into the ‘groove’ of any music, there are added dimensions to the “microfluctuations [...] that bond participants in the musical event [...] which accounts for something significant”.<sup>152</sup> While musical choice is one aspect of negotiation in moments of practice, other negotiations around vision statements and the priorities of the musical interaction are also pivotal. Equally important, the performative representation of the community (inter)action requires negotiation around costumes and stagecraft as I discuss in the following chapters.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

In this chapter I have composed a theoretical score which supports the articulation of the different interpretations or arrangements of community (inter)action that follows in the next three chapters. I briefly investigated the reconciliation process in Australia, the incorporation of reconciliation into Australian music, and then created an analytical framework to examine the convergence of two popular movements: reconciliation and community music. I proposed the concept of ‘singing in between’ as one mechanism with which to theorise this convergence. The notion of ‘singing in between’ is, however, a rather complex one, interweaving various theoretical concepts and empirical evidence in order to come to an understanding of the shared experience, shared intent, and shared action that emerges from the practice of community (inter)actions.

The power of music to affect many of the political and social structures that continue to obstruct justice and equity for Indigenous and other Australians remains an ideal. It will

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<sup>150</sup> “*Anangu*” means “(Aboriginal) person”; found in a number of Western and Central Desert languages. The quote was cited in an email from Rachel Hore, 2010. Hore, Rachel (2010) personal communication (Emails 23/09/10 and 31/09/10).

<sup>151</sup> Keil, Charles (1995) *The Theory of Participatory Discrepancies: A Progress Report*, *Ethnomusicology*, 39.1, Keil, Charles and Feld, Steven (1994) *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

<sup>152</sup> Stokes (2004: 67) notes that this motivation is not uncommon within the world music industry.

take much more than a song to address the ‘failure’ of Government policies;<sup>153</sup> to widely effect many of the social problems stemming from a history of racial injustice and ongoing marginalisation; or to enact a treaty that not only has legal, economic, cultural and symbolic dimensions but includes an “[a]cknowledgement of the past and some form of restorative justice”.<sup>154</sup> At the very least, however, community (inter)actions can prompt the deconstruction of “the ‘white privilege’ perception of the world [and] this land”;<sup>155</sup> to learn more about the continent and its history; to better understand *our* country, so that “one day we [all] become Australian”;<sup>156</sup> to construct a consolidated identity “commensurate with living in an Indigenous land and that Indigenous Australians welcome”.<sup>157</sup> Like other popular and participatory music practices, community (inter)actions enact a social process that generates values. Those values are made through a *shared experience* of place and history that creates a *shared intent* to be part of and motivate change. This ‘in-between’ space brings a sense of harmony, both musically and metaphorically, which bears on *shared action* – the *community (inter)action* of music making.

Drawing on ethnographic evidence discussed in the following chapters, the theoretical construct of ‘singing in between’ proposes that though the notion of harmony is one of significance and wide currency, it is tempered by the discordant moments in this sociomusical practice. The community (inter)actions show that “[t]he boundaries and the perceptions of bounded cultures are themselves emerging and reproduced in interactions shaped by mutual, and always different expectations, interests and influences”.<sup>158</sup> ‘Singing in between’ is a space where engagement shifts from an ‘interface’ between separately conceived domains or bounded cultures towards a

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<sup>153</sup> “For simplicity, Australian Aboriginal policy is normally characterised in several phrases: conflict and appropriation; protection and segregation; assimilation and integration; and self-determination or self-management. The present policy could be called ‘normalisation’ – a term justified by the apparent failure of self-determination with a tendency to swerve towards a new kind of assimilation” argues Sullivan 2011:1.

<sup>154</sup> Bamblett 2010: 18.

<sup>155</sup> Bamblett 2010: 9. See also Slater, Lisa (2007) My Island Home is Waiting for Me: the Dreaming Festival and Archipelago Australia, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 21/4: 571-581.

<sup>156</sup> Reynolds, Henry. 2011. Foreward. In Gammage 2011: xxiii.

<sup>157</sup> Newbury 2011:1.

<sup>158</sup> Ottosson, Åse (2010) Aboriginal Music and Passion: Interculturality and Difference in Australian Desert Towns, *Ethnos*, 75.3: 277.

distinctive set of values and practices that appreciate Indigenous and non-Indigenous social forms are inextricably relational. 'Singing in between' demonstrates that to inhabit a single 'sociocultural field'<sup>159</sup> requires not only ongoing long-term relations focused on musicality and music-making, but an acknowledgement that the community (inter)action itself emerges from its own articulation of racial difference, subsequently demonstrating the complexity and contradictions of the lived experience of those categories as it evolves. The ethnographic evidence illustrates that renewing and sharing a sense of 'Indigenous Australia' within a broader Australian culture, music, and identity is an ongoing narrative that is striving to move beyond a discursive project of 'reconciliation' to one of active 'relation'.

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<sup>159</sup> Hinkson and Smith 2005.



## Interlude

### Harmony as life: An ethnographic episode from Victoria

*They were two hundred singers from all parts of Victoria and beyond,  
from dry, dusty villages and vibrant cosmopolitan suburbs,  
They were from families with long musical histories and from harsh music teachers, (being told  
they had no singing voice)  
They were from community choirs and professional ensembles,  
They were teachers of music, leaders of choirs or students of vocal performance,  
young people who spent endless days studying Western classical music.*

*They were two engaging vocal leaders,  
sharing a personal and professional journey,  
They were from duets in house concerts,  
or on stage before thousands.  
They were from musical theory and personal experience,  
developing their skills within a socio-musical movement that embraced  
diversity, alternative repertoire and a philosophy that singing should be part of the everyday, for  
everyone.*

*Together on the first day of the festival, on a hot, summer's morning they were all anticipation  
and energy in the dim, cool space of the old Town Hall.  
The two led the others with a focus on movement and voice,  
creating layered voices, cross rhythms and harmonies,  
all traversing the room randomly to engage with each other, bringing individuals into the whole,  
a spiralling mass of bodies and voices and increasing harmony  
Harmony as both metaphor and experience  
Harmony as both philosophy and practice  
Harmony as life.*

**Harmony as life, Julie Rickwood ©2010**

The Boite's <sup>1</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Daylesford Singers' Festival began with the "Big Vocal Welcome", led by Carl Pannuzzo and Penny Larkin, a married couple that performed under the name Pot n Kettle. Carl and Penny were also experienced performers, being members of other groups, as well as choir and workshop leaders. As I entered the open space of the Daylesford Town Hall on Saturday morning, this official building was transformed, filled to capacity with middle-aged women and a scattering of men, trendy teens, young married couples (their babies in prams nearby) – the varied bodies and different voices created an intriguing human collage. Their colourfully clothed backs greeted my

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<sup>1</sup> The Boite is discussed in greater depth in the following chapter. For an extensive historical account of the The Boite see Smith, Graeme (2007) *Playing with Policy: Music, Multiculturalism and The Boite*, *Victorian Historical Journal* 27.2: 152-169.

entrance. The concentration on Carl and Penny was palpable. The workshopers had surrendered themselves to this shared experience, to be guided by these vibrant and humourous leaders.

After some breathing exercises and bodywork, Carl and Penny divided the large group into smaller groups, using a variety of rifts to create a whole sound of harmony and syncopation. After establishing each rift, people were encouraged to walk around the space in random paths, greeting each other with their eyes and listening to the various rifts as they past. Having establishing this element of connection, Carl and Penny taught the various parts for a warm-up song – bass, tenor, alto, soprano and the “crazy” section. The words of the song created an ideal of existence: empathy, harmony, glory, grace, peace and love. The atmosphere envisaged by Carl and Penny emerged – strong singing that reflected a contemporary a cappella soundscape, one that included dissonance as well as harmonic blending. The joy in the singers’ faces revealed the ideal emotion of community music making and confirmed the vision of The Boite: a world of song and sound, sonic and physical associations that heal. One soul, a woman not unlike so many in the room – middle aged, colourfully dressed – was moved to tears and I was once again reminded of the power of this practice, one that can resonate deeply within and is the source of much of the discourse that circulates. This introductory workshop established the tone expected of the whole festival. Later, there would be some critique in the survey The Boite sent to all participants, but, in the meantime, everyone engaged with the present; joyful in the lived experience of singing with others, learning new material, and sharing their passion over meals and in concerts.

By Sunday evening, the energy levels had dropped, despite the anticipation humming in the dank air. Waiting for the final concert to begin in the Town Hall, the old musty smell of the hall lingered in the crowded cavern, despite the odours of humanity. My fingers still tingled with the feel of the worn, wooden banisters, smooth and cool, such a contrast to the oppressive heat outside. Parched throats were eased and thirsts quenched by cool sips of the local mineral water, amid the increasing volume of competing conversations. I sat down next to a woman excited by the music she was about to witness. Di’s smile was generous and lively. Her face danced and her eyes sparkled as she explained her role as a leader of a community singing group. Di had

participated in the Community Music Victoria (CMV) program to develop a network of singing leaders throughout the state. She loved the whole concept of “Vocal Nosh”, small groups of people brought informally together to share food and sing songs from a repertoire created specifically for them.

There was an intention in the Singers’ Festival to celebrate difference and diversity. The workshop leaders brought that through their song styles, rhythm techniques, and pedagogy<sup>2</sup>. Amongst them, a refugee women’s group from Africa performed and led workshops. The final concert delivered this celebration with enthusiasm. Yet this gathering was overwhelmingly populated by the known members of the community music movement: the middle aged, the middle class and women. There were young families and others that brought some diversity to the participants. Both a young people’s and children’s program had run parallel to the open workshops. These elements were enough to create a cultural diversity to the community spirit that nurtured singing and connection, the two spiralling together, intertwining musical and social practice. For some singers the festival had become an annual excursion into:

[...] a celebration of the musical mosaic of different cultures. For this one weekend we feel the joy that is possible when people unite in an expression of the human spirit. What the world needs now is more events like the Singers’ Festival<sup>3</sup>.

The singers were conscious of the community they created in that weekend “full of learning and immersion in a lively melting pot of music, rhythm and song”<sup>4</sup>. Some recognised a greater value:

Spending time with the women from Kankelay<sup>5</sup> was one of the most moving experiences of my life. They approach music making and performing with their whole being and the joy they find in their music is humbling, when we think of all they

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<sup>2</sup> The musical leaders included Sally Ford (Latin), Alejandro Espino (Mexican), Tracey Miller (Gospel), Nasrine Ramani and Diego Guerrero (Flamenco), Tania Bosak (TaKeTiNa), Joseph Jordania (Georgian).

<sup>3</sup> Chowantetz, Marg (2010) Personal comment, cited in King, Roger (2010) *Boite Singers’ Festival at Daylesford, Jan 7-10 2010, Feedback*, Melbourne: The Boite.

<sup>4</sup> Davidson, Colin (2010) Personal comment, cited in King 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Kankelay means “Unity” in Krio (a creole language). The members of Kankelay are from Sierra Leone and sing both traditional and contemporary songs in Krio, English and indigenous languages from Sierra Leone.

have been through – seeing them sing is a reminder of the purpose of music – to transcend words and feelings we may otherwise never express<sup>6</sup>.

At the Jubilee Lake campground, the formal Sunset Song Circle on the first night and the informal barbeque celebration after the concert on the final night, both filled the quiet, moonlit nights with music and conversation. They ritualised and reinforced the festival experience as “pure magical bliss”<sup>7</sup>, bracketing the weekend from the everyday.

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis, Georgina (2010) Personal comment, cited in King 2010. Others also commented on the Kankelay performance. The women from Kankelay had experienced war and refugee camps in their journey to Australia.

<sup>7</sup> Morabito, Annie (2010) Personal comment, cited in King 2010.

## Chapter 4

### Victorian Voices: Community Interaction in South East Australia

Now you're listening, not just hearing, the tears  
Of a people who've been shouting out for years  
Without the land you could not eat, you cannot sleep, or breathe or live  
Now you're listening  
Not just hearing words  
Of a people, who've been crying out to be heard  
Our home is our land, where we stand proud and tall  
Our home is our land, where we stand together  
**'Our Home Our Land', Lou Bennett**

Some say the past is another country  
Some say the past, well, it's dead and gone  
But we'll never heal if we don't confront it  
We've gotta say sorry, then we can all move on.  
How hard can it be to just say sorry?  
How hard can it be to do what's right?  
How hard can it be to just say sorry?  
How long will it take to see the light?  
**'The Sorry Song', Bruce Watson, arr James Rigby**

*Red dust, black faces  
Lost at first  
What do we do and where do we go?  
We sing and the women come  
They sing  
Hooray, we think, but the best is to come.  
Back down the dusty track  
Hot  
Children are singing Yil lull ay all over  
Red cross dinner  
Sing, they said and the adults will come.  
We sang, they came.  
Rice and stew  
Then the magic moment  
Are you Cathy? I'm Teresita.  
Two head girls, black and white, sit together and talk of strong women and singing  
Both of us love our strong singing women  
We are proud of our strong singing women  
Both of us know the importance, and the significance.  
We both know that it is so much more than the singing.  
So we sang, sitting in the dark and the dust and the sandflies  
Children in our laps  
Songs of turtles, crocodiles, canoes, God, Country, and Community  
Proud songs  
Whispering hope  
One farewell song and another  
Blessing songs*  
**Excerpts from Tiwi Musings, a poem by Cathy Nixon, 2009**

## **Preamble**

In this chapter I examine the practices used to strategically address the combined agendas of music making and political activism, and illustrate the motivations for and the representations of the resulting community interaction. More specifically, the chapter focuses on the 'lived experience'<sup>1</sup> or 'embodied behaviour'<sup>2</sup> of music making at the crossroad of musical and political action, particularly in relation to cross-cultural collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The opportunities that emerged during my field research in Victoria in August 2009 and January 2010 enrich the broader discussions of the previous chapters. The ethnographic material from Victoria affords a valuable regional comparison to the music making based in the Northern Territory and Western Australia that is the subject of later chapters. Prior to the exploration of the particular ethnographic material from Victoria, I briefly discuss its geography and some historical and current issues that are background to the cross-cultural relations of contemporary musical interactions in that State.

Victoria is a beacon of community music making in Australia. The Interlude prior to this chapter captured some of the vibrancy that makes it so. More specifically, the Interlude was a poetic response to and ethnographic narrative of a singers' festival in Daylesford in the hot, dry summer of January 2010. That festival is just one of many singing development opportunities that occur in Victoria throughout the year<sup>3</sup> and which are beyond the scope of this chapter to consider. Instead, I concentrate on Community Music Victoria and the Boîte in order to more finely examine the conditions that enable the intensity of community music making in Victoria.

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, Michael (1996) *Things as they are: New directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press

<sup>2</sup> Phelan, Helen (2008) Practice, ritual and community music: doing as identity, *International Journal of Community Music* 1.2: 156.

<sup>3</sup> Others include the Gorgeous Voices Festival in Bendigo, the Castlemaine Festival, various workshops organised through Community Music Victoria (CMV) and other community music organisations such as the Dandenong Ranges Music Council, various workshops led by individual community music leaders, as well as other workshops by The Boîte.

### ***Of place and history***

The state of Victoria sits on the southeast corner of mainland Australia.<sup>4</sup> The richness and beauty of the state is evident to any visitor. Small compared to most other States and Territories, the 227,594 square kilometres of Victoria is nonetheless geographically, topographically and climatically diverse; “[f]rom craggy cliff faces to crisp white beaches, nearly every type of terrain can be found here”.<sup>5</sup> Victoria shares the Murray River as a border with New South Wales to the north, the Bass Strait with Tasmania to the south, and borders South Australia to the west. Tumultuous oceans and bluffs are a feature of its southern coastline, the east is dominated by the Great Dividing Range that includes alpine areas, and the west is extremely flat and semi-arid. Seventy-five percent of the population is concentrated around Port Phillip and Western Port bays. Many of the rest of the population live in cities and towns, some of them glorious examples of the wealth of the State after the 1850s gold mining boom. Outside of the manufacturing and service centre of the capital city, Melbourne, agriculture dominates the economy because of the comparatively rich soils and wet, temperate climates compared to the rest of Australia.

Many Aboriginal groups in Victoria believe that *Bunjil*, the eaglehawk man, was one of the great ancestors who vitalised and shaped the formless and empty world.<sup>6</sup> *Bunjil* breathed life into people, taught them how to hunt and gather this bountiful land, and gave them a code for living. At least 1,600 generations of Aboriginal people have lived in Victoria, adapting to the massive environmental changes over those 30,000 odd years and creating a semi-sedentary life with technological changes.<sup>7</sup> At the time of colonisation, there were some twenty-nine cultural language groups. Like many Aboriginal people, each person had multiple identities - moiety, clan, language group and confederation – in order to navigate the dense relations of kinship, trade and

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to personal knowledge and experience, this summary is drawn Broome, Richard (2005) *Aboriginal Victorians: A History since 1800*, Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin.; <http://www.about-australia.com/facts/victoria-geography/>: accessed 5 April 2013; and <http://www.victoria.org.au/Geography.htm>: accessed 5 April 2013.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.about-australia.com/facts/victoria-geography/>: accessed 5 April 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Broome 2005: xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Broome 2005: xvii.

cultural exchange developed over millennia.<sup>8</sup> As Broome points out it was into this richness that “Europeans intruded with their ships, guns, livestock and, unconsciously, killer microbes, to create wild new times, in which all became uncertain and much was altered”.<sup>9</sup>

The common history of Aboriginal dispossession of land and clashes over resources followed although Victoria had its own distinctive pattern. After some early European exploration and unsuccessful British settlement attempts, Portland Bay was settled by the Henty family in 1834, and subsequently flourished with settlers from Tasmania. This was the country of the *Gunditjmarra*. Initial engagement revealed some level of mutual regard, with peaceful relations and exchange of goods and services.<sup>10</sup> This was highlighted by the Batman Treaty of 1835.<sup>11</sup> The treaty was not undertaken for pure motives and was an unequal exchange, but nonetheless it exemplified a set of confluences at the time: little convict labour, “a modicum of imperial conscience”,<sup>12</sup> and a valuing of Aboriginal labour up until the influx of workers during the Gold Rush in the 1850s. British Government opposition meant, however, it was never enacted.

Victorian independence from the colony of New South Wales (NSW) was legislated on 1 July 1851. The 1850s gold mining boom and subsequent period of prosperity in the 1880s collapsed with the 1893 Depression. Victoria became a State of the Commonwealth of Australia at Federation in 1901 and Melbourne was the national capital until 1927 when Federal Parliament moved to Canberra. Melbourne, once a traditional *Kulin*<sup>13</sup> meeting place,<sup>14</sup> and then a financial hub, remains one of Australia’s

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<sup>8</sup> See Broome 2005 for greater detail.

<sup>9</sup> Broome 2005: xxii.

<sup>10</sup> Broome 2005: xxii.

<sup>11</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss The Batman Treaty in detail, nor the fact that another treaty was created for Geelong. For more detail see, for example, Broome, Richard, with Frost, Alan (1999) *Colonial Experience: the Port Phillip District 1834-1850*, La Trobe University History Department, and Broome 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Broome 2005: xxii. Broome adds that even after the gold rush, which brought relatively well educated and liberal thinkers to Australia, a conscience about Aboriginal people emerged and resulted in the first protective legislation enacted by a colonial government. This is discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>13</sup> The *Kulin* are a confederation of five linguistic groups who share a common language: *Boonwurrung, Wathawurrung, DjaDjawurrung, Daungwuurung* and *Woiwurrung*. See, for example, Broome, Richard (1994) Aboriginal workers on south-eastern frontiers, *Australian Historical Studies* 26.103: 202-220. See also Broome 2005.



most economically and culturally vital cities. The city prides itself on a cosmopolitan way of life, enlivened by the post-World War II immigration policies that encouraged European migrants other than British and Irish, and subsequent waves of migration. Cultural expression is prolific which often encourages progressive ideals that emanate beyond the city's expanding boundaries.

Land, compensation, appropriate treatment of Aboriginal peoples or "right behaviour",<sup>15</sup> and constructions of Aboriginality all play a part in the formation of race relations in Victoria; from first contact, through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century era of missions and reserves, and into to the contemporary periods of 'indifferent'<sup>16</sup> inclusion and reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> The Boîte's 2009 Melbourne Millennium Chorus (MMC) concert, *Our Land Our Home*, characterised a contemporary musical engagement with the same mix of elements.

### ***Revisiting community music making in Victoria***

The small geographical size and relatively dense population of Victoria has produced culturally vibrant urban and regional centres of music making supported by a network of community music activists and organisations. Numerous public policies since the 1970s that adopted multiculturalism and, more recently health and wellbeing, act as frameworks for policies of cultural expression and representation that support this

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<sup>14</sup> Broome 2005: 15.

<sup>15</sup> Broome, Richard (2006) "There were vegetables every year Mr Green was here": Right behaviour and the struggle for autonomy at Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve, *History Australia* 3.2: 43.1-43.16, Monash University epress.

<sup>16</sup> McGregor, Russell (2011) *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

<sup>17</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a deep discussion of race relations in Victoria. See, for instance, Atkinson, Graham and Brett, Mark (2007) Land Justice in Victoria, *Native Title Service Victoria*: 5, [www.nts.vic.gov.au/document/Land-Justice-in-Vic-23Aug2007-NNTT.pdf](http://www.nts.vic.gov.au/document/Land-Justice-in-Vic-23Aug2007-NNTT.pdf): accessed 12 July 2012; Attwood, Bain (2003) *Homes for Aborigines*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin; Barwick, Diane (1988) *Rebellion at Coranderrk*, Canberra: Aboriginal History Monograph 5; Bock, Andrew (2011) Victoria's Aboriginal history is full of tragedy and inspiration, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October; Christie, Michael (1979) *Aborigines in colonial Victoria, 1834-1886*, Sydney: Sydney University Press; Cowlshaw, Gillian (1999) Black Modernity and Bureaucratic Culture, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2: 15-24; Lydon, Jane (2002) The experimental 1860s: Charles Walter's images of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, Victoria, *Aboriginal History* 26: 78-130; McCallum, David (2006) 'Merging' the Aboriginal population: Welfare, justice, power and the separation of Aboriginal children in Victoria, *Health Sociology Review* 15.1: 29-37; and Mulvaney, John (1989) *Encounters in place: outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606-1985*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.

musical activism. While this can be true of music making nationally, and in other parts of Australia, it has been particularly so in Victoria. Significantly, there are important aspects to this public support of music in relation to the musical interactions that are the focus of this study.

As discussed in Chapter Two Community Music Victoria (CMV) is an organisation whose approach and processes to support community music making have been recognised as outstanding by the Music Council of Australia (MCA). The Vocal Nosh project that Di had shared with me at The Boîtes Singers Festival<sup>18</sup> was auspiced by CMV. Although the organisation promotes more than just singing programs,<sup>19</sup> “Victoria Sings” is its most successful program. It received significant initial funding from VicHealth after an approach by well-known community music leader and composer, Fay White, and Annemarie Holly.<sup>20</sup> Since the withdrawal of funding from that government department, the program continues to run successfully as a result of a strong volunteer network. This network is supported with development workshops and publications of a cappella rounds, songs and chants.<sup>21</sup> Victoria Sings is an initiative “designed to weave community singing into the cultural fabric of Victoria”.<sup>22</sup> It fits within CMV’s wider endeavour to realise a dream of “a society in which everyone makes music, where music making is an utterly normal and constant activity of all”.<sup>23</sup>

Jane Coker from CMV<sup>24</sup> declared that the strong support of and interest in community singing overall is a reaction against technology, a “clawing to stay human”.<sup>25</sup> This recognition of a necessary component of being human is expressed in their internal documents as promoting the joyful experience and fun in singing. CMV also argues that music brings strength to individuals and society by providing a foundation of social connection; by carrying culture through memories, stories, identities, values and hopes;

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<sup>18</sup> See Interlude.

<sup>19</sup> See <http://cmv.customer.netspace.net.au/>: accessed 10 October 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Coker, Jane (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 13/01/10).

<sup>21</sup> Community Music Victoria (nd) *Victoria Sings: a cappella rounds, songs and chants for community singing*, Melbourne: Community Music Victoria, VicHealth, Arts for Health; and Community Music Victoria (2007) *Victoria Sings short stuff: rounds, chants and small songs for community singing*, Maryborough: Grapevine Music.

<sup>22</sup> Community Music Victoria (nd) *We can all make music: introducing Victoria Sings*.

<sup>23</sup> Hawkes, Jon (nd) Foreword, in Community Music Victoria: 2.

<sup>24</sup> Coker was also the Tour Manager for the BWC’s Beyond the Sunset Tour.

<sup>25</sup> Coker 2010.

by transcending divisive differences; and by restoring the practice of everyday arts. This claim to a fulfilment of “basic human needs for free and creative expression, connectedness and participation”<sup>26</sup> has been differently crafted to meet funding bodies’ needs to measure and assess the benefits of singing to community health and wellbeing. As discussed in Chapter Two, this, unfortunately, can create a tension within the practice of community singing where the overplaying of health benefits suppresses the fully lived human experience, an experience that scientific disciplines struggle to measure.

Community Music Victoria is active in expanding its music making programs to young people, schools,<sup>27</sup> people in institutions and others outside its general demographic of mature, white, middle-class women. This has included garnering the interest of Lou Bennett and Kavisha Mazzella<sup>28</sup> to lead large community singing groups.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the CMV does not specifically facilitate cross-cultural collaborations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous singers although some recognition of cross-cultural relations is found within the song texts of their Victoria Sings publications, as demonstrated by the lyrics from the Bruce Watson song that opened this chapter.

Popular music academic Graeme Smith has outlined the shifts in public policies that enabled ‘public multicultural music’ to index the celebration of hybridity and diversity that he suggests is the current imagining of the nation state. Despite the ambiguous points of entry inherent in this music, he argues, it enables Australians “to think about the relationship between larger social structures and their own points of personal identification”.<sup>30</sup> Smith notes that this reflection of the nation in musical expression is not a spontaneous emergence but a combination of musical, organisational and governmental activity. Importantly, he recognises that the most recent shift subsumes

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<sup>26</sup> Community Music Victoria (2010) *We Can All Make Music. Making music makes us strong: Why singing together enhances community strengthening activities*, <http://cmv.customer.netspace.net.au/MakingMusicMakesUsStrong.html>, accessed 22 January 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Through an association with the Songroom (Coker 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Who, it will be noted, are active in The Boîte and in other parts of Australia (Beyond this chapter, see Appendix 3 and Chapter 6).

<sup>29</sup> Coker 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, Graeme (2009) Public Multicultural Music and the Australian State, *Music & Politics* 3.2: 14.

Indigenous Australians into a multiculturalism that the Australia Council defines as “represented by a variety of expressions ranging from ethno-specific and bi-cultural, intra-cultural to cross-cultural and nation to nation inter-cultural exchange”.<sup>31</sup> This inclusion of Indigenous Australians into the multicultural nation is echoed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship:

“Multicultural” is a term that describes the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society. Cultural and linguistic diversity was a feature of life for the first Australians, well before European settlement. It remains a feature of modern Australian life, and it continues to give us distinct social, cultural and business advantages.<sup>32</sup>

Appropriating Indigenous diversity to claim an historical continuity to diversity within the contemporary Australian population ignores the existence of the White Australian Policy and the long term denial of citizenship to Indigenous Australians. Nevertheless, this shift to include Indigeneity within the notion of multiculturalism had been musically made in 2001 by The Boîte, a community music organisation that has long been a promoter of ethnically diverse and fusion music.<sup>33</sup>

In August 2009 The Boîte was staging the Melbourne Millennium Chorus (MMC) concert series entitled *Our Home Our Land* in August which again highlighted Indigenous music making. In addition, the Brunswick Women’s Choir (BWC) was to embark on its *Beyond the Sunset Tour* from Adelaide to Darwin later that same month. This seemed a fortuitous coincidence and both timely for my early field research. During the first visit to Melbourne I fell into discussion with one of the singers of the MMC who excitedly told me about the Lake Bolac Eel Festival, a festival, she said, where Indigenous culture was an integral part. Here was potentially another example of cross-cultural collaboration in the state of Victoria but the Lake Bolac Eel Festival did not quite fulfil the criteria of my tightly framed research project. I wanted community singing interactions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The Lake Bolac Eel Festival

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<sup>31</sup> Australia Council (2006) *Arts in a Multicultural Australia*, Sydney: Australia Council, cited in Smith 2009: 10.

<sup>32</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2007) Fact Sheet no. 6: The Evolution of Australia’s Multicultural Policy, revised 15 June 2007, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/06evolution.htm>, cited in Smith 2009: 1.

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.Boîte.com.au/>. For an extensive historical account of the The Boîte see Smith, Graeme (2007) *Playing with Policy: Music, Multiculturalism and The Boîte* in *Victorian Historical Journal* 27.2: 152-169.

was beyond these self-imposed limits. As discussed in Chapter One, I was unable to include the BWC in this ethnographic investigation. In the end, the Boîte's MMC Concert gave me the only sufficient material from Victoria with which to work in relation to the convergence of community music and reconciliation. Our Home Our Land played into a history of land, compensation, 'right treatment', and constructions of Aboriginality.

### ***The Boîte's world of music***

The Boîte has a long history of engagement with and promotion of the music of 'others', or more specifically the 'other selves' of (mostly) Melbourne based musicians, and the various issues that arise through those engagements<sup>34</sup>. The Boîte was first established in 1979 during a time of community and government engagement with multiculturalism. On 1<sup>st</sup> June of that year the Boîte held its first concert at the Actors Theatre in Richmond, promoting musicians from diverse Australian communities. Among numerous institutions established at the time, The Boîte became an influential centre for the promotion and performance of ethnic music. Since 1989 it has regularly promoted music through its World Music Café, now located at Mark Street, North Fitzroy, and other venues throughout Melbourne. The advent of the 'world music'<sup>35</sup> genre as a marketing term in the 1980s enabled The Boîte to find a more comfortable way to describe what had previously been referred to as 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' music. This marker has remained throughout its thirty odd year history although the terminology used to describe the music can be modified to include and reflect particular musical interests such as a cappella.

Heavily involved in the a cappella scene during the 1990s, The Boîte promoted a cappella festivals showcasing professional ensembles and community choirs. In line with that tradition, the Boîte's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in May 2009 was celebrated with a massed choral performance directed by Stephen Taberner<sup>36</sup> at the National Gallery of Victoria.

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<sup>34</sup> See, in particular, Smith 2007. See also Smith 2005 & 2009.

<sup>35</sup> See greater discussion in Chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> Taberner is a popular a cappella singing leader both in Australia and the UK. He is credited with playing a significant role in the increase in male a cappella choirs in Australia. Inspired by Georgian male polyphonic music, Taberner has taken this Georgian style and created a unique Australian male choral performative style. Taberner is the Musical Director of the Spooky Men's Chorale. Perth is the only city to have a second chapter of the choir, called The Spooky Men of the West. See <http://www.stephentaberner.com>. Last accessed 12 September 2012. See also

In 1999 the a cappella festivals were replaced with the MMC. The a cappella festivals had reached their ability to fulfil the needs of the Boîte 's evolving community singing endeavour,<sup>37</sup> which is now described as being:

...designed to support singing in the Victorian community, to explore cultural diversity through learning songs, meeting artists and discussing issues, to encourage individuals to become actively involved in the arts, and to provide rare opportunities for choir leaders to spend 6 months developing major choir/theatre works and lead a very large community choir in major concert performances.<sup>38</sup>

Since 2004 the Boîte Schools Chorus (BSC) has become a concurrent program to the MMC, specifically designed to encourage younger participation. These concerts, based on the same program as the MMC, are performed at the Dallas Brooks Hall and in 2009 also included Frankston Arts Centre<sup>39</sup>. The MMC and BSC draw on a network of professional musicians, choral leaders, community choirs, school choirs, and other singers in a project that lasts a few months and culminates in the concerts. While the planning and artistic team engage in a twelve to eighteen months project, the singers are involved in the ten week rehearsal and performance component.

Inevitably, these annual events have been used to celebrate or mark issues identified as significant to the sociomusical endeavour of the Boîte. The Boîte values and supports artists from diverse cultural communities, promotes cultural understanding through innovative presentation and nurturing creativity, and provides access to and active participation in the arts for all ages.<sup>40</sup> It is an influential sociomusical body adaptive to change, as Smith has also noted:

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Rickwood, Julie (2010a), 'Taking the Piss?: Australian blokes and a cappella choirs', in Shelly D. Brunt and Kirstn Zemke (eds), *What's It Worth?: 'Value' and Popular Music: Selected Papers from the 2009 IASPM Australia-New Zealand Conference, Auckland, Dunedin: IASPM-ANZ* (International Association for the Study of Popular Music-Australia New Zealand).

<sup>37</sup> King, Roger (2009) Personal conversation (Interview 2/07/09).

<sup>38</sup> The Boîte (2010) *Annual Report*, Melbourne: The Boîte : 4.

<sup>39</sup> The Boîte (2009) *Annual Report*, Melbourne: The Boîte : 5.

<sup>40</sup> The Boîte 2009: 1. Recently The Boîte's Coordinator, Roger King, clarified that their mission statement had changed little in twenty years. Last year they added a bi-line: "Victoria's iconic multicultural arts organisation". Until this was added The Boîte had "steered clear of the term [multicultural] because of its bureaucratic sound and its muddled definition within the community. We have belatedly reintroduced it because it is the foundation of the Boîte and, as a political policy under siege, deserves our support" (King, Roger [2013] Personal communication [Email 19/05/13]).

In the case of the Boîte, its ability to creatively modify its activities in response to changes in both public policy and audience has been crucial [to its longevity]. Over the period of its existence there have been important shifts in the way the music brought to Australia by non-English speaking migrants and from related cultures has been understood: from a romantic workerism projected onto the migrant, through a social-democratic concern with cultural inclusiveness, to a more general preoccupation with the musical affirmation of community. The Boîte has worked through shifting ideas of how music may be socially authentic and true to a vision of Australian society, and how this authenticity may be made as a more general model of an ideal relationship between music and society.<sup>41</sup>

Smith's assertion reflects the insight into music and society by Frith that I discussed in Chapter Three.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, the concept of creative modification is crucial in the examination of *Our Home Our Land*, the twelfth concert series in the overall MMC project. Each MMC project is designed not to support an ongoing single choir but to create an annual choral event around a particular issue. The combination of featured artists and a large community choir is the usual template.<sup>43</sup> In 2009 the specific focus was on Indigenous issues in relation to the environment. The previous MMC projects provide an important context in which to examine *Our Home Our Land*.<sup>44</sup> While all had actively addressed The Boîte's concentration on world music and associated political issues, both the 2001 and 2009 MMC concerts distinctively brought Indigeneity into The Boîte's sociomusical enterprise. Coincidentally, the song 'Our Home Our Land' had featured in that previous MMC concert series in 2001. "Winter Dreaming: A Concert for Reconciliation" used the centenary year of Australia's Federation to explore relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In addition to the massed choir, performers that year had included Indigenous musicians Richard Frankland, Kev Carmody and Lou Bennett. The 2001 concert had also included two of the songs that have become part of 'the community canon' referred to in the previous chapter: 'Yil Lull' and 'Inanay'. The song 'Our Home Our Land' has not entered that canon in the same extensive way but it was ideal as the theme song for The Boîte's 2009

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<sup>41</sup> Smith 2009: 166.

<sup>42</sup> Frith, Simon (1996) *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press: 273–274.

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 3 for details of featured performers in previous MMC productions.

<sup>44</sup> The Boîte's MMC concerts and a list of the songs performed can be found in Appendix 3.

project. Australian Indigenous themes directed by Indigenous artists have therefore featured twice in the MMC Concert Series which “indicates the importance we place on [Indigenous issues]”,<sup>45</sup> particularly given that people from some one hundred and thirty cultures have settled in Australia since colonisation.

### ***Our Home Our Land: The 2009 Melbourne Millennium Chorus Concert Series***

An examination of *Our Home Our Land* signals some of the elements necessary to illustrate the ‘singing in between’ of community interactions discussed in the previous chapter. I first consider the central message of connection to land through an examination of the songs, the programme content, and the performances of *Our Home Our Land*, and conclude by placing this concert series within the broad sociomusical agenda of *The Boîte*. *Our Home Our Land* highlighted an inclusiveness that was not about “the music brought to Australia by non-English speaking migrants”. It was indeed the integration of the music of the ‘other self’, Indigenous Australians whose heritage draws on a deep history. The concepts of ‘land’, ‘country’ and ‘environment’ can slide over one another throughout the various discourses within *Our Home Our Land* and mesh into a merger of interests that foreground the Indigenous. As a result, the politics of ‘place’ were inevitably an undercurrent within the music. Interestingly, Smith, who had made reference to the incorporation of Indigenous Australians into public policy on ‘multiculturalism’, did not note this change within the shifts of *The Boîte’s* activities.

### *Connection to land and land justice*

The title for the 2009 project drew on the song ‘*Our Home Our Land*’<sup>46</sup> written by the project’s Artistic Director, Lou Bennett. Bennett was pivotal to the project and not simply as the composer of ‘*Our Home Our Land*’. Bennett is a *Yorta Yorta/Dja Dja Wurrung* woman from Echuca. In the late 1980s-early 1990s Bennett was a member of the influential music trio, *Tiddas*, whose songs had influenced many women’s community choirs during that time.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently, she has been involved in other musical projects, including with her band, *The Sweet Cheeks*, as a member of *The Black*

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<sup>45</sup> King 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Sometimes the song is titled, ‘*Our Land is Our Home*’. See, for instance, *The Boîte* (2009a) “*Our Home Our Land*” Concert Series Programme.

<sup>47</sup> See Chapter 2.



Arm Band, and in various theatre productions, notably “*Yanagai! Yanagai!*”, a production that retold the story of the *Yorta Yorta* struggle to regain their land. Bennett has also been active in responding to and resisting Aboriginalist discourses that work to sustain non-Indigenous audience’s expectations of Indigenous performers.<sup>48</sup> Her music is an important vehicle for her broad views: “Indigenous issues, lots of women’s issues, lesbian issues, it’s about respecting our earth, it’s humanitarian issues, yeah so there’s a bigger picture than just Indigenous music”.<sup>49</sup> Bennett has also undertaken postgraduate research at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University that extends her personal experiences to academically explore the arts as a medium for the retrieval, reclamation and revitalisation of Indigenous languages, with a particular focus on *Yorta Yorta*.<sup>50</sup> This research project had been prompted by a life long journey to answer a childhood question: “Why didn’t we learn Aboriginal languages in our schools?”.<sup>51</sup> Bennett’s investment in this Boîte project was therefore multifaceted. As the Artistic Director, Bennett was able to orchestrate the representation of Aboriginality in this performance - the continuity between traditional and contemporary representations of Aboriginality in music, dance and language; and direct the narrative through song and text of the connections between Indigenous and environmental issues.

The title song ‘Our Home Our Land’ therefore lent itself to the focus on environmental concerns with, and Indigenous knowledge of, the Murray River, part of a river system which has been subject to drought, flood, other factors of climate change, intensive land use, and political fury over the last few decades.<sup>52</sup> The Our Home Our Land project promoted ‘connection to land’ bringing together different but compatible perspectives

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<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Barney, Katelyn (2009) “Hop, Skip and Jump”: Indigenous Australian women performing within and against Aboriginalism, *Journal of Music Research Online*, [www.jmro.org.au](http://www.jmro.org.au), accessed 7 July 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Bennett, Lou (2003) Personal comment, cited in Barney 2009: 12.

<sup>50</sup> See Koori Cohort of Researchers (2009) *Revitalisation of Indigenous Languages through the Arts*, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University: Melbourne, <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse/Our%20Organisation%2FDesign%20and%20Social%20Context%2FResearch%2FResearch%20centres%2FKoori%20Cohort%20of%20Researchers%2FProjects%2FIndigenous%20Deep%20Listening%20Project%2FCreative%20events%2FRevitalisation/>, accessed 12 September 2012. Bennett, Lou (2009c) Personal comment (2/08/09) and *Indigenous Stories: Lou Bennett* (2010) Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) 22 June, <http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/stories/s2934824.htm>, accessed 13 September 2012.

<sup>51</sup> ABC 2010.

<sup>52</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss these various pressures on the Murray River. For more information on the Murray-Darling Basin see <http://www.mdba.gov.au/>.

on the Murray River from the *Yorta Yorta*<sup>53</sup> and environmental organisations. In particular the concert project focused on the establishment of the Barmah National Park in December 2008. The joint management of the park by the Victorian Government and the *Yorta Yorta* was shaped around the Victorian River Red Gums Statute and the Traditional Owner Settlement Act.<sup>54</sup> The Our Home Our Land project incorporated a visit to *Yorta Yorta* country with Lou Bennett who was joined by *Yorta Yorta* Elder, Wayne Atkinson. Atkinson also spoke at one of the rehearsals. A series of bush tucker walks along the Yarra with Fay June Ball, Koori Heritage Trust educator, was also included.<sup>55</sup> These layers to the story being told through the project were accessible to varying degrees depending on the level of involvement, from the planning and artistic team through to the audience. While some participants are more interested in the singing than the ideas being explored, others “are deeply moved by the performances and that is important”.<sup>56</sup>

The campaign for the Barmah State Forest to be turned into a national park had been ongoing since 1998 when the *Yorta Yorta* occupied the *Dharnya* Centre<sup>57</sup> in Barmah Forest as a protest against the Victorian<sup>58</sup> and Howard governments’ “10 point plan” to water down native title legislation.<sup>59</sup> The *Yorta Yorta* struggle for land justice is said to have started in 1860, when they claimed compensation for interference to Traditional Fishing Rights,<sup>60</sup> and it was at the forefront in the *Yorta Yorta* political movement led by

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<sup>53</sup> The *Yorta Yorta* name for the Murray is “*Dhungulla*”. The *Yorta Yorta* Nation is situated along the Murray River, either side of the Victorian/NSW border. See, for example, Atkinson, Wayne (2000) “*Not one iota*”: *The struggle for land justice*, PhD thesis, LaTrobe University, Melbourne; Atkinson, Wayne (2004) *Reconciliation & Land Justice: You Can’t Have One without the Other*, *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* 7.2; and roadsideservice, (nd) *Yorta Yorta struggles for land justice and the Barmah National Park*, *jewonthis*, <http://jewonthis.wordpress.com/2010/07/14/yorta-yorta-struggles-for-land-justice>, accessed 12 July 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Unattributed (2010) *Barmah National Park & Joint Management for Yorta Yorta!!!*, *Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation’s Newsletter* 6: 1. This article was sourced from the Arnold Bloch Leibler’s Reconciliation Action Plan Newsletter *Rapport*, a newsletter of Arnold Bloch Leibler – Lawyers and Advisors.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson, Katrina (2009) *Our Home Our Land*, *Annual Report*, Melbourne: The Boîte .

<sup>56</sup> King 2013.

<sup>57</sup> The *Yorta Yorta*’s cultural centre.

<sup>58</sup> At the time under the leadership of Premier Jeff Kennett.

<sup>59</sup> Atkinson 2004.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example Atkinson 2000.

William Cooper in the 1930s.<sup>61</sup> It was central to an unsuccessful Native Title claim in the 1990s.<sup>62</sup> The national park campaign was therefore seen as a great success. It established alliances between the traditional owners, environmental groups, and the Victorian National Parks Association and, once declared, generated this comment:

What a stunning symbol of reconciliation [...] given the recent sorry history of the Yorta Yorta being judged by our courts of law as not the people they identify themselves to be, having lost their connections to country [...] well over a century ago, [one] 'washed away by the tide of history'.<sup>63</sup>

Land justice, then, is a central component of reconciliation for the *Yorta Yorta*, an essential element in returning an "inheritance that has been wrongfully taken".<sup>64</sup> Neither the Our Home Our Land programme nor the dialogue during performances overtly referred to this long battle for land justice, the contested positions in relation to the Barmah National Park, nor the ongoing contested negotiations between users of the Murray River.<sup>65</sup> It highlighted instead the "Caring for Country" guidelines for the recently declared Red Gum National Parks, commentaries on the Murray River from the Australian Conservation Foundation and Friends of the Earth and, significantly, presented *Yorta Yorta* knowledge of the waterway and its local environs in a "Story of Creation and Biami" which was based on extracts from limited sources. Above the *Yorta Yorta*/English glossary on page three, the 'story' concludes with these words, which is the most that is said about the lengthy campaign for land justice. This statement was

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<sup>61</sup> Atkinson 2004. For a detailed and nuanced history of William Cooper's political activism see McGregor 2011.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Arnold, Ann (2006) Backwash in the tide of history, *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 9, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/backwash-in-the-tide-of-history/2006/01/08/1136655089495.html?page=fullpage>, accessed 13 July 2012; Long, Warwick (2010) Dreams and despair: the making of a national park, *ABC Rural news*, 29 June, <http://www.abc.net.au/rural/content/2010/s2940011.htm>, accessed 10 July, 2012.

Seidel, Peter (2003) Deakin University Yorta Yorta Presentation, 9 April, <http://www.abl.com.au/ablattach/YortaYortaPresentation090403.pdf>, accessed 13 July 2012; and Strelein, Lisa (2005) From Mabo to Yorta Yorta: Native Title Law in Australia, *University Journal of Law and Policy* 19: 225-271.

<sup>63</sup> This quote, which commented on the establishment of a lease back agreement to the *Yorta Yorta* Board of Management, was cited in Anon 2010 (sourced from Arnold Bloch Leibler above).

<sup>64</sup> Atkinson and Brett 2007: 12.

<sup>65</sup> Such as farmers, irrigators, governments at all levels, recreational users, etc as well as the *Yorta Yorta* themselves.

drawn from extracts that referenced Wayne Atkinson's doctoral thesis completed in 2000:<sup>66</sup>

Putting the Yorta Yorta back in time and place provides a foundation for following the story of their love for country and their tenacious struggle to hold on to what they believe has always been theirs by inherent right.<sup>67</sup>

A few years after completing that thesis, Atkinson made a statement that specifically brought together reconciliation, land justice, and the theme song of the concert series:

Our land is our home [where] we grow strong together is a fitting symbol for the gap between the ideals of land justice and the reality of the returns gained. If reconciliation is about helping Australians move forward with a better understanding of the past and how the past affects the lives of Indigenous people today, then inclusive in the challenge of the unfinished business is land justice. It goes hand in hand with the healing process and is a key remedy for real, effective and mutual reconciliation.<sup>68</sup>

The inclusion of the latter statement by Atkinson in the programme could have more overtly articulated the *Yorta Yorta* history, their struggle for land and the theme of the concert. Bennett, who was acutely aware of the *Yorta Yorta* land rights history, focused on more immediate interests: the Barmah National Parks campaign and language revitalisation. In the artistic work of *Our Home Our Land* these issues were "explored in eight songs and a few readings"<sup>69</sup> and celebrated in the performances themselves.

### *The songs, the programme, and the performances of Our Home Our Land*

The song 'Our Home Our Land' can be seen to be fundamentally representative of the *Yorta Yorta* land justice struggle and, at the same time, aligns with current broad environmental concerns. The song was first composed by Lou Bennett when commissioned by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission (ATSIC) Native Title Committee. The recording of that song was made on the 1995 Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) double-CD collection entitled *Our Home, Our Land... something to sing about*. The recording artists included the other members of Bennett's group Tiddas, Archie Roach, Ruby Hunter, Kev Carmody, Shane Howard,

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<sup>66</sup> Atkinson 2000.

<sup>67</sup> The Boîte 2009a: 3.

<sup>68</sup> Atkinson 2004: 2-3.

<sup>69</sup> King 2013.

Bunna Lawrie, Bart Willoughby, Sami Butcher, David Bridie and Mark Forrester. “It was a momentous occasion, bringing black and white artists together to sing about our connection to land”, Bennett commented.<sup>70</sup> In the making of that CD, musicologist Jill Stubington recognised that “while the fight for cultural survival and land rights is fierce and unrelenting, it is accompanied by [a] gesture of inclusion [to non-Indigenous Australians]”.<sup>71</sup> The song has also been performed in other contexts, including in the production of *murundak* by the Black Arm Band.<sup>72</sup> Bennett has articulated her intent in writing the song:

Our Home Our Land was written for all Australians. Anyone and everyone who walks on this land needs to know the history, Aboriginal Australia’s history, to fully appreciate their home.<sup>73</sup>

The cross-cultural collaboration of professional musicians and community singers in the 2009 Boîte project therefore grew out of a rich soil of past collaborations where land was central to the sociomusical endeavour. Bennett regards the land as vital to life:

[M]ore than a commodity, it is the very essence of why we are here, if we don’t look after the land, the land cannot and will not provide for us, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Take the time to walk on the land, listen to her, talk with her... she will talk back in her own way!”<sup>74</sup>

Bennett’s words reflect a transition in emphasis away from land rights broadly to one of Indigenous knowledge and custodianship which is beneficial to contemporary environmental concerns. As noted in Chapter Three, Indigenous knowledge about the environment is also increasingly a component of recent discussions about reconciliation. Instead of a focus on a detailed history of *Yorta Yorta* land claims, and most specifically the loss of the Native Title claim, The Boîte’s 2009 concert series was a performance of cross-cultural concern and engagement with the environment, and crucially within that, recognition of Indigenous knowledge and language. In addition to the programme

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<sup>70</sup> Bennett, Lou (2009a) Artistic Director notes, in The Boîte , *Our Home Our Land* Concert Series Programme, Melbourne: The Boîte : 2.

<sup>71</sup> Stubington, Jill (2007) *Singing the land: The power of performance in Aboriginal life*, Strawberry Hills: Sydney: 133.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>73</sup> Bennett, Lou (2009b) Personal comment, cited in *Melbourne Millennium Chorus 2009-Our Home Our Land*: [http://www.Boîte.com.au/pages/events\\_parent.php?parent\\_event\\_id=31](http://www.Boîte.com.au/pages/events_parent.php?parent_event_id=31), accessed on 1 June 2009. See also Stubington 2007: 133.

<sup>74</sup> Bennett 2009b.

notes, this potent message was echoed in the full program of songs which were considered to be “inspiring messages of hope”.<sup>75</sup> The other songs, selected by Bennett and Andrea Khoza, the Choir Director, were: ‘It’s the Little Things’, written by *Tiddas*, ‘Bush Tucker’ by Kerianne Cox, ‘*Manubak Garra*’<sup>76</sup> by Lou Bennett, ‘*Inanay*’<sup>77</sup>, ‘Happy Earth’ by *Tiddas*, ‘Eagle Flying’ by Kavisha Mazzella, ‘Divorced’ by Andrew O’Phee, ‘Singing for Rain’ by Shellie Morris, ‘Black Fella, White Fella’ by Neil Murray, and ‘We Are The People’ by Ricardo Idagi. Together, these songs formed ‘more than a commodity’: they were songs that acknowledged and celebrated cross-cultural environmental knowledge and equality.

The collection of songs evoked an emotional celebration of a recent event which marked an historic occasion. The songs referenced current emphases in race relations, aligning with the second layer of invitation suggested by Stubington. Many contemporary Victorian (and other) Indigenous musicians are vocal in their subaltern politics; actively legitimising their right to ‘place’, their right to sing about the fraught history of ‘country’: a location, a region, a state or the nation, and, more recently, the deep history of the Aboriginal people and the equal validity in their ways of being and knowing. These interests are also conceptually included into notions of reconciliation. Cross-cultural collaborations can therefore bring a consciously articulated Indigenous voice to join with non-Indigenous voices in contemporary issues of joint concern and/or celebration. In the case of *Our Home Our Land* the non-Indigenous voices supported the Indigenous voice, constructing a cross-cultural chorus behind a distinctive Aboriginal narrative.

The three concerts of *Our Home Our Land* that I witnessed included performances by Bennett and ‘The Sweet Cheeks’, Fay June Ball, the dancer Brendan Marks, and Khoza, who also directed the three hundred member choir which performed some of the program with or without the professional musicians. The professional performers wore contemporary clothes of choice, Brendan Marks dressed in a contemporary representation of ‘traditional’. The choir members wore a costume of assimilation: black

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<sup>75</sup> Wilson, Katrina (2009) Project Manager notes, in *The Boîte*, *Our Home Our Land* Concert Series Programme, Melbourne: The Boîte : 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Yorta Yorta* for “sleep now”.

<sup>77</sup> ‘*Inanay*’ was performed by the Boîte Schools Chorus only.

pants and black T-shirts that bore the MMC logo and a turtle. The turtle motif was strategic. The Broad-shelled Turtle (*Chelodina expansa*) is an animal totem connected to *Yorta Yorta* creation stories, Bennett's personal totem,<sup>78</sup> and also a threatened species.<sup>79</sup>

The choir singers came from Melbourne and regional Victoria.<sup>80</sup> Three generations of one family were in the sopranos, two generations in others. Some singers admitted to being "repeat offenders", having returned year after year for over a decade. Most sang in regular choirs. There were few men; apparently the recently created Men in Suits choir led by Stephen Taberner had drawn them away. As a result the choir lacked balance and often the basses, tenors and sopranos were lost in the overall sound of a massed choir accompanied by amplified instruments. Even in the unaccompanied songs the size of the alto section meant some lack of balance and blend; their numbers were not utilised to provide a greater depth of harmony.

'Our Home Our Land' both opened and closed all three performances of Our Home Our Land at BMW Edge in Federation Square which overlooked the Yarra River, the coffee coloured water and the craft it carried visible only during the Sunday afternoon concert. The theatre's glass walls and angular architecture lent a contemporary physicality to the concerts. Its acoustics were live. In all three concerts the audience filled the 450 capacity of the theatre. Reflecting the typical MMC audience, it was heavily populated with the friends and families of the choir members: mostly white and middle-class, as well as some reflection of Melbourne's cultural diversity.

For the first concert on the Saturday night I was accompanied by a long-time friend who had never engaged with community singing. We sat near the tenors and basses, in the second row, to be able to capture the immediacy of the performers: their faces, voices

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<sup>78</sup> Bennett 2009c.

<sup>79</sup> Recently a joint program between the Yorta Yorta and the Arthur Rylah Institute, Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, was established to work collectively on the future management of the turtles. (<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/arthur-rylah-institute/research-themes/wetland-ecology>, accessed on 13 July 2012)

<sup>80</sup> These included Mallacoota, Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Mornington Peninsula, Orbost and Castlemaine.

and bodies engaged in the ‘flow’<sup>81</sup> of their music making. Their movement, especially their swaying was at times overwhelming; their singing enthusiastic and full of spirit. Noticeably present then was the intensity and authenticity that is representative of community music making, which heightens emotion: Jo leant across and grabbed my hand as tears welled in our eyes. Other audience members were similarly moved; “I cried! Twice!”.

A rehearsal on the Sunday added difference to the two performances that followed. At the rehearsal Khoza fine-tuned the choir’s entries and closures, tightened their harmonies and timing. Bennett, wearing one of the choir T-shirts, joined the bass section to add strength to its lack of volume. Bennett also taught a percussive rainstorm piece to add a soundscape to the performance. Marks requested bush noises and bird calls as a soundscape for his dances. He also explained the language and concept of the dances, providing an educational component.

The Sunday afternoon concert audience was visibly different from the evening before, with African people, Indigenous people, and the elderly more greatly represented. This concert was a “chance for the mums to come”, said Therese Virtue,<sup>82</sup> one of The Boîte’s long term staff members.<sup>83</sup> Both in that concert, and the one in the evening, I sat at the back of the theatre, noting the loss of clarity, the immediacy, the lack of a big choral sound expected of some 300 singers. Especially absent was the punch of emotion I had experienced the evening before. Interestingly, the more distanced perspective enabled greater recognition of the overall narrow margins and intervals in the harmonies, a similarity of treatment and sound in the songs. The soundscapes, however, contributed to an improved overall atmosphere in comparison to the performance on the Saturday night. Post-party discussions revealed the joy that the singers had gained from their additional contributions of ‘noise’. As with the songs, the singers had been happy to follow the directions of the professionals to enhance the performance.

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<sup>81</sup> Csikszentimihalyi, Mihaly (1995) Singing and the self: Choral music as ‘active leisure’, *Choral Journal* 35.7: 13-19.

<sup>82</sup> Both Virtue (Director, World Music Café) and her partner, Roger King (Director/Chief Executive Officer), were awarded the OAM for their services to the community in organising multicultural events and directing multicultural music programs (Smith 2009: 153).

<sup>83</sup> Virtue, Therese (2009) Personal comment (2/08/09).



Bennett's parents were present at the Sunday evening concert and they gave an acknowledgement to country and elders, both black and white. Bennett then announced that the Our Home Our Land concert was part of the reconciliation journey, it was a vehicle designed to entice, entertain and to educate something she had not said at the previous concerts. Bennett's partner, "a proud *Kurna-Narungga* woman",<sup>84</sup> was also present at the final concert, witnessing the MMC for the first time. Sitting directly in front of the choir and performers she had loved the sounds from "all around, the sea of voices and faces". That snippet of conversation followed an even shorter conversation with Bennett herself who was charming and introduced me to her parents, "My Mum and Dad – Black and White reconciled, loving different, strong, empowering, optimistic".<sup>85</sup> Despite my intent I was unable to have a more involved conversation with Bennett as she was in high demand throughout the whole weekend, surrounded by family, friends, and choir members. I did, however, manage a deeper conversation with Andrea Khoza, the Musical Director.

As with Bennett, Andrea Khoza had a long standing working relationship with The Boîte. She had co-directed the 2008 Boîte MMC Concert series "Limpopo" with her husband and fellow musician, Valanga Khoza, and had been involved in previous MMC concerts.<sup>86</sup> Her relationship with Valanga Khoza had made her well aware of the strategic though sometimes shallow and symbolic integration of the music of 'others' by music and other organisations in fulfilling funding bodies' requirements to prove 'inclusion'.<sup>87</sup> The Boîte set itself apart from those.<sup>88</sup> Her involvement in Our Home Our Land was therefore a mindful one:

I felt I needed to inform Lou, Roger and Katrina that my knowledge of Aboriginal culture was very limited. Lou's reaction was very positive! She responded with commitment, saying that this is the time to move on and learn from each other. It was then I began to be excited about this journey,

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<sup>84</sup> *Indigenous Stories: Lou Bennett* (2010) Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) 22 June, <http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/stories/s2934824.htm>, accessed 13 September 2012.

<sup>85</sup> *Indigenous Stories: Lou Bennett* (2010) Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) 22 June, <http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/stories/s2934824.htm>, accessed 13 September 2012.

<sup>86</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>87</sup> Khoza, Andrea (2010) Personal comment (19/01/10).

<sup>88</sup> For a greater treatment on this point see Smith 2007.

exploring environmental and indigenous issues through song.<sup>89</sup>

Khoza added in a later conversation that the 2009 experience was very different from the 2008 experience where she had been engaged with a music with which she had considerable knowledge and connection. She had therefore greatly valued working with Bennett who she described as “gentle and generous, a warm communicator who promotes understanding, learning, talking, sharing and singing”.<sup>90</sup> Their skills had complimented one another. Bennett’s compositions tend to be aurally created harmonies often accompanied with guitar and designed for small trios or ensembles. Khoza was therefore able to create choral arrangements for some of the songs in the program.<sup>91</sup>

Among the choir members, a number of young Aboriginal women had travelled from Bairnsdale to be part of the MMC. The Community Services Officer who accompanied the young women said that she hoped this was a seeding for more involvement in the following years, as well as a growing interest in singing with others in a similar fashion in and around Bairnsdale. Khoza was delighted at this mentoring prospect. She had acknowledged the Aboriginal singers in the programme, saying they had been “generous in sharing their own knowledge and experiences [within a general feeling] of curiosity and hunger for connection to a culture we are striving to get to know”.<sup>92</sup>

### *Our Home Our Land Our Voice*

Our Home Our Land can be seen as “an articulation of the community as harmonious whole”.<sup>93</sup> The MMC concert performances displayed the versatility that Smith argues is necessary to reassemble elements of earlier historical cultural forms in order to become an aesthetic asset. The songs and the construction of the performances themselves were not new. Community choirs have increasingly become part of the everyday, particularly since the 1980s, and the MMC had been in existence for a decade. The

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<sup>89</sup> Khoza, Andrea (2009a) Choir Directors notes, in The Boîte , *Our Home Our Land* Concert Series Programme, Melbourne: The Boîte : 2.

<sup>90</sup> Khoza, Andrea (2009b) Personal comment (2/08/09).

<sup>91</sup> Khoza 2009b.

<sup>92</sup> Khoza 2009a: 2.

<sup>93</sup> Phelan 2008: 148.

music had been performed previously, in different contexts, by different performers. In this performance, however, these elements were reassembled to construct an aesthetic asset – a community interaction that celebrated a new national park and brought vitality to the *Yorta Yorta* language. Hybridity and diversity were present; the concerts were an enactment of cultural pluralism and a model of contemporary Australian identity; representative of an ideal society.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

The integration of Indigenous knowledge into the broader national discourse of environmental concern was readily accessible and musically portrayed in *Our Home Our Land*, creating a sense of community activism. At the same time, however, the project distanced itself from a deeper exploration of the fraught history of land rights within Victoria's borders. It also failed to acknowledge that the project extended Bennett's vision of the revitalisation of the *Yorta Yorta* language through the arts.<sup>94</sup> Aboriginal politics were inherent in the concert series but their intensity was muted. As Phelan has argued attention needs to be given to the potential of practice to generate its own meaning and thus possibly embed a 'degree of misrecognition'<sup>95</sup>. In *Our Home Our Land*, while a coherent set of values around inclusivity, knowledge and celebration were generated, the deeper politics were not. The artistic and planning teams and to a lesser extent the massed choir had the benefit of learning from each other and Wayne Atkinson about some of that history. The audience were given little more than what was included in the programme. King argued, however, that MMC audience members who were interested enough to explore the land rights issues could do so through the links provided in the program. They would then "soon have come across the long standing *Yorta Yorta* campaign".<sup>96</sup> At some level the *Our Home Our Land* concert series subverted its own goals in an oddly contradictory way. It transcended its articulated sense of an agenda to celebrate a national park by enacting the ideal of national identity. It did so, however, by shadowing much of the detail of Victorian Aboriginal history and current Aboriginal political agendas that inherently also informed *Our Home Our Land*. The

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<sup>94</sup>Koori Cohort of Researchers 2009.

<sup>95</sup> Phelan 2008; Bell 1992.

<sup>96</sup> King 2013.

concert series was intentionally a vehicle for cross-cultural celebration, not political divisiveness.

As one of Australia's oldest states, Victoria embodies a deep colonial history and a deeper Aboriginal history that have cultivated a practice of dynamic race relations. In this chapter I exposed the nuanced negotiations within cross-cultural relations, particularly within the context of Victorian political, social and cultural history. The Our Home Our Land concert series illustrated the 'embodied behaviour' suggested by concepts emerging from cultural and postcolonial studies. It showed how the lived experience of community interaction incorporates "ideas of fluidity and hybridity that see cultures not as discrete categories but rather as constituting a field over which individuals move, constantly redefining complex and contradictory identities".<sup>97</sup>

The Boîte facilitates world music performances that are strategically situated within a progressive exploration of Australian history and politics: "a local manifestation of a global phenomenon".<sup>98</sup> The organisation is careful to ensure that the voices of 'other selves' are equally heard in the leadership of their MMC projects. The music making is always primary, despite the political intent. As the example of Our Home Our Land suggests, the deeper politics are muted in order to concentrate on "music's role in the affirmation and creation of community in a more general sense".<sup>99</sup> The 2009 concert series can therefore be seen to extend the Boîte's overall sociomusical agenda and to remain a:

[...] model for national identity. [Our land our home] provided musicians and audiences with a readymade explanation of their social significance and a means of explaining their affective links with the music. If the music was to be, as many promotional documents described it, an "expression of our multicultural society," then the act of playing and listening signalled a participation in this social good, and brought it into vibrant existence.<sup>100</sup>

The richness of community music making in Victoria in some ways perplexed my research endeavour – when I so quickly identified what seemed like two ideal representations of cross-cultural collaborations at the beginning of my research project I

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<sup>97</sup> Smith 2009: 11.

<sup>98</sup> Smith 2007: 165.

<sup>99</sup> Smith 2007: 166.

<sup>100</sup> Smith 2009: 5.

had hoped to find other collaborations within the State that fulfilled my research requirements. During that preliminary field research, however, I discovered only that there was so much community music making happening that any other discrete examples of cross-cultural collaborations were going to be difficult to locate within the timeframe of my project.

Arguably my field research in Victoria was restricted by time and opportunity. Much of the data gathered reinforced the strength of community music making already known. The CMV's project to support community music making continues to be prolific. Its primary agenda is still to normalise that practice, to make it part of the everyday. It nurtures growth in community music, endeavouring to plant the practice of community singing in a seemingly apolitical space but one that nevertheless sits within the arena of health and wellbeing as discussed in Chapter Two. The Boîte plays a similar role in nurturing community music. Specifically, however, it heavily invests in the promotion of the music of 'others' or, indeed, 'other selves', consciously engaged in sociomusical activism that engages with contemporary political issues that skirt potentially divisive elements. Within both organisations, the common beliefs of many individual singers align with the rhetoric inherent in the community music movement: music making was invariably conceived as being important to the heart and soul, to the healthy mind and body, to the wellbeing of society. Remarks of that ilk were heard over and over.

While community music making is more, or less, constructed within political and social ideals it is through the 'embodied behaviour' of group singing that it primarily conserves, contests or influences social and cultural sites. The Boîte's *Our Home Our Land* was an example of the 'lived experience' of community interactions that assert projects of integration of or engagement with Indigeneity. The relationships developed necessitated not only the typical negotiations of aesthetics and representation within a musical performance – but also the added dimensions that occur when crossing musical and cultural boundaries in order to engage with 'other selves' and to 'sing in between'.



## Chapter 5

### Madjitil Moorna: Community Interaction in Western Australia

*Ngaala keyen moort, ngaala boola moort*  
*Ngaala boola boodjak yoowarl-koorl*  
*Yanginy ngaala koondarm, dorntj-dorntj warangkiny*  
*Ngany, noonook, ngaala moorditj moort*  
(We are one, but we are many  
And from all the lands on earth we come  
To share a dream, and sing with one voice  
I am, you are, we are Australian)

**A Noongar translation of the chorus of  
'I Am Australian' by Bruce Woodley and Dobe Newton**

*Ngalang younga wirn, Ngalang koolbardayong,*  
*Boodjack balangniny moorditj*  
*Ngalang mamaarn yira ngank boodjak waal,*  
*Dabarkan bookliny ni kebitj.*  
*Sssh... Ni! Dabakarn koorliny, ngank boodjak*  
*kookoorliny*  
(Our kangaroo spirit earthbound and strong  
Our gaia Mother Earth cry  
Walk slowly listen running water  
Hey, spirit blowing in the wind,  
Mother Earth smile.  
Listen, walk slowly,  
beautiful Mother Earth)  
**'Ngank Boodjak' (Mother Earth) by  
Della Rae Morrison and Jessie Lloyd**

*You and your family, your moort,<sup>1</sup> all of 'em, Bring!!*  
*Your sista, your cuz, your elders; give 'em a ring.*  
*There's safety in numbers as you learn to sing,*  
*You'll feel safer with the more you bring.*  
*Learning lingo through songs is a moorditj<sup>2</sup> thing*  
*Heal yourself, your moort and your mob as we sing.*  
*Woolah!!! Voices in harmony, vibrating with a Zing,*  
*Spread the word through the grapevine or just ring.*  
*Learn songs with CDs, papers, and a weekly sing,*  
*Join in the gigs as you feel it's your thing.*  
*And you will be glad you got off your ring,*  
*You moorditj, you oorse<sup>3</sup>, you moort, you DARDI<sup>4</sup> SING!!!*  
***Be a Madjitil Moorna Dardi Sing, Karl Mourach, 2009***

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<sup>1</sup> Noongar for "family".

<sup>2</sup> Noongar for "good/excellent".

<sup>3</sup> Noongar slang for "great/good/awesome".

<sup>4</sup> Noongar slang also for "great/good/awesome".

## **Preamble**

The Prelude that opened this thesis introduced the community choir *Madjtil Moorna*.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I describe and analyse the characters, the constructions and the complexities that are *Madjtil Moorna*. As the most regular practice of community music making by Indigenous and non-Indigenous singers of the case studies of this research project, *Madjtil Moorna* provides an important representation of the motivations, outcomes and challenges to the dual agendas of community music making and reconciliation.

I joined *Madjtil Moorna* as part of my doctoral research project from mid-April to early June in 2010, after a preliminary visit in October 2009, and the later visit in December 2012 that prompted the Prelude. Over the concentrated months of field research I rehearsed, performed and socialised as a member of the choir.

This chapter will initially explore the wider historical and musical frameworks surrounding *Madjtil Moorna*'s existence before examining the choir's localised history, leadership, music, and extra-musical endeavours. In doing so, I consider three of the four principal points that Timothy Rice makes about music and meaning.<sup>6</sup> That is, I examine the musical interaction of *Madjtil Moorna* based on music's significance as human experience, the ways music is referentially signified and the attempts to control music's signification and significance within hierarchies of power through aspects of their music, musical experience and musical performance. The analysis of the processes, practices and relationships will therefore be interwoven throughout with the voices of the choir members.

"Aunty" Karl Mourach,<sup>7</sup> *Madjtil Moorna*'s 'significant senior' and "the spiritual heart of the choir",<sup>8</sup> is a member of the Stolen Generations. Her personal journey both frames

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.madjtilmoorna.org.au/> and <https://www.facebook.com/madjtil.moorna?fref=ts>. Last accessed 6 June 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Rice, Timothy (2001) Reflections on music and meaning: metaphor, signification and control in the Bulgarian case, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10.i: 19-38.

<sup>7</sup> For many years she was known as Carol Gunning but converted back to her family name and gave herself the name Karl when her identification as a *Noongar* person became an important component in her life. Mourach explained that the title of elder is an honour bestowed upon you by other elders. This has not occurred. Both 'significant senior' and the following description



and guides *Madjtil Moorna's* sociomusical project. Mourach was taken from her family, placed in a mission, and later sexually abused by the family with whom she was placed. Her brother was denied access when he tried to contact her in his young adulthood. Her own life's journey enables "a deep understanding of the community's need to heal and reconcile".<sup>9</sup> Mourach, a member of the choir from its beginning, was instrumental in developing the choir's name, vision, and logo.<sup>10</sup> She is an important cultural teacher and cultural liaison person for the choir. The poem above was written to encourage Indigenous participation in the choir. That encouragement continues. Karl means fire in *Noongar* and is an apt description for this funny, spiritual, creative, warm-hearted hearth of the choir. Mourach knows she is:

...valued as one of the few Aboriginal members. We are always looking for more. I understand why some don't stay, but it is a Catch 22. Some people come. They don't see a lot of Aboriginal people there so they don't come back.<sup>11</sup>

*Madjtil Moorna* is translated as 'magical sounds of the bush', based on '*madjtil*', meaning magic, and '*moorna*' being sounds of movement in the bush. Mourach created the name using the 1992 *Noongar Dictionary*<sup>12</sup> in order to find the best way to describe the choir. She was also attracted by the rhythm of the words; "marrying words together that had a flow".<sup>13</sup> The translation has been surrounded in some debate. It has been suggested that the meaning could relate to black snakes, sharks and/or is based on *Noongar* words that did not/do not exist. Amongst various discussions, Mourach enjoyed a lively exchange with a non-Indigenous linguist.<sup>14</sup> Della Rae Morrison, the longest serving musical director, commented that it didn't matter whether the translation was ambiguous or unknown; as a conceptualisation of the choir it was worthwhile: "It's the thought that counts", she said.<sup>15</sup> The controversy surrounding the

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have come from choir members. She nonetheless finds both an honour (Mourach, Karl [2010] Personal conversation [Interview 28/05/10]).

<sup>8</sup> Clarke, Robyn (2008) *A Small but mighty choir sings "SORRY" and participates in Australia's National Apology*, unpublished; in author's possession.

<sup>9</sup> Madjtil Moorna (2009) *Madjtil Moorna Song Book*, Kalamunda: Madjtil Moorna: 9.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 4 for the logo and the vision statement.

<sup>11</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Whitehurst, Rose (1992) *Noongar Dictionary: Noongar to English and English to Noongar*, Noongar Language and Culture Centre.

<sup>13</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Mourach, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Morrison 2010.

choir's name is indicative of some of the problems that can occur when Indigenous languages are recovered and revitalised and is just one example of the numerous trials the choir has faced.

The choir's coordinator, Jo Randell, accepts that two initial barriers to cross-cultural relationships is a lack of trust and an inclination to stereotype one another.<sup>16</sup> The vision of *Madjitil Moorna* is to be representative of how to dismantle those barriers and bridge the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, to be "the essence of community working together for good".<sup>17</sup> All members understand the the message inherent in the choir's name, logo, and vision. Randell is not alone amongst the choir to believe its presence demonstrates and inspires the breaking down of barriers, the building of bridges, and a healing for individuals and community. These are ambitious goals for a community choir. Beyond negotiating cross-cultural communication, other challenges need to be confronted. They include responding to performance and other invitations while maintaining a musical vitality; the achievement of extra-musical goals such as learning, healing and outreach; and the ever present need to source funds. Some of these elements are inherent in community music making generally, others are emblematic of the journey of reconciliation. Combined they require a passionate commitment.

### ***Of place and history***

The impact of colonisation and later government policies and practices on Indigenous lives is a key motivation for the sociomusical interaction that is *Madjitil Moorna*. As indicated in the Prelude, the *Noongar* and other Indigenous members play a pivotal role by telling their personal stories and sharing their families' journeys. The colonial history of south west Western Australia is therefore essential to understand the significance of those stories and the overall practice and performance within the choir.

Perth was founded by Captain James Stirling in 1829 as part of the Swan River Colony. This was the first free settlement in Australia, although transportation of convicts began

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<sup>16</sup> Randell, Jo (2009) *Madjitil Moorna and the Halls Creek Mob*, in *Western Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Council Newsletter* 26: 14.

<sup>17</sup> Randell, Jo (2010) Personal conversations (Interviews 31/05/10 &15/06/10).

in 1850 when labour demands for the growing colony could not be met. While claimed as a British territory, the region had been visited by European explorers since the 1600s, including from Holland and France, and had been populated by Indigenous peoples for some 50,000 years. Immediately the British settled they began relationships with the Indigenous peoples of south west Western Australia.<sup>18</sup> Collectively referred to as the *Noongar* people, their country is bounded by the west coast at a point south of Geraldton, proceeding easterly to a point approximately north of Moora, and then south-east to a point on the southern coast between Bremer Bay and Esperance. The major towns of Bunbury, Busselton, Margaret River, Albany, York, Merredin, Katanning and the Perth Metropolitan Area are within its boundary.<sup>19</sup> South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) Research Manager, Chris Owen, adds “while there are different subgroups of *Noongar* people in different locations such as *Ballardong*, *Yued*, *Whadjuk*, *Wardandi*, *Pinjarup*, *Bibbulmun*, *Wilman* and *Mineng* they are one community”.<sup>20</sup>

At the time of first contact relations between the *Noongar* and the new settlers were amicable. Conflict escalated as British colonisation and the expansion of settlement took up the best land and water resources. Introduced diseases also disrupted *Noongar* life. Observance of traditional laws and customs as well as the knowledge “of the names and locations of [...] the original tribes, some myth cycles, naming practices, and aspects of

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<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise referenced this paragraph and much of the following historical discussion is collectively drawn from sources, including Birdsall, Chris (1988) All one family in Ian Keen (ed), *Being Black: Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australia*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press: 137-158; Darbyshire, Jo (2010) *The Coolbaroo Club: 1947-1960: An exhibition exploring contemporary history of Aboriginal people in the city of Perth and celebrating the role of the Coolbaroo League in this decade of change after the Second World War*, Perth: City of Perth; Kelly, Glen (2009) About this book, in John Host and Chris Owen, “*It’s still in my heart, this is my country*”: *The Single Noongar Claim History*, South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC), Nedlands: University of Western Australia Publishing, Charles and Joy Staples South West Region Publications: vii-ix.  
[http://uwap.uwa.edu.au/static/files/assets/5dd25286/It\\_s\\_Still\\_in\\_My\\_Heart\\_This\\_is\\_My\\_Country\\_Extract.pdf](http://uwap.uwa.edu.au/static/files/assets/5dd25286/It_s_Still_in_My_Heart_This_is_My_Country_Extract.pdf), accessed 7 September 2012 ; Owen, Chris (2009) Preface: The Single Noongar Claim Case, in Host and Owen: xi-xxvii; South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (nd) *The Noongar People*, South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC), Cannington, Western Australia, <http://www.noongar.org.au/noongar-people-history.php>, accessed 23 May 2011; City of Perth (nd) *History of the City of Perth*, Brochure, City of Perth Heritage Program, City of Perth, Perth, <http://www.cityofperth.wa.gov.au/documentdb/63.pdf>, accessed 23 May 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly 2009: xi.

<sup>20</sup> Owen 2009: viii.

the spirit world”<sup>21</sup> were done so in the face of the overwhelming changes wrought by European settlement.

The discovery of gold led to great prosperity in the 1890s and in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Perth consolidated as the major centre in the Western Australian colony. The population and size of Perth changed significantly after World War Two through immigration and the mining boom of the 1960-70s. During the ‘entrepreneurial 1980s’ through to the mining boom of the last decade, the city continued its transition from a large country town to the ‘dynamic and progressive city’ of approximately 1.7 million people it is now.

Government policies and legislation responded to the needs of European expansion. A mounted police force was created to deal with both the ‘Noongar problem’ and interracial conflicts throughout the State. In 1905 the Aborigines Act was introduced, succeeded by the 1936 Native Administration Act.<sup>22</sup> Aboriginal people were moved to native camps, reserves or settlements on the outskirts of many towns and access to employment and facilities were restricted. Interracial marriages were illegal. Children were taken from their families and placed in institutional care anywhere in the State and trained for domestic service. Curfews for Aboriginal people also existed in the city of Perth. The infamous AO Neville<sup>23</sup> was appointed to administer the Aborigines Act in 1915. He finished office as the Chief Commissioner of Native Affairs in 1940. Neville’s twenty five year project of ‘protection’ meant a strict and vigilant surveillance of Aboriginal people. Owen further explains the impact of government policies that were based on categorised levels of Aboriginality<sup>24</sup>:

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<sup>21</sup> Birdsall, Chris (1988) All One Family, in Ian Keen (ed), *Being Black: Aboriginal Cultures in ‘Settled’ Australia*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press: 137.

<sup>22</sup> The 1936 Act was replaced with the Native Welfare Act in 1954 (Darbyshire 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Neville was appointed to the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines in 1915 and later the Chief Commissioner of Native Affairs until his retirement in 1940. For a greater treatment of Neville see, for instance, Haebich, A and Reece, RHW (1988) Neville, Auber Octavius (1875-1954), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/neville-auber-octavius-7821>, accessed 10 September 2012; and

*First Australians: An Illustrated History* (2008) companion book to the SBS Television series, [http://www.stolengenerations.info/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=142&Itemid=123](http://www.stolengenerations.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=142&Itemid=123), accessed 10 September 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Government officials categorised Aboriginal people into various categories and percentages of *blood* and *caste*. These were usually those of *half-caste* and *full-blood*, though with permutations

These categories bore no relationship to Noongar society – as if a Noongar’s skin colour or the way they were described by the government affected their ability to pass on traditional knowledge – yet these categorisations [...] affected entire generations.<sup>25</sup>

Some *Noongar* hold the view that the government policies and actions that resulted in the loss of *Noongar* lives and culture was an act of genocide<sup>26</sup> or a war of extermination.<sup>27</sup> Music, film, and literature have vividly captured this period. Gina Williams’s song ‘Mr Neville’ is a personal interpretation of the ongoing impact of his legacy.<sup>28</sup> Aspects of this history were portrayed in the 2002 film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*<sup>29</sup>, based on the biographical novel *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington/Nugi Garimara<sup>30</sup>. The Miles Franklin Literary Award 2000 winner, Kim Scott, also interrogated this period of ‘scientific experiment’ through the compelling narrative of *Benang*.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Noongar* found ways to endure and adapt. They retained “the fundamentals of their lifeways”<sup>32</sup>, in spite of the scientific and social thinking that they were a ‘doomed race’ destined to become extinct. But as the narratives in *Benang* suggest, this sometimes meant making difficult personal choices in response to government practices. In the book, Uncle Will explains his reasons for denying his Aboriginality to his nephew, Harley/ Benang, who is the narrator of the story. Harley is the “first white man born” as part of the eugenicist project of his non-Aboriginal grandfather, Eugene Solomon Scat. Uncle Will says:

What happened, see, is I have always tried to keep away from  
Aboriginals because I knew the people would try to bring me  
under the Aborigines Act. And they took your children,  
hunted you down, moved you for no reason. I didn’t want  
assistance from them. All I wanted was for them to leave me

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such as quadroon (¼ Aboriginal) octoroon (½ Aboriginal) and so on up the fractional scale. See, for instance, Scott 1999 and Host and Owen 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Owen 2009: xvi.

<sup>26</sup> Owen 2009: xiv.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Stasiuk, Glen with Kinnane, Steve (2010) *Keepers of our Stories*, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 39: 89.

<sup>28</sup> Gina Williams has also worked with Madjtil Moorna and is discussed below.

<sup>29</sup> *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002) Director: Phillip Noyce, HanWay Films

<sup>30</sup> Pilkington, Doris/Garimara, Nugi (1996) *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Brisbane: Queensland University Press.

<sup>31</sup> Scott, Kim (1999) *Benang: from the heart*, North Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

<sup>32</sup> Halfpenny 2010.

alone, and to be free of them. It has made me very lonely, all my life.<sup>33</sup>

The urbanisation and assimilation of the *Noongar* people did, therefore, mean some loss of culture but, concurrently, its continuing presence was not readily recognised within a system preoccupied with a stereotype of Indigenous peoples - those who most resembled the 'classical' Aboriginal.<sup>34</sup> *Noongar* adaptation to the impacts of settler society has meant that their culture has become multifaceted, diverse and yet "maintains a structural integrity all of its own".<sup>35</sup> As *Noongar* Elder Ken Colbung asserts, land continued to remain central to beliefs, emotions and practices and was integral to *Noongar* culture. He also claims that in the early 1980s there were older people alive who were 'heritage-bearers'.<sup>36</sup> The recent work of urban anthropologists has supported these understandings, re-examining *Noongar* culture from a perspective that challenges former views.<sup>37</sup> Contemporary *Noongar* culture is now more readily recognised as constituting a system in its own right, with its own tenets, laws and beliefs, and its own community of practitioners and believers.<sup>38</sup> Some of those elements will become evident in this examination of *Madjitil Moorna*.

In spite of these ruptures, music continued to be practiced, even if traditional forms were practiced less frequently or lost. New music emerged, often a fusion that drew on traditional forms, elements, or repertoire topics, combined with the exposure to other musics from settler communities. Music and dance thrived after the Second World War. At the time, Aboriginal people were excluded from white venues and clubs. The Coolbaroo Club was set up to address this injustice and ran dances for Aboriginal people and friends from 1947-1960.<sup>39</sup> It became an important point of contact with black musicians and artists from around the world, including Michael Silva and Nat 'King' Cole from the USA. The club was also a political organisation, speaking out on issues affecting

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<sup>33</sup> Scott 1999: 146-147.

<sup>34</sup> As also discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>35</sup> Owen 2009: xix.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Berndt, RM (1980) *Aborigines of the South-west*, in RM Berndt and CH Berndt (eds), *Aborigines of the West*, Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press.

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, Baines, Patricia (1988) A litany for land in Ian Keen (ed), *Being Black: Aboriginal Cultures in 'Settled' Australia*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press: 227-249.

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, Owen 2009: xix. Host 2010 and Host and Owen 2009 thoroughly describe how the culture survived.

<sup>39</sup> Darbyshire 2010.

Aboriginal people, particularly through its newspaper *Westralian Aborigine*. The name of the club came from the *Yamatji*<sup>40</sup> word for ‘magpie’. It was selected by one of the founding members, Jack Poland, a *Yamatji* man who had served in World War II. The name suggested a message of reconciliation – of white and black coming together - but also as a representation of the mixed race identities of some members. The magpie is on *Madjital Moorna’s* logo<sup>41</sup>, echoing that message of reconciliation. Today, *Noongar* musicians make important contributions to the musical complexity of Perth, the state and the nation.<sup>42</sup> While *Madjital Moorna* emerged from these broad historical, social and musical circumstances, its existence should also be credited to the a cappella scene in Perth.

### ***A cappella scene and community music making in south-west Western Australia***

Though some 2,700 km ‘as the crow flies’, or some 3,400 km driving distance from Melbourne - through the city of Adelaide, numerous towns, roadhouses and the extensive Nullabor Plain - a vibrant a cappella scene also existed in Perth in the late 1980s. As elsewhere in Australia, that scene has shaped much contemporary community choral music-making in the south-west of Western Australia. Its particular impact on community choirs in this region is identifiable, but different to the western classical and barbershop choral networks that were also active in the region. It often struck me that though there were obvious lines of connection across the vast distance, influenced by some of the same international and interstate musicians who have been influential in the eastern States the south west pocket of Western Australia had nurtured a vibrant and vigorous community music movement in the iconic style of the ‘independent’ western state. This was inherently due to both its isolation and small population that prompted its own networks of individuals, organisations and festivals.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The Aboriginal people of the Murchison-Gascoyne region, north of Perth.

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>42</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to outline this in any length beyond the context of *Madjital Moorna’s* musical directors explored below. Refer to Chapter 3 for a broader discussion about Indigenous musicians.

<sup>43</sup> Unless specifically referenced the following discussion is based on numerous personal conversations. I would like to give my appreciation to the generous contributions from Gyan Godfrey, Matthew Clements, Monica Lacey, Clive Lacey, Jo Randell and Jacqui Reid in 2009. In

The Perth a cappella scene and the community music network which now exists are unique to this place, encouraged by its own musicians who experimented with an a cappella approach to their music making. Some of these included Red Pepper, Hammer and Tongues, and the Gore Family.<sup>44</sup> Many conversations during field research mentioned the impact of the North Perth Ethnic Music Centre, now called Kulcha, established by Linsey Pollak in October 1983.<sup>45</sup> Pollak was, and continues to be, an inspiring community musician. As discussed in Chapter Two, it was Pollak who first invited Frankie Armstrong from the UK to Australia and it was her natural voice philosophy and pedagogy that inspired many community choir singers and leaders in Perth and elsewhere. Local musician and choir leader Digby Hill stated that Armstrong's work added to the strong a cappella culture that already existed in Perth.<sup>46</sup> Interstate a cappella singing leaders such as Rachel Hore,<sup>47</sup> Stephen Taberner, Melanie Shanahan, Tony Backhouse,<sup>48</sup> Joseph Jordania,<sup>49</sup> Lisa Young, Sue Johnston, Carl Pannuzzo, Vicki King, Valanga Khoza and Andrea Khoza have also been regular west coast visitors. Festivals and singing workshops have had an enormous impact, bringing these interstate musicians together with local musicians to nurture and support the development of community singers. Some of the music festivals that have added to the depth of a cappella performances, choirs and their musicality are the Fairbridge Folk Festival, Nannup Music Festival, Nanga Music Festival, and, importantly, the Denmark Festival of the Voice which began as "just a choir festival"<sup>50</sup> in 2002 that was uniquely a cappella,

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2010 further conversations reinforced and provided additional information. Amongst those who contributed I would like to thank Jim Fisher, Digby Hill, Bernard Carney, Graham Mason, Joseph Jordania, Stephen Taberner, the members of *Madjiti Moorna* and other choirs, particularly Akapellamunda, and my singing companions and audience members at various workshops and performances, including at the Denmark Festival of the Voice. I apologise that much of the detail of those conversations are glossed over in the necessity of brevity.

<sup>44</sup> Hill, Digby (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 15/10/10).

<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.linseypollak.com>. Last accessed 12 September 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Hill 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Rachel Hore's contributions will be further discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 as she is pivotal to the musical interaction in Alice Springs. See <http://www.rachelhore.com>. Last accessed 24 March 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Backhouse was another pioneer in the a cappella scene. See <http://www.tonybackhouse.com.au/>. Last accessed 12 September 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Like Taberner, Joseph Jordania has played a significant role in the increase of male a cappella choirs in Australia, introducing Georgian male polyphonic music to Australian singers and audiences.

<sup>50</sup> Clements, Matthew (2009) Personal conversation (Interview 9/10/09).



and uniquely Western Australian. Initially the festival brought community choirs from Perth together with others in the south west to sing for one another and to share their passion for choral singing. Subsequently it has included numerous development workshops and performances by professional musicians outside of the a cappella format, and, more recently explored other options prompted by a festival focused on the voice, such as storytelling.

Locally based musical activist Gyan Godfrey is well recognised as a 'mover and shaker' of community music in Perth. With Rosie Johnston, Godfrey was one of the creators of Voicemoves, an organisation set up in the early 1990s to support local choirs. Emerging from the Fremantle a cappella Festival, Voicemoves was initially supported by the Fremantle Council. Voicemoves' activism has oscillated over the decades and was near collapse before being revitalized by Monica Lacey and others in 2008. It continues to operate predominantly as an online resource and facilitator of the bi-annual 'Choir Bash', an opportunity for community choirs "to share their music with each other and to allow audiences to show their appreciation".<sup>51</sup> Godfrey also established Rhythmsong, an annual music camp. Rhythmsong's main goal is to "enhance creativity"<sup>52</sup> in musicians at all skill levels. She is particularly strategic about the inclusion of young musicians through a scholarship program. With Matthew Clements, Godfrey also created Springsong. Clements commented that Springsong gave community choirs a performance opportunity. This provided a focus – "something that energised the choirs"<sup>53</sup> - in addition to musical development workshops. A number of other locally based community music leaders were pivotal to the community choirs and choral events that supported the strengthening of the a cappella culture in the late 1980s. Blues musician, Jim Fisher, and various other folk and world music musicians including Kavisha Mazzella<sup>54</sup>, Maria Wilson, Rosie Johnston, Martin Meader, Simon Nield, Jenny Simpson, Theresa Hughes, Digby Hill, Helena Hendell and Bernard Carney all had some influence, either through the genre of the music facilitated and/or musical pedagogy. Significantly,

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<sup>51</sup> Lacey, Monica (2009) Personal conversation (Interview 8/10/09).

<sup>52</sup> Godfrey, Gyan (2009) Personal conversation (Interview 4/10/09).

<sup>53</sup> Clements 2009.

<sup>54</sup> Mazzella, who is now based in Melbourne, grew up and started her career in Fremantle. Her influence on the Perth a cappella scene in the late 1980s and 1990s was significant, particularly in her role as the Musical Director of *La Gioie Della Donna*, a choir of Italian women migrants. See <http://www.kavisha.com/>. Last accessed on 24 March 2013.

Fisher's 'One Voice' choir nurtured the Perth a cappella scene. Some of the choir's original members were so captured by its adventurous, cutting edge representation of community music-making they set up and led other community choirs or community singing opportunities. Jo Randell was among those within this energetic a cappella scene.

### ***The birth of Madjtil Moorna***

It was the issue of recognition of Aboriginal culture that first motivated the Zig Zag Community Arts (AACA) Inc board to consider the creation of a community choir. In 2006 it sought ideas for a community arts project that would include Indigenous participation in its annual festival held in Stirk Park, Kalamunda. As a result of discussions it was decided to create an Indigenous choir. Although not on the working party that proposed the idea, Jo Randell, a member of the board, took on the coordinating role for the ZZCA arts project. One of her first tasks was to identify Indigenous musicians who could lead the commissioned festival choir. Randell had been one of the thousand odd singers of a Perth Festival Choir in 2004. One of the songs performed had been the Noongar welcome song *Kaya*, written by Chairmaine Bennell. Randell had been inspired by the song's musical directors, Della Rae Morrison and Jessie Lloyd. She approached Morrison and Lloyd to take on the festival project and they accepted the invitation. At the same time, she promoted the festival choir and called for members. That publicity attracted mostly non-Indigenous singers and so, undaunted and with an unwavering belief in the power of music to bring people together, a choir for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was created – a choir of reconciliation. Following its success as a festival project it subsequently continued as a result of responding to performance invitations. And so was born *Madjtil Moorna*.

Randell, a former schools and college educator, has persisted as the coordinator of the choir. She is a talented, long-term community musician and arts activist and has led community choirs and community singing workshops, singing and other arts courses. Randell has worked with Fisher, Hill, Mazzella, Hore, Backhouse, and other community music leaders to expand her skills. She works tirelessly for *Madjtil Moorna*, identifying it as a passion. In recognition of that work she received the Music in Communities Reconciliation Award in 2011. Randell manages the day to day of the choir and is

inspired by its evolution, its ability to “just go along, go with the flow, where the energy is, where the invitations are. We respond. And we’re led by Aboriginal directors who can come and go as they please. There are no contracts... It’s all done on trust”.<sup>55</sup>

When I first met the choir at Randell’s invitation in October 2009, I attended one of their regular Monday night rehearsals and other events throughout the week including a presentation by some members of *Madjtil Moorna*. The rehearsal on the Monday night at the Forrestfield Community Hall gave me an introduction into what was typical of the choir: a warm welcome, soup and bread to share before singing. Rehearsing in this community hall was an early strategic decision, as was the provision of soup and bread beforehand. Forrestfield is nestled beneath the Perth hills, under the town of Kalamunda, and part of the Kalamunda Shire. The area has a significant Indigenous population. It was hoped that such a location would attract Indigenous membership. I helped stir the soup while talking with a new member of the choir, Sue Dauth, a recent widow whose adult children lived elsewhere in the world. Singing was one of her passions. She was a now member of three choirs; *Madjtil Moorna*, a union choir, and a Swiss choir. Dauth would later teach me to yodel, on a warm evening in the East Kimberley. After the friendly supper, members gathered to sing, mostly middle-aged and younger adult women, mostly non-Indigenous. Morrison led the warm-ups as more members arrived and then led a casual session of singing in parts. Guitar often accompanied the singing. There was about fifteen or so singers. The night ended with a ‘soundbath’, a common practice amongst community choirs which is thought to have healing qualities. One or more people sit or stand within a circle of singers, one voice begins, on a single note; other voices join, adding to the unison or bringing in harmonies; it is improvisational, singers listen to each other intently, chords change and the sound swells; moments of glorious harmony reverberate, discordant moments bring unexpected tingles to the skin, down the spine; resolution of the sound comes and goes, the volume drops, voices withdraw, a vibrating silence remains; one knows transcendence. Sighs and laughter break the magic.

The Injury Control Council of Western Australian (I CCWA) presentation reinforced and extended my nascent knowledge of the choir. Two of its members, Pauline Vigus and

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<sup>55</sup> Randell 2010.

Dawn Michelle, spoke about the crucial role of its Aboriginal musical directors and their *Noongar* guide, “Aunty” Karl. They shared the thirteen week journey of preparation for the first performance at the Zig Zag Community Festival and the invitations for performances that followed to support reconciliation events, Sorry Day, National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (most commonly known as NAIDOC) Week and other community events. They repeated Randell’s comments about breaking down barriers and building a bridge between cultures. They spoke of the significance of the repertoire, and the other things that represent them, and that matter, beyond the songs and the singing: the logo, the banner, the bush and other craft, the sharing of stories “using traditional methods”<sup>56</sup>, fundraising events, and community outreach projects. Here I found the iconic nature of this musical interaction: its beliefs, ideology and social practice. The link between aesthetics and ethics became clearer. *Madjtil Moorna*’s way of making music is also a demonstration of “a good way of being socially in the world”.<sup>57</sup> Vigus and Michelle then presented the main message of their presentation, the detail of the invitation that led to their project to the East Kimberley in 2009, its outcomes, and the possibility of return visits. The East Kimberley project played a crucial role in field research with *Madjtil Moorna* in 2010 and will be discussed in more detail below. First, I outline the choir’s processes and practices that frame the negotiation of responsibilities, personalities and politics.

### ***Administrative, musical and cultural leadership***

The interrelationship of administrative leadership with the choir’s musical and cultural leadership was carefully nurtured while at the same time being “very organic”.<sup>58</sup> It was not without its tensions but as Vigus commented “we’re very good at respecting and valuing different roles and seeking compromises”.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Vigus, Pauline (2009) Personal comment (ICCWA Presentation 06/10/09).

<sup>57</sup> Turino, Thomas (1993) *Moving Away from silence: music of the Peruvian altiplano and the experience of urban migration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, cited in Rice 2001: 31.

<sup>58</sup> Vigus 2010a.

<sup>59</sup> Vigus 2010a.

### *Administrative leadership*

Jo Randell is the both the motivational and administrative hub of *Madjtil Moorna*.<sup>60</sup> Her commitment to the choir is both personal and political. It has become a “compulsion”,<sup>61</sup> an essential element of her identity, her life. Randell is a passionate advocate for the choir’s sociomusical endeavours and, as a consequence, for Indigenous aspirations. As discussed in the Prelude, Randell’s personal journey within the choir has had a profound impact. Where she might have once been ignorant of Indigenous historical perspectives she increasingly hears them now, and subsequently understands and critiques the silence and/or misinformation that once surrounded those perspectives. Where she might have previously avoided certain conversations with family members and others, she is now “opinionated”<sup>62</sup> about Aboriginal issues. Where she once felt a “sense of hopelessness”<sup>63</sup> for Aboriginal people she is now “surprised at how forgiving and warm hearted and generous”<sup>64</sup> they are, in spite of their history of mistreatment and powerlessness. Where once she had been a “crippled teenager with a competitive streak”<sup>65</sup> she no longer compares her own achievements with others. Randell said that the richness of her musical journey had given her permission to allow intensity in herself and others. Consequently, she has greater empathy with, and is more open to, difference. She firmly believes that her own and others’ journeys in the choir have been “life-changing, with attitudes challenged and amazing experiences shared”.<sup>66</sup> Her commitment to the choir has been embraced by her immediate family which includes the active participation in events and projects by her husband and which has, from time to time, included financial support of the choir.

Randell orchestrates the operations of the choir, fine tuning the various priorities of promotion and performance, funding and finance, songs and social events. There is frenzy to this work. Decision making requires liaison within the choir, ensuring that the musical and cultural leaders are part of the process. She acknowledges that this is not

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<sup>60</sup> Henceforth frequently referred to as MM, as the choir is often called by its members.

<sup>61</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>66</sup> Randell 2010.

always easy. She is aware of the 'border zones' or 'discomfort zones' that come with working with Indigenous people. Randell acknowledges they have different ways of operating and of making decisions which she described as "elusive".<sup>67</sup> Randell has also taken on primary responsibility for the circulation of information, events, and invitations to the membership and supporters of MM in order to prompt support or active participation on a range of Indigenous issues as well as MM events. Similarly, she networks with Indigenous and funding bodies to promote MM and invite collaboration and/or financial support of projects.

The administrative burden on MM was increased since the consensus decision in 2011 to separate from ZZCA and become a separately incorporated body. MM was receiving more grants funding than the parent body and its project was no longer solely or closely aligned with ZZCA or the annual Festival. Incorporation provided an opportunity for the "growth of the organisation"<sup>68</sup> in order to build capacity so that it might manage events and provide grants, scholarships, mentoring, and employment to young Indigenous musicians. Various funding bodies suggested MM would benefit from financial and creative independence, and *Noongar* elder Richard Walley said that incorporation would give MM a better sense of identity: "It's the words [in the constitution] that are important, Jo, they must reflect your group's culture".<sup>69</sup>

Randell is assisted by an administrative team that includes Vigus and Lee Peters; an arts and craft team led by Marie Jacquier; and other members who join various project teams. All members of the choir are asked to share their talents and skills in both the musical and extra-musical program of the choir. Enabling capacity is an important aspect of the choir which extends to its projects and which will be discussed in more detail in the section on outreach below.

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<sup>67</sup> Randell, Jo (2009) Personal comment (8/10/09).

<sup>68</sup> Vigus, Pauline (2011) Personal communication (Group Email: "Bran Nue MM: Minutes – Yarning about Madjitol Moora", 1/02/11).

<sup>69</sup> Walley, Richard (nd) quoted in Vigus 2011.

### *Musical leadership*

Della Rae Morrison has led the choir since its 2006 debut at the Zig Zag Festival, sharing the musical direction with Jessie Lloyd and later, George Walley. Morrison is *Noongar* and Lloyd a *Murri* from North Queensland. As the band *Djiva*<sup>70</sup>, Morrison and Lloyd have received both NAIDOC and Western Australia Music Industry (WAMi) awards. Morrison was born into a musical family and began singing in a choir in primary school, followed by high school. She later sang in a duo with her brother. Morrison was a member of the *Yirra Yarkin* Aboriginal Choir and Theatre Company. She played a role in the stage production of *Bran Nue Day* in the 1990s. Lloyd and Morrison are experienced music promoters. Together they directed South West Aboriginal Entertainment (SWAE). They are also experienced community singing leaders. In the mid-1990s Morrison taught 'Universal Love' by Lilly Radloff and Kathy Travers to the Coexistence Choir. It was the song she performed in the Deckchair Theatre production 'Bratwurst and Damper', staged by Deckchair Theatre in Fremantle.<sup>71</sup> Together, Morrison and Lloyd led the 'Yowarliny' choir at *Yirra Yarkin* and have facilitated choral projects in a number of communities in Western Australia. They brought some of that repertoire to MM. Lloyd also passed on the songs and stories from her own family and other communities based in Queensland, in the oral tradition to which she was accustomed. The composer of 'Yil Lull', Joe Geia, is Lloyd's father. Alert also to the exotic attraction of Torres Strait Islander songs she introduced songs from that region. Like Morrison, Lloyd has been brought up in a musical family, learning harmonies and songs from her aunties, mother and older family members who were also musicians. Music making was and is part of the everyday.

As the first musical directors of MM, Morrison and Lloyd were pivotal to its success. They appreciated the enthusiasm within the festival choir and the opportunities for more regular performances that saw it evolve into a community choir. As Morrison described, the choir was "on a roll"<sup>72</sup> and growing. She enjoyed being part of its non-competitive and supportive nature, with many like-minded members. There were layers and dimensions within the whole choir that she admired. At the same time, Lloyd and

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<sup>70</sup> *Noongar* for "Mother Earth".

<sup>71</sup> Della Rae Morrison played the mother in the theatre production.

<sup>72</sup> Morrison 2010.

Morrison were well aware of the innate tensions with choir: its lack of appeal to Indigenous people because it does not emerge from the everyday of known community; the lack of cultural context for Indigenous involvement; the possible segregation from *Noongar* elders and community because of the uncertainty of the translation of its name; the politics involved in performing Indigenous songs; the awkward inclusion of Indigeneity into some of the repertoire; the insistence upon and sometimes difficult maintenance of Indigenous musical leadership; and its attraction to organisations for simply symbolic performances of reconciliation.<sup>73</sup> Admired as leaders, a number of long term choir members have subsequently missed some of the aspects of the choir under Lloyd and Morrison. Many recalled those earlier years, describing the laughter, the jokes, the musical challenges, the strong leadership, and the vibrancy of the choir; the “glow up when they were there”.<sup>74</sup>

George Walley, who began his musical direction in 2009, views “Madjitil Moorna as a way to live reconciliation through music”.<sup>75</sup> Walley enjoys the fun “that comes from everything the choir does”<sup>76</sup> appreciating the close connections made within the choir and the skills and enthusiasm of many of its members. He had been initially approached by Tracy Sandercock, a very active member of the choir, who was aware of the need to find a new musical director. After seeing Walley perform *Raining on Djilba* at Chocolate Martini, a music venue in East Perth, she suggested he might like to sing the song with the choir. Afterwards Morrison and Lloyd, who were increasingly working in Melbourne, contacted him suggesting he could take up the musical leadership of the choir. Randell followed up that invitation with some persistence. Walley had been somewhat reluctant to take on the musical direction because he lived in Mandurah, some 80 kilometres south of Forrestfield. He eventually realised that Morrison, Lloyd and Randell had “some bit of respect for what I do with people and music”<sup>77</sup> and so accepted the offer.

With no previous community singing leadership experience Walley, who is *Bindjareb Noongar*, has brought a collaborative approach to the choir’s music-making. With the

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<sup>73</sup> Lloyd, Jessie (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 14/01/10); Morrison 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Nelson, Cindy (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 28/05/10).

<sup>75</sup> Madjitil Moora 2009: 8.

<sup>76</sup> Walley, George (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 27/05/10).

<sup>77</sup> Walley 2010.



frequent absences of Morrison, he became the anchor for musical direction. Walley plays guitar, sings and supports the choir with its musical training. His relaxed leadership style results from being normally surrounded by experienced musicians, both professionally and personally. Walley has increasingly been working with Morrison's son, Kobi, to ensure an additional guitarist for the choir. Randell says he occasionally needs to be fondly reminded that he *is* the musical director. Though his casual and generous leadership style is valued in many ways, some members, who are less musically confident, find it challenging because they struggle without a clear indication of starting notes and someone to conduct them. With Walley's agreement, Randell helps those members. Walley believes the choir should be open to change and new ways of doing things and looking at things, and so has encouraged bringing in other people to work with the choir.

There is opportunity for musical development for those seeking it but many singers were simply pleased to contribute their voice to the choir and enjoy the pleasure of singing together. Other members come with a strong musical background and found the choir's approach to music novel. Vigus noted that:

The singing is without structure which I found quite challenging first of all, because of my classical background. I'm use to sight reading and just to have the words and aural [was] so also very novel to me. Quite uncomfortable, not troubling, but out of my comfort zone. I don't know that it's developed any new skills though.<sup>78</sup>

In 2011 Gina Williams, a *Ballandong Noongar* with *Kitja*<sup>79</sup> heritage, worked with the choir and is likewise a WAMi award-winning singer-songwriter. Williams also won a TripleJ Unearthed award in 2001.<sup>80</sup> She is a well-regarded performer, drawing on the song and storytelling traditions of her elders to tell her story; one of self-discovery that began with the realisation of her adoption and her indigeneity. Those discoveries were followed by some challenging times. It is her songs in language and her "good humour, resilience of spirit and strength of character"<sup>81</sup> that prompted Randell and Vigus to

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<sup>78</sup> Vigus 2010a.

<sup>79</sup> A language group based in the East Kimberley, Western Australia.

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.triplejunearted.com/GinaWilliams> (Accessed 25 November 2012).

<sup>81</sup> See <http://www.triplejunearted.com/GinaWilliams> (Accessed 25 November 2012) and [rodneysen.net/2010/08/gina-williams-remarkable-story.html](http://rodneysen.net/2010/08/gina-williams-remarkable-story.html) (Accessed 25 June 12)

invite her to work with MM. Subsequently, Williams has visited the choir from time to time and has taught two of her recent compositions, 'Iggy's Lullaby' and 'Wanjoo Wanjoo', a welcome song in Noongar. Increasingly, various Indigenous musicians are invited to work with the choir, either on a long or short term basis, exposing choir members to a diversity of Indigenous cultures, musical expression and musical leadership. These have included "Aunty" Josie Boyle, Candice Lorrae Dempsey (Ulla Shay) and Karla Hart.<sup>82</sup>

Musical enrichment is part of the choir's operation in rehearsals and in other opportunities such as the spontaneous improvisation sessions at the Midland railway station in October 2009. During the 2010 East Kimberley Outreach Project, younger members and musicians, Claire Dunn and Wren Thomas,<sup>83</sup> enjoyed jam sessions with Walley, Kobi Morrison, and local musicians. Dunn and Thomas even arranged one of Walley's songs for themselves and performed it at the final night's concert. Some choir members seek further musical development outside of the choir. Pat Oakley did so by auditioning for Deborah Cheetham's<sup>84</sup> opera *Pecan Summer*. She was accepted for tuition and described that as "[o]ne of the most wonderfully empowering and life changing experiences that has ever happened".<sup>85</sup> Tracey Sandercock attended a week long workshop with Frankie Armstrong during a visit to the UK.

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<sup>82</sup> Randell 2011; Randell, Jo (2012b) Personal communication (Email 05/08/12); Randell, Jo (2013) Personal communication (Email 03/02/13).

<sup>83</sup> Dunn and Thomas were unique amongst the general membership. They joined the choir for a year or so, prompted by Dunn's ailing mother whose membership of the choir was inspiring, but also because of other opportunities the choir brought, such as the outreach project to the East Kimberley.

<sup>84</sup> Deborah Cheetham is a *Yorta Yorta* woman. She is a soprano, composer and author. The opera *Pecan Summer* is based on the events surrounding the *Yorta Yorta* walk-off from Cummeragunja in protest of their treatment at the mission. It is described as an "opera for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a contemporary opera for Indigenous Australians, a story for all Australians" ([http://www.deborahcheetham.com/pecan\\_summer](http://www.deborahcheetham.com/pecan_summer), accessed 6 August 2012). It should be noted that Deborah Cheetham is Madjitol Moorna's patron. She occasionally attends choir functions.

<sup>85</sup> Randell 2012.

### *Cultural leadership*

A significant component of the cultural learning is brought with the musical directors. Morrison, Lloyd and Walley have not only introduced repertoire to the choir but have also shared personal stories, aspects of their culture, and instructed on issues such as appropriate protocols. Walley has drawn on his professional background in cultural heritage. The visiting musical directors have also been asked to contribute to this building of cultural knowledge. In addition, Indigenous members are structurally supported to take responsibility for cultural advice and liaison. When willing, they are encouraged to share their personal histories to add to the body of cultural knowledge. As Mourach's statement earlier made clear, Aboriginality in the choir's membership is highly valued and their contributions important to its project of reconciliation. Throughout the choir's existence, a number of Aboriginal people have come to try it out, visiting for just one rehearsal or staying for a while. None have had the long term commitment and impact of Mourach.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter Mourach has played a pivotal role in the "journey of discovery"<sup>86</sup> upon which MM has embarked. After creating the choir's name she spoke with a visual artist about the logo. During that conversation Mourach was asked about the choir's vision which, at that time, they didn't have. After initially mindmapping ideas for the vision statement, she wrote it up quickly: "I just focused on all the things, the aspirations of the choir, all of that. And I must have done it within, like, half an hour it was done. That's why I say it was probably channeled."<sup>87</sup> *It was channelled*".<sup>88</sup> The artist's questioning about the vision statement then helped Mourach to find the elements for the logo:

I'm looking at gumnuts and I'm looking on the internet to see ways to put something together, and things, and then the blackbird, the *kulbardis*, the magpies, because they were black and white birds, and we had to have [a flower]. I worked for *Yorgum*. *Yorgum* is the red flowering gum tree, a healing tree. And that's what *Yorgum* is all about, about that

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<sup>86</sup> Randell, Jo (2011) *Coordinator's Report – Madjitol Moorna 2011*, unpublished document, in author's possession.

<sup>87</sup> The notion of channelling is not uncommon amongst Indigenous storytellers, songwriters, film makers, etc. In whatever media, telling a story can sometimes be acknowledged as being channelled through ancestors (see, for instance, Stasiuk 2010).

<sup>88</sup> Mourach 2010.

healing. And every part of the tree is pretty much healing aspects. So, I wanted to make sure the red flowering gum was in there for the healing. And then, of course, of the bush, sounds and movements in the bush. And then the birds. One of our songs is bushbirds on a branch. One of the songs that we sing [...] something about together, black and white together. So, it was there as part of the songs [...] and then, of course, we just handed that thinking over to someone else who put it together. [...] So then the next step was the banner!<sup>89</sup>

Mourach's trust in these sorts of processes comes from being an "openly spiritual person",<sup>90</sup> a spirituality that has been informed by *Noongar*/Indigenous belief systems and the New Age Movement. She's attended meditations, spiritual workshops, and other practices with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous spiritual leaders. She feels highly attuned to country and people, recognising validation from spirits and experiencing miracles.

Cindy Nelson is another Aboriginal member who has had a significant journey with the choir. She responded shyly but positively to the invitations of musical, promotional and cultural leadership. Importantly, Nelson shared her lived experience as a *Noongar* person with the choir: the joys, challenges and the traumas. She has developed her musical, language and public relations skills. She recalled the first time she had hosted a concert, laughing as she said "they couldn't get the microphone offa me".<sup>91</sup> She attributes the choir with helping her to find her own voice:

And the most wonderful thing that came out of that [Halls Creek] trip [...] was when we left [...] We had to put our hand in and pick [a stone] out. And the stone that I get, I held it and looked at it and it came to me when I got on the plane, of what the stone was. It was a speech bubble, shaped like a speech bubble. And I thought, wow!<sup>92</sup>

Nelson often leads the alto section and plays percussion. Her increasing knowledge of the *Noongar* language has led to teaching it in schools and in the community and, consequently, improving her professional qualifications. She also teaches Indigenous songs, including 'Kaya', which she sang to me in a sunny back garden in Bassendean. It would be the only time I heard this song throughout my stay with the choir. We had

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<sup>89</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Nelson 2010. This statement was followed by laughter.

<sup>92</sup> Nelson 2010.

joined a few of choir members to watch videos and DVDs on Indigenous issues. Nelson recounted that the “choir has made me confident to go out there and do this language and speak clearly and loudly about the *Noongar* language”<sup>93</sup>. Nelson speaks affectionately of her choir experience, understanding it as a blend of the people, the learning about other cultures, the language, the music, the comfort, and acceptance. When showing me a self-identity project that she had recently completed, the choir was a significant part of the collage. Nelson added:

Like if I don't go to the choir – which there's reasons why I don't go – my whole self is in a turmoil all week. But if I go to the choir I am so relaxed the whole week. There's no worries, there's no anger or anything really. It took me a while to sort of pick that up.<sup>94</sup>

Though it is the Indigenous musical leaders and members who take on important cultural leadership roles, the culture of the choir is also informed by non-Indigenous members. As discussed in the Prelude, Robyn Slarke was instrumental in the creation of the *Sorry Song*, brings her years of active engagement in Aboriginal and other issues to the choir. It was during her role as the Director of the Coexistence Campaign that she formed the Coexistence Choir which was led by Rosie Johnson.<sup>95</sup> Slarke believes that the Coexistence Choir was the first choir of its kind in Australia. It had up to 150 members. In 1997 she invited Morrison to bring the *Yirra Yarkin* choir to sing with the Coexistence Choir at the *Sing to the Senate* event. Many other Indigenous musicians and dancers, and other supporters of Native Title, were present at that concert held on the Fremantle Esplanade. Reconciliation Australia also supported this event, which was instrumental in establishing the fledgling organization, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) in WA. Slarke's activism was reinforced after reading the *Bringing Them Home Report*<sup>96</sup>:

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<sup>93</sup> Nelson 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Nelson 2010.

<sup>95</sup> Slarke, Robyn (2012) Personal communication (Email dated 6/08/12).

<sup>96</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997) *Bringing The Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia. This report makes note that it is a tribute to the strength and struggles of many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by forcible removal. It states on the opening page: “We acknowledge the hardships they endured and the sacrifices they made. We remember and lament all the children who will never come home. We dedicate this report with thanks and admiration to those who found the strength to tell their

Like many other non-indigenous Australians, I had worked with Aboriginal organizations for years, lived and socialized with Aboriginal friends – and YET – I had not begun to appreciate how widespread the pain and devastation of the policy of removing Aboriginal children had been – and still is.

Whilst working with the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, establishing Magabala Books, we had certainly uncovered the brutality faced by Kimberley communities, the frequent rapes, the mixed race children whose pastoralist fathers disowned them, the removal from lands of elders and whole tribes, the wiping out of traditional names and the forced ‘forgetting’ of language. BUT...

The *Bringing Them Home Report* somehow laid bare the pernicious and widespread nature of the ‘stealing of children’ and the government policies which underpinned and legitimized this heartless practice<sup>97</sup>.

Slarke’s political motivations are important resources for MM. She often brings material on Indigenous and other social justice issues to rehearsals. She regards MM as a modest reincarnation of the Coexistence Choir. It was Slarke who introduced the choir to the ‘Sorry Song’ in 2007. Though more politically outspoken than others, Slarke’s passionate engagement with Indigenous issues is nonetheless replicated in many of the other MMers. Certainly a number had worked with Indigenous communities. Peters, for example, had a long history of working with Indigenous people and was committed to improving equality and their wellbeing.<sup>98</sup> Others, like Dauth, had been involved with Aboriginal families and communities from childhood, growing up in a family whose progressive values had been constructive to her own.<sup>99</sup>

### ***‘Singers of Aboriginal songs’***

Unlike the *Noongar* native land claim, or the Our Land Our Home performances in Melbourne, land is not a central concern of the project of MM. It is, however, etched into the choir’s repertoire with ‘*Ngank Boodjak*’ (Mother Earth) written by Lloyd and Morrison. David Milroy’s ‘Let It Sing’ and Walley’s ‘*Singing in Djilba*’ also make reference to country. The repertoire includes songs that carry themes and other concepts which

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stories to the Inquiry and to the generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people separated from their families and communities.”

<sup>97</sup> Slarke 2012, emphasis in original.

<sup>98</sup> Peters, Lee (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 18/05/10).

<sup>99</sup> Dauth 2010.

are not outside the realm of much Indigenous musics.<sup>100</sup> ‘Down in the Kitchen’, a Palm Island Mission song from the 1930s, was introduced early to the choir. Lloyd’s grandmother was a contributor to its composition. It portrays a humorous snapshot of the realities of mission life for the Stolen Generations. Children’s songs ‘*Inanay*’ and ‘*Serra Ray*’<sup>101</sup>, the popular material of ‘My Island Home’ and ‘*Yil Lull*’, as well as originals from its musical directors and invited musical leaders are included in MM’s repertoire. The symbolic though somewhat “clichéd”<sup>102</sup> ‘I Am Australian’ by Bruce Woodley and Dobe Newton is also part of the repertoire, made relevant by the opening first verse being sung by Indigenous singers only and a Noongar translation of the chorus being included. ‘Answer of Love’, the song Morrison had taught to the Coexistence Choir, is included in the choir’s songbook, but it was neither rehearsed nor performed during my field research. As discussed in the Prelude, Fletcher’s ‘Sorry Song’ plays an important role in the repertoire. This body of songs are not all ‘Aboriginal songs’ but, as discussed in Chapter Two, this is a matter of determination and definition constructed within the choir itself.

The overall sound of the choir is representative of the natural voice that is often preferred within community singing. The choir is also not strictly a cappella, frequently being accompanied by guitar which helps with pitch. There is also significant use of clap sticks and other percussion. There is little concentration on technique and blending. Lloyd described the choir as a loose rowdy bunch “even in performance style”<sup>103</sup> that appealed to community and other events because of their fun and generally “pumped”<sup>104</sup> delivery of songs. Singer Cathy Bredemeyer agreed, saying she loved the way the choir sang without inhibition, simply enjoying the singing, and “giving it all”.<sup>105</sup> Other choir members also commented on their appreciation of the unstructured nature

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<sup>100</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>101</sup> “Seagull” in Torres Strait Island Kriol, cited in Office of the Queensland School Curriculum Council (2002) *Sounds Australian*, The State of Queensland. The song is spelt “Serrare” and is sourced from York, FA (nd) *Children’s Songs of the Torres Strait Islands*, Batemans Bay: Owen Martin Publications.

<sup>102</sup> Lloyd 2010.

<sup>103</sup> Lloyd 2010.

<sup>104</sup> Lloyd 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Bredemeyer, Cathy (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 25/05/10).

of MM's musical style. This approach resonates with how Turino<sup>106</sup> describes the Ayacucho Indians' music making as:

iconically represent[ing] and enact[ing] an ethics of community participation that overrules narrower, more strictly musical aesthetic; that is musical performance seems to be simultaneously a symbol and a social practice.<sup>107</sup>

As part of a busy annual program,<sup>108</sup> Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week are important commitments for the choir. MM has also performed in a few multi-choir concerts, such as Global Voice: Multicultural Choral Concert organised by Kulcha as part of the Fremantle Arts Festival. The choir also performs at numerous corporate and community functions and in schools. *Madjital Moorna's* demanding performance and community involvement schedule is made possible by an expectation of simply attending when and where possible. The diversity in musical direction and the fluidity of singer numbers is accommodated within its ethos. Sometimes the performance schedule results in only a handful of singers attending a school visit. It can also mean that the same repertoire is circulated for some time before the opportunity to learn new material can be achieved. This can become somewhat tedious and a few people have left, frustrated with the level of musicality performed by the choir despite this being a critical aspect in the social practice of the choir. While encouraging a positive rendition of the songs, being out of tune and out of time is less important than the inherent message of the songs and the representation of fun and harmony by "people from various racial and cultural backgrounds singing together, led by strong Aboriginal musicians".<sup>109</sup>

Despite the 'Aboriginal songs' that dominate its repertoire, and the pivotal roles that the Indigenous musical directors and members play, attracting Indigenous membership has been difficult. The presence of Indigenous singers is important to MM's credibility as a choir embodying reconciliation and for its ability to meet its own vision. Mourach and Randell, as well as other leaders in the choir, have instituted numerous strategies to interest the local Indigenous community. The poem by Mourach was one such attempt.

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<sup>106</sup> Turino 1993.

<sup>107</sup> Rice 2001: 31.

<sup>108</sup> For example, in 2009 they had some 40 performances.

<sup>109</sup> Vigus, Pauline (2010) *Application for Music in Communities Award*, unpublished document, in author's possession.



Others have included various projects with local schools for performances at the Zig Zag Community Festival. These projects have seen the choir collaborating with dance, circus and other performing groups. Morrison has also proposed setting up a similar choir at City Farm which might be an attractive location to more Aboriginal people.

### ***Learning and healing***

Within *Madjitol Moorna*, learning and healing are seen as intrinsically interconnected with singing. Singing, learning and healing are then intertwined with reconciliation which the choir promotes by “bringing cultures together”.<sup>110</sup> In practice, however, this bringing together is contextually multilayered and ambiguous. While the notion underscores the declarations of learning and healing, and the knitting together of cultures is regarded as inherent, this natural consequence of the choir’s existence is never clearly articulated beyond the concept of reconciliation.

Musical pedagogy certainly plays a role. Healing is seen to be generated by the use of the natural voice which allows people “to enjoy singing with others, for well being and increased self-confidence”.<sup>111</sup> Certain practices were also considered potentially useful for healing. Walley, for example, saw potential in the soundbath and proposed introducing a didgeridoo to act as a drone upon which the singers could improvise.

The choir’s repertoire is strategically situated within the web of singing, learning and healing. Overwhelmingly brought by the choir’s musical directors and visiting musical leaders, the songs expose the choir to a variety of musical styles, Indigenous languages, and textual content. The repertoire provides a gateway into Indigenous historical perspectives, lived experiences, and access to Indigenous languages.

Language is seen an essential element to both learning and healing: “You know they say if you speak to someone you speak to their head, but if you speak to someone in language you speak to their heart”.<sup>112</sup> Interestingly, this link between language and social and individual well being is “increasingly being supported by academic

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<sup>110</sup> See, for example, <http://www.madjitilmoorna.org.au/>. Last accessed 12 September 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Madjitol Moorna 2009: 9.

<sup>112</sup> Mourach 2010

research”.<sup>113</sup> Nicholas Biddle recently noted that there was an increase in the absolute number of Indigenous language speakers between 2006 and 2011.<sup>114</sup> He suggested that there was a range of potential benefits both to the community and individuals from the maintenance of Indigenous languages and associated cultural and historical knowledge.<sup>115</sup> He further noted that Indigenous Australians who were learning an Indigenous language were more likely to report that they were a happy person.<sup>116</sup> While acknowledging limitations to the research, language usage was found to have a distinct potential to improve the wellbeing of the Indigenous population and individuals. Biddle also noted that there were more non-Indigenous Australians indicating that they spoke an Indigenous language,<sup>117</sup> but no correlations with wellbeing were provided. Randell, however, suggested in an email to MM supporters that for non-Indigenous people “the simple act of singing in language is profoundly moving and inclusive”.<sup>118</sup>

Drawing on traditional and contemporary Indigenous practices, storytelling is also seen as an integral part of the choir. Storytelling is common among cultures who maintain an oral medium of expression, it is a “facet of human existence that when explored deeply and socially, tells us significant things about the pragmatics of daily life, including experiential realities”<sup>119</sup>. Drawing on and extending the work of previous researchers such as Ruth Finnegan,<sup>120</sup> Michael Uzendoski and Edith Calapucha-Tapuy argue that much is congealed within the stories that people tell to themselves and to others. They

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<sup>113</sup> Biddle, Nicholas (2012) *Indigenous Language Usage*, Paper No. 1, Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences: 9.

<sup>114</sup> Biddle 2012: 10.

<sup>115</sup> Biddle 2012: 3-4.

<sup>116</sup> Biddle, Nicholas and Swee, H (2012) The relationship between wellbeing and Indigenous land, language and culture in Australia, *Australian Geographer* 43.3: 215-232.

<sup>117</sup> Biddle 2012: 3-4.

<sup>118</sup> Randell 2012.

<sup>119</sup> Uzendoski, Michael A and Calapucha-Tapuy, Edith Felicia (2012) *The Ecology of the Spoken Word: Amazonian Storytelling and Shamanism among the Napo Runa*, Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

<sup>120</sup> Finnegan, Ruth (2007b) *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa*, Oxford, James Currey/Chicago, University of Chicago Press/ Pietermaritzburg, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press. See also Finnegan, Ruth (2012) *Oral Literature in Africa*, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers CIC Ltd.

suggest that stories are central to the processes by which culture is created and practiced and illustrate ways of thinking and being in the world.<sup>121</sup>

Storytelling is a continuing practice for many Indigenous Australians and is regarded as an integral part of life. Stasiuk notes that contemporary Indigenous filmmakers also draw from this tradition when:

...[g]athered around the campfire in the evening, elders, matriarchs, leaders and children would bed down for the night and stories were shared and passed from one generation to the next [...] These stories were based on the land and surrounding environments of the tribe. They encompassed and embraced totemic belief systems, experiences derived from the seasons [...] and mythical stories from time beginning.<sup>122</sup>

Storytelling is important within the culture of *Madjitiil Moorna* because as a cross-cultural engagement the oral practices of Indigenous cultures need to be appreciated as equal to literal communication practices from European cultures. Some of these stories spill out of the songs, emerge in the occasional cultural sharing evenings that are scheduled into the choir's program, or are generated in and through public performance as in the conference performance discussed in the Prelude. Within that discussion, the 'Sorry Song' was seen to play a crucial role by both reflecting upon and encouraging the sharing of stories.

One choir member described a particular storytelling session as "open, honest and tough on people"<sup>123</sup>. These internal and external events can be filled with significant affect. They also provide access to greater clarification of events and issues once absent in mainstream Australian history. Choir members share cross-cultural emotional responses that enable the construction of relational histories. The audience for the storytelling is, of course, the dominant membership – the non-Indigenous. Often an interest in Aboriginal culture and history, or active involvement with the reconciliation process, is the motivation for membership, so the reception is based on an investment in wanting to know more. Embedded too is the perception that singing is a comfortable, 'soft' form of cross-cultural engagement. The rehearsals and other gatherings are

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<sup>121</sup> Uzendoski and Calapucha-Tapuy 2012: 2.

<sup>122</sup> Stasiuk, Glen, with Steve Kinnan [2010] Keepers of our Stories, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 39/Supplement: 87.

<sup>123</sup> Dauth, Sue (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 31/05/10).

regarded as a “safe place”<sup>124</sup> where members can “talk about [cultural] issues knowing that there are no threats, no subtleness”<sup>125</sup>.

As suggested by the personal declarations referred to in the Prelude, these stories can contain elements similar to those told by contemporary Indigenous film makers. The stories within the choir “are often told and presented in a manner that is ruthless, fresh, truthful and honest [and gives the other members of the choir access] to the Indigenous perspective and experience with the same honesty and vigour”.<sup>126</sup> The affective stories are clearly interpreted as a vehicle for healing. Mourach spoke of this:

I am stolen generation and when I feel the caring vibes of [the other] members, I’m OK until someone puts their arm round me, that sort of stuff [...] I tear up sometimes, surprising myself: an arm, a handhold, an expression, support from such loving, caring beings of light can only lead towards a healed heart and soul. I’ve been validated publicly by interviews on radio and ITV, not only by being a member of MM but also being able enough to speak and share my story to help others to heal.<sup>127</sup>

The process of healing, however, is never actually defined, simply an assumed outcome of singing together. Choir members described MM as joyful, soulful, “a therapy”,<sup>128</sup> “the tonal human voice healing circle”,<sup>129</sup> and other similar statements. A number of members spoke of their belief in the healing vibrations produced through singing together and/or the power of harmonised voices.<sup>130</sup> As noted above, Randell articulates a causal link between singing, self-confidence and wellbeing. Mourach “is devoted to spreading healing vibrations through singing”<sup>131</sup> and sees the tearful responses to songs and performances as evidence of personal, shared and communal healing. She spoke of this directly in relation to a sense of sadness that enveloped her during a recent performance of the ‘Sorry Song’: “[...] if I am still having an emotional response, my healing is continuing”.<sup>132</sup> Morrison suggested that the healing power of music was subtle

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<sup>124</sup> Sandercock, Tracey (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 22/05/10).

<sup>125</sup> Morrison 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Stasiuk 2010: 89.

<sup>127</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>128</sup> McInnes, Marion (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 25/05/10).

<sup>129</sup> Worth, Margaret (2010) Personal communication (Completed form 27/05/10).

<sup>130</sup> Morrison 2010.

<sup>131</sup> Madjartil Moorna 2009: 9.

<sup>132</sup> Mourach, Karl (2012) Personal communication (Email 16/08/12).

or hidden but that most members in the choir were open to it.<sup>133</sup> Singer John Mitchell recognised the choir as a place to “express compassion”<sup>134</sup>. There is a shared understanding that many Indigenous individuals are in communities “where there is much sadness”.<sup>135</sup> The belief in the power of music, and, more specifically, harmony to heal is also conveyed in much of the choir’s promotional material such as posters, published articles, and in the films made of their East Kimberley projects.<sup>136</sup> The notion of healing then can be seen to be composed of emotional expression and affective release. The emotional investment built up within the choir’s sociomusical practice and internal dialogue is offered to their audiences and project partners as an avenue for healing.

The ‘coming together of cultures’ that underscores the choir is consequently the process of reconciliation as constructed and demonstrated by MM. Words and phrases such as joy, fun, connecting, healing, singing, black and white together, filter through their rehearsals, cultural learning events, meetings, promotions and performances. The choir inhabits a notion of reconciliation as one based on the sharing of and learning about Indigenous cultures. Through this process choir members build shared emotionally charged experiences which foster deeper relationships that are then presented in cross-cultural performances. Extending from its own sociomusical practice, the choir aims to encourage healing beyond itself and to share “its message of reconciliation [...] with the wider community”.<sup>137</sup> Part of *Madjital Moorna’s* vision is to share their positive spirit through local and regional outreach projects.

### ***Outreach: local and beyond***

Ideologically, the outreach projects are grounded in a shared belief in the choir’s ability to heal within and:

inspire beyond and, we have, as we say, been the pebble in the pond, the vibrations spreading ever further outwards, and, as I say this [now], I am getting a vision - that scenario when vibes move in perfect circles and when they come

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<sup>133</sup> Morrison 2009.

<sup>134</sup> Mitchell, John (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 1/06/10).

<sup>135</sup> Randell, Jo (2009) Personal comment (8/10/09).

<sup>136</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>137</sup> Vigus 2010.

across the object or the obstacle, they move around it or border it, with the vibes from the original energy source, not impacting on it, but gently encompassing it.<sup>138</sup>

Mourach sees this capacity as emerging from the choir's "pure, unconditional love. And it's showing the value of love in the community".<sup>139</sup> While others might not frame it in quite such romantic terms, there is still a shared desire within the choir to work with other communities, hoping that MM models a sociomusical entity that enriches lives and gives other groups access to that fortification:

[The choir] could achieve so much. Look how far we've come. Yeah. If there was more funding around we could do more events, more shows, we'd go more places in the country, south of Perth this time. Because I think they just need to hear us sing: these towns that are down and got nothing.<sup>140</sup>

Pragmatically, the choir encourages members to donate their skills and experience to the outreach projects in order to support the perceived needs of the communities with which they engage. As will become apparent, this can be quite significant. Contributions from members and their families include leading music, dance, film, arts, craft, and bike maintenance workshops; project management; meeting facilitation; and dentistry.

Financially, these outreach projects are made possible by accessing project funding from numerous government and corporate sources as well as personal contributions. With assistance from the administrative team, Randell has been highly successful in gaining significant funding for the choir's leadership costs, activities, and for the major costs of outreach projects. In fact, it has often been the requirement of financial support that has to some extent influenced the journey of the choir. Increasingly, seeking funding has been strategic, approaching funding bodies and corporations focused on health, education and reconciliation. The outreach projects have shifted MM's focus away from merely a musical endeavour to one of working more closely with communities and expanding its inventory of skills training. The constant need for financial support has meant that outreach projects are generously self-assessed. As a result, while not always ideally successful in meeting its project targets, enthusiasm is rarely dampened. The

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<sup>138</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>139</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>140</sup> Nelson 2010.

achievements gained are through commitment, perseverance and sheer determination, even in the face of significance challenges and sometimes poor outcomes.

### *Local and Regional Projects*

As mentioned above, local projects have included working with local schools, primarily focused on performances at the ZigZag Community Festival. Other local projects have included leading singing workshops at Lockridge in the hope of being able to mentor a similar choir in that community. Designed to bridge the Aboriginal and Islander populations, the workshops were generally attended by non-Indigenous people keen to learn to sing. The primary outcome was therefore not achieved.

In late 2010, the choir was working towards a project in Narrogon, a community with a high Indigenous youth suicide rate and social problems. The choir's project was seen to fit well with other programs of support operating in the community, such as the men's program at the leisure centre. Before the project could be undertaken, however, greater liaison with the community was required.

### *Halls Creek and the East Kimberley*

[...] like how Halls Creek has picked up now. Even the kids have so much confidence in themselves. Whereas before, our first visit, I had kids say "I hate myself. I hate my eyes. I hate my hair". And I'd say "Why sweetie?". And they'd [reply] "I hate me". This was the things we had first trip up there. This time I never hear one thing [like that].<sup>141</sup>

The outreach projects to the East Kimberley came about through personal connections and have been primarily based in Halls Creek. As Nelson's comment indicates the focus is on the children, the future of Halls Creek.

The East Kimberley covers an area of 121,000 square kilometers and is best known to tourists for its adventure "icons and places of interest"<sup>142</sup> such as Purnululu National Park<sup>143</sup>, Lake Argyle, Ord River, El Questro Wilderness Park, Mitchell Plateau, the Gibb

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<sup>141</sup> Nelson 2010.

<sup>142</sup> Kununurra Visitors Centre (2010a) *The Glove Box Guide to the East Kimberley*, Kununurra Visitors Centre.

<sup>143</sup> Formerly known as Bungle Bungle National Park.

River Road, Argyle Diamond Mine, Kununurra and Warnum.<sup>144</sup> It is a remote area of great beauty, with extremes in temperature and rugged terrain. Vigus was captured by the region in 2009 on the choir's first visit:

I've never been north of Kalbarry, so going up to the Kimberley was a wonderful experience. And I don't think I felt connected to the land in the same way as in the Kimberley. There is something special about that red dirt and the boab trees. They call to you somehow.<sup>145</sup>

Halls Creek itself gets little attention in the promotional guides to the region. The town is located at the northern end of the Canning Stock Route, which runs 1,850 km through the Great Sandy Desert to the southern end of the route at Wiluna. The town also lies between Fitzroy Crossing and Warnum. A dusty, remote service town with a large Indigenous population it has witnessed more than its fair share of grief and tragedy. It was once regarded as the most dysfunctional town in the nation with "years of alcohol-inflicted pain".<sup>146</sup> Many policies, programs and much energy have been invested to support recovery in the community. MM was invited to do likewise through an old association.

Jo Randell had taught an Aboriginal Access course at the Geraldton College of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) some 30 years ago. One of her students, Doreen Green, had been outstanding and achieved a teaching career under difficult personal circumstances. More recently, Green had been active in getting a 'grog ban' applied to Halls Creek and was keen to find ways for the township to engage in other activities now that there was "renewed pride and a sense of freedom to make plans and strengthen their community".<sup>147</sup> In 2008 Green read about MM in a Department of Indigenous Affairs Newsletter and contacted Randell. A teacher at Halls Creek, she was pinning her hopes on the future and wanted investment to be made in the children which Randell supported. In one of our first conversations in late 2009 Randell had remarked that the first visit to Halls Creek had exposed the choir to the dignity of the Elders but also the

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<sup>144</sup> An Aboriginal community also known as Turkey Creek about 200km from Kununurra. Its Art Centre is renowned. The well-known artist Rover Thomas is from this community. His ancestors carry on his legacy in visual arts.

<sup>145</sup> Vigus 2010a.

<sup>146</sup> Taylor, Nicol (2009) The healing power of song, *RRR Network News*, Rural, Remote and Regional Women's Network of Western Australia, Spring: 15.

<sup>147</sup> Taylor 2009: 15.



great loss and dysfunction in the following generation. Randell had taken to heart Green's encouragement to "Be bold, Jo. We have to do it for the kids".<sup>148</sup>

Randell and other members of *Madjitol Moorna* wanted to support Green's vision of a better future for the Halls Creek community. They eagerly accepted Green's invitation to help show that "good stories happen in Halls Creek".<sup>149</sup> The 2009 project visit, held over a week in May drew on the skills and expertise within the choir and its project support team. The week consisted of workshops held at local schools and with local agencies in singing and songwriting, art and crafts, cooking, manual arts, storytelling, writing, and career counseling. The choir also sang at the hospital and Frail Aged Hostel. The week concluded with a community concert called "Harmony in Halls Creek" featuring local musicians and MM who shared their bracket with:

hundreds of children cramming onto the town's outdoor stage [...] eagerly watched by their families, local residents and people who had driven in from outlying communities to enjoy the music, dancing and safe family fun. Events like this were simply never held in a town in crisis.<sup>150</sup>

The trip itself finished with an appearance by the choir and some of the Halls Creek children at the Barramundi Concert, part of the Ord River Muster in Kununurra.

In an evaluation report to the ZZCA Board, the project's goals were to "promote positive self-esteem and good health through the healing power of singing together in Aboriginal languages as well as English".<sup>151</sup> In an accompanying document, Randell added that the project would also "lift spirits, build pride in culture and provide role models for healthy living by our example".<sup>152</sup> These admirable endeavours were engineered through a multi-layered approach. While music making and associated arts and craft activities were central to the project, a major contribution was a dental clinic set up by Jan Owen, singer with MM, dental nurse, and dental health educator, and her orthodontist

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<sup>148</sup> Randell, Jo (2009b) *Madjitol Moorna and the Halls Creek Mob, Aboriginal Education and Training Council Western Australia*: 11.

<sup>149</sup> Unattributed (2010) May Special Edition, *Halls Creek Better Life Project Newsletter*, 14/05/10: 3.

<sup>150</sup> Taylor 2009: 15.

<sup>151</sup> Randell, Jo and Dunn (Vigus), Pauline (2009) *Report: Madjitol Moorna and the Halls Creek Mob Project*, unpublished.

<sup>152</sup> Randell, Jo (2009c) *Report on Kimberley Dental Team's First Trip: Madjitol Moorna Perspective*, unpublished.

husband, John Owen. The couple wanted to address the inequality of access to dental health care in the remote Kimberley. They sought to enhance current services and improve dental health literacy. They subsequently created the voluntary Kimberley Dental Team which services the region at least twice yearly.<sup>153</sup>

Conversations with many of the MMers who went on that 2009 trip indicated that though the rewards had been worth it, overall it had been emotionally, psychologically and physically tough. Behind the positive images in the documentary *Harmony in Halls Creek*<sup>154</sup> there had, inevitably, been some dissonance within the choir and between choir members and Halls Creek community members arising from cross-cultural misunderstandings and/or a lack or miscommunication of intentions and outcomes. There were many lessons learnt and ultimately some good connections made. A return visit by the choir to bring their “songs, activities and huge amounts of positive energy”<sup>155</sup> was encouraged. This was important to the legitimacy of the choir and its project as it did not want to be seen as just another ‘white goods’<sup>156</sup> phenomenon.

The second “ambitious and multi-faceted”<sup>157</sup> project in Halls Creek in 2010 was well funded through the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), Healthway and LotteryWest. Sponsorship was also provided by Zig Zag Community Arts Inc, the Shire of Halls Creek and Owen Homeopathy. MMers contributed their own funds. The choir worked closely with and was supported by a number of local agencies. Green saw the MM project has having two major outcomes:

On one level the choir will be working with students and community members to produce a performance that uses music to heal. The choir will also be engaging with the students and community using their skills and experience to help in the holistic development of those in the project.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Kimberley Dental Team (nd) *Our Inspiration*, <http://www.kimberleydentalteam.com/>, accessed 3 September 2010.

<sup>154</sup> *Harmony in Halls Creek* (2010) Filmed by: Mat de Koning. Produced by *Madjital Moorna*.

<sup>155</sup> Unattributed 2010: 3.

<sup>156</sup> ‘White goods’ or ‘white clouds’ is an Indigenous colloquialism used to describe the numerous one-off, short term projects by government and non-government organisations in Indigenous communities.

<sup>157</sup> Unattributed 2010: 3.

<sup>158</sup> Unattributed (2009) Madjital Moorna Choir are on their way, *Halls Creek Herald*, 7 April: 1.

The project was similar in design to 2009 although various strategies were put in place to avoid some of the pitfalls experienced in 2009. Again a range of workshops were held in the schools, a child care centre, the Recreation Centre and the TAFE; and meetings were held with local agency representatives. The visits to the Frail Aged Hostel and the hospital were repeated, as was the community concert at the end of the week. The inclusion of visits to the Kimberley Language Resource Centre and Burke's Park Training Centre were additional. Nevertheless it was not a finely tuned week and challenges emerged.

Like most of the East Kimberley Project Team I had never had the opportunity to visit the Kimberley. After travelling for four hours from Kununurra through the region's stunning beauty we arrived at Halls Creek, with its dust and wide streets, late in the afternoon. The painted sunset sky was accompanied by *String Versions of System of a Down* on my iPod. Listening to the classical arrangement of popular metal music gave my introduction to Halls Creek a bizarre twist. It was not an isolated moment of surrealism. The rest of the week included similarly unique situations.

The first event occurred early on the first morning, at our welcome to country held at the Kimberley Language Resource Centre. On arrival, the returning choir members renewed relationships with people they had met the year before, others shyly found their way, talking gently with the Elders and other community members. Eventually we all went into the meeting room where May Butcher (*Kitja*) and Tiny McCale (*Jaru*) waited to welcome us. Butcher spoke in English; McCale in *Jaru* and English. Mourach and Walley responded on behalf of the choir and then we sang. The audience politely clapped. One of the choir members asked a male Elder, Stan Brumby, who proudly sported a cowboy hat, to sing a song. He sang in language and then spoke in English about his wish to take children out bush to teach culture. The song had affronted some of the women who spoke angrily to Brumby and left. Bewilderment and tension built so another song was suggested. McCale stepped forward to sing it. McCale had worked in Halls Creek District High School and had taught many songs in *Jaru* about bush tucker to

“help keep language strong”<sup>159</sup>. Butcher returned to the room and danced a traditional dance. It was sometime later before I was aware of what had happened. Mourach recalled:

[...] and old Stan, he'd got ripped by old girl, Aunty May. That's what Doreen said. Those old fellas, they don't care, they'll rip them. I saw that, was good to see that culturally. That cultural exchange. This old boy singing a woman's song, and he shouldn't have been singing it. That's what she was ripping him for. And then she came in and said this is our song and I'm going to dance. This is how we do it. Really sweet. So good that exchange. So good it happened when everyone was there. Like you stood still in time.<sup>160</sup>

Later in the morning, Halls Creek District School's administration was strangely unprepared for our arrival and the processing of our visitor status. The preschool teacher was surprised by our visit, which we thought was scheduled. The teacher however cheerfully accommodated our singing with the children. After lunch, we sang to a whole school assembly and promoted the week of activities. Later we travelled over to *Warlawurra* School<sup>161</sup> for a session of singing, dancing, drumming and scrambling up the amazing red rock beside the school, and then returned to Halls Creek to set up the Recreation Centre for activities the next day. We visited Doreen Green in the evening to watch the SBS news and current affairs program *Living Black* which was promoting MM's visit to Halls Creek in a segment entitled “A Perth choir singing the right note”. Returning to our accommodation at the Kimberley Hotel in the dark, voices from the surrounding bushes hauntingly pierced the crisp, clear night sky.

The screening of the *Harmony in Halls Creek* documentary at the Recreation Centre on the Tuesday evening was an interesting event. The documentary had been shown previously to the community, prior to its final edit. About forty to fifty locals attended the screening, mostly children. A technical problem delayed the start and people left. Others left throughout the screening. The children were constantly mobile, running about the room. They only really engaged with the film when they or their friends were

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<sup>159</sup> Scott, Maggie, McCale, Tiny, Nicholson, Danbangali, Lily, Magialen Gordon, Ruby, Bawungali Inverway and Ruby, Janyjiwug Nicholson (2008) *Nyawa ngali marnana Wanyjirra jaru: We speak Manyjirra*, Halls Creek: Kimberley Language Resource Centre: 37.

<sup>160</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>161</sup> Also known as Red Hill School.

on screen. The level of community engagement with the documentary anticipated by *Madjiti Moorna* was clearly not evident.

The health message “Respect Yourself, Respect Your Culture” was heavily promoted on all material related to the Halls Creek project. The community concert at the end of the frantic week, promoted as “Harmony in Halls Creek 2010”, was smoke free and posters declared that there should be “No Grog, No Gunga, No Humbug”.<sup>162</sup> The free concert, with free BBQ, was well attended. The enthusiasm of the families to see the children perform with MM was not repeated this year, partly because of logistical arrangements. To my surprise, MM did not rehearse once during the week for this concert, overly committed and spread thin by the activities of the week long project. Nevertheless, the songs were familiar and delivered in the choir’s signature upbeat manner. The audience politely responded to the choir’s performance. Their real enthusiasm was shown for the popular styles of music from within the Kimberley<sup>163</sup> presented by local performers Geoffrey Fletcher, Kimberley Gold, Wild Turkey and the Walkabout Boys; that was when the dancing became wild and laughter and fun filled the dusty park.

Despite the lessons of 2009, the 2010 project was unable to achieve all of its goals. Amidst the chaos of the week the project team accommodated changes to the program and responded to community requests and opportunities. Motivation, flexibility and the dampening down of excitement had become essential assets. Some of the planned educational outcomes conceived in Perth were shown to be impossible targets. The ability, for example, to record stories from Elders and others in order to create relevant language resources for local students was beyond the depth of current cross-cultural relationships and, as I discovered, the Language Centre already had resources to meet those needs. Mourach was not surprised that the stories had not emerged:

I’ve always known about the wait time. You don’t fill the gaps. You have to leave that space in there so people can process, because, that’s it. A lot of whitefellas have to fill the gap. They feel uncomfortable about the dead air. Whereas it’s really getting there, someone working out the process [...] And again, you don’t go straight into the subject. You have to

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<sup>162</sup> A translation would be no alcohol, no marijuana, no hassling relatives for money. Humbugging is common within Indigenous communities and has evolved out of the practice of demand sharing.

<sup>163</sup> Music that draws on country, rock n roll, and hip hop.

walk around the subject [...] And I was thinking, but who am I to get these stories? I don't know these people and why would they trust me anyway. They don't know me. I'm not connected yet, I don't know them.<sup>164</sup>

Some of the choir members returned later in August 2010 to assist the Halls Creek Community create their own music festival, the inaugural *Nguryuru Waaringarrem*.<sup>165</sup> The choir saw their support as a scaffold for future festivals which the community would lead. They wanted to help make Halls Creek a music hub for the East Kimberley, “where people of all ages enjoy making music in their everyday lives; a place where children expect to write, sing and perform their own songs”. This latter aspect was achieved in 2009 when students joined with Walley to write the song *Halls Creek Rodeo* which is planned to be recorded in the future.

In 2010 MM also spent half a day with the Warmun community, visiting the art gallery and later performing in a concert with Wild Turkey, on the community's Australian Football League (AFL) field under a sky sitting so close the aptly named Milky Way felt within reach. Surrounded by the community perched on rugs and camping chairs at the the edges of the field, first the choir and then the band sang from a temporary stage near the centre. The distance between performers and audience seemed odd until it became clear that the children needed that space to run, to play AFL, to gather before the stage to dance for a few moments, and then scatter off to run and play some more.

The 2010 project was again filmed by Mat de Koning. Promotional material for the screening of the second documentary in 2011 in Perth noted the value of both documentaries in boosting morale and confidence for kids and families in a healing community. *Madjitil Moorna* has no immediate plans to return to Halls Creek with similar projects although other forms of engagement with the community are possible. Nevertheless, the outreach project to the East Kimberley has inevitably helped develop skills in cross-cultural communications and the negotiation of politics.

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<sup>164</sup> Mourach 2010.

<sup>165</sup> Both words mean “gathering, big celebration”. The first word is *Jaru* and the second *Kitja*.

### ***The Politics within Apolitical***

The issue of land, which is etched into the repertoire at some level, is a major concern to a number of the choir's members. Among those with strong environmental leanings, Cathy Bredemeyer was often found exploring and spending meditative engagement with the land when in the East Kimberley; Karl Mourach could see reinforcement of actions and miracles in natural occurrences; and Della Rae Morrison responded to the threat of uranium mining on Indigenous land by becoming active in an anti-uranium lobby group. Morrison gave me a poem in 2010 that expressed her strong connection and sense of responsibility to country, called *Caretaker of Country*.<sup>166</sup>

Morrison's activism prompted her to invite MM to sing at an anti-uranium rally. Such occasions, however, concern Randell as they undermined the choir's intention to take an apolitical stance. She and other leaders in the choir are "shy of [...] political issues".<sup>167</sup> Randell admits that for the same reason she has avoided suggesting repertoire that might cross that line. She admits that the 'Sorry Song' could be regarded as political "but it shouldn't be. I mean regardless of your politics you should acknowledge the history that is undeniably factual".<sup>168</sup> An admirer of some of Fletcher's other compositions, she said

I'd [...] be nervous about taking on songs that deal with too many issues. Like, Kerry has another beautiful song that another choir has learnt. It's the John Patt song about deaths in custody. It's a very powerful song that just made me burst into tears but I just think I'm not brave enough to do that one because I think it could hijack the whole [project of the choir] and, you know, a valid criticism could be [we're] pretty gutless, [we're] just sticking to the fluffy, feel good stuff [...] and to acknowledge. We always need to acknowledge.<sup>169</sup>

Jessie Lloyd had been attracted to leading a choir that sang Aboriginal songs as a form of reconciliation because of its apparent apolitical nature. Nevertheless, political and cultural tensions arise. One of the responsibilities of the musical directors and visiting musical leaders is to contribute repertoire. But even repertoire can prove to be problematic. During the preparations for the ZigZag Community Festival in 2006, Randell

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<sup>166</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>167</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>168</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>169</sup> Randell 2010.

was keen to have 'Kaya', the song that Lloyd and Morrison had taught to the Perth Festival Choir introduced to MM. In Randell's enthusiasm for the song she contacted Bennell directly, thinking she was adopting appropriate protocol. Subsequently, tensions arose between Bennell and Lloyd and Morrison, and between Lloyd and Morrison and Randell. As a result *Kaya* was dropped, despite the fact that other choirs in Perth regularly perform it. Other issues in relation to repertoire also arose. Randell commented that 'Serra Ray' had been challenged as to its appropriateness for inclusion in the repertoire because it advocates cruelty to animals. Understood as a song about hunting, however, it is one of education, and it continues to be sung and taught because it is popular with children.

Performances can likewise be politically difficult. Audience responses have been mixed. Audiences for symbolic occasions always show a warm appreciation. The performance of the 'Sorry Song' in 2008 was especially heightened. Morrison acknowledged, however, that some *Noongar* people found the choir's performances disturbing because it was "confronting to see whites knowing the songs".<sup>170</sup> She added that she had witnessed this attitude change, seeing the negativity dissolving "because the beauty of the song can't be held on to [by Aboriginal people only]".<sup>171</sup> Some non-Indigenous audience members expressed a certain cynicism to the choir performances, claiming that the choir was a construct and inauthentic.

Walking the tightrope of cultural and social politics is simply part of the journey of MM. As the choir has prolonged its evolution, Randell has become increasingly conscious of cross-cultural protocols and the need for negotiation. Nevertheless, she still wades determinedly into muddy waters in order to sustain MM, to maintain commitment to its vision statement, and to further drive the impact and influence of the choir. She sees friction as part of "the enormity of what we're dealing with"<sup>172</sup> in relation to cross-cultural relationships in Australia as a whole. Overall, she declares that "there's been a number of rocky things over the years, all to do with language and culture. We've all learnt to get over those and mostly it's been great". The tensions and negotiations are

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<sup>170</sup> Morrison 2010.

<sup>171</sup> Morrison 2010.

<sup>172</sup> Randell 2010.



“almost symbols of what we’re doing. Those little incidences. And as long as we handle them well we do grow. It is a microcosm of what’s going on [in the broader reconciliation process]”.<sup>173</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

“[...] music becomes a way of not only gaining some understanding of the cultural other, but also of shifting your own position, constructing and reconstructing your own identity in the process. Music, in short, represents a way out of cultural pessimism”.<sup>174</sup>

Since its humble beginnings in 2006, *Madjitil Moorna* has created a deep sense of self and its contributions to community and reconciliation. It has moved beyond a community choir to a “movement”,<sup>175</sup> with such aims as “for education through music to be a stronger part of everyday life”.<sup>176</sup> Guided by the vision statement, the discourse within the choir reinforces its “vibrant, organic and responsive”<sup>177</sup> essence so that its musical interaction of “living and singing reconciliation”<sup>178</sup> can continue. Within and beyond the choir, relationships based on shared interests, shared goals and shared lives have been cultivated and matured.

*Madjitil Moorna* embodies wider social tensions, and it is significant that its music making takes place *because* of cultural difference rather than in spite of it. It experiences the clash inherent in a musical interaction that attempts to blur cultural boundaries while also foregrounding Indigenous experience and expression. At the same time, “relational, interactional, intersubjective, dialogical and mutually transformative processes”<sup>179</sup> are nurtured. Nevertheless, these deeper connections can sometimes be muted in their community performances that more often than not are

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<sup>173</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>174</sup> Cook, Nicholas (1998) *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 30.

<sup>175</sup> Randell 2010.

<sup>176</sup> Randell, Jo (2010a) *Madjitil Moorna with the Halls Creek Mob: Submission to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) – Indigenous Flexible Funding Application*, unpublished document: 1.

<sup>177</sup> Randell 2011.

<sup>178</sup> Randell 2011.

<sup>179</sup> Ottosson, Åse (2010) Aboriginal Music and Passion: Interculturality and Difference in Australian Desert Towns. *Tehnos* 75(3): 276.

designed to down play the political and to overtly express cross-cultural harmony simply through the joy of singing.

*Madjitiil Moorna* sees benefit in extending its values and practices. It is a choir of strongly motivated individuals with generous hearts and good intentions. Consequently, it sets itself challenging goals that warrant constant attention: musical leadership, funding requirements, performance commitment, and outreach projects. There are trials in maintaining all of this, especially within a framework that attends to collaborative leadership and an apolitical stance. The sometimes unacknowledged and competing priorities located within this ambitious musical interaction can be difficult to balance. Conflicts arise when priorities clash and frictions do occur because of cultural differences, enabled by an environment where political correctness is avoided and where fine musicality is made secondary to the songs and the singers, the symbols and significance. The choir can be seen to be both “a good way of being socially in the world”<sup>180</sup> but is, at the same time, a sociomusical interaction grounded in political ideology and structural hierarchies that can be misrecognised or silenced in their desire to create meaning that is beyond or without politics. Adherence to *Madjitiil Moorna's* mandate is only made possible by the realities of a volunteer non-Indigenous administration seeking funding that helps to financially reward the Indigenous musical and cultural leaders.

The complexity inherent in this one sociomusical interaction highlights the paradox of reconciliation, and, at the same time, also prompts a consideration of the way in which the notions of harmony and healing are far too readily, simplistically and broadly applied in the various discourses surrounding community music-making. Intricate and intimate threads are necessary in order to weave harmony and healing together; the threads of shared stories, emotional connection, a recapturing and sharing of language and culture, an exploration of the past, a reframing of the present, a vision of the future, and songs that embody meaning and significance.

Ultimately, the considerable investment of time, energy and devotion by the core of its membership and supporters has yet to return the imagined dividends, but ideals and

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<sup>180</sup> Rice 2001: 31.

perseverance seemingly know no bounds. There is a sense of purpose that unquestionably nurtures its ambitious goals, however modestly achieved, and a belief in the vital duty of its own journey. There is a solace in its own aura. It is certainly a choir that is intent on finding a way out of cultural pessimism.



## Chapter 6

### Centralian Choirs: Community Choirs in Central Australia

From the top of the range  
it falls-  
like afternoon shadow.  
Imperceptible,  
yet there you are  
at the bottom, in the dusk.  
The music has stopped  
but resonates still-  
from warm rock,  
pockets of air, the beating  
chambers of your heart.

**Diminuendo by Sue Fielding 2012<sup>1</sup>**

*Vuma* (6 repeats)  
*Wo M-sin-di-si* (4 repeats)  
*Heh Ka-yeh Zul-wi-ni*  
*Du-meh Si them-bi-so*  
*Vuma Vuma*  
*Wo M-sin-di-si* (4 repeats)  
(Believe in the Lord  
And you will be saved  
There's hope and promise in Heaven  
Just believe and you'll be saved)

***Vuma* (South African)**

*Ilkangkula yurrangkaka, Kurtungurl' etna trerraka<sup>2</sup>;*  
*Inta kanh' ankw-intarlanga Kumpinya.*  
*"Kamerrai," etna ilkaka, "Paarrp, Ingkaartia, tangkalhelai!"*  
*Wurinhah' unta turnaka: "Rrukerrai!"*  
*Wurinya yilpa-yarraka, Kwatja laiya 'nurrerraka:*  
*Inmarrala nganha wuka Tjinpala.*  
*Laakinha ruampli' kngarrala Nurnanha tulpatumanga,*  
*Unta parramala angkai, "Rrukerrai!"*  
(Fierce raged the tempest o' ver the deep,  
Watch did Thine anxious servants keep,  
But Thou wast wrapp'd in guieless sleep, Calm and still.  
'Save, Lord, we perish,' was their cry, 'O save us in our agony!',  
Thy word above the storm rose high, 'Peace, be still!'  
The wild wind hush'd; the angry deed, Sank, like a child, to sleep;  
The sullen billows ceased to leap, At Thy Will.  
So, when our life is clouded o'er,  
And storm winds drift us from the shore,  
Say, lest we sink to rise no more, "Peace, be still.")

**Song 141 (Eng. 394, Pitj 43, Tune: 140)<sup>3</sup>**

**(Fierce Raged the Tempest, Godfrey Thring [1862])**

<sup>1</sup> Printed with permission of the author. *Diminuendo* was first published as part of The Red Room Company's project, *The Disappearing*. [www.redroomcompany.org](http://www.redroomcompany.org).

<sup>2</sup> This is the *Pitjantjatjara* translation of Fierce Raged the Tempest, a song that captured many audience members new to the Desert Gospel choirs. This was evident at *The Big Sing in the Desert* in 2010 and the *Desert Voice* Concert in the same year.

<sup>3</sup> It is not uncommon for Aboriginal singers to refer to the hymns by their number.

## **Preamble**

The once-familiar term reconciliation seems to have drifted off into a backwater of late. [The Desert Voice concert] is the type of event that would help greatly in keeping that essential goal in the forefront of our lives. The memory of the evening will stay with me for a long time.<sup>4</sup>

Three Aboriginal ladies choirs,<sup>5</sup> one Aboriginal school choir, and one town choir of community singers came together for a concert in 2010 in Alice Springs. Most of the singers had sung together in a similar concert in 2009 and would do so again in 2011 and 2012. The marquee space for the 2010 Desert Voice concert of the Alice Desert Festival managed to hold the choirs and most of the audience who were huddled in seats and on the ground, although some spilled out beyond its boundaries. A few hours beforehand the choirs had rehearsed under a darkening sky and soon after had watched the rain pour over the already soaked oval where the performance was normally held. Many singers later said the marquee provided a superior venue, better for containing the voices and allowing a greater intimacy with the audience. After the Aboriginal choirs performed songs from their Desert Gospel repertoire, the combined Central Australian Ladies Choir performed two popular songs translated into local languages, and then all the choirs performed the South African gospel 'Vuma' and 'Why We Sing' by Greg Gilpin. These last two songs were selected by Morris Stuart, the Artistic Director of the Desert Voice concert. Stuart was also the Musical Director of the 'Afro-fusion' community choir that had performed in the concert. 'Vuma' especially appealed to the Aboriginal choirs because of its Christian message and to all the choristers because of its engaging rhythms and harmonies. 'Why We Sing', an anthemic *a cappella* song that swells with harmony and emotion, spoke to the endeavour of the concert and Stuart's overall musical project in Central Australia. The bridge in the song overtly articulates the song's message: "Music builds a bridge, it can tear down a wall; music is a language that can speak to one and all".

This is not like the musical interaction in Victoria or in Western Australia. As in southern Australia, this interaction is unique to place, to its people. This one concert in 2010 does not, however, encapsulate the fullness of the musical interaction in Central Australia.

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<sup>4</sup> Tjilpi, Graham (2012) Choirs in fine voice, *Centralian Advocate*, 11 September: 6.

<sup>5</sup> When speaking in English, Aboriginal people refer to women as ladies and adopt this for their choirs.

What most portrays the interaction of the choirs is still gossamer, a shimmer in the heat of a late spring day, emerging from the red earth, the hot rocky surface; caught in the willy willy<sup>6</sup> circling across the dusty soil; a melody yet to be scored.

My field research in Central Australia began in late July and lasted until late September 2010. I did not anticipate the number of times I would return, a witness to the increasing intensity of the engagements, collaborations, and the opportunities that unexpectedly arose. I returned for two weeks in May 2011, two weeks in May 2012, and briefly in October of the same year. As with the field research in Western Australia, my methodology was mixed and flexible. I joined *Asante Sana*, the community choir based in Alice Springs; participated in two weekend singing workshops; and attended some of the rehearsals of the Aboriginal ladies choirs based in and around Alice Springs.

In this chapter I begin with a brief description of place and history, followed by an overview of Desert Gospel choirs and a brief history of community choral music in Alice Springs. I then analyse in greater detail the choirs and the various exchanges and collaborations that have taken place. Following, I provide a descriptive analysis of *Asante Sana* and a number of Aboriginal ladies choirs for whom Desert Gospel is central. I tell the story of the people, processes and practices that created the choirs and their musical encounters and examine the broader issues of musical exchange and collaboration. In Central Australia, the cross-cultural exchange between all these choirs and the shared musical expression that resulted at first seemed surprising. Four community choral projects were pivotal to these community interactions that continue to gain momentum: Many Roads One Voice, Desert Voice, African Grace and The Big Sing in the Desert.

I twist the lens to give a sense of the ancient and the contemporary, the physical and the historical that shape the musical interactions in Central Australia and the connection between past, present and future; the elemental spiral of place, people and music.

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<sup>6</sup> An Australian description of a whirlwind with probable origins from the *Yindjibarndi* based in the Hamersley Range, Western Australia (or a neighbouring language). See, Dixon, RM, Moore, Bruce WS Ramson, and Thomas, Mandy (2006) *Australian Aboriginal Words in English: Their origin and meaning*, South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

## ***Of place and history***

Alice Springs [...] sits in a very uncomfortable place, at the intersection of road and rail, river and mountain, black and white, and life and death.<sup>7</sup>

Alice Springs, or *Mparntwe* in the local *Arrernte* language, sits at the core of the continent of mainland Australia, approximately 400 kilometres from the iconic geological heart of Australia, *Uluru*.<sup>8</sup> Set within “one of the most distinctive and spectacular landscapes in the world”,<sup>9</sup> or a “harsh, uncommon beauty”,<sup>10</sup> Alice Springs began its colonial history in the late 1880s as Stuart, a telegraph station on the Adelaide to Darwin line. The town of Alice Springs was gazetted in 1933. Its historical existence reflects events of colonial and post-colonial economic development: exploration, pastoralism, Christian missions, mining, World War Two, government services, and tourism.<sup>11</sup> Today Alice Springs has a population of approximately 28,000 people<sup>12</sup> who are generally younger, more transient, and comprise more Aboriginal people per capita than most other parts of Australia.<sup>13</sup> It is full of contradictions: at once dynamic, creative, cosmopolitan, vibrant and hopeful, as well as fearful and dysfunctional. Both positive and fraught cross-cultural and intra-racial relationships are the drama of its everyday; ‘banal’<sup>14</sup> relationships are its common practice. Jennifer Mills agrees, suggesting that life in ‘The Alice’ constitutes “the constant small-town overlap of

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<sup>7</sup> Mills, Jennifer (2012) Review of “Alice Springs” by Eleanor Hogan, *Canberra Times*, November 17: 25.

<sup>8</sup> *Uluru* (also known as Ayers Rock) is actually some 400 odd kilometres south of Alice Springs.

<sup>9</sup> Mills 2012: 25.

<sup>10</sup> Powell, Alan (2009) *Far Country: A short history of the Northern Territory*, Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press: 167.

<sup>11</sup> This brief history has been drawn from Powell 2009; Wells, Linda (2011) *Still A Town Like Alice: Alice Springs 1986-2008*, Alice Springs: Alice Springs Town Council; Petrick, Jose (2010) *The History of Alice Springs through Landmarks and Street Names*, Alice Springs: Jose Petrick; Donovan, Peter (1988/2010) *Alice Springs: Its history and the people who made it*, Alice Springs: Alice Springs Town Council.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nrp.nsf/Latestproducts/LGA70200Population/People12006-2010?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=LGA70200&issue=2006-2010>, accessed 7 January 2013. It should be noted that it is assumed that the official figures can only give an estimate and not an absolute figure because of the challenges to collecting census data. In a town “where local knowledge often defies government statistics” (Wells 2011: 15) it is assumed to be greater.

<sup>13</sup> Wells 2011: 14.

<sup>14</sup> McKee, Alan (1997) The Aboriginal version of Ken Done... banal aboriginal identities in Australia, *Cultural Studies*, 11.2: 191-206.



radically contradictory elements”.<sup>15</sup> Media attention too readily concentrates on the negative tensions within the community despite the many positive stories that are also available. It is a place that often draws non-Indigenous people because of its physical beauty, its people, and its culture. Compelled by that combination, one of the singers from *Asante Sana* poetically reminisced, “I was carried up here on angel’s wings”.<sup>16</sup> Another singer simply said “I fell in love with the country”<sup>17</sup> while another, who had only recently arrived from interstate, commented on the town’s “great sense of community”.<sup>18</sup>

I was part of that 2010 Desert Voice concert referred to in the opening line of this chapter, a year of unprecedented rains which triggered the transformation of the ‘Red Centre’ into a verdant garden of wildflowers; the Mulla Mulla, Cassia and Sturt’s Desert Rose blooming amongst the prolific flora. The concert was performed under a marquee on a wet and cool spring day in Anzac Park,<sup>19</sup> beneath Anzac Hill or *Antelkentyarliweke*,<sup>20</sup> during the Alice Desert Festival. The Alice Desert Festival began in 2001, the year in which the *Yeperenye* Festival<sup>21</sup> lasted “for thirty-five hours [...] and featured 4000 performers”.<sup>22</sup> Those performers included Yothu Yindi, Slim Dusty, Paul Kelly, Frank Yama, NoKTuRNL, Jimmy Little, Christine Anu, George Rrurrumbu, Kutcha Edwards, John Williamson and Warren K Williams. For those behind the scenes, the “spectacular and moving showcase of music, dance and culture that celebrated Australian Aboriginal ways of life and survival”<sup>23</sup> was a logistical nightmare, but for many spectators “it was one of the most magnificent and moving gatherings of their time”.<sup>24</sup> The Alice Desert Festival has subsequently become an annual “showcase of music, theatre, visual arts, literature, dance, multimedia, cuisine, humour and creativity in general, reaching across

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<sup>15</sup> Mills 2012: 25.

<sup>16</sup> Hussey, Mark (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 6/09/10).

<sup>17</sup> Smith, Henry (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 4/09/10).

<sup>18</sup> Chappell, Deb (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 16/09/10).

<sup>19</sup> The word “Anzac” comes from the acronym ANZAC, Australian and New Zealand Army Core, but has become a common place word since the ANZACs were constructed as important as the mythic iconicity of nationhood.

<sup>20</sup> Brooks, David for Mparntwe People (2007) *A town like Mparntwe*, Alice Springs: jukurrpa books, Institute for Aboriginal Development Press: iv and 22.

<sup>21</sup> A one off event.

<sup>22</sup> Wells 2011: 101.

<sup>23</sup> Wells 2011: 100.

<sup>24</sup> Wells 2011: 101.

ages and cultural diversity of the Alice Springs community”.<sup>25</sup> The 2012 program stretched out from 10 August to 10 October.

*Antelkentyarliweke* is an ideal site for a view of *Mparntwe*. From its peak one can scan the town. Looking to the south, and then eastwards along the Heavitree range, one can see the dip formed by *Anthwerrke*, or Emily Gap<sup>26</sup>. This sacred site, possibly the most important place in the whole region, is where the caterpillar beings of *Mparntwe* originated. Indigenous history and knowledge are located in the geography surrounding Alice Springs. Sacred sites mark the places where important creation events have taken place, and hold significant meaning and power for the people of those sites<sup>27</sup>. Caterpillars are the major creative beings of *Mparntwe* although there are other sorts of beings that have shaped parts of the landscape. It was the caterpillar beings *Yeperenye*, *Ntyarlke* and *Utnerrengatye* who created the Macdonnell Ranges<sup>28</sup>. Running east and west from Alice Springs, ‘The Macs’ are clearly evident of these creative beings. For over 50,000 years the *Arrernte* people have been the “custodians for particular sites and pieces of land”<sup>29</sup> of their country. Today *Arrernte* and other Indigenous people either live in or regularly visit Alice Springs “as a cultural and political centre with [increasing] numbers of people from remote Central Australian Aboriginal communities who choose to take up residence in the town”<sup>30</sup>. Some of those communities are famous for their Desert Gospel music.

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<sup>25</sup> Wells 2011: 101.

<sup>26</sup> Brooks 2007: 5.

<sup>27</sup> Wells 2011: 155.

<sup>28</sup> Brooks 2007: 7.

<sup>29</sup> Stuart Kngwarraye, Doris (2009), Personal conversation with Wells (Interview September), cited in Wells 2001: 155.

<sup>30</sup> Wells 2011: 16.

## ***Desert Gospel Choirs***<sup>31</sup>

This is a unique musical language only made possible when the traditional and emotive vocal lines of Central Australian voices are applied to Lutheran hymnal music.<sup>32</sup>

In June 1877, the arrival of German Lutheran pastors W F Schwarz and A H Kempe at *Ntaria*<sup>33</sup> marked the beginning of the Christian missionary expansion into Central Australia. The 2,000 kilometre journey by Schwarz and Kempe, which began in the Barossa Valley near Adelaide in South Australia, has been described as one of “epic proportions”<sup>34</sup>. There were three basic characteristics to the mission’s evangelistic method: the determination to use the local language, to provide food and rations, and the establishment of a school for children so “that the next generation of Aboriginal people could be more thoroughly influenced by the missionaries”<sup>35</sup>. The mission “bore witness to the process whereby *Arrernte* people moved off land as it was taken for cattle leases”<sup>36</sup>. The local Aboriginal people came to the mission largely for strategic and

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<sup>31</sup> For the purposes of this thesis I have concentrated on the choral expression of desert gospel which captures both gospel singers and church choirs. This blurs their distinctions to some extent, however, there is a transition or continuity from the singing of Lutheran hymns to gospel singing and they are interchangeable in their production of sociality. Desert gospel music is far broader than choral music for it includes bands and other performance genres. For discussions on other forms of desert gospel music see, in particular, Ottosson, Åse (2006) *Making Aboriginal men and Music in Central Australia*, PhD Thesis, Canberra: Australian National University; Ottosson, Åse (2009) *Playing with Others and Selves: Australian Aboriginal Desert Musicians on Tour*, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 10.2: 98-114; and Ottosson, Åse (2010) *Aboriginal Music and Passion: Interculturality and Difference in Australian Desert Towns*, *Ethnos* 75.3: 275-300.

<sup>32</sup> Rose, Jon (2003), *Inkat'irbirberintjaka: Ntaria Aboriginal Ladies Choir*, *ABC Adlib Stories*, Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/adlib/stories/s904238.htm>, access on 21/11/10. See also Rose, Jon (2008) *Listening to History: Some Proposals for Reclaiming the Practice of Live Music*, *Leonado Music Journal* 18: 9-16.

<sup>33</sup> *Ntaria* is the *Arrernte* name for the site of the Hermannsburg Mission on the banks of the Finke River hence the European name “Finke River Mission” is also commonly used in reference to Hermannsburg/*Ntaria*. Hermannsburg/*Ntaria* is situated approximately 125 kilometres south west of Alice Springs.

<sup>34</sup> Borgas, Rob (2011) *God’s Picture among the Australian Aborigines*, *Lutheran Forum*, Pentecost/Summer: 64 & then 58-61.

<sup>35</sup> Borgas 2011: 64.

<sup>36</sup> Austin-Broos, Diane (2009) *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past: Invasion, Violence, and Imagination in Indigenous Central Australia*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press: 29.

practical reasons, seeking trade with the missionaries for material goods or to “secure refuge against a violent frontier”<sup>37</sup>.

By the end of the Hermannsburg Mission’s first decade it had established a school and a chapel and had produced singing and reading resources in *Arrernte*. Mission life became increasingly attractive for Aboriginal people as the sudden changes wrought by the pastoralists gained impact, although it was far from idyllic for everyone. Isolation, illness, droughts, severe frosts, lack of medical aid, disappointing spiritual experiences and the challenge of mediating with local station owners and police all took their toll on the original pastors who, by 1891, had departed with their families. For the Aboriginal inhabitants, this early mission period threw into stark relief the disjuncture of traditional practices and Christianity. Moses Tjalkabota, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century evangelist from Hermannsburg, was just one of the children given “no other option than totally to deny the religion of their elders if they wanted to become Christians”.<sup>38</sup> Tjalkabota recognised apparent hypocrisies but nevertheless found ways to hold “onto God’s word and the Christian songs more than onto the *tjurrunga*<sup>39</sup> and heathen songs”.<sup>40</sup>

Austin-Broos argues that although the conversion to Lutheranism at Hermannsburg was more radical than in other parts of remote Australia, the process of being “overwritten [did not] prevent a Western *Arrernte* Christian vernacular”.<sup>41</sup> Christianity “emplanted – emplaced- itself in the *Arrernte* world”<sup>42</sup> because the *Arrernte* rendered Christianity in an *Arrernte* way. Some of those practices evoked an *Arrernte* past by inscribing Biblical narratives in sites of historical significance. Carolyn Schwarz and Françoise Dussart claim

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<sup>37</sup> Schwarz Carolyn and Dussart, Françoise (2010) Christianity in Aboriginal Australia revisited, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 21: 3. See also Willis, P (1988) Riders in a chariot: aboriginal conversion to Christianity at Kunnurra, in T Swain and D Rose (eds), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Religions: 308-320; Myers, Fred (2010) All around Australia and overseas: Christianity and indigenous identities in Central Australia 1988, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 21: 110-128; Albrecht, Paul (2002) *From Mission to Church, 1877-2002: Finke River Mission*. Adelaide: Finke River Mission.

<sup>38</sup> Borgas 2011: 58.

<sup>39</sup> An object of ritual significance.

<sup>40</sup> Borgas 2011: 58.

<sup>41</sup> Austin-Broos, Diane (2010) Translating Christianity: Some keywords, events and sites in Western *Arrernte* conversion, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 21: 14-32. See also Austin-Broos, Diane (2003) The Meaning of *Pepe*: God’s Law and The Western *Arrernte*, *The Journal of Religious History* 27.3: 312.

<sup>42</sup> Myers 2010: 126.

that the processes of discontinuity and continuity do not have to be mutually exclusive in Aboriginal Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the processes of conversion that involved transcendence also remained shaped by its interaction with the everyday world<sup>44</sup> and could even “reconnect to an imagined Aboriginal past and local order based on the importance of place and country”.<sup>45</sup> Terence Ranger argues that all Indigenous societies appropriate elements of Christianity in order to use them to make sense of change.<sup>46</sup> Austin-Broos agrees, asserting that a sudden disjuncture did not necessarily occur in this isolated domestic economy in Central Australia, but occurred over time, requiring a process of integrating knowledge, experience, and belief embedded in social behaviour and observance of a local ritual order known as *pepe*, the *Arrernte* vernacular form of Lutheranism.<sup>47</sup>

Following the departure of Schwarz, Kempe and Schulze, Carl Strehlow was sent to Hermannsburg in 1894, after serving a few years as the pastor of Immanuel Synod Mission at Bethesda, near Lake Eyre in South Australia. Strehlow restored order and discipline among the non-Indigenous staff at the mission, renovated station buildings, dispensed basic medical attention, and reopened the school<sup>48</sup>. At the same time Strehlow learnt *Arrernte* and attempted to gain the confidence of the Aboriginal people. Like his predecessors, however, he initially tried to suppress all forms of traditional Aboriginal ceremonies in the mission area. Over time, he became “increasingly sympathetic to certain aspects of Aboriginal religion”<sup>49</sup> and although his strict

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<sup>43</sup> Schwarz and Dussart 2010: 5.

<sup>44</sup> Austin-Broos, Diane (2010) Translating Christianity: Some keywords, events and sites in Western Arrernte conversion, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 21: 14-32.

<sup>45</sup> Schwarz and Dussart 2010: 7.

<sup>46</sup> Ranger, Terence (2003) Christianity and Indigenous Peoples: A Personal Overview, *The Journal of Religious History* 27.3: 255 – 271.

<sup>47</sup> Austin-Broos has written widely on *pepe*, the Western Arrernte word for “paper”. It was used to refer to Christian law which involved a particular rendering of literacy and rested on a highly localised order. She asserts that the “Western Arrernte’s *pepe* was a vernacular Christianity that sought to assimilate a new and strange world to a more familiar world” (2003: 315). See also Austin-Broos 2009 and 2010; Strehlow, TGH (1978) Central Australian Man-Making Ceremonies, *The Lutheran* 10, April:10, Albrecht, Paul G E (2002) *From Mission to Church, 1877-2002: Finke River Mission*, Adelaide: Finke River Mission; and Hill, Barry (2002) *Broken Song*, Sydney: Random House.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Austin-Broos 2003, 2009 and 2010; Borgas 2011; and Strehlow Research Centre (nd) *The Strehlow Story: Missionary years to Carl Strehlow’s death in 1922*, Information Sheet No 2, Alice Springs: Strehlow Research Centre.

<sup>49</sup> Borgas 2011: 59.

Christianity prevented him from attending ceremonies, his documentation of customs and beliefs through elders was received “with great interest by European scholars”.<sup>50</sup>

Music was an essential element of life at the mission. As in other colonial missionary and evangelical movements in other parts of the world, “music served as a crucial vehicle for conversion”.<sup>51</sup> The sacred music of missionaries that accompanied the colonial process possessed power.<sup>52</sup> Being the primary text in the encounter between missionaries and the *Arrernte* people, music opened up “the acquisition of new meanings, which grew in power because of their aesthetic differences”<sup>53</sup>. Over time, the *Arrernte* became composers of the music, setting new words to introduced melodies or to Indigenous melodies - Black Lutheran hymns.<sup>54</sup> In effect, the ‘encounter’ democratised Aboriginal musical production, taking song composition outside of traditional music.<sup>55</sup> As Åse Ottosson notes, the music was “reinterpreted, reworked, and new songs composed through Aboriginal people’s everyday experiences, languages, singing styles and social organisation”.<sup>56</sup> In effect, it became *Arrernte* music which provided contemporary forms of power and status within Central Australian communities.<sup>57</sup> Fiona Magowan closely investigated this dynamic in the Methodist Hymnody created and performed by the *Yolngu* in north east Arnhem Land. She specifically examined musical memory, creativity and charisma in *Yolngu* spiritual experience. Nevertheless, the cognitive dimensions of music transmission in the mission era that she identified in that musical encounter are replicated in the Hermannsburg

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<sup>50</sup> Boyd 2011: 106. Carl Strehlow’s son, TGH Strehlow later collected many sacred and secret objects which has received much criticism. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in the various debates about the Strehlow Collection. See, for instance, Morton, John (nd) *The Strehlow Collection of Sacred Objects*, Alice Springs: Central Land Council, <http://www.clc.org.au/articles/info/strehlow/>, accessed 8 May 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Radano, Ronald and Bohlman, Philip V (eds) (2000) *Music and the racial Imagination*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press: 20, cited in Ottosson 2006:70.

<sup>52</sup> Bohlman, Phillip V (2002) *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>53</sup> Bohlman 2002: 14.

<sup>54</sup> Hurley, Andrew Wright (2012) German-Indigenous Musical Flows at Hermannsburg in the 1960s, *Shifting Sounds: Musical Flow*, Hobart: IASPMANZ Annual Conference, 5-7 December. See also Radke, Doug (nd) Cover Notes for *Hermannsburg Choir on tour*; and Radke, Doug (1967) Hermannsburg tour in retrospective, *The Lutheran* 20: 9.

<sup>55</sup> Hurley 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Ottosson 2006: 70.

<sup>57</sup> Myers 2010: 119.

case: a process which incorporates the suspension of knowledge and a cognitive reorientation; the reception of and agency in musical curiosity and transference; and the adoption of leadership and independence in music practice.<sup>58</sup>

Jon Rose notes that the music is “full of colonial cultural contradiction”,<sup>59</sup> being both part of the dislocation and disruption of the Aboriginal population but also having the capacity to nurture them through times of persecution and extreme physical hardship. Andrew Wright Hurley has recently argued that the lack of appreciation of this paradox by non-Indigenous Australian audiences impinged on its reception in the 1960s,<sup>60</sup> and, I suggest, continues today as is revealed in later discussions and in the Coda. Field research also showed that various members of the Aboriginal choirs have composed and continue to write gospel songs and/or translate hymns into *Arrernte*, *Pitjantjatjara* and *Luritja*. Borgas also remarked on this continuing practice:

In the past, choirs from Hermannsburg, Areyonga and Ernabella have sung the hymns from [previous hymnals]. But today, a new generation of song-writers and singers have once again been composing their own songs to worship and sing praises to God. About 30 songs from the Areyonga and Docker River Gospel Singers are included in this new Pitjantjatjara hymnal.<sup>61</sup>

Based on her research at Hopevale in Cape York, Queensland, Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg similarly argues that Aboriginal choirs historically construct, perform and negotiate their Indigenous Christian identities through hymnody and choral singing.<sup>62</sup> She suggests that musical styles in Hopevale have been Indigenising while, at the same time, both globalising and modernising after many years of conservative Lutheran musical and spiritual worship. Swijghuisen Reigersberg maintains that the performance of Aboriginal concepts in religious songs may be one way in which the singers might

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<sup>58</sup> Magowan, Fiona (2012) The Intercultural Dynamics of Missions and Music in Yolgnu Spiritual Experience, in Suzel Reily and Jonathan Dueck (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 45-68.

<sup>59</sup> Rose 2008: 11.

<sup>60</sup> Hurley 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Borgas, Rob (2010) Preface”, *Nyiri Inmatjara Lutheran Uwankaraku (Pitjantjatjara Lutheran Hymnal)*, Alice Springs: Finke River Mission of the Lutheran Church of Australia Inc: x.

<sup>62</sup> Swijghuisen Reigersberg, Muriel (2009a) *Choral Singing and the Construction of Australian Aboriginal Identities: an applied ethnomusicological study in Hopevale, Northern Queensland, Australia*, PhD thesis, London: Roehampton University, University of Surrey; and Swijghuisen Reigersberg, Muriel (2009b) “We are Lutherans in Germany”: change and performance in Australian Aboriginal Christian identities through history, place and song, *British Forum of Ethnomusicology Conference*, Liverpool, United Kingdom, John Moores University: Liverpool.

reconcile their localised mission history with their modern identities as Aboriginal Christians. In the same way, Magowan suggests that Indigenous Christian songs embody faith as cultural expression, recognising that expressions of emotion and sentiments of country are also an integral part of Indigenous Christian worship across Australia.<sup>63</sup>

Hermannsburg is referred to in *Arrernte as Ntaria*. The Hermannsburg Choir, now known as the *Ntaria* Choir, is one of the most popularly known Central Australian Aboriginal choirs.<sup>64</sup> Their musical practice emerged from the teaching of hymns translated into *Arrernte* from those early mission days. Tjalkabota recalled that “Mr Kempe taught us the right melody with the violin. Schulze also taught us”.<sup>65</sup> Strehlow continued the musical practice. By 1922 the localised repertoire was being performed by a four part choir: soprano, alto, tenor and bass. In the 1960s the Hermannsburg Choir competed in Eisteddfods in Darwin and toured southern states. While the Eisteddfods and tours were important means for members of the Hermannsburg community to travel beyond Central Australia and to engage in political action around the time of the 1967 Referendum,<sup>66</sup> their music making was primarily not meant for outside audiences, but for church and social endeavours such as singing around campfires. Today the local

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<sup>63</sup> Magowan, Fiona (2007) Globalisation and Indigenous Christianity: Translocal Sentiments in Australian Aboriginal Christian Songs, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 14: 479.

<sup>64</sup> The Ernabella Choir from South Australia is also well known. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss this choir in detail. The choir emerged from a Presbyterian Mission for *Pitjantjatjara* people. See, for instance, Palmer, Dave (2010) *Ngapartji Ngapartji: the consequence of kindness*, Big hART, <http://bighart.org/media/file/Evaluations/Ngapartji%20Evaluation-consequences%20of%20kindness.pdf>, accessed 19/1/2012; Pybus, Carol Ann (2012) ‘We grew up this place’: *Ernabella Mission 1937-1974*, PhD thesis, University of Tasmania; Westwood, Matthew (2007) Religious choirs a constant across desert generations, *The Australian*, September 14, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/religious-choirs-a-constant-across-desert-generations>, accessed 19/1/2012.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in Westwood 2007.

<sup>66</sup> The 1967 Referendum contained two questions. The second question was to determine whether two references in the Australian Constitution, which discriminated against Aboriginal people, should be removed. It was overwhelmingly supported by the Australian people and passed. For a greater treatment of the 1967 Referendum see, for instance, McGregor, Russell (2011) *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press; and National Archives of Australia (2013) *The 1967 referendum – Fact sheet 150*, Canberra: Australian Government <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs150.aspx>, accessed 4 May 2013.



choir operates as the *Ntaria* Ladies Choir, under its “bush conductor”,<sup>67</sup> David Roennfeldt, and continues to perform in and outside of Central Australia. This gendered nature of the gospel and church choirs in Central Australia is now common. Male musicians are generally more interested in country, rock and reggae music.<sup>68</sup>

Like the arrival of the first Lutheran pastors, the departure of Strehlow, after he became seriously ill in 1922, was also an event of ‘epic proportions’. It was captured in the Gordon Kalton Williams and Andrew Schultz cantata “Journey to Horseshoe Bend”, based on T G H Strehlow’s novel of the same name,<sup>69</sup> at the Sydney Opera House in 2003<sup>70</sup> which featured The *Ntaria* Ladies Choir. Their voices were said to “run like the dry riverbed through the instrumental forces of the work”.<sup>71</sup> Boyd less poetically noted the singers’ use of the chest voice, rather than head voice, and a focussed nasal sound rich in harmonics, thus “appropriating the chorale melody to their own sense of tuning and timbre and spinning it into their complex and sophisticated knowledge systems”.<sup>72</sup> In her analysis of the cantata, Boyd observed the use of the “emotive Aboriginal singing of *Karrerraiworlamparinj*, the Lutheran chorale ‘*Wachet Auf*’ (‘Sleepers Awake’), used most famously by J.S. Bach in his Cantata 140”.<sup>73</sup> Boyd also commented on the presence at the Opera House performance of some of the descendants of the original Hermannsburg Choir which had sang to Strehlow on his departure.<sup>74</sup> She added that the

rich blend of Christian and Aranda ethnography placed side by side in the novel make it a fertile source for the creation of Williams’ and Schultz’s epic ‘symphonic cantata’—a work which includes the participation of Aboriginal performers alongside their non-indigenous peers, on an equal footing [...] with the European-styled singing voices of the Sydney Philharmonic Choir,

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<sup>67</sup> Cited in Westwood 2007.

<sup>68</sup> For a thorough treatment of Central Australian male musical expressions see Ottosson 2006, 2008 and 2010.

<sup>69</sup> Strehlow, TGH (1969) *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson. NB TGH Strehlow was Carl Strehlow’s son.

<sup>70</sup> For an analysis of the cantata see Boyd 2011. A review of the CD of the cantata has also been undertaken. See Jones, Anthony Linden (2005) Review of *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, by Andrew Schultz & Gordon Kalton Williams, *Music Forum: Journal of the Music Council of Australia* 11.4: 76-77.

<sup>71</sup> Jones 2005: 77.

<sup>72</sup> Boyd 2011: 109.

<sup>73</sup> Boyd 2011: 106.

<sup>74</sup> Boyd 2011: 106. See also the liner notes of the CD written by Williams.

*presenting the possibility of the co-existence of both cultural difference and a coming together of indigenous and non-indigenous Australia.*<sup>75</sup>

Journey to Horseshoe Bend attracted criticism however. It was suggested, for example, that the singing of Bach chorales by the *Ntaria* Choir branded the work as ‘Aboriginal’, which was demeaning to the choir members and was “therefore ethically and culturally inappropriate”.<sup>76</sup> Williams, however, responded that although the critics saw the choir’s performance as evidence of an Indigenous culture being swallowed by the dominant culture, “I think those [critics] would now have a job convincing people [from *Ntaria*] that this is not part of their tradition”.<sup>77</sup> Boyd was reassured by Austin-Broos:

...that these Aboriginal women would have been very surprised to be told that it was inappropriate for them to sing Bach chorales, for they had been doing so for nearly a century. Using texts translated into Aranda<sup>78</sup> by Carl Strehlow, sung by their parents, grand-parents and great grand-parents, these Aboriginal women felt a distinct sense of ownership of this material [...] That Aranda culture has survived at all was partly a consequence of the coming of the missionaries whose teaching was in the local language(s), which itself became a vehicle for the survival and later revival of indigenous knowledge.<sup>79</sup>

Aboriginal religious choirs have therefore been a constant for generations,<sup>80</sup> an aspect of the “ongoing intercultural dynamic of interaction, mutual influences and continuous ‘othering’ in Central Australia”.<sup>81</sup> The *Ntaria* Choir and the Areyonga Gospel Singers have recorded CDs<sup>82</sup> which highlight the musical tradition which draws from their Christian beliefs and the colour and tones of their Aboriginal languages.<sup>83</sup> That tonality borrows from regional ancestral singing styles, one that comes from the throat and nose “with little portamento glides from pitch to pitch and with an organic sense of rhythm”.<sup>84</sup> While many of the choirs can sing without accompaniment, the use of accompaniment is also common with keyboard and guitar the preferred instruments. Their

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<sup>75</sup> Boyd, 2011: 96-109. Emphasis added.

<sup>76</sup> Boyd 2011: 110.

<sup>77</sup> Williams, Gordon Kalton (2003) Personal communication, cited in Boyd 2011: 111.

<sup>78</sup> A former orthography for *Arrernte* and sometimes is still in use.

<sup>79</sup> Boyd 2011: 110.

<sup>80</sup> Westwood 2007.

<sup>81</sup> Ottosson 2010: 282.

<sup>82</sup> They include *Ekarlta nai!* (Be Strong!) (1999) and *Tjina Kngarra* (Best of Friends) (2011) by the *Ntaria* Ladies Choir; and *Areyonga Gospel Singers, Volume 4* (2010) by the Areyonga Gospel Singers.

<sup>83</sup> Westwood 2007.

<sup>84</sup> Rose 2003. See also Ottosson 2006: 70.

performances tend to adhere to the characteristics of the Desert Gospel style which is generally emotionally sparse and with highly composed bodily expression.<sup>85</sup>

Most recently, the *Ntaria* Choir featured in the *Big hArt* production, *Namatjira*, based on the life of the famous *Arrernte* watercolourist Albert Namatjira.<sup>86</sup> These current members of the choir have memories of singing with their grandparents who were members of the Hermannsburg Choir, when singing the repertoire of gospel songs at home and at bush camps was part of the everyday. Singing remains important. Gwen Ingkamala said “It makes me feel good inside [...] Singing makes you busy from other things, bad things that you see and talk about”.<sup>87</sup> As I later discuss this removal from the challenges to life through singing is also important to the singers of *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala* based in Alice Springs, many of whom were born in *Ntaria*, and the community choirs from Areyonga and Titjikala. Before discussing these Aboriginal Ladies Choirs in more detail, it is necessary to consider other aspects to the community choral culture in Central Australia.

### ***Community Choral Music in Alice Springs***

While the Desert Gospel music of Central Australian Aboriginal communities and their choirs has a long tradition, non-Indigenous community choral music in Alice Springs also has a history. An a cappella scene of the depth and institutional support seen in south east and south west Australia did not occur here, but nevertheless there was a culture of community singing which included a cappella choirs and ensembles. The choirs were part of the “loud and healthy live local music scene”<sup>88</sup> of the mid-1980s. Amongst the mix were the Country and Western Club, the Folk Club, musical styles from the USA brought by the American community,<sup>89</sup> classical ensembles, rhythm and blues

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<sup>85</sup> See also Ottosson 2006: 70.

<sup>86</sup> Created by Scott Rankin with the Namatjira Family, *Namatjira* was more than a touring theatrical work; it was a “multilayered creature”<sup>86</sup> that included support for *Ngurratjuta/Many Hands Art Centre* where many of Namatjira’s descendents create and sell their artwork. See <http://www.namatjira.bighart.org/>. *Big hArt* has also worked with the Ernabella Choir, another internationally known Aboriginal Choir from South Australia, in the production *Ngapartji! Ngapartji!*. See <http://www.ngapartji.org/>.

<sup>87</sup> Westwood 2007.

<sup>88</sup> Wells 2011: 80.

<sup>89</sup> Many Americans work at the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap, a controversial USA/Australian base near Alice Springs. See, for instance, Welch, Dylan (2011) *The spy who came in from the*

musicians, jazz bands, numerous Aboriginal bands emerging through the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA),<sup>90</sup> as well as a town choir, a trade union choir,<sup>91</sup> and the Choral Society.

Jude Mapleson, an original and ongoing member of *Asante Sana*, emphasised that community music is a part of the fabric of the vibrant cultural and intellectual life of Alice Springs. Mapleson described the Alice Springs Junior Singers, who had a history of international performances, as a “huge movement in a cappella singing here in Alice Springs”.<sup>92</sup> Liese Gordon, a member of *Asante Sana* and regional school music coordinator, also spoke of the significance of the Alice Springs Junior Singers, recalling their workshops with Melbourne based a cappella group Coco’s Lunch in the 1990s and the leadership of Monica Christian who taught the young singers aurally so that both competent sight readers and others would learn to develop the fine ear necessary for tight harmonies.<sup>93</sup> A former member of the Alice Springs Junior Singers, Anne Schmidt, was now a member of *Asante Sana* and had told Gordon she was thoroughly enjoying the opportunity to be again singing in that fashion.

Liese Gordon’s musical contribution to Alice Springs is both well-known and highly regarded. While her musical environment has been one grounded in school based music and choral performance, she has participated in a number of bands and vocal ensembles and taken a leading role in some musical groups. Gordon led the town choir in the 1980s, when the Town Council decided they should support a choir and, although she was not paid, Gordon took on the role of musical director. Not having been immersed in the a cappella scene she did not have the same regard for the mantra that ‘everyone can sing’. Having an ear for perfect pitch she found the town choir “was a bit too hard, because I had people who couldn’t sing in tune [...] Everyone can [sing] but there are some people who can’t”.<sup>94</sup> She clarified this later saying that surrounded by others who

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heat, *The Age*, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/the-spy-who-came-in-from-the-heat-20110624-1gjbv.htm>, accessed 9/01/13.

<sup>90</sup> Wells 2011: 90.

<sup>91</sup> Peachy, Bill (2007) Personal comment, cited in Lee, Nicole 2007, African freedom songs light up the desert. 2007 Desert Festival, *ABC Local Stories*, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2007/09/11/2029461.htm>, accessed 8 November 2009.

<sup>92</sup> Mapleson, Jude (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 14/09/10).

<sup>93</sup> Gordon, Liese (2011) Personal conversation (Interview 6/05/11).

<sup>94</sup> Gordon 2011.

can carry a harmony some people can improve their own skills but there are others who cannot.<sup>95</sup>

Jude Mapleson, a folk music enthusiast, was introduced to harmony singing through a friend who invited her to sing in a Sweet Adelines<sup>96</sup> choir in the 1980s called Desert Harmony. The choir, and the quartet that emerged from it, called Pizzazz, performed at Eisteddfods and folk festivals. She was passionate about singing in harmony: “[It] has to be one of the most joyous sounds in the universe. I love it”.<sup>97</sup> When *Emma*, a Deckchair Theatre Production, played in Alice Springs during its 1990s Australian tour, Mapleson joined *La Gioie Della Donne*, the Perth-based Italian women’s choir led by Kavisha Mazzella. Her love of harmony singing also compelled her to join the community choir Friends of Connor, directed by Andy Pringle; The Black Cockatoos, a street performing harmony group; and Cafe MD1, an a cappella choir led by Marg Collins.

Other members of *Asante Sana* were also active in this a cappella environment in Alice Springs. Kim Moloney had also been a member of Desert Harmony, taking over the leadership role once the American musical director returned to the USA. As a child, Moloney had sung in Eisteddfods and had been a member of the National Girls’ Choir and other harmony groups. As an adult she has sung with various ensembles over the years, including most recently, The Honeyjoys, whose membership included other *Asante Sana* members, Joy Taylor, Kalikamurti Suich, Jo Ruby, Kate Lawrence, Christa Barjen, Alicia Buchanan, and local musician, Dominique Castello. All of these women had previously sung in choirs or ensembles either in Alice or elsewhere. Taylor, Ruby and Lawrence, for instance, had all been members of the Adelaide based South Australian Trade Union Choir. Other *Asante Sana* singers had been members of choirs or singing groups elsewhere before coming to Alice Springs. Robyn Manley, for example, had sung with The Cyrenes in Canberra.<sup>98</sup> After arriving in Alice Springs she joined the Choral

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<sup>95</sup> Gordon, Liese (2012) Personal conversation (Interview 27/10/12).

<sup>96</sup> The Sweet Adelines is an international barbershop style choir movement, originating from the USA.

<sup>97</sup> Mapelson 2010.

<sup>98</sup> Robyn Manley and I had both been members of The Cyrenes, a women’s choir in Canberra in the 1990s. I was not aware of Manley’s membership of *Asante Sana* until I saw her at the first rehearsal I attended in 2010.

Society. Manley spoke about her enjoyment of the more formal arrangements preferred by the Choral Society. She commented that it was:

a great joy because we've done some quite challenging pieces and it's a delight when it comes together. It's [...] deepened both my appreciation for music and my delight in singing. And also expanded both my repertoire and range. And my confidence.<sup>99</sup>

A number of *Asante Sana* members had previously been members of the Choral Society. It had been an active and vital component to community music making in Alice Springs until just after the new millennium, when it ceased to operate. The establishment of annual mid-year treks from Melbourne to Alice Springs by Morris Stuart with his artist wife, Barbara Stuart, sparked the creation of a community choir that filled the choral vacuum.

### ***Asante Sana***

[The] 70-strong *Asante Sana* choir, made up of Alice residents, that the enthusiastic Stuart manages to somehow create each year, [thrilled the audience]. I highly recommend that people make the trip out to the magical Ormiston Gorge next Sunday to soak up the fine voices of the *Asante Sana* Choir.<sup>100</sup>

In 2005 Morris and Barbara (Barb) Stuart began what has become an annual mid-year trek to Alice Springs from their home in Melbourne. The retreat was initially designed to provide Barb with site-specific engagement for her visual arts. *Asante Sana* began in 2006 when Barb suggested a musical project for Morris. *Asante Sana* is Swahili for "Thank you very much". As the name of the choir suggests it sings a repertoire dominated by South African gospel and freedom songs. *Asante Sana* formed when the Stuarts invited singers to join a community choir for an a cappella concert at Trepkina Gorge – a natural amphitheatre near Alice Springs – as part of the 2006 Alice Desert Festival. The drive for membership is well remembered:

I think Morris came to Alice Springs and just walked around the streets asking people if they'd like to sing in a choir and the usual networks of Alice Springs kicked in. People started coming and suddenly there was sixty, seventy people singing.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Manley, Robyn (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 14/09/10).

<sup>100</sup> Tjilpi 2012. See also <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Asante-Sana-Choir/206866396020070> and <http://asantesana.wikispaces.com?Introducing+Asante+Sana>. Last accessed 5 June 2013.

<sup>101</sup> Peachy 2007.

Mark Hussey also noted that it was through ‘word of mouth’ that he joined, especially drawn by the choir’s focus on South African music “[...] that linked me in to songs like ‘*Sensenina*’ and ‘*Nkosi*’”,<sup>102</sup> two songs he had previously performed with the South Australian Trade Union Choir. Morris Stuart commented that he was not surprised by the way the choir evolved around personal networks:

One of the things I’ve discovered about Alice is that nothing should surprise you. So no, I’m not surprised that it spread by word of mouth because it seems that’s the way this place works. There’s a real sense of community and it’s a small place with a lot of very creative people.<sup>103</sup>

Since then *Asante Sana* has continued as an a cappella performance choir with a significant profile and program during the winter/spring months. It generally performs three times during the Alice Desert Festival – in the opening parade, in the Desert Voice Concert, and in a performance of its own supported by other musicians, often in one of the acoustically enhancing gorges that lie to the east or west of the town. The choir also performs at numerous community and corporate events, and in community spaces, including the hospital and the Old Timers Hostel.

In addition to his musical leadership, Morris Stuart is a pastor, theologian, social scientist and teacher. Born in Guyana of African heritage, he was educated in London before migrating to Australia with his Australian born wife. Together, the Stuarts have a long term engagement with the Yuendumu community and other Indigenous communities in Central Australia, supporting “Aboriginal aspirations and working with their leaders”.<sup>104</sup> Morris Stuart is dedicated to facilitating improved musicality in Central Australia. His endeavour is to “draw in people from different cultures and ages to community arts through singing”<sup>105</sup> and this is grounded in *Asante Sana*’s no-audition policy. Stuart is a fine musician. With some singing training but much self-taught musical skill development, he has led various community choirs and community singing workshops in Victoria. He and Barb Stuart joined the anti-apartheid movement during their time in London. They sang freedom songs during this era and joined a number of small ensembles. As *Wa Mutunga*, a vocal sextet formed when the Stuarts are joined by

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<sup>102</sup> Hussey, Mark (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 6/09/10).

<sup>103</sup> Stuart, Morris (2007) Personal comment, cited in Lee 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Stuart 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Stuart, Morris (2008) *Asante Sana*,

<http://asantesana.wikispaces.com?Introducing+Asante+Sana>, accessed 4 June 2009.

their four adult children, they have supported *Asante Sana* at some of the Alice Springs performances.

Stuart insists that aural transmission is the most ideal pedagogy for choirs. He demands the best from the *Asante Sana* members, insisting on commitment and intensive rehearsal during its season – generally every Thursday evening and every fourth Saturday, mostly held at the Flynn Church in Todd Mall. Extra rehearsals and other rehearsal spaces are scheduled when necessary. He has the “ears of an elephant”<sup>106</sup> and will quickly pick up mistakes. Conversely, when the choir gets it right, his response to their musicality is one of joyous, boundless enthusiasm. Stuart is mesmerising to watch. His tall, elegant body dances; he cannot limit the keeping of meter, the modulation of volume, to his hands or arms. The choir becomes his instrument and he plays it with passion. His dark face glows with concentration, evident in the sweat beading down his face, his neck, soaking into the towel that is an essential tool of his craft. He cajoles, he cries, he drills the choir mercilessly but as their voices blend, rise and fall, creating exquisite harmonies and nuances of emotion, they know it is worth the effort Stuart and they invest. This insistence on fine musicality, combined with the choir’s performance of songs with a social justice message, is highly regarded<sup>107</sup> and listeners often comment on the choir’s ‘authentic’ sound.

Given Stuart’s background, African freedom and gospel songs feature strongly in the ‘Afro-fusion’ repertoire. He insists that

[i]t’s not only [Barb’s and my] connection with the story, but the story itself. And the music itself. And it’s accessible. For some reason South African music has got some really great SATB<sup>108</sup> arrangements; it’s layered, even the more complex; it’s conversational; it’s emotional; it’s message music; it arises like all great stories from a struggle [...] So, yeah, it’s the music and the story and the simple but beautiful tunes and harmonies. I can’t think of a single piece of music from South Africa that I haven’t liked. And there’s a lot of other music from other parts of Africa I don’t understand, but I don’t have any difficulty with South African music [...] And it’s nothing to us to celebrate that music and the history behind it .<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Hussey 2010.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Tjilpi 2012.

<sup>108</sup> Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass – four part harmonies for mixed choirs.

<sup>109</sup> Stuart 2010.



Stuart believes that “African freedom songs tell a deeply human story”.<sup>110</sup> He claims that the songs reflect all human emotions, including suffering, pathos, anger and hope. He believes this music can be a force for inspiring people because “I think it’s an abiding message and a particularly important message for this time in Australia’s history”.<sup>111</sup> Stuart felt that bringing South African music to Central Australia was well placed, appealing to the “humanitarian cohort of people who live here”. He also saw a connection to the story, the triumph, and the hope of South African people specifically with the Indigenous communities in Central Australia. Singer Laura Baird agreed:

[I] love the music. The songs are great. And that history as well. The African songs have such a history and like, for Morris, [and] for Africa and the whole world really, considering that a lot of them are freedom songs. It’s a universal thing in a way. Even though they are about specific places in specific languages there’s still something to learn and being here as well. The same kind of history. Not the same history but similar in terms of land and people.<sup>112</sup>

This connection is rendered symbolically in the performance costume of *Asante Sana*; a black poncho with printed fabric panels that represent the bringing together of Central Australia and South Africa.<sup>113</sup> Certainly the focus on South African music was a great attraction for the membership. One of the younger male singers, Wanyama Whiton, commented:

I definitely have favourites. It’s the lively most African sounding ones that get me the most. I enjoy singing the English ones, [like] *Fear No More* [...] but I get most out of the lively ones. Yeah. I guess what I like the most about it is just the experience of it. Like Morris is pretty good at conjuring that up and everybody’s clicking with it, and yeah, I think the African songs do that the best.<sup>114</sup>

The repertoire also includes songs from other traditions such as ‘*Oh Bawa*’ from Fiji and ‘*Äkamise Aeg* (Awakening Time)’ by Rene Espere from Estonia; contemporary songs and ballads including ‘Angel’ by Sarah McLachlan and ‘Let It Go’ an arrangement based on a Michael Leunig poem by Suzann Frisk ; compositions by Stuart such as ‘Desert Lament’, and an arrangement of ‘Fear No More the Heat of the Sun’ by William Shakespeare; and

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<sup>110</sup> Stuart, Morris (2008a) Personal comment. Cited in Nancarrow, Kirsty, 2008, African choir, *ABC Online*, Stateline Northern Territory, <http://www.abce.net.au/cgi-bin/common/printfriendly.pl?http://www.abc.net.au/stateline>, accessed on 5 June 2009.

<sup>111</sup> Stuart 2007.

<sup>112</sup> Baird 2010.

<sup>113</sup> The poncho and its design features were created by Jude Mapleson, who is a prominent artist in Alice Springs.

<sup>114</sup> Whiton, Wanyama (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 16/09/10).

locally inspired material such as ‘Alice, Alice, It’s You’ by Letty Scott, ‘*Ngurawatjilpa*’ by Frank Yamma,<sup>115</sup> and more recently, ‘Connections’ by Ted Egan,<sup>116</sup> which includes a number of Central Australian languages.<sup>117</sup>

True to popular discourse, Stuart declares the choir contributes to the wellbeing of its members, claiming that through singing they are energised and physically and emotionally healthier.<sup>118</sup> He added that for many of the choir members involved in working on the ground with Indigenous communities, the choir provided:

a good vehicle for them to express, to get relief from the frustrations of it too. It keeps your hope up and I think also all music [and] singing in the choir has a very healing function [...] great therapy [...] I think it is a deeply spiritual exercise. I’m not trying to proselytize to anyone but I think the music reaches people in a way that they’re not even thinking about.<sup>119</sup>

Singers agreed that the choir brought psychophysical benefits. Mapleson commented that “The endorphins must be good. Maybe I should sing in a choir every day of the week”.<sup>120</sup> Other comments included: “It’s such a joyful thing to do. It’s an uplifting thing.”<sup>121</sup>; “Singing magnifies [...] the emotions.[...] It does lift the soul. And it is be cherished and used.”<sup>122</sup>; “[Choir] is my self-care [...] you’re there to sing, which is what you’re giving, but it’s kind of a chance to [...] feed myself”.<sup>123</sup>

At the same time, members articulated the development of musical skills. Unlike *Madjitil Moorna*, the primary focus is on singing. Stuart aims for perfection and though many are challenged by his methods of long hours of repetition and specific

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<sup>115</sup> For a list of the 2010 repertoire see Appendix 5.

<sup>116</sup> Ted Egan, and his wife Nerys Evans, are members of *Asante Sana*. Ted Egan is well known in the Northern Territory and beyond. He is a “singer, songwriter, raconteur, world champion Fosterphone player, academic, historian, [former] superintendent at Yuendumu, old bushie, [former] Administrator of the Northern Territory, film maker [and] entrepreneur” (Wells 2011: 82). Egan and Evans have some impact on *Asante Sana*— they support choir performances with solos, the choir supports Egan’s solo performances, and the couple hosted the welcome event for the Soweto Gospel Choir in 2011. Egan’s big tenor voice is noticeably absent when he is not singing. It can create a sudden vacuum if you are singing beside him, as I did in 2010.

<sup>117</sup> Moloney, Kim (2012) Personal conversation (Interview 27/10/12).

<sup>118</sup> Stuart 2008.

<sup>119</sup> Stuart, Morris (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 6/08/10).

<sup>120</sup> Mapleson 2010.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, Henry (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 4/09/10).

<sup>122</sup> Chappell, Deb (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 16/09/10).

<sup>123</sup> Baird, Laura (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 4/09/10).

identification of troubled sections, even individuals, most singers appreciate what they gain. Smith clearly appreciated the focus on song and singing technique:

This is my third or fourth season [...] I love singing with other people. One of the things I love about it is that you don't have to get into people's agendas, people's opinions about things. You just sing. And you all go to this one point, where you make one sound together. And I like that sort of thing because, as an artist, I am very individual and basically I don't go into groups at all. I do my own thing [...] and being in this is a good thing, as far as the group goes. Because the group has a focus. If it was a group having meetings and everybody was putting their two bobs worth in, I'd lose interest in that [...] Anyway, that's one of the main reasons I like singing in the choir. And also having been in the choir I've learnt a lot. The strength of my voice has improved. My ear, I feel my ear has improved. And I'm starting to get to learn about the harmony. My ear is starting to pick it up. Like I can do an octave, above or below, no problem but I had to do thirds before I came to the choir, I'd really struggle with that. So that's the thing that really pleases me, I'm learning. So it's improving my voice, and my ability, and my musical appreciation [...] I try to get things right because that's an important part of it, to get things right so that it blends with the others when singing. So it's challenging and uplifting, which is good. And I like discipline very much.<sup>124</sup>

Other singers also spoke about the improvement they had made in understanding and singing in harmony. Moloney talked about the deep embodiment of the songs that came through the aural technique, commenting that she sometimes found it "bizarre" that years later she could remember "every note and every word".<sup>125</sup> Trained music teachers Liese Gordon and Deb Chappell also spoke of their regard for Stuart's aural technique and his insistence on learning songs without scored music and, after an initial introduction, without the written lyrics. Gordon commented that although she had initially struggled without the "paper as a reference"<sup>126</sup>, she was aware that Stuart made changes within the rehearsal process and therefore "learning it together as a choir makes it really gel".<sup>127</sup> Chappell also articulated the benefit:

[If] you have the music, or the words, people will use them instead of looking at [the musical director]. So it just creates this wall [...] I have really, really enjoyed being in *Asante Sana*. And you know it makes a difference to have someone whose roots are in that music [...] What the people come for is the African songs.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Smith 2010.

<sup>125</sup> Moloney 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Gordon 2012.

<sup>127</sup> Gordon 2012.

<sup>128</sup> Chappell 2010.

Stuart's approach included pushing people out of their comfort zones, taking on responsibilities for various components of percussion or solo lines. While Barb Stuart often took on solo roles, others, particularly Moloney and Manley had been "put on the spot".<sup>129</sup> Moloney felt that soloists enhanced the choir and that it was "magic when it happens"<sup>130</sup> but felt that the selection process could be improved to give more singers the opportunity. Whiton recalled being singled out to take on a solo:

[And] I struggled at the beginning, making it happen because I wasn't expecting it to happen. He threw me into the deep end. We were singing and then suddenly he was pointing at me and beckoning and I did that thing of looking over your shoulder. I didn't know what he wanted me to sing or the notes to sing it [...] But I figured it out. And I'm glad of it. I sort of wish he had prepared me and said "Look, do you want to do this thing?" [But] he just wants you to throw yourself into it, intuit it I guess, and it inspires confidence when you get it.<sup>131</sup>

In 2010 *Asante Sana's* members were predominantly white, middle-class professionals, mostly women, with some local African residents also attracted to it. Its membership included teachers, artists, health workers, public servants, students, parents, young professionals, and grandparents. Despite Stuart's religious beliefs and the rehearsal venue, the choir is a secular one and members are not necessarily Christian. Members came from both untrained and trained musical backgrounds. In 2010 membership numbers were down compared to previous years. The general suggestion was that the word 'commitment' had been over emphasised during the recruitment drive that year and many younger members and those who worked more frequently 'out bush' decided to opt out for the year. Membership numbers would swell again the following year, however, due to the project with the Soweto Gospel Choir.

There were no Indigenous members during the time of my field research although a few Indigenous people had sung in the choir previously, generally agency workers from interstate. Stuart commented that "When we started, we wanted Aboriginal people to be involved in the choir, but it is very difficult to organise because [they have] a totally different social rhythm".<sup>132</sup> However, *Asante Sana* has more readily "stepped across the

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<sup>129</sup> Moloney 2012.

<sup>130</sup> Moloney 2012.

<sup>131</sup> Whiton 2010.

<sup>132</sup> Stuart 2010.

Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal divide”<sup>133</sup> through Stuart’s willingness to accept invitations to work with the regional Aboriginal choirs and through his curatorship of the Desert Voice Concert of the Alice Desert Festival. Essential ingredients of the annual Desert Voice Concerts are the Aboriginal Ladies Choirs.

### ***Aboriginal Ladies Choirs***

I’ve been affected and overwhelmed and trying to work out why someone like me, whose [...] been singing in choirs for forty years, all of a sudden is a mess because of what I’ve just heard. It’s an emotional response that I can’t really divine [...] There’s parts of music, there’s parts of the community, there’s parts of just the vibrational effect of the way they sing and language that I don’t understand [It’s] not like anything I’ve heard before [...] And part of it is the beauty of the music and part of it was the privilege of hearing how they just so effortlessly sang as one [...] I just want to hear them again and again; to feel that again. And I really hope that they can share it with more people.<sup>134</sup>

The impacts of exploration, pastoralism, and Lutheran missionary projects that “provided a new way of being and ritual order that propelled the *Arrernte* toward a sedentary life [at *Ntaria*]”,<sup>135</sup> were also experienced by those people who came to live on other mission centres and cattle stations in Central Australia. Areyonga and Titjikala are two of these. I first met the women in these choirs, together with the Alice Springs based choir, *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala*,<sup>136</sup> at the inaugural Big Sing in the Desert<sup>137</sup> in 2010.

Community music leader Rachel Hore approached Morris Stuart in early 2010 to jointly lead The Big Sing weekend workshop held at the Ross River Resort, near Alice Springs in late July. It presented an opportunity to bring the regional Aboriginal singers into a national gathering. Songs were exchanged and shared, and new material introduced. The Big Sing has become a significant component to the evolution of the musical interaction in Central Australia and is the focus of the Coda that follows this chapter.

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<sup>133</sup> Stuart 2008.

<sup>134</sup> Grahame, Amanda (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 12/09/10).

<sup>135</sup> Austin-Broos 2009: 26.

<sup>136</sup> *Arrernte* for “Praise in Many Tongues” or “Praise in Many Languages”, although more often translated as “Praise in Many Voices” and, occasionally, “Harmony in Many Languages”.

<sup>137</sup> Henceforth often referred to as The Big Sing.

Although Desert Gospel is a tradition to which the Aboriginal Ladies Choirs “hold tight”,<sup>138</sup> members of the choirs had also been actively seeking to improve their musicality and expand repertoire since the 2008 “Many Roads One Voice” project of the Alice Desert Festival. “There was a desire to follow up [Many Roads One Voice] and have singers, black and white, spend more time singing together, learning repertoire and learning from each other”, explained Rachel Hore.<sup>139</sup> Hore had subsequently worked on a singing and leadership project with the Titjikala Choir in 2009 and devised The Big Sing project. The Aboriginal singers were keen to work with that “singing lady”<sup>140</sup> and with Stuart, both of whom had been pivotal to the success of Many Roads One Voice.

Although not officially a leader in Many Roads One Voice, Stuart was instrumental in enabling the combined choral event to reach its potential. He supported the four official musical leaders – Kutcha Edwards, Emma Donovan, Kavisha Mazzella and Rachel Hore, and *Asante Sana’s* strong harmonies were vital to its success. Patrick McCloskey, a former CAAMA Music Development Manager, who had devised Many Roads One Voice, had hoped an outcome like The Big Sing would eventuate from Many Roads One Voice.

He was aware that:

there has been a fairly limited diet of musical information going to Aboriginal communities [...] I think there’s been this thing in Australia about Indigenous communities, where we have this idealised utopian kind of view of Indigenous cultures and we want to keep them pure, how they were pre-contact, and we deny them the flexibility of knowledge and information from outside. All the communities that I’ve worked with have always felt that their cultures are growing, organic things always moving and changing.<sup>141</sup>

McCloskey’s comment attempts to articulate the tension between Central Australian traditional music, contemporary music which integrates non-Indigenous musics, and, at the same time, the limited exposure to other diverse musics, particularly in regard to choral practices. The Many Roads One Voice project drew on McCloskey’s assessment that the strongest Aboriginal bands were emerging from communities where Gospel singing remained strong. He was:

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<sup>138</sup> Sleath, Emma (2011) Areyonga welcomes Soweto, *Local Stories*, Alice Springs: ABC, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2011/05/04/3207771/htm>, accessed 18 November 2012.

<sup>139</sup> Hore, Rachel (2009a) *Tijikala Choir Development with Rachel Hore 7<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> October 2009*, unpublished document in possession of author.

<sup>140</sup> This was commonly used by the Aboriginal singers to identify Rachel Hore.

<sup>141</sup> McCloskey, Patrick (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 5/08/10).

pretty mindful of the fact that Indigenous singing is the focal point. Historically in Indigenous communities there weren't a lot of Indigenous instruments [...] so the voice had some pretty resonant meaning in singing country and ceremonial stuff".<sup>142</sup>

Performed following the Apology to the Stolen Generations and after the Northern Territory Intervention<sup>143</sup> had been taken over by the Rudd Labor Government, Many Roads One Voice was seen to reflect and celebrate the diverse cultures present in Alice Springs. It was conceived to "give people an opportunity to deeply connect on a level beyond politics, language, and prejudice"<sup>144</sup> and to speak "with one voice for equality and justice for all".<sup>145</sup> The song material for Many Roads One Voice paid special tribute to Indigenous contributions to Central Australia music through choral arrangements of many classic CAAMA recordings, including 'Motorcar *Wiru*' from the Bush Fire Radio Songs collection,<sup>146</sup> 'The Shower Block Song',<sup>147</sup> 'Don't Worry Be Happy',<sup>148</sup> and 'My Island Home'.<sup>149</sup> As McCloskey later simplified it, the project "celebrated local history through song".<sup>150</sup> The project was made possible because of the vibrant community singing culture that operated in and around Alice Springs. It was an opportunity to bring together some of the Aboriginal choirs that had previously performed in the Desert Song concerts of the Alice Desert Festival with *Asante Sana* and other community choirs.

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<sup>142</sup> McCloskey 2010.

<sup>143</sup> The Northern Territory Intervention was established by the Howard Government on 21 June 2007 in response to the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle Little Children are Sacred Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse*. The Intervention was, and continues to be, controversial, with many contested perspectives on whether it was appropriate policy and whether it has, indeed, had the desired impact. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the initial and subsequent interventions in any detail.

<sup>144</sup> McCloskey 2008: 29.

<sup>145</sup> McCloskey and Stowe 2008.

<sup>146</sup> Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) (1989) *CAAMA Music Catalogue no. 202*, Alice Springs: CAAMA.

<sup>147</sup> Written by Bruce Davis and Suzie Bryce. "The Nganampa Health Council has produced a series of four CDs featuring songs with a variety of health messages of relevance to Indigenous communities. The first CD, produced in 1989, features the 'Shower block Song', and also other songs covering topics including health hardware, land and health lifestyle practices" (Nganampa Health Council, Alice Springs: Nganampa Health Council, <http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/promotion-resources?lid=14898>, accessed 15 January 2013).

<sup>148</sup> The song made popular by Blekbala Mujik, not the Bobby McFerrin song.

<sup>149</sup> 'My Island Home' was arranged for choral performance by Rachel Hore for this project. See Rickwood forthcoming for more detail.

<sup>150</sup> McCloskey 2010.

Prior to 2008, the Desert Song concert had featured various regional Aboriginal choirs. The choirs had gathered in the dry bed of the Todd River to sing for each other, their communities, and a small audience from within the Alice Springs community.<sup>151</sup> In 2007 the *Ntaria* Ladies Choir, the Mimili Gospel Singers<sup>152</sup> and the Areyonga Choir had performed separately and as a combined chorus.<sup>153</sup> After the success of Many Roads One Voice, the Desert Voice concert replaced Desert Song. Desert Voice was designed to carry forward the spirit of Many Roads One Voice. I will return to Desert Voice and the other collaborations later in the chapter. In the following section my attention will focus on each of the Aboriginal ladies choirs.

### *Areyonga*

Areyonga is a community of approximately 200 people, situated in a snug valley surrounded by tall red cliffs and sparsely treed hills. Scattered along just a few roads is the community of colourful houses with mobile phone numbers scribbled on the front walls, an arts centre, a general store, the school, a swimming pool and sports centre, council and health buildings, Lutheran church and its manse. *Utju*, as it is referred to by its residents, is about 220 kilometres west of Alice Springs on the road to *Watarrka* National Park (Kings Canyon). It is a vital community, despite the poverty and health issues that are evident. Music making, art, sport, kin, country, spirituality, religion, gambling, and easy chatter amongst the youth under the street light near the school, all cycle through their days and nights. Struggles, burdens, capacity and potential are present here.

The community was established during the 1920s when a drought forced a large group of the *Pitjantjatjara* people from the Petermann area into the Hermannsburg area and from there to Areyonga. The community also has a number of *Arrernte* and *Warlpiri* people who have joined the community through marriage. In the 1940s a Lutheran

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<sup>151</sup> Mapleson 2010.

<sup>152</sup>This choir has also recorded its music. See Westwood 2007. See also Marshall, Anne (2001) *Ngapartji-ngapartji: ecologies of performance in Central Australia: comparative studies in the ecologies of Aboriginal-Australian and European-Australian performances with specific focus on the relationship of context, place, physical environment, and personal experience*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Sydney.

<sup>153</sup> Westwood 2007.



mission was established and many people moved to Areyonga. By the 1970s the population at Areyonga decreased significantly as many of the group moved back to the *Pitjantjatjara* community in Docker River. The Lutheran mission was closed down in 1990 but services and worship continue through the administration of the Finke River Mission in Alice Springs.<sup>154</sup>

I had been told by CAAMA staff that contemporary music making from this small community was prolific. Music making was crucial to the community's identity, reflective of their strong sense of culture, community and Christianity. Teresa Wilson vividly recalls her childhood: "Every night we would have an Aboriginal pastor and we would go out at night with a kerosene lamp and sing just about all night. We grew up singing".<sup>155</sup> The 1980s band Areyonga Desert Tigers was one of better known performance groups, and the Areyonga Gospel Singers have made a number of recordings. Currently, there are two ladies choirs in Areyonga, the Gospel Singers and the Church Choir. A few women sing in both choirs and it has become common for members from both to perform as one in Desert Voice. In this case they are referred to as the Areyonga Ladies Choir.

*Utju* women frequently select clothing with tiger and other animal print which is worn by the choir as their performance costume. The name of the community's Australian Football League (AFL) team is also referred to as the "Tigers". Central Australian communities love their AFL as much as their music and in *Utju* it is common to dye one's hair so that it has the two tones of a tiger. The popularity of AFL became even more apparent when I returned in 2011 with members of *Asante Sana* and the Soweto Gospel Choir. Despite the visit by an internationally renowned choir most of the men and older children in the community missed the concert because they had been delayed by an AFL match being played at *Ntaria*. The concert was held on the community's stage, built into a tall rock wall on one side of the valley. It had often been used in the 1960s and early

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<sup>154</sup> This information was gathered from <http://www.reddust.org.au/areyonga.html>, accessed 31 May 2011, as well as personal information.

<sup>155</sup> Wilson, Theresa (2007) Personal comment. Cited in Lee, Nicole (2008) Areyonga Choir, *Local Stories*, ABC: Alice Springs, 21 September, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/09/10/2365789.htm>, accessed on 5 October 2010.

1970s for choral competitions when Areyonga was at its “zenith”.<sup>156</sup> The mixed choir at the time was winning Eisteddfods in Darwin, collecting trophies, and touring. During this period many of the young singers had painted their names onto the rocks scattered around the natural amphitheatre. I recognised the names of many of the women still singing today.

My first visit, over two days in early September 2010, was made possible when I accompanied the Stuarts who were visiting the community to support the choir’s preparations for that year’s Desert Voice concert. The rehearsals were held in the evening in the simple corrugated iron church which resonated with their high-pitched harmonies. Members of the community sat in the pews to watch, listen, and show their appreciation; others gathered outside, beyond the open door. The camp dogs walked in and out, telling the women “that they should be home”.<sup>157</sup> Humour was a constant, as was the direct negotiation between the women, when their voices cut across each other to decide on what song to sing, who should sing it. At times it seemed like chaos to me but then suddenly the decision was made and they sang.

For the second evening’s rehearsal, *Utju* Elder, Daphne Puntjina Burton, rang the bell at 7:30 pm to call the singers and audience to the church. When I arrived at the church there were a few people sitting in the pews, others gathered outside. Music blared out from a CD player from inside. Hilda Bert, one of the singers, sat on a bench. We chatted about her work and family until we went in to rehearse. Stuart led the women through their own material, working them hard on entries, breathing and timing, reminding them to be really strong, not to be “afraid of the note”. The women were good natured, laughing often at themselves and Stuart. They were a joy to watch; they sang with typical laid-back passion, their voices penetrating and filling the space – from the frailest to the largest, each body was equally committed.

Two songs by songwriters in the community were rehearsed: *Godanya Nganampa*, written in 2003 by Petrina Windy, Caroline Windy and Hollie Webb, and *Jesunya Nganampa, Tili winki pitjang*, with words by Petrina Windy and Stephanie Donald, music

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<sup>156</sup> Borgas, Rob (2012b) Personal comment (8/06/12).

<sup>157</sup> Windy, Sandra (2010) Personal comment (7/09/10).

by Petrina Windy.<sup>158</sup> Various members of the Areyonga choirs are composers, or “wonderful tune writers”,<sup>159</sup> including Puntjina Burton. Barb Stuart and I joined them for the songs that would be sung by all the choirs in the Desert Voice concert. I carried the tenor line of ‘*Vuma*’ on my own, Aboriginal women rarely singing at that pitch. “You sing like a man” they commented, teasing me. It was evident that though the women were committed to their own repertoire of hymns and gospel songs, ‘*Vuma*’ captured their imagination, their engagement more pronounced than with the other combined song, ‘Why We Sing’.

On both evenings I slept in a swag on the alphabet rug in one of the school’s classrooms that would normally have gathered small, learning bodies. The *Pitjantjatjara Reader 1* was my bedtime read. Fortunately most of the community is at least bi-lingual so my lack of language skills was only a partial disadvantage although I was well aware that much of the detail of the discussions during the rehearsals had been lost on me.

### *Titjikala*

Titjikala (or *Tapatjatjaka*), a similarly sized community to Areyonga, is located about 107 kilometres south of Alice Springs, on the edge of the Simpson Desert. On the former cattle station of Maryvale, these are traditional lands to the *Arrernte* people. Several families living in Titjikala are also traditional owners of the area around the community. There are people who have been living in the Titjikala area for several generations, but whose family members came from other regions. Consequently, Titjikala has become the home of *Arrernte*, *Luritja* and *Pitjantjatjara* people. From the 1940s onwards families came to the Maryvale Station to work as stockmen and domestic helpers. The station owners provided rations to the people who resided and worked on their stations. Aboriginal people started settling in the area in the 1950s, when a Lutheran mission truck visited every six weeks. In the early 1960s the community built permanent accommodation and was supplied with water from the station. As part of the village a Lutheran church was built in the same ‘garage style’ as the housing. The church

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<sup>158</sup> See Appendix 6 for a list of the gospel songs and hymns referred to in this chapter.

<sup>159</sup> Borgas 2012a.

continues under the administration of the Finke River Mission with two ordained ministers living in the community.<sup>160</sup>

I visited Titjikala only the once, a few days before the visit to Areyonga. The drive to the community with the Stuarts had been spectacular. The intense deep red of the sandy soil could not be hidden amidst the fields of yellow blooms or the wash of purple hues. We scrambled out of the car often, capturing the beauty with our cameras. We passed a family and their dogs, resting in the shade while they waited for someone to bring the spare part to fix their car. They were content and did not need our help. Titjikala does not share the same rugged beauty of the Areyonga valley. The settlement is flat and dusty, although nearby is the impressive Chambers Pillar, a multicoloured rock column that is part of the creation stories of the community.<sup>161</sup> The general store, school, women's centre, *Tapatjatjaka* arts centre, childcare centre and health clinic are clustered together; paddocks of hard tall grass stretch out between houses huddled in groups. Like Areyonga, Titjikala is also home to a warm and vibrant community where lives are shadowed by the negative impacts of colonisation and the constant intrusive cycle of Federal government policies and practices.<sup>162</sup>

As with many of the women at Areyonga, I had first met some of the singers from Titjikala at The Big Sing earlier in the year. It was Janie Wells, who had first introduced

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<sup>160</sup> This information was gathered from a number of sources: Tapatjatja Arts, <http://www.tapatjatjaaarts.com.au>, accessed 31 May 2011; Macdonnell Shire, <http://www.macdonnell.nt.gov.au/community-information/tapatjatjaka-titjikala>, accessed 31 May 2011; Titjikala Arts, <http://www.titjikalaarts.com.au/about-titjikala-arts/>, accessed 31 May 2011; and Aboriginal Art Online, <http://www.aboriginalartonline.com/regions/titjikala.php>, accessed 31 May 2011; as well as personal information.

<sup>161</sup> "In the Dreamtime it is said the Gecko ancestor Itirkawara left the Finke River and journeyed north east. As he traveled he grew into a huge and powerfully built man of super human strength and with an extremely violent temper. On the way home to his birthplace he challenged and killed, with his stone knife, a number of ancestors. Flushed with the ease of his success, he then disregarded the strict marriage code and took a wife from the wrong skin group. His enraged relatives banished him and the girl. The two retreated into the desert, Itirkawara raging in fury, the girl shrinking from him in deep shame. Among the dunes they rested and turned into prominent rocky formations - Itirkawara into the Pillar, and the girl, still turning her face away from him in shame, into Castle Rock, around 500 metres away." <http://www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/parks/find/chamberspillar#.UPI9jvLLB8E>, accessed 13 January 2013.

<sup>162</sup> Titjikala was one of the communities first visited by the "scoping teams" sent to enforce the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007. (Barker, Anne [2007] Report, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Radio National "PM" Program, 26 June.)

herself to me with a ready smile at The Big Sing, who welcomed Morris and Barb Stuart, Linda Herangi, the community's Health Worker, and me as we walked in to the community hall for the rehearsal. Other choir members nodded and said hello. Three familiar children greeted me with wide grins, recalling my cooking and cleaning at the Salvation Army in Alice Springs during rehearsals a few weeks prior.<sup>163</sup> They knew the repertoire as well as the women and followed Stuart's directions as he worked the choir with his usual discipline: correcting their timing, reminding them of the harmonies, getting them to hit the notes clearly rather than sliding. They rehearsed 'Why We Sing' and 'Vuma', the two songs for the combined choirs; 'Ingkaarta Pitjai'<sup>164</sup> and 'Nyanpi Matilda',<sup>165</sup> the songs to be performed by the Central Australian Ladies Choir; and songs from their own repertoire 'Mamanya wanka' and 'Ngaryulu Mamaku Pataningi'.<sup>166</sup> Stuart spoke about stage craft and shared his excitement about the coming Desert Voice performance. There would be about forty five singers in the Central Australian Ladies Choir. He commented that a choir of that size in Central Australia had not been seen since the Hermannsburg Choir was at its peak.

Despite the presence of contemporary music making within the community with bands such as the Titjikala Desert Oaks Band,<sup>167</sup> the Titjikala community did not have the long, strong, choral history of the *Ntaria* and Areyonga Choirs. A choir had performed at Many Roads One Voice and the members had been taken with Hore's leadership style. Subsequently, the choir successfully applied for funding for a nine day workshop with Hore in 2009 to help develop their aural skills and to mentor leadership. Hore was aware of the choir's lack of both harmony experience and exposure to a range of choral repertoire. Margaret Campbell, the choir's leader, had certainly appreciated the opportunity that the workshop brought, suggesting it:

helped us a lot. Helping us to sing strong way, learning more about harmonies [...] It's good sometimes without a keyboard and guitar so we can hear ourselves. I was a leader [...] that was good. I might teach all the

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<sup>163</sup> Being remembered for those contributions would later reveal that the women in the community choirs would always assume I had knowledge about meals and were disappointed when I couldn't deliver any solutions to the absence of dinner during the time of the *Desert Voice* performance in Alice Springs.

<sup>164</sup> 'Kumbaya' in *Arrernte*, translated by L. Mocketarinja.

<sup>165</sup> "Waltzing Matilda" in *Pitjantjatjara*, translated by Daphne Puntjina Burton.

<sup>166</sup> See Appendix 6.

<sup>167</sup> Ottosson 2006: 71.

other girls [...] Sometimes they are shy, and I tell them to be strong, show your heart, have faith, that's the way you get strong.<sup>168</sup>

Hore suggested that harmony skills in Central Australia were not as common as in the Top End,<sup>169</sup> and that the Lutheran and Gospel based repertoire had changed little. She felt that many of the Central Australian choirs had stagnated somewhat and had therefore been excited by the exposure to new repertoire and harmonies<sup>170</sup> presented by Many Roads One Voice. Hore had also been inspired to support a “new way for choir music for Central Australia to move beyond gospel”<sup>171</sup> as a result of the performance of contemporary songs in *Pitjantjatjara* by the Ernabella Choir in the *BighArt* production, “*Ngapartji! Ngapartji!*”. ‘*Jularu*’, the translated version of ‘Sorrow’ by David Bowie, had left a discernible impact.<sup>172</sup>

The Titjikala project resulted in a demo CD of six songs, including songs in two and three part harmonies. Songs were in English, *Pitjantjatjara*, and one song was in *Maori*. ‘*Taku Mana*’ was relevant to the choir because Herangi and her husband had been living and working in Titjikala for well over a decade. The couple was greatly loved for their generosity, care, joyful spirits, and commitment to the community. Hore maintains that the need for connection or relationship to a song is vital to Aboriginal singers.<sup>173</sup> The women were also keen to connect with the other Aboriginal choirs at future performances and events.<sup>174</sup> This eventuated through Desert Voice, The Big Sing, and the musical development opportunities with the Soweto Gospel Choir during its African Grace tour in 2011. Singing in the concert with the Soweto Gospel Choir also prompted the creation of a costume by the Titjikala Choir. Similar in design to *Asante Sana*’s poncho-style costume, it utilised motifs designed by one of the community’s artists.

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<sup>168</sup> Cited in Hore 2009a, *Titjikala Choir Development with Rachel Hore 7<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> October 2009 Report*: 3.

<sup>169</sup> The “Top End” is the description for the northern area of the Northern Territory.

<sup>170</sup> Hore, Rachel (2009) Personal conversation (Interview 15/12/09).

<sup>171</sup> Hore 2009.

<sup>172</sup> The success of *Ngapartji! Ngapartji!* stimulated further creative arts projects at Ernabella. Shortly after *Ngapartji! Ngapartji!* Hore was invited to lead a song writing workshop with young women in the community.

<sup>173</sup> Hore 2009.

<sup>174</sup> Hore 2009a: 3.

Margaret Campbell's ill health has meant that others have needed to take on the leadership role. This has included Lena Campbell, one of the younger members of the choir who, like many Indigenous women, is multiskilled and active; she is well known artist and has also been a member of the Titjikala Community Council and the Women's Advisory Council.<sup>175</sup> The diverse demands on Central Australian women's lives became even more apparent during time spent with *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala*, the Aboriginal ladies choir based in Alice Springs.

### *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala*

*Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala* was facilitated by the Salvation Army in Alice Springs. Most of its members grew up in *Ntaria* and maintain strong family connection to that community. Some of the women had performed with the *Ntaria* Choir in the past and more recently with the *Namatjira* project. Because of their locality, I was able to spend more time with the members of *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala* than the other Aboriginal Ladies Choirs. I joined them in 2010, attending choir rehearsals and other gatherings at the Salvation Army. I thus discovered a lot more of the joys, challenges, and complexity in these women's lives.

There was a core of about half a dozen women, including its facilitator, Peta Boon, Manager of the Aboriginal Program. Boon, who had been given a 'skin name', described the core of Aboriginal women as the 'driving force' of the choir. They were seasoned singers and had a shared repertoire. She described their sound as honest and raw, adding that "[t]hey're tight. They're all really confident with their harmonies. There's no fear of doing what they're doing and they all know they sound terrific".<sup>176</sup>

The women had been singing regularly during Bible Studies and became interested in forming a choir. Stuart worked with them in preparation for Many Roads One Voice and has been irregularly attending their rehearsals since. Boon admired Stuart's "knack of

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<sup>175</sup> Lena Campbell has exhibited her work at the Araluen Arts Centre in Alice Springs in 2001 and 2002, and her work, 'Honey Ants' was used on the cover of Briscoe's 2003 publication. See Briscoe, Gordon (2003) *Counting Health and Identity: Aboriginal health and demography in Western Australia and Queensland 1900-1940*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press: ix.

<sup>176</sup> Boon, Peta (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 2/09/10).

bringing out their real sound [...], a unique gravelly sound"<sup>177</sup> created by the blend of voices and amplified by the 'powerhouse', Toni (Antonia) Mulkatana, whose big voice is surprising in her small frame. Mulkatana had recently suffered a stroke but she had an inner strength partly due to her genetic disposition but she had also become strong from being a rodeo rider and a mother of eight children. Barb Stuart, however, recalled the women in *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala* as being shy singers at first: "Morris had to encourage them. [He] said 'sing up to the sky' and [then] they really let rip".<sup>178</sup> Stuart agreed: "Yeah, they sounded like fifty people".<sup>179</sup> He had helped them prepare for a performance at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre for a Salvation Army Conference in November 2008. Boon, who is conscious of her "big white moon face",<sup>180</sup> vividly remembered that concert:

I think there were thirteen of us and we went and sang. And it was just the best time. The whole place erupted. We got a standing ovation. It was just beautiful because [the audience] hadn't heard anything like that before.<sup>181</sup>

The choir members talked passionately about their Christianity; the importance of it in their daily lives and their choral expressions. It was central to their identity and validated the way they live their lives and their wholeness.<sup>182</sup> Many of the women reflected upon their childhood growing up in *Ntaria*. "We grow up when we were a child, you know, singing the gospel songs", said Hudson.<sup>183</sup> Hudson's parents were members of the Hermannsburg Choir and together with her sisters, Kathleen France and Clara Inkamala, she found singing in harmony an embodied and intuitive thing. "[W]hen we want a new song we sing together straight"<sup>184</sup> [and then] we sing in part, you know [...] When I make the harmony for myself, I listen to my sister singing", said Hudson.<sup>185</sup> France confirmed: "She make another harmony", and then Hudson concluded, "She sing a little bit higher. I sing a little bit lower".<sup>186</sup> Hudson and Inkamala write gospel songs

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<sup>177</sup> Boon 2010.

<sup>178</sup> Barbara Stuart (2012) Personal conversation (Interview 6/09/12).

<sup>179</sup> Morris Stuart (2012) Personal conversation (Interview 6/09/12).

<sup>180</sup> Boon 2010.

<sup>181</sup> Boon 2010.

<sup>182</sup> Boon, Peta (2011) Personal conversation (Interview 7/05/11).

<sup>183</sup> Hudson, Noreen (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 19/09/10).

<sup>184</sup> By "straight" Hudson and France mean singing the melody line in unison.

<sup>185</sup> Hudson 2010.

<sup>186</sup> France, Kathleen (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 19/09/10).



drawing on their innate ability to create melody and harmonies - inspired by the “Holy Spirit”<sup>187</sup>. France explained her two sisters’ ability: “When [Noreen] thinks really hard. That word comes, and she put [it on paper]. Clara too [...] And the right words come out and she write it down [...] Sometimes she cries”.<sup>188</sup> Hudson agreed that her tears were important to the process and added “...my sister, Clara. When she makes up song, she ring me. Listen to this. I’m singing. She singing, writing songs”.<sup>189</sup> They also translate songs from English, *Pitjantjatjara*, or other regional languages into *Arrernte*, which amounted to the same thing as writing songs, suggested Boon:

There are so many different ways of saying something, like any language [...] it takes them a long time because they really consider what’s going to be the best phrasing for their song. Because it might take them a while to get to the heart meaning of the song [...] there’s a real skill involved.<sup>190</sup>

All three sisters have toured with the *Ntaria* Choir and as *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala*: “[W]e singing in city”, Hudson explained, “because we love God, we love singing. That is our life, singing”.<sup>191</sup> France explained their choral tradition: “It happens a long time, choir. From Strehlow Choir they was singing. We’ve got old CDs. Not CDs, cassettes”, she laughed.<sup>192</sup> Other members of *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala* had also been members of the *Ntaria* Choir and shared their nostalgic memories of the mission, appreciating the good education they had received, the retention of their language as well as English, and the joy of singing. Hettie Meneri had happily pointed out her younger self on the cover of the 1999 *Ntaria* Ladies Choir CD. At the same time, the women also commented on the loss or inability to openly express their traditional Aboriginal culture. “We weren’t allowed to have our own culture” was repeatedly articulated. As discussed above, a syncretic culture was created at *Ntaria* which included music as well as art. Hudson and Inkamala have been artists with the Hermansburg Potters. Hudson showed me her work and spoke about her visit to New York for an exhibition, and Inkamala was one of the contributing artists on the group self-portrait from the Hermansburg Potters displayed at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. Despite their remote home location, these women and their work are well travelled.

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<sup>187</sup> Hudson 2010.

<sup>188</sup> France 2010.

<sup>189</sup> Hudson 2010.

<sup>190</sup> Boon 2010.

<sup>191</sup> Hudson 2010.

<sup>192</sup> France 2010.

Concern for the choir members' adult children's health and wellbeing was constant. I recall a particular conversation when one of women shared her concerns about her daughter who struggled with her alcohol use. Hudson also mentioned similar anxiety in regard to the loss of songs as the singers aged: "We're asking young people [...] They don't know [the songs]. This drinking problem is going up and up. They don't sing. They just shout".<sup>193</sup> As a result, caring for grandchildren was also commonplace, with some of the children attending the rehearsals from time to time. Boon acknowledged that the choir was a "little escape"<sup>194</sup> from the demands on their lives. "It's their time", she added, "something they want to do [and] really believe in [...] It gives them an opportunity not to be receiving but to be a part of giving [to the community]".<sup>195</sup>

Hudson had talked to me at The Big Sing about how difficult life was for many people in Alice Springs and how she and others were hoping to bring them to the church services and Bible Studies group and to join in the singing, to let them see that there was another way of being. Boon agreed that Hudson was passionate about the Gospel repertoire but said that like many others, Hudson had a growing appreciation of songs outside of that genre. They had learned to sing 'Lean on Me' with the Salvation Army Guitar Group and it was now one of their favourite songs. The Big Sing and Desert Voice had also introduced them to new material which they enjoyed because it resonated: "Some songs are like about life, or country, or like that, you know. Or freedom songs, like [Morris] did with us the last time. African one. Freedom song".<sup>196</sup>

When I returned in 2011 for the African Grace project with the Soweto Gospel Choir, I watched some of the *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala* women performing at a wedding in the Olive Pink Botanic Gardens. Boon had invited me. They sang the blessing song well enough, but without their usual confidence. I discovered they were upset. On arrival at the park France had collapsed but they had been determined to contribute to the ceremony nonetheless. I joined them afterwards, and they greeted me warmly despite their distress. We gathered around France who was waiting for the ambulance. We chatted quietly. Hudson was teary about France's back but as she was assured France

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<sup>193</sup> Hudson 2010.

<sup>194</sup> Boon 2010.

<sup>195</sup> Boon 2010.

<sup>196</sup> Hudson 2010.

would be well cared for. Only one of the choir members would join in African Grace the following week. Many of the others would be in *Ntaria* on family business. I was able to spend time with them all again at the Salvation Army just before returning to Canberra and I left with Hudson telling me that next time she would help me to learn *Arrernte*. “*Awa*”, I replied in agreement. By 2012 *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala* had ceased to exist following the departure of Boon from the Salvation Army and because many of the women had subsequently moved to another church.

### *Central Australian Ladies Choir*

*The sound of the song was a description of landscape, of country. Amanda’s lack of Pitjantjatjara was irrelevant. She didn’t need to understand the words to feel their shaping of land, the colouring of earth and sky, their reference to ancestors and centuries of intimate knowledge. And there was more. A story of loss. The expression of sorrow was powerfully evident in the haunting harmonies, the timbre of voices, the slow tempo of the melody. Their casual delivery of the song belied its ability to grab the heart, to turn it gently, to swell its potential to make different her sense of the world. The tears that lingered on her cheeks should be caught, Amanda thought, saved in a vessel so she could always be reminded of the first time she had listened to these women sing.<sup>197</sup>*

Morris Stuart’s passion for improved musicality in Central Australia included supporting the performance skills of the Aboriginal ladies choirs while still nurturing their unique sound. Stuart was candid about his motivation:

I think that [...] what’s happened with Aboriginal singers; when something unusual occurs and is arresting, people then say that’s the sound they produce. Sometimes it’s a good sound and often it’s a very unpleasant sound. [Non-Indigenous people are] too scared to say it because they think its offensive and we end up patronising them, and we end up with a procession of groups that need a lot of tonal help and vocal help and my view was, what they need is some technical input. You don’t have to ruin what they’re doing but help them to do it better. And what we’re doing with those women is a little bit of encouragement, a little bit of demonstration, and patience and respect and they’ll give you much more than you ever dreamed of. And that’s what I’ve found with them. It will still be their sound, it’ll still be the way they use their voice, but they’ll

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<sup>197</sup> Rickwood, Julie (2011) *The Sound of the Song*, unpublished.

replicate it in a very arresting way and in a quality way, if that's what you expect. And I do.<sup>198</sup>

Boon agreed:

People have heard Aboriginal voices and have said "It's not very pretty is it?". But they haven't heard it like this! Morris has a gift and just making these ladies feel so good about the sound of their voice. And [...] they want to have their Aboriginal sound. And that's really lovely that he brings that out of them.<sup>199</sup>

Part of Stuart's project is to bring the choirs together into a combined choir, one he refers to as the Central Australian Ladies Choir. Membership of that choir is open to all Aboriginal community choirs and singers who want performance opportunities. The Big Sing is helping to facilitate that process, attracting increasing numbers of Aboriginal singers to the weekend workshop and which I discuss in the Coda. Each year, the Desert Voice Concert brings two or more of the Aboriginal Ladies Choirs together to perform individually and as the Central Australian Ladies Choir. In 2009 *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala* and the Titjikala Choir performed. In 2010, these two choirs were joined by the Areyonga Choir. In 2011, the same three choirs performed. In 2012, the Areyonga and Titjikala Choirs performed with singers from *Ntaria*, Docker River and Mutitjulu. Women from the Docker River<sup>200</sup> and Mutitjulu communities had been inspired by the performances of the Central Australian Ladies Choir when it performed with the Soweto Gospel Choir and at Desert Voice 2011,<sup>201</sup> and through their attendance at The Big Sing in 2012. Part of that inspiration included recognition of the opportunities to travel and represent their community,<sup>202</sup> as well as being able to identify as part of the Central Australian Ladies Choir. The Desert Voice 2012 performance received high praise. In addition to conversations with friends and colleagues in Alice Springs who commented on the outstanding singing and humour that the Aboriginal choirs brought to the concert, a letter to the editor of the *Centralian Advocate* by Graham Tjilpi captured the impact:

Last Saturday evening a most memorable event took place in front of a sell-out crowd at the Araluen Arts Centre [...] The choristers received a standing ovation at the end of the concert. In my view it is not over the

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<sup>198</sup> Stuart 2010.

<sup>199</sup> Boon 2010.

<sup>200</sup> The Docker River Gospel Singers have a self-titled CD *Docker River Gospel Singers* (nd).

<sup>201</sup> Borgas 2012.

<sup>202</sup> As Myer (2010:125) recognised for the *Warlungurru* (Kintore) Gospel Singers.

top to say that this event should have had national television coverage [...] [T]hese splendid singing voices represented a coming together of many different cultures and generations. To hear the National Anthem and Waltzing Matilda sung in an indigenous language was such a tremendous privilege.<sup>203</sup>

Discussions with members of *Asante Sana* later in the year, however, indicated some disquiet about the Araluen Arts Centre as the venue for the performance focus of their collaboration with the Aboriginal Ladies Choirs. Mapleson felt that Desert Voice should return to the venue of Desert Song, the dry bed of the Todd River. Moloney was concerned that holding Desert Voice at the Arts Centre over-emphasised performance. She remarked that the night when *Asante Sana* members gathered around a campfire, singing in celebration of the end of their season had held more meaning.

### ***Musical exchange and collaboration***

*Asante Sana* member, Mark Hussey, responded to my question about Indigenous membership with a statement “it’s very much enforced that it’s not about the colour of your skin”.<sup>204</sup> This is an important aspect to everyday relationships in a remote town surrounded by remote communities. The Stuarts and other members of *Asante Sana* are politically astute and aware of much of the finer workings of both cross and inter racial tensions and potentials. I was drawn into such conversations over numerous dining tables in homes and cafes. Some members of the choir had worked with regional Aboriginal communities and individuals for many years – through the health system, training programmes, and various other government or agency interventions. Unlike the circumstances of the southern musical interactions discussed in previous chapters, Aboriginal people are not only more visible but inherently part of the machinations of place.

The exchange and collaborative workshops and cross-cultural performances are often framed within the discourses emerging from the community music and reconciliation movements, as this example from an application for funding makes clear:

“People change the world, but music changes people”. Singing is one of the best ways to promote harmony in the community and as the concerts are being presented to the community in free open air environments in

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<sup>203</sup> Tjilpi 2012.

<sup>204</sup> Hussey 2010.

the centre of town, and in the iconic Trepkina Gorge, East MacDonnell ranges, the community will be well-aware of the cultural activity, and reap the benefits of this music contribution to reconciliation and a sense of community. These are values that Central Australia seeks to cultivate, develop and celebrate. Processes and events like this enable Centralians to express and reinforce their identity through a celebration of the arts. The process will build the capacity of artists, communities and individuals in Central Australia, to the general benefit of the entire community.<sup>205</sup>

The motivation to join *Asante Sana*, however, was rarely based on the fact of the choir's reconciliation context or its collaborations. Nevertheless, the experience of singing with the Aboriginal ladies choirs was regarded as important in maintaining and improving cross cultural relations as well as developing musical skills. The opportunity to sing and socialise with the Aboriginal singers, and to acknowledge and promote their demonstration of Aboriginal music, was seen as an important contribution to, and expression of, the Central Australia community.<sup>206</sup> *Asante Sana* members also acknowledged that they enjoyed and benefitted from the workshops and performances:

I just think it's fantastic to hear our songs, or to hear Indigenous people sing, and sing strongly. I think it's fantastic, and it's an added bonus to hear our songs sung in their different tonality. And I think one of the best times that I've ever had with the choir was that year that we had at least two or three schools come along and then two or three remote choirs of ladies, and not just ladies too [...] Three hundred of us sang "Don't Worry, Be Happy" and that's tight. There's some really tight bits in that.<sup>207</sup>

Stuart has built an extensive choral community in Central Australia, working with *Asante Sana* and other choirs in Alice Springs (for example, *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala*, the Yirara School College Choir, and the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Choir), choirs visiting Alice Springs (such as the Australian Youth Choir, Sydney Street Choir, the Brunswick Women's Choir and the Soweto Gospel Choir), and choirs from surrounding desert communities (such as Areyonga, Titjikala, and singers from Mutitjulu, Docker River and *Ntaria*). Workshops, rehearsals and performances reinforce the belief that "[s]inging is something we can all share together".<sup>208</sup> Hudson agrees, "[w]e can sing together and then they can sing their own songs and we can sing our own songs. That's really really

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<sup>205</sup> *Asante Sana and RedHotArts, 2010, Grant Application, Arts NT Community Festivals Fund, unpublished; in author's possession.*

<sup>206</sup> Hussey 2010.

<sup>207</sup> Hussey 2010.

<sup>208</sup> Stuart 2008a.

nice. We doing, we sharing”.<sup>209</sup> Through these exchanges and collaborations, Stuart believes that people are connecting to their humanity, building community, and healing. He declared that “these are important things and I think singing in a choir does that. It helps people work together”.<sup>210</sup> Stuart’s ambitious musical project began initially with *Asante Sana* in 2006 and took a trajectory after *Many Roads One Voice*. It expanded further when Hore invited him to co-lead *The Big Sing in the Desert*, which has subsequently become pivotal to the *Desert Voice* concerts.

*Desert Voice* follows a general pattern. Stuart rehearses with *Asante Sana* regularly, visits the Aboriginal communities, and organises joint rehearsals in Alice Springs. The concert begins with the school choir (or choirs) performing and then each Aboriginal choir sings hymns or gospels from their own repertoire. As mentioned above, translated versions of popular folk and anthemic songs are then performed by the Central Australian Ladies Choir. *Asante Sana* performs songs from its own repertoire and then all choirs come together for songs that perform social and musical harmony.

After the *Desert Voice* concert in 2010, Stuart was contacted by the Australian management of the Soweto Gospel Choir. The opportunity for the Central Australian choirs to support the Soweto Gospel Choir at the beginning of its 2011 Australian “African Grace” tour introduced an international dimension to this evolving musical interaction. The concerts at the Araluen Arts Centre that concluded the week long exchange and development project promoted musical diversity and collaboration.

The Aboriginal choirs opened the concert by singing ‘*Ingkaarta Pitjai*’ and ‘*Nyanpi Matilda*’,<sup>211</sup> the songs they had sung at *Desert Voice* the year before. These songs were selected by Stuart in consultation with the choirs. Hilda Bert from the Areyonga choir, however, said she would have preferred to sing Psalm 23 in *Pitjantjatjara*, ‘*Mayatjaluni kanyilpai*,’<sup>212</sup> rather than ‘*Nyanpi Matilda*’.<sup>213</sup> I understood that for her singing a well-known Australian folk ballad, even in the translated version written in the 1970s by a singer from Areyonga, was less representational of their musical traditions than a hymn

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<sup>209</sup> Hudson, Noreen (2008) Personal comment, cited in Nancarrow 2008.

<sup>210</sup> Stuart 2008a.

<sup>211</sup> See Appendix 6.

<sup>212</sup> See Appendix 6.

<sup>213</sup> Bert, Hilda (2011) Personal comment (05/05/11).

in *Pitjantjatjara*. The Aboriginal Ladies Choirs had sung ‘*Mayatjaluni kanyilpai*’ to the Soweto Gospel Choir earlier in the week, when the choir had made a visit to Areyonga, and this exchange had been important to the women.

*Asante Sana* then sang a number of songs selected by Stuart that included the epic ‘Mother Africa’ which features on the soundtrack of the film *Power of One*<sup>214</sup> and ‘*Sensenina*’.<sup>215</sup> After the Soweto Gospel Choir had performed its two brackets, all the community choirs joined them for the finale to sing ‘*Vuma*’ and ‘Oh Happy Day’. Both songs express a belief in salvation and subsequent happiness. The songs were strategically selected. ‘*Vuma*’ was familiar to all the singers and ‘Oh Happy Day’ was known to many of the singers and audience members because of its music chart success in the late 1960s.<sup>216</sup> In that finale, the normal composure of the Aboriginal singers was cast aside in order to sing solos, to move and to dance with everyone else on stage.

The Soweto Gospel Choir delivers a well-crafted energetic performance of gospel celebration that has captivated audiences worldwide. Their visit widened the “cultural interface”<sup>217</sup> of community music practice in Central Australia. At that interface were links to histories of racial oppression, the indigenising of Christianity, gospel traditions, as well as the mutual experience and joy in singing – the choirs had “common ground”.<sup>218</sup> The week of activities saw relationships develop and a comfortable rapport emerge across all participants. The intensity of contact, connection, exchange, singing, dancing, eating, laughing and inspiration were all part of the journey. Shimmy Jiyane from the Soweto Gospel Choir said that “we wanted to come and see [Central Australian communities] for ourselves, and get to hear their stories and sing with them, and just

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<sup>214</sup> *Power of One (1992) Directed by John G Avildsen, Regency Enterprises, Studio Canal, Alcor Films, Village Roadshow Pictures.*

<sup>215</sup> A well-known protest song from the Apartheid era.

<sup>216</sup> Boyer, Horace Charles (1979) Contemporary Gospel Music, *The Black Perspective in Music*, 7.1: 5-58.

<sup>217</sup> Nakata, Martin (2002) Indigenous Knowledge and the Cultural Interface: Underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems, *IFLA Journal* 28.5/6: 280-291; and Nakata, Martin (2007) The Cultural Interface, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 36.Supplement: 7-14. See also Dillon, Steve (2007) Maybe we can find some common ground: Indigenous perspectives, a music teachers’ story, *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 36.Supplement: 59-65; and Dillon, Steve, Bartleet, Brydie-Leigh, and Leong, Sam (2012) Editorial, *International Journal of Community Music* 5.1: 3-9.

<sup>218</sup> Nakata 2002, 2007.



have fun”.<sup>219</sup> Stuart saw the experience as more powerful: “Music is a wonderful construct to convey story; to convey a whole range of things which builds people’s capacity, builds their self esteem, breaks down barriers, keeps them going through difficult times”.<sup>220</sup> Subsequently, the 2011 Desert Voice concert showcased that development in musical skill and confidence in all the Central Australian choirs.

The singing workshops, rehearsals and performances in Central Australia provide support and opportunities, resources and recognition to the Aboriginal ladies choirs and *Asante Sana*. The fortuitous interwoven connections with the Soweto Gospel Choir created an international expansion to those ongoing relationships and opportunities. That particular collaboration reinforced and embodied Stuart’s project to improve community music making through a focus on South African music that could resonate with Aboriginal religious expression and articulate social justice issues in Central Australia. Through this shared musical experience the specifics of Aboriginal history and musical expression were more intuitively connected to a globalised understanding of the impacts of, and musical responses to, colonisation and discrimination. Established bonds and bridges were reinforced, with the Soweto Gospel Choir playing an important intermediary.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

During my most intensive field research from July to September in 2010, I witnessed the impact of local and national events on Central Australian lives. I fondly recall the bewilderment of a ten year old *Pitjantjatjara* boy who shared the back seat of the Stuart’s 4WD with me as we drove to *Utju*, wondering why these adults were so engrossed by the long chattering of a *piranpa*.<sup>221</sup> Curious about the outcome of the recent federal election, we had pulled over to the side of the road to ensure radio reception so we could listen to Independent Rob Oakeshott’s lengthy speech announcing his alignment with Labor to help form Australia’s first minority federal Labor government. I also vividly remember being confronted by the blue and white signs

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<sup>219</sup> Sleath 2011.

<sup>220</sup> Sleath 2011.

<sup>221</sup> *Pitjantjatjara* for ‘whitefella’.

declaring “Warning: prohibited areas”.<sup>222</sup> I was surprised they were little vandalised until I was told that Aboriginal people knew that such action was worthless or there was community support for them. I heard divided views on the impacts of the Intervention on Aboriginal people’s lives. I nevertheless felt a sense of shame with the Australian Government and the message it was advertising to the many international travellers passing along these roads. I witnessed too the increased control of people’s lives in Alice Springs, the intensification of lighting in public spaces and police surveillance. Towards the end of that field research period, I was also to understand more the intensity of and protocol surrounding ‘sorry business’ when Gus Williams<sup>223</sup> passed away in Hermannsburg. Not surprisingly, the funeral ceremony included singing by the *Ntaria Ladies Choir*.<sup>224</sup>

These are just a few examples of the micro and macro impacts on the lives of people within and around Alice Springs. Some bring sorrow and hardship, others bring joy and hope. Singing is just one mechanism that more often can bring the latter. The connections within each of the choirs referred to in this chapter, within the musical exchanges and collaborative performances that took place, and, when these regionally based choirs engaged with the Soweto Gospel Choir, were musically, socially and culturally important. These Central Australian interactions placed value on music as a cultural mediator and mined its power to cross racial boundaries. The interactions provided opportunities to connect in cross-culturally enriching ways. Like other music-making in Central Australia, these community choirs were finding ways “to identify and work from some kind of shared values in order to reduce social alienation and racial tensions and to increase mutual understanding and respect”.<sup>225</sup> Cultural diversity was shared and celebrated, and the performances resonated with reconciliation agendas. Music was a potent vehicle in this choral ‘common ground’. It enabled the “histories,

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<sup>222</sup> These signs were an Australian Government Initiative as part of the 2007 NT Intervention. They banned liquor and pornography. They were posted outside of Aboriginal communities.

<sup>223</sup> Gus Williams is well known for both his political and musical leadership in Central Australia. Williams was born in Alice Springs in the late 1930s and grew up at the Hermannsburg Mission where he sang in the church choir, at one stage leading it. He later discovered country music and subsequently facilitated its growth in Central Australia. His political life at Hermannsburg was not without its critics, but ultimately he was respected for his strong, independent community leadership and advocacy for Aboriginal people (See Ottosson 2006 and Hurley 2012).

<sup>224</sup> Funerals are a common performance venue for the Aboriginal Ladies Choirs.

<sup>225</sup> Ottosson 2010: 278.

politics, economics, multiple and interconnected discourses, social practices and knowledge<sup>226</sup> that operated in diverse daily lives to become increasingly shared and more consciously relational.

One Road Many Voices, Desert Voice, and African Grace were each a celebration of music, a cross-cultural encounter, a contemporary choral engagement with our 'other selves'. As I illustrate in the Coda, The Big Sing similarly embodies a hope for a future that is strengthened by community and action; a future where Australia is reconciled and more equitable. Each of the projects presented opportunities for musical exchange, musical development, and cross-cultural engagement but the agendas were predominantly those of the project leaders, responding in part to the interest of the Aboriginal singers but also to the funding opportunities and/or the interest of non-Indigenous singers in opportunities to sing in exotic places.

There is a tension between the "efforts to promote and protect distinct cultural qualities and practice"<sup>227</sup> with those that perform social and cultural cohesion. The performance of South African gospel and freedom songs raises questions about Central Australian musical identities. The agency of the Aboriginal choirs to select what they sing in public arenas appears to be somewhat circumscribed by others. The Desert Gospel music of each of the Aboriginal choirs is celebrated but its performance is contained. For the Central Australian Ladies Choir this musical tradition has so far been overshadowed by popular folk songs and anthemic national songs translated into Aboriginal languages. While the translation and cover versions of popular non-Indigenous songs by Indigenous singers can, as Dunbar-Hall and Gibson suggest, invert some previously understood meanings<sup>228</sup> about the songs, these 'slippages of meaning'<sup>229</sup> were not obvious to the audience and went unnoticed and unremarked. In addition, there has so far been little utilisation in the Desert Voice concerts of the translations of South African songs created by the Aboriginal singers and songwriters that is occurring at The Big Sing. When performances brought together the Central Australian Ladies Choir with *Asante Sana*,

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<sup>226</sup> Nakata 2007: 9.

<sup>227</sup> Ottosson 2010: 278.

<sup>228</sup> Dunbar-Hall, Peter and Gibson, Chris (2004) *Deadly sounds, deadly places: contemporary Aboriginal music in Australia*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd.

<sup>229</sup> See Hurley 2012; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson (2004); and Walker, Clinton (2000) *Buried Country: The Story of Aboriginal Country Music* Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press.

and all with the Soweto Gospel Choir, the music selected was oriented towards non-Aboriginal music and non-Aboriginal social and political agendas, although parallels were drawn. Overall, there was an uneasy alignment of coexistence between these musical encounters.

The Central Australian choirs that I discussed in this chapter, *Asante Sana*, *Tnantjama Ngkatja Ntjarrala*, the choirs from Areyonga and Titjikala, and the Central Australian Ladies Choir in its various configurations, are choirs that are formed in diverse ways; prompted by culturally, socially and musically different motivations. Despite the differences and the tensions, however, there is a shared passion about the practice of community singing; all are interested in opportunities to explore other choral music and each can articulate the rewards that they personally gain. To highlight that expression, there is no better end to this chapter than a piece of prose from Deb Chappell, a member of *Asante Sana*, who eloquently captured what singing with others meant to her:

[Singing] can be deeper than speech – it magnifies the meaning of the spoken words through the emotions that the music brings. It can bring something else too – a power and a healing [...]

A cappella singing in harmony is especially moving for me. It takes me to another place – beyond this world. Sometimes I feel I am taken to the very edge of heaven. I can smell the fragrance of wonder and feel as if deep mysteries that are beyond words are within my grasp. Really, sometimes I almost hear the angels sing with us.

I think the African freedom songs and spirituals have a special depth that is difficult to articulate. They are born out of deep suffering and therefore speak of great hope. I also believe this hope and, though I haven't suffered like them, yet I am linked to them and their faith as I sing their beautifully crafted yet simple songs of faith. This is a HUGE encouragement in my walk of faith. What a blessing those songs are.

Often the song awakes joy in my heart. I look around and see others are feeling the same. We do indeed "share the joy". When the song is over we give a collective sigh of contentment. I feel like my soul has been fed and watered and I am at peace.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Chappell, Deb (2010) *Why I Sing*, unpublished, in author's possession.

## Coda

### The Big Sing in the Desert: An emphasis on exchange and common ground

*There's nothing you can do that can't be done.  
Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.  
Nothing you can say but you can learn how to play the game  
It's easy.*

**'All You Need is Love' by John Lennon and Paul McCartney**

We were all closely gathered in the communal room of the original Loves Creek Homestead, built in 1898 at Ross River as a working cattle station by the pioneering Bloomfield family<sup>1</sup>. The roughly sawn timber walls and heavy beams made it dark and cavernous at times, but beyond the high windows, the sun was bright and glowed off the deep red rock of the steep hill behind in the late afternoons. We were sitting and standing around the large screen which was playing through a series of photographs from the past two days. The young women who had put the photo story together were operating as a Non-Government Organisation called Joining the Dots.<sup>2</sup> They had come to support The Big Sing in the Desert 2012 by creating multimedia capture and dissemination of the weekend singing workshop. Unsurprisingly they chose as its title the famous Lennon and McCartney song which we had learned to sing in four part harmony because it captured the sentiment of the weekend workshop; the smiling, joyful faces of the singers and the few children who had accompanied some of the adults from nearby Central Australian communities or far distant parts of Australia.<sup>3</sup>

Ross River is a modest resort, about 85 kilometres east of Alice Spring. Its simple green cabins tumble down a gentle slope near the homestead; over the river is a camp ground and bunk house with a communal cooking area. It sits within the stunning landscape of the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges. Nearby is the spectacular Trepina Gorge where the singers spent one afternoon singing in the resonant space and exploring its creek and paths, the Aboriginal women searching (unsuccessfully) for *ingkulpa*.<sup>4</sup> Closer still is

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.rossriverresort.com.au/about.htm>, accessed 15 January 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.joiningthedots.org/>; and [http://www.rachelhore.com/bigsing\\_blogintro.html](http://www.rachelhore.com/bigsing_blogintro.html), accessed 1 July 2012.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 7 for the list of songs learnt at the Big Sing in the Desert in 2010 and 2012.

<sup>4</sup> *Arrernte* for "bush tobacco".

N'Darla Gorge which few were able to travel to, although one afternoon we all ventured to the nearby bluff at a turn in the Ross River, to sing with each other, to sing to the bluff (and hear our voices bounce back), to sing to country. At night the dingoes sang to us lullabies, the morning chorus came from the budgerigars. In between, the hours were filled with our songs, our voices.

Two years previously, at the inaugural Big Sing, this opening scene would not have been possible. In that introductory year there had been both fewer women from the regional Aboriginal communities and fewer non-Indigenous singers from Alice Springs. Most of those attending the weekend workshop in 2010 had been attracted by Rachel Hore's reputation. Many had experienced her workshops. Some admitted to attending multiple workshops both in Australia and overseas. One singer from Western Australia recalled her introduction to Rachel's work as a choral leader:

[I]t was when Gyan [Godfrey] ran the first *Rhythmsong* and had Rachel come and she taught us some songs. So I think that's when I first saw her work as a singing instructor, teacher, and almost have become a bit of a groupie, I suppose [...] [S]he's such a wonderful teacher, teaches us lovely songs [...] I always remember that first *Rhythmsong* she was at [...] [S]he taught us one song in Pit<sup>5</sup> and she mentioned she'd been doing some stuff with women in the Centre so when she sent [the promotional material for The Big Sing] around, I thought 'Oh!'. [I enjoy her] repertoire and the style and Rachel, she just doesn't seem to get angry with anyone.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the Aboriginal singers, who had been fully or partially sponsored by many people within Hore's network of singers, had been attracted to The Big Sing because they had worked with both Rachel and Morris Stuart in the 2008 Many Roads One Voice project. A handful of non-Indigenous singers were attracted specifically by Morris' involvement, having been members of *Asante Sana*. Barbara Jackson admired Morris' work, knew of Rachel's reputation, and saw the opportunity to be involved in the weekend workshop as a welcome relief from her long-term work in the *Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara* (APY) Lands:

I was blown out by his [leadership], how he directs music and all of the songs. We just had lyrics, we had no music. And in ten weeks, I'm sure, we were on stage at the Araluen [Centre] and it was just stunning [...] I think it was nearly 80 people. It was wonderful [...] I just wanted to do the workshop. And particularly because it was Rachel and Morris. And

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<sup>5</sup> *Pitjantjatjara* is commonly referred to simply as "Pit" by those working in and around the APY Lands.

<sup>6</sup> Gunn, Pam (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 31/07/10).

particularly because they were doing it together. I just thought it might be pretty amazing. Even though I'd never done a workshop with Rachel I'd heard from members of the choir I sing with back home that she was pretty great, special, so I imagined it would be pretty fantastic. So I was really excited.<sup>7</sup>

The Big Sing in 2010 had met its modest goal of bringing non-Indigenous and Aboriginal people together to sing.<sup>8</sup> Rachel had been enormously happy with the event, claimed it a great success, and hoped it would be an ongoing event in coming years.<sup>9</sup> She summed up the weekend: "Over 80 singers (and a dog!) attended from around Australia sharing songs from different cultures, including learning songs in *Pitjantjatjara*, *Arrente* [sic], *Khosa* and English".<sup>10</sup> Rachel repeated the words of one of the *Arrente* singers, saying they really liked singing with everyone and meeting lots of lovely people: "Both *Anangu* and white people living, eating, singing in harmony, learning and sharing songs in different languages, meeting people from different places, learning different harmonies".<sup>11</sup> Morris reported that he had also been pleased with the weekend and was assured the Aboriginal women had benefitted:

I had no expectations except hopefully. It exceeded them really. I think the presence of the Aboriginal women, not just being there, but being really present, being able to express themselves ostensibly – where they're coming from, being able to be received, and having the confidence to share and teach stuff. I just heard from Areyonga. I was on the phone with one of them yesterday and one of the Indigenous people there said they had a wonderful weekend, they're just raving about it.<sup>12</sup>

Barb Stuart added, "I had breakfast with one of the group of women [...] and one of them said that 'Yes, it's good that black and white can be together'".<sup>13</sup> There followed a discussion about the relaxation that had been evident amongst the Aboriginal women, their ability to enjoy themselves, to sing, to lead songs, to dance wildly; one woman, who walked with a stick, dropped it to the ground to sway to the singing of '*Inanay*', and other Aboriginal women had revealed a surprising sensuality in their dance movements.

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<sup>7</sup> Jackson, Barbara (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 31/7/10).

<sup>8</sup> A list of the songs exchanged and learnt can be found in Appendix 6.

<sup>9</sup> Hore, Rachel (2010) Personal communication (Emails 23/09/10 and 31/09/10).

<sup>10</sup> Hore 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Hore 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart, Morris (2012) Personal conversation (Interview 6/09/12).

<sup>13</sup> Stuart, Barbara (2012) Personal conversation (Interview 6/09/12).

Morris was reassuring: “A few people wondered because there’s an air of inscrutability about them but, no, they loved it [...] or they might say ‘It’s alright’”.<sup>14</sup> A *Darug/Gundungaran* woman from urban Australia who had visited this remote area for the first time expressed her appreciation of the experience:

[...] and listening to the ladies singing in language. I think that’s the biggest thrill in my life because our language was taken away. I could sit there and just listen to the talk or watch and listen to them sing. To me it’s just magical.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, there had been expectations left unmet, disappointment with the musical content, a social discontent, and less connection made than would happen in 2012; and there was not the presence of a group of skilled enthusiastic young people wanting to record it. Various participants in 2010 had mentioned throughout the weekend that they were frustrated by the lack of musical development they normally received at a Rachel Hore workshop. They also complained about the ‘God-bothering’, had a very poor view of the ‘durgy’ hymns, and were disappointed with the lack of ‘authentic’ traditional songs from the Aboriginal participants. Others similarly repeated Gunn’s comments:

I guess I should have thought about it a little bit more. Because I’m not religious it’s a little over the top religious for me. [And] I was hoping there would be them singing their non-religious songs if they have them. Maybe they never do, these particular groups of women. So, it wasn’t quite what I was hoping<sup>16</sup>.

Assumptions, expectations and ignorance became evident. Previous exposure to contemporary Indigenous lives varied amongst the non-Indigenous participants and the responses to their indigenised Lutheran belief system and its choral expression were likewise diverse. Curiously, the experience of many of the non-Indigenous singers in 2010 revealed that little had shifted in expectations of Central Australian Aboriginal music performance since the 1960s. When singers from *Ntaria* had performed in “campfire concerts” put on at Palm Valley, a stunning lush valley with rare palm trees not far from *Ntaria*, for Sundowner coach tours or during the Hermannsburg Choir’s tour to southern states tour in 1967, the pre-conceived notions of Aboriginal cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Stuart, Morris 2012

<sup>15</sup> Cooper, Carol (2010) Personal conversation (Interview 1/08/10).

<sup>16</sup> Gunn 2010.



expression by non-Indigenous audiences were similarly challenged<sup>17</sup>. The syncretic reality of contemporary Central Australian Aboriginal musical expressions confronted the constructed notions of 'tradition', 'authenticity', 'musical assimilation' and 'cultural imperialism'. A visitor to the campfire session one evening at The Big Sing, a young, urban, university educated woman, articulated in a most dramatic way the clash of theoretical understandings and lived exposure to contemporary Indigenous lives. Nevertheless, her angry outburst about the damage of enforced religious doctrine had been more quietly uttered amongst the singers. Some singers did, however, express appreciation of the opportunity to be challenged, to have understandings shifted, knowledge deepened. Rachel responded to the feedback from the workshop in a fulsome manner:

Some of your feedback was about the choice of music – generally too slow and too many religious songs. We did think hard about which songs to bring, as this was going to be such a mix of voices and backgrounds. Morris and I chose our songs chiefly to make it comfortable for the indigenous women in this first workshop. As English is often a second or third language for them, our experience is they like to sing songs slowly and give up on a song if it is too fast. Hymns are what they love and respond to and what makes sense to them in their choral tradition.

Some people thought we might learn more 'traditional' aboriginal music. Traditional music is not taught to everybody (especially whitefellas), and is usually sung in relation to being in country or ceremony. Teresa Wilson from Areyonga told me that the main songwoman at Areyonga, Daphne Puntjina, had learnt her traditional songs off field recordings from the 1960's as most of her traditional songs were already lost.

As we were in country that belonged to none of these women, hymns were our main musical link. Whether or not you have Christian faith, I believe it's important to respect this long and beautiful musical tradition that is sung mostly by women.<sup>18</sup>

The gathering in 2012 benefitted from the return of about half the singers from the first Big Sing, the many new singers familiar with Rachel's work who were better informed about the lack of expectations required, and more singers resident in Central Australia. The experience of African Grace with the Soweto Gospel Choir for many of those from Alice Springs and surrounding communities in the interim year had produced another

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<sup>17</sup> Hurley, Andrew Wright (2012) German-Indigenous Musical Flows at Hermannsburg in the 1960s, *Shifting Sounds: Musical Flow*, Hobart: IASPMANZ Annual Conference, 5-7 December.

<sup>18</sup> Hore 2010.

level of familiarity and collaboration. Unlike the previous Big Sing, the Aboriginal women shared culture beyond that of their Lutheran traditions and familiar songs translated into local Aboriginal languages. In 2012, some of the songs learnt in the workshop were translated into *Arrernte* and *Luritja* including 'Vuma' and 'Lay Your Burden Down' by Jane Christie-Johnson.

On the first night, after an evening of informal solo and small group performances from many of the workshop participants, Daphne Puntjina Burton led traditional dances in the light of the campfire. She had been unable to attend the previous Big Sing and her presence in 2012 was a positive force. Puntjina Burton briefly explained the dances: two women being chased by men; women with digging sticks; the story of the seven sisters (Pleiades); looking for bushtucker; and dancing with the *manguri*, the fur or hair head ring worn for carrying loads. Her thin, aged body was strong and knowledgeable; she danced with energy. Other women joined her. Like many senior women, Puntjina Burton sings, dances, and paints; law and knowledge is embodied. She also carries religious knowledge and has translated hymns or composed gospel songs.<sup>19</sup> Elders of the church are most often those also responsible for upholding traditional law.<sup>20</sup>

On the second night, after kangaroo tail and damper cooked on the fire, and witnessing an intense political discussion between NT Member of Parliament Alison Anderson and Morris Stuart, the singing around the campfire found shared repertoire, including songs from childhood: 'The Hokie Pokie', 'Three Little Ducks', 'She'll be Coming Round the Mountain', '*Pokarekare Ana*', and 'Ghost Rider', with Puntjina Burton acting out the title role in the latter song. The response was wild hoots of laughter. We learnt 'Hands, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' in *Pitjantjatjara*. '*Nyanpi Matilda*' was the big hit of the night, with Sandra Windy playing the role of the jumbuck (sheep), Puntjina Burton the swagman, and another woman the policeman. The Areyonga women had taught the *Pitjantjatjara* version earlier in the day and everyone sang and laughed with delight as the women enacted its lyrics. It would be a reference point for gentle teasing the

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<sup>19</sup> Puntjina Burton keeps church and 'traditional' business separate so as not to corrupt either, although there are points of connection between the two. (Borgas, Rob [2012a] Personal comment [01/06/12]).

<sup>20</sup> Pybus, Carol Ann (2012) '*We grew up this place*': *Ernabella Mission 1937-1974*, PhD thesis, University of Tasmania: ii.

following morning when Puntjina Burton led the church service and during the final singing session which was full of “singing, dancing, so much joy”.<sup>21</sup> It would re-emerge as a much appreciated humorous addition to the Desert Voice concert later in the year. After the final group photo on the last afternoon the Aboriginal women gathered together to sing their ‘farewell song’.

In 2012 there seemed to be little discontent amongst the non-Indigenous singers although the experienced and pragmatic amongst them, and those participants resident in Central Australia, tempered their assessment of the weekend. Some singers from more distant parts of Australia framed their appreciation of the weekend based on its cultural and physical placement: “I came here to be in a part of the land I’ve never been before [...] to meet the people and understand their culture in a positive way [...] even more importantly for my daughter to experience this with me”.<sup>22</sup> Others within the gathering expressed their reflections more effusively:

As I witnessed the friendships form and people’s confidence build (and the smiles enlarge!) I got to thinking about what it is that creates community. Amidst the allure of sweet harmony and bodily expression, there were other things that were happening, quite naturally. I began to discover that what connected us to each other was the children, the campfire, sharing meals, the vibrant yet mindful facilitation and a strong desire to learn from one another. We were nourished not only with the sounds from our combined voices but with heapings of laughter, dancing and hugs!

In the process we may just have discovered how similar we are, how much we needed to laugh, that we each have a story and it’s sacred, that language can be both a mystery and a trigger for unique insights to culture.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the weekend, Rachel remarked mostly on the presence of laughter that had so marked the weekend. She also spoke of how she and Morris believed in the power of community and making community through singing. They also shared a desire, she said, to support the preservation of Central Australian choral singing, a music

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<sup>21</sup> Lambert, Sarah (2012) Personal comment, *The Big Sing in the Desert 2012 facebook page*, <https://www.facebook.com/TheBigSingInTheDesert2012?ref=ts&fref=ts>, accessed 1 July 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, (2012) Personal comment, <http://www.rachelhore.com/blog/>, accessed 1 July 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Elsley, Penny (2012) Personal comment, *Joining the dots at the Big Sing*, 30 June, <http://www.rachelhore.com/blog/>, accessed 1 July 2012.

practice that demanded “a bigger space and value in the wider choral context of Australia”<sup>24</sup>. Morris similarly felt the weekend was positive to all:

I think it’s been a fascinating process we’ve entered into, with Aboriginal women making a contribution in a very direct and confident way – there was nothing tokenistic about their contribution this weekend. Often when groups gather together there is an underlying patronising that goes on, but I think people really stepped up into their place, stood, took it and we’ve all reaped the benefit of that. I always think that with choral singing, the narrative is bigger than the music, much bigger than the music and it enables people to build a sense of community – break down barriers, actually cross barriers they normally wouldn’t cross. I think it’s a great opportunity for people to start reconfiguring their views about other people, on both sides, and finding common humanity.<sup>25</sup>

During the evolution of The Big Sing the specific agendas of Rachel and Morris within this Central Australian context have merged. Before the first Big Sing there had been more of a distinction between their endeavours with the Aboriginal singers. Rachel’s motivations had been based on the invitation of the Aboriginal choirs to access material beyond their Desert Gospel tradition. Morris had responded to their desire to improve the musicality of the choirs in order to improve performances. There was therefore a tension in bringing together the preservation of a musical practice and an increase in its performative level with that of responding to a desire for greater exposure to different choral traditions and repertoire. The inclusion of the non-Indigenous participants was designed around the known interest in attending workshops in exotic places, their desire for cross-cultural musical encounters, and an assumption of alliance with the progressive ideals of the project leaders. Present throughout then was the challenge to create community within a gathering where desires and motivations did not perfectly align.

The big screen flickered through photographs of heads bent together working over the lyrics or melody of new material; the nursing of small children; the two leaders, Rachel and Morris, dynamically conducting; hands being held; damper and kangaroo tail on the fire; singing around the campfire; but most frequently, the circle of song and voice and

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<sup>24</sup> Hore, Rachel (2012) Personal comment, The Narrative is Bigger than the Music, *Reflections from the Organisers*, posted 30 June, <http://www.rachelhore.com/blog/>, accessed 1 July 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart, Morris (2012) Personal comment, The Narrative is Bigger than the Music, *Reflections from the Organisers*, posted 30 June, <http://www.rachelhore.com/blog/>, accessed 1 July 2012.

movement. Concentration and joy were manifest in the photographs. As we watched the captured moments change there were shouts of awe, delighted laughter, and tears of joy. Before the weekend had concluded this immediate documentation cemented the workshop's impact, made real the hope of cross-cultural exchange and common ground that had been its aim.



## Conclusion

### A Window to Somewhere Else

*why do we make music; why do we go to festivals? because in music, in dance, we find a window to somewhere else, another plane. eventually, as we say yes to that higher beauty, and thereby to each other (because as fellow pilgrims we are no longer in opposition), the ego dissolves, the fear dissolves, the petty fussiness dissolves: there is no i-music, no you-music, only music. and then a smile starts, which eventually goes all the way around your head and joins up with itself. and, of course, with all the other smiles. this feeling is called love, I think.*

**Stephen Taberner (2013) Personal comment (4/04/13)**

Music gives us a real experience  
of what the ideal might be.

**Simon Frith (1996) *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press: 274.**

[Music] shows a way forward in the rejection of policies of assimilation in favour of the “Two Ways” of placing indigenous and non-indigenous on equal footing, permitting the kind of healthy cross-cultural influence and fusion which will continue to yield new music of significance and difference, enriching the stockpile of human artistic expression.

**Anne Boyd (2011) *To Didj or Not to Didj ?: Exploring indigenous Representation in Australian Music Theater Works* by Margaret Sutherland and Andrew Schultz, in Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson (eds), *Opera Indigene: Re/presenting First Nations and Indigenous Cultures*, Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT : Ashgate: 113.**

### **Preamble**

Through ‘a window to somewhere else’ one can see “the possible, the spaces, the maybes”.<sup>1</sup> It is a charmed apparition that is often celebrated in the making of music and one imagined through the lens of reconciliation. The convergence of community music and reconciliation provides a multifocal glimpse through that window. The view resonates with harmony, with healing, with hope, and even, quite possibly, with love. The view shimmers with the transcending of differences, the building of coalitions, and

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<sup>1</sup> Winton, Tim (1994) *The Riders*, Sydney: Pan MacMillan Publishers: 51.

the expanding of consciousness “which are all preconditions for grassroots social movements”<sup>2</sup>.

Setting out to answer the questions formulated for this research project, I uncovered rich discourses and dialogues circulating within both the community music and reconciliation movements. I found the constructions, the contexts, the complexities, and the contradictions inherent in the formalised processes and practices of both. I also discovered that at their convergence are the nuanced, layered and textured lived experiences of ‘singing in between’. I have drawn on ethnographic data and interrogated numerous academic landscapes to construct an interdisciplinary methodological and theoretical approach for my investigation and for the resulting interpretative analysis. In this highly interdisciplinary project I engaged across a range of literature rather than a deep excavation of a singular disciplinary approach to the study of music and society.

In this Conclusion, I reflect upon each chapter, drawing out the major themes and premises. I lightly touch upon the ethnographic episodes from the Prelude, Interlude and Coda. The re-articulation of the empirical data and the methodological and theoretical underpinnings provide an overview of the research project. I highlight the contributions I have made to academic dialogues, particularly to the study of community music, and to the ethnographic field research of music making. In my concluding remarks I comment on the view exposed through ‘a window to somewhere else’ and share the conversation that sparked the title of the thesis.

### ***Methodological and Theoretical Framework***

In Chapter One I focused on ethnography as methodology and explored various issues and challenges inherent in field research. I concentrated on the ethics involved in the gaining of intimacy and knowledge from the privileged position of researcher, practitioner and friend – the ‘intimate insider’. My discussion also focused on some of the challenges and opportunities presented by returning to a previously known field

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<sup>2</sup> Leavy, Patricia (2009) *Method Meets Art: Arts-based research practice*, New York: The Guildford Press: 116.



site. I concluded by declaring my authorial voice within the polyphony of voices that I set out to present in this thesis.

In Chapters Two and Three I explored literature on community music and reconciliation. In both chapters I considered relevant theoretical issues to my research endeavour. My study critically addressed aspects of these two popular movements. In Chapter Two I outlined a history to the community interactions that were the subject of this thesis. Recognising a link to the a cappella scene, I mapped out the changes that have taken place over the last decade or so. I declared that nodes of community choral events and choirs continue to emerge out of the influence of the a cappella scene and retained some of its distinctive qualities. I noted the increase and normalisation of community choirs and the development of a community music movement. I established that the positive outcomes of community music making, and more broadly, the arts, are widely promoted. I suggested that these 'good news stories' were being used to persuade decision makers and funding bodies, and circulated to sustain the rhetoric amongst the 'believers'. Aligning with the arts and health agenda, I also noted that much research on community music making had been undertaken over the last decade to support the claims of improved individual and social wellbeing from participation in community singing. My analysis suggested, however, that the evidence base of much of that research was poor and had been rather muted within the discourse. What was missing in much of the current research is the demonstrable increase in musical knowledge and practice; the details, reasons for and processes of repertoire selection and musical pedagogy; as well as the agency of the singers in their music making. Research has to take account of differences amongst individuals: their personal histories, social circumstances, health and motivations; differences between the agendas of the choirs; variations in repertoire and musical pedagogy; and, importantly, acknowledgment of the social and political imperatives, economic resources, and cultural arenas at the local, national and global levels in which they operate. The experience of meaningful engagement with music can prompt an expansion of human being, doing and knowledge; reinscribing an inherent creative and artistic practice which is too often absent or undernourished in many lives. A raft of both long term metric measurement and ethnographic approaches are necessary in order to move beyond simple causal links between music and wellbeing.

In Chapter Three I discussed the reconciliation movement, itself complex and highly contested. Further, the notion both ignores the fact that no conciliation existed and in some ways misses the breadth and diversity of cross-cultural relations from the past and in the present. Setting up a distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can therefore be somewhat arbitrary. The structural intolerance to different ways of living, especially in regard to the choices made or desired by Indigenous Australians, can and does inform community and individual constructions of what it means to be an Indigenous Australian. Similarly, the media presents divergent images of Indigenous people that do nothing to quell the uncertainty held by many non-Indigenous Australians about the role they might play in race relations. Many in the reconciliation movement have certainly commented on some of the structural intolerances and systemic problems and have also provided alternative ways of understanding Indigenous lives, but it may have achieved as much as is possible within its scope of influence.

In Chapter Three I also explored the incorporation of reconciliation into Australian music before exploring ways to create an analytical framework to examine the convergence of community music and reconciliation in community choirs and choral events. The community interactions investigated in this thesis highlighted the potential in and limitations of the community music and reconciliation movements. The empirical evidence exposed some of the weaknesses in both movements. Neither of the movements operates at the margins of popular conversations, although both are admittedly aligned with progressive rather than neo-liberal views. Nevertheless, the discourses emerging from both movements circulate with numerous abstract metaphors that cloud and clutter the contested spaces, thus hiding the manoeuvrings that occur for either political or economic advantage. Amplified within the convergence of community music and reconciliation are the public discourses of inclusion and wellbeing. These positive notions are caught between ideological, political and social agendas, especially when an interventionist approach is taken. Inclusion and wellbeing are also priorities in government policies and programmes on which the movements are dependent for some of the funding that supports their activities.

The community interactions showed the potential for social change, that the shifting of ideas about our 'other selves' through cross-cultural music making was possible and that lives could become more connected and relational. The community interactions generated values through a shared experience that boosted a shared intent to be part of and motivate change. This 'in-between' space brought a sense of harmony, both musically and metaphorically, which enhanced the interaction. I therefore meditated on this 'in-between' space, interweaving various theoretical concepts and the empirical evidence to propose a mechanism with which to come to an understanding of the shared experience, shared intent and shared action of the choral events and choirs. As a theoretical concept, 'singing in between' dwells in a space where engagement is shifting from an 'interface' between separately conceived domains or bounded cultures towards a distinctive set of values and practices that can appreciate that Indigenous and non-Indigenous social forms are inextricably relational. The notion of 'singing in between' therefore provides a way to recognise the single 'sociocultural field'<sup>3</sup> that community interactions can be seen to inhabit.

In the second half of the thesis I closely investigated each of the regional case studies. These are discussed in the following section.

### ***Common Agendas and Regional Variations***

All around you, under the concord sky, there still floats the influence of that human-faith-melody – transcendent and sentimental enough for the enthusiast or the cynic, respectively – reflecting an innate hope, a common interest in common things and common man [sic].<sup>4</sup>

The common interests of music and a desire for cross-cultural encounter were readily located in community interactions. While I acknowledge the influence of the community music and reconciliation movements that surround and nurture the community interactions I needed to unhinge the everyday practice from the movements. Certainly the popular discourses from both movements entered the dialogues circulating within the three regional case studies. But the case studies more readily exposed that music

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<sup>3</sup> Hinkson, Melinda and Smith, Ben (2005) Introduction - conceptual moves towards an intercultural analysis, in Melinda Hinkson and Ben Smith (eds), "Figuring the Intercultural in Aboriginal Australia", *Oceania* 75.3: 157-166.

<sup>4</sup> From the score of Concord Sonata by Charles Ives, cited in Joanna MacGregor, 2002, "Charles Ives", in *Bloody Amateurs*, John L Walters (ed), Reading: Unknown Public Ltd P&C: pp

making can be about both community and action. Within the case studies I could better identify the varied tones inherent in the convergence of music and reconciliation when it arises from within community - that personal connections and music making shift between harmonious and dissonant moments across celebration, healing and hope in order to make meaning and to act meaningfully in the world. Further, that “acting meaningfully in the world” was contextualised and situated.

The musical engagements suggested a way to move beyond reconciliation to one of relation, through music making. The community interactions in Victoria, Western Australia and Central Australia showed that the systemic structures that perpetuate social disadvantage and injustice can be more readily recognised and critiqued when relationships are more intimate and robust; more open to listening, exchange and negotiation. All three regional representations of ‘singing in between’ revealed a strengthening of Indigenous voices. Each shared a desire to revitalise or maintain Indigenous languages,<sup>5</sup> to promote Indigenous culture, to sing accessible Indigenous songs, and to inscribe storytelling into their practices.

But there were differences in other priorities. In Central Australia it was the desire to hold tight to the tradition of Gospel Desert choirs while exploring other choral possibilities. In Western Australia the journey of the Stolen Generations framed the choir’s mandate to promote reconciliation through musical expression. And in Victoria, the 2009 Melbourne Millennium Chorus concert series was a vehicle for cross-cultural celebration of a recently declared national park and the contribution of Indigenous knowledge to address contemporary environmental issues.

Each of these regional dimensions also brought forth to varying degrees the non-Indigenous observation of increased confidence of Indigenous voices and a non-Indigenous integration into Indigenous lives and knowledge, which were rarely straight forward. In some way there is an historical need in the non-Indigenous actions – a wanting for confirmation of a contribution to and conscious engagement with the ‘other’ of our ‘other selves’. The non-Indigenous activists driving these projects inspired

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<sup>5</sup> See Biddle, Nicholas (2012) *Indigenous Language Usage*, Paper No. 1, Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences.

other actors with their vision, drawing on their charismatic and determined leadership. Each reinforced the profile of successful community music leaders suggested by Bartleet et al.<sup>6</sup> With a belief in the power of music, matched by a desire for improved cultural relations, these activists passionately nurtured musical and social harmony. They encouraged community voices to merge and blend over a history of racial discord, a vocal process that attempted to shift the tension between the healing of wounds of the past and the imagining of a different Australia. They constructed community choral engagements that embodied harmony, healing and hope – orchestrating representations of reconciliation. Importantly, the musical interactions showed that ongoing long-term relations that focused on musicality and music-making could more successfully achieve the aims or ambitions desired.

While specific and contextual, each of these interactions prompted the exploration and reshaping of individual, local and national notions of identity, community and music practice. Each of the projects presented opportunities for musical exchange, development and cross-cultural engagement. Each of the musical interactions was a celebration of difference, diversity and social change within which the trope of harmony was strongly utilised. Overall, each musical interaction revealed the “strategies of self-identity and power-negotiation”<sup>7</sup> which operated within them, and the “performed self-perception”<sup>8</sup> that resulted.

The ethnographic evidence also exposed productive tensions within this ‘cultural interface’. There is a tension between the “efforts to promote and protect distinct cultural qualities and practice”<sup>9</sup> with those that perform social and cultural cohesion. There was little acknowledgement that the community interactions emerged from their own articulation of racial difference, and subsequently demonstrated the ambiguities of the lived experience of those categories, particularly in the ongoing interactions in

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<sup>6</sup> Bartleet, Brydie-Leigh, Dunbar-Hall, Peter, Letts, Richard, and Schippers, Huib (2009) *Sound Links: Community Music in Australia*, Brisbane: Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre, Griffith University.

<sup>7</sup> Phelan 2008: 146.

<sup>8</sup> Phelan 2008: 146.

<sup>9</sup> Ottosson, Åse (2010) Aboriginal Music and Passion: Interculturality and Difference in Australian Desert Towns, *Ethnos*, 75.3: 278.

Western and Central Australia. A tension existed in regard to Indigenous politics which were often underplayed or unrecognised. This highlights that 'singing in between' is never intended to be a politically charged interaction. While at one level the interactions nurtured a shared understanding of the present and a mutual imagination of the future, they often glossed over the deeper politics of the past or present in which they were operating. For example, in celebrating the announcement of the Barmah National Park in Victoria, *Our Home Our Land* muted a significant land rights history. *Madjitol Moorna* in Western Australia declared an apolitical stance to its sociomusical project, yet it was clearly taking a position within the politics of reconciliation. When surveying across all the interactions, it is evident that politics were overshadowed by the celebration of community music and its ability to engender harmony, healing and hope, motivations which were primary, and felt most worthy.

While the notions of harmony and healing were readily identifiable and frequently articulated, the notion of hope was also was inherent. It circulated in promotional material and was often articulated in the agenda of the project leaders. Their lived experience, which increasingly developed close relationships with Indigenous musicians and singers, shaped their work. Hope circulated too within the conversations of the singers, within the songs and performances of the choirs. A politics of hope<sup>10</sup> was operating, one that emerged from within the community interactions. As the case studies revealed, the politics of motion and a commitment to action were innate when 'singing in between'; this is the very fabric of the community interactions I discuss in this thesis: they are "relational, interactional, intersubjective, dialogical and mutually transformative processes".<sup>11</sup>

### ***Contributions to Academic Dialogue***

Through my research I have been able to make significant contributions to community music research and to ethnography. I unpacked numerous notions that circulate within community music: harmony, community, social inclusion, and wellbeing. I highlighted

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<sup>10</sup> Wong, Deborah (2009) An Ethnomusicology of Hope in a Time of Trauma, in Elizabeth Mackinlay, Brydie-Lee Bartleet and Katelyn Barney (eds), *Musical Islands: Exploring connections between music, place and research*, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 3-19.

<sup>11</sup> Ottosson 2010: 276.

some of the limitations in much of the present research linking music and wellbeing. I created a theoretical construct, 'singing in between', that enabled analysis of cross-cultural music making; to make sense of the 'musical pathways' and 'border crossings' that enable meaning, connection, knowledge and expression. I cemented this theoretical construct in community and action. The three regional examples of community interaction reinforced that what results is always contextualised, unique and not able to be replicated, despite similarities in motivations and agendas. I have added to dialogues relating to ethnography, contributing elements from my own experience that could engender further discussions. Most importantly I have provided another example of an interdisciplinary approach to music research.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Despite the complexity around the notion of reconciliation, it operates broadly within community music as a means of cross-cultural engagement, particularly in recognition of Indigenous contributions to Australian music. The aesthetics and practice of community music making broadly heralds social inclusion and social cohesion, so choral events are often used to symbolically represent reconciliation and national identity. Many community choral events find ways to capture and reflect reconciliation and/or national identity by singing 'Indigenous songs'. The rhythms, melodies and harmonies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musics are at once exotic, familiar and potent to the desire or the imagining of a reconciled nation and a greater sense of home. Of course, many singers in these symbolic events are dislocated from the Indigenous musics they sing. As a result of popular media, however, the source of the Indigenous songs is no longer so definitively "safe, exotic and somewhere else"<sup>12</sup>. Nonetheless, the role that these singers play in race relations can still be uncertain and confusing.

The community interactions described in this thesis, on the other hand, can be seen to be vibrant and vital acts at the 'cultural interface'; grass-roots representations of singing with 'other selves'. The aesthetics and practice of community music making are embodied, not merely symbolic. Each interaction utilised established community choral

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<sup>12</sup> Hayward, Phillip (1993) Safe, Exotic and Somewhere Else: Yothu Yindi, Treaty and the mediation of Aboriginality, *Perfect Beat* 1.2: 33-42.

traditions to encourage voices to merge and blend over a history of racial discord in an attempt to shift the tension between the past and the imagining of a different Australia. Each captured the intent of reconciliation and massaged national identity through the lived experience of cross-cultural musical encounter, connection and expression. Each case study was designed to model possible social and cultural dimensions to a reconciled Australia. As a result, more of the realities of Indigenous lives were made relational in the making of music, became corporeal through lives and stories shared. These community interactions are best described as 'singing in between', a transitional space in which to manage the challenge of cross-cultural engagement.

When 'singing in between' members of the choirs were able to access and feel a sense of celebration. At the same time, they could also sense "unease at the internal displacements that underlie the nationalist project".<sup>13</sup> When singing with 'other selves', "the 'white privilege' perception"<sup>14</sup> of Australia was more easily revealed. The community interactions exposed that "[t]he boundaries and the perceptions of bounded cultures were shaped by mutual, and always different expectations, interests and influences".<sup>15</sup> Some members of the dominant culture were then prompted to reflect upon their place in Australia, the telling of history, their socio-political responsibilities, and what role they played in race relations, "without losing ground beneath their feet".<sup>16</sup>

While the convergence of community music making and reconciliation was a common thread between each of the regional case studies there were distinct differences. Each emerged from its own regional history of coexistence and each interaction uniquely constructed the process of "connection and encounter".<sup>17</sup> In Victoria, Our Home Our

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<sup>13</sup> Mar, Phillip (1997) "Island Home": Cover versions, *Communal/Plural* 5: 151.

<sup>14</sup> Bamblett, Muriel, Burke, Gabrielle, Hunter, Sue Ann and Lewis, Peter (2008) Social Inclusion and the Dangers of Neo-colonialism: An Aboriginal Child and Family Services Perspective on Social Inclusion and Building Partnerships with Mainstream. Refereed paper presented to the *Partnerships for Social Inclusion Conference*, Centre for Public Policy, Melbourne, 15-16 October, <http://www.public-policy.unimelb.edu.au/conference08/>, accessed: 28 June 2012: 9.

<sup>15</sup> Ottosson 2010: 277.

<sup>16</sup> Slater, Lisa (2007) My Island Home is Waiting for Me: The Dreaming Festival and Archipelago Australia, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 21/4: 573.

<sup>17</sup> McMahon, Elizabeth (2003) The gilded cage: from utopia to monad in Australia's island imaginary, in Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (eds), *Islands in History and Representation*, London and New York: Routledge: 202.



Land was an isolated event with a few months of preparation and a concentrated period of performance. In Western Australia, *Madjtil Moorna* remains committed to its evolving sociomusical project. Meanwhile, the ebb and flow of cross-cultural choral projects in Central Australia is becoming more rhythmic, linked to the aesthetic of music making and the ability of music to produce practical outcomes. In June 2013 The Big Sing in the Desert will attempt to build on the previous experiences that I discussed in this thesis. What emerges from that weekend workshop will no doubt once again influence the Desert Voice concert later in the year.

These community choral engagements can be seen to promote the belief that community music-making can bridge cultural gaps. The music performed both articulated and offered the immediate experience of collective identity to which the singers were drawn, through affective and emotional alliances engendered through musical engagement. As Frith notes “[w]hat makes music special is that musical identity is both fantastic – idealizing not just oneself but also the social world one inhabits – and real: it is enacted in activity”.<sup>18</sup> But the interactions also revealed productive tensions: that to “learn from and to listen to one another”<sup>19</sup> required commonalities to be discovered; that embedded strains within race relations can only be shifted over time; that decision making processes and performance priorities require ongoing adjustments; that there is still much to exchange, to understand, and to know at the ‘cultural interface’. They affirmed that as tensions were resolved and ‘shared intention’ was garnered, the ‘cultural interface’ shifted away “from an emphasis [...] between separately conceived domains”<sup>20</sup> to one becoming relational and occupying “a single sociocultural field”.<sup>21</sup>

The ethnographic evidence illustrated that music is one way in which a practical outcome can be produced. The musical interactions showed that cross-cultural music making could be both political action and emotionally satisfying. They revealed that the tensions inherent in cross-cultural encounters could be made understandable and could

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<sup>18</sup> Frith 1996: 274.

<sup>19</sup> Duffy, Michelle (2007) *The Possibilities of Music: "To Learn from and to Listen to One Another"*, in Ros Bandt, Michelle Duffy and Dolly MacKinnon, *Hearing Places: Sound, Place, Time and Culture*, Newcastle UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 319.

<sup>20</sup> Hinkson and Smith 2005: 158.

<sup>21</sup> Hinkson and Smith 2005: 158.

be worked through, in order to produce something substantive at the grassroots level. While the structural changes desired are yet to be fully realised, there is good reason and a shared intent to have a positive time getting there.

'Singing in between' illustrated that renewing and sharing a sense of 'Indigenous Australia' within a broad Australian culture, music, and identity is an ongoing narrative that is striving to move beyond a discursive project of 'reconciliation' to one of active 'relation'. Australian identity can be shifted and shaped by deeper understandings of relational histories and geographies. Recognition of our evolving coexistence in all its regional variations is paramount to this. Ultimately, the case studies have shown that the more the joy of making music was held in tension with the discomfort of unsettled assumptions, the more one could visualise through that 'window to somewhere else'.

During one of my conversations with two Central Australian sisters, Melbourne was mentioned. Their contribution to that conversation has such poignancy in the context of national identity that it makes for a fitting close to the thesis. The sisters had visited the city with another sister and other members of their choir to perform at a national event. They were recounting that visit when Kathleen interjected into the conversation: "We was standing for trams [...] Me, Noreen and Clara [...] A husband a wife were standing. Two Chinese, a woman and man. They was looking at us because we was Aboriginal. Clara started dancing". Noreen added the question the observers asked: "Where do Aboriginal people come from?". Kathleen gave more detail: "They ask. [We respond] We are Australian".

## Appendix 1

### Discussion of some of the ‘Indigenous songs’ included in the ‘community choral canon’.

#### *My Island Home*

Neil Murray wrote ‘My Island Home’ in response to a personal experience that he reframed for the lead singer of the Warumpi Band, George Rurrumbu (also known as Burarrawanga or Djilaynga).<sup>1</sup> It was released in 1987 on The Warumpi Band’s second album *Go Bush!*. In 1995, almost a decade after its initial composition, Murray rewrote the song with Christine Anu. The lyrics were changed to reflect Anu’s personal experience of living in the city and having a Torres Strait Island ‘home’.<sup>2</sup> That version was awarded the Song of the Year by the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) in 1995 and was also included in the best 30 Australian songs for APRA’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007.

Anu added lyrics to her 2000 recording for the reprisal “Island home – Earth beat” which repositioned the song “from being about a singular geographical space to being inclusive of the whole of Australia”.<sup>3</sup> Those lyrics, however, rarely carry through to community choirs. The original version by Murray, as arranged by community music leader Rachel Hore, is more common. Hore had been asked by the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) and RedHot Arts to arrange ‘My Island Home’ for the Many Roads One Voice choral concert at the Alice Desert Festival in 2008. Neil Murray was in Alice Springs at the time of Many Roads One Voice and watched the performance of ‘My Island Home’ by the combined choirs. Hore commented that he “loved it and it was one of the highlights of the festival”.<sup>4</sup> Hore’s arrangement has subsequently circulated within the community music movement and Murray is happy with its popularity with community choirs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, Neil (2008) : 41.

<sup>2</sup> Murray 2008: 95.

<sup>3</sup> Barney 2005: 144.

<sup>4</sup> Hore 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Murray 2010.

### ***Kulba Yaday***

'*Kulba Yaday*' was first recorded by Christine Anu as the B side to her 'My Island Home' single and was subsequently recorded on a number of CDs. The original 1994 recording lists other contributors in addition to Anu: Jensen Warusam, David Bridie (also its producer), John Phillips and Michael Barker. To further clarify the song's authorship, meaning and/or translation I attempted to contact Christine Anu through her management and her sister Helen, but have yet to receive a response. Efforts have also been made to contact some of the other credited contributors. Despite the inability to talk to the primary sources there are suggestions about its origin. Harbison described '*Kulba Yaday*' as an adaptation of a popular Torres Strait Islander song.<sup>6</sup> It may also be that the song is representative of the "verbal invention" of Torres Strait Islander compositions referred to by Mar<sup>7</sup> and has no actual translation. The quest for the song's whole journey nevertheless remains part of ongoing research. The song circulates within the community. Conflicting sources are cited and it is mostly taught aurally, although harmonised scores and phonetic lyrics also circulate.

### ***Inanay***

'*Inanay*' first became popular within the a cappella scene when recorded on the *Tiddas* CD *Sing About Life*<sup>8</sup> and more widely known when used by ABC TV for promotional purposes. It is also in an ABC Song Book (1998). Lou Bennett learnt this song from her cousins and her grandmother in the late 1980s while working at Victoria's first established Aboriginal college, Worawa. No direct translation has been given, but the song is believed to be a lullaby or a children's song. The liner notes for '*Inanay*' simply say that it is a "traditional aboriginal song (words not available)". Bennett has suggested that the song travelled on 'songlines' which was evidenced in a version on Thursday Island sung by the Mills Sisters.<sup>9</sup> Research suggests the song is in the Mabuyag Island's *Kala Lagaw Ya* language but it could also be a Darnley Island song from Eastern Torres

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<sup>6</sup> Harbison, Melissa (1995) Island way brought to life, *Koori Mail*, 17 May: 20.

<sup>7</sup> Mar, Phillip (1997) "Island Home": Cover versions, *Communal/Plural* 5: 145-15.

<sup>8</sup> Tiddas (1993) *Sing About Life*, ID Phonogram Recordings 5183482, Australia.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Madjitol Moorna (2009) *Madjitol Moorna Song Book*, Kalamunda: Madjitol Moorna: 22.

Strait. It may have travelled to the Torres Strait through the Pacific from Hawai'i<sup>10</sup>. The fact that it continues to be transmitted by oral tradition in a non-scribal manner is typical of the community music movement although many phonetically written versions circulate among community choirs as well. Misinformation about its source can accompany its circulation.

### ***Yil Lull***

Joe Geia wrote '*Yil Lull*' in 1988 as a bicentennial lament. In it "we can find the quintessential mix of grief and hope, acknowledgement of the past and optimism for the future that has characterised Indigenous popular music in recent decades"<sup>11</sup>. The spelling of the song's title and arrangements vary in its circulation within the choral community.

### ***Baba Waiar***

Written in the 1980s, the original version of '*Baba Waiar*' is in the style of Torres Strait Islander *kores* (choruses). Miseron Levi, from St Paul community on Moa Island, wrote it following his first wife's passing. It was written in *Kala Lagaw Ya*. It is a good example of the ongoing importance of religious music in the life and culture of Torres Strait islander communities. Translated it says: "Father we ask you, please send your holy spirit/Father we ask you for your holy angels too/To come and stay with us us all through this night/All through this night until the morning light". '*Baba Waiar*' was recorded by Seaman Dan in 2009 on his *Sailing Home* CD<sup>12</sup>. Levi's English translation was included in that recording. Seaman Dan's recording was also influenced by the a cappella arrangement by Rachel Hore, which had widely circulated before she had knowledge of the song's source.<sup>13</sup> She subsequently ensures that its origin is known. Other arrangements have also been created within the community music movement.

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<sup>10</sup> Neuenfeldt, Karl (2012) Personal communication (12/04/12).

<sup>11</sup> Prior, Sian (2006) *From Little Things Big Things Grow: A compendium of contemporary Indigenous music*, Perth: International Arts Festival *murundak* House Program.

<sup>12</sup> Seaman Dan (2009) *Sailing Home*, Produced by Karl Neuenfeldt and Nigel Pegrum, Steady Music (TI1004) Cairns, Australia.

<sup>13</sup> Hore, Rachel (2012) Personal communication (Emails 16/04/12 and 18/04/12).



## **Appendix 2**

### **Brunswick Women's Choir**

#### ***Discography***

*Songs of Women*, 1994, Independent release by the Brunswick Women's Choir Inc.  
Production – Michael Roper.

'Thalassa', on *Australian a cappella*, 1995, The Boite and Sandstock Music, SSM050CD,  
Producer – Dieter Bajzek.

*Give Me the Roses While I Live*, 1999, Independent release by the Brunswick Women's  
Choir Inc, Production – Michael Roper and Cathy Nixon.

*I Can Hear Her Calling*, 2001, Independent release by the Brunswick Women's Choir Inc,  
Production – Catriona Milne, Diz McKinnon, Lesley McLure and Lynda Memery.

*Peace Cannot Be Silent*, 2007, Independent release by the Brunswick Women's Choir Inc,  
Production – Cathy Nixon, Vaughan McAlley, Martin Wright, Lani Stanistreet and Jacqui  
Mason.

NB Post field research in Victoria, the BWC released another recording, *Sing Away*, in  
2012 as part of the choir's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary which was celebrated in 2011.

#### ***Awards***

1995 Choir wins joint first prize at Melbourne International Festival of Choirs.

2002 Musical Director, Cathy Nixon receives the Vida Goldstein award for the Arts.

2003 Cathy Nixon wins the Honouring Women in Moreland award for improving the  
wellbeing of women in the area.

2007 *Seeking Harmony* receives a commendation in the Victorian Local History Awards.

2009 Choir is a joint runner up in the national Music in Communities Awards.

#### ***Tours***

2004 New Zealand

2005 Regional Victoria

2009 Adelaide to Darwin and on to Tiwi Islands





## Appendix 3 Melbourne Millennium Chorus Concerts

**Table 1: Melbourne Millennium Chorus Concerts 1999-2009**

Year	Title	Artistic Director/s	Theme
1999	Melbourne Millennium Chorus	Melanie Shanahan	Australia's diversity and entry into new millennium.
2000	Melbourne Millennium Chorus 2000	Melanie Shanahan	Questioning the legitimacy of the majority of Australians in the land of their birth.
2001	Winter Dreaming: A Concert for Reconciliation	Richard Frankland & Diana Clark	The relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the land we inhabit and exploit and our identity and integrity as a nation.
2002	Flight: Concert for Refugees	Roger King, Arnold Zable & Therese Virtue*	The incarceration of refugees in Australia.
2003	Mongoma: Mother of Song	Therese Virtue, Roger King, Jen Skate & Ariel Valent*	The support of excellent musicians recently migrated to Australia.
2004	Rongo: Voices of Australasia & Oceania	Roger King*	A celebration of the power and joy of the music of our region.2005
2005	Azadi: Songs of Liberation	Stephen Taberner & Therese Virtue	Inspired by the Sydney anti-war rally in 2003, this concert's theme had two equally essential aims: first, to present the songs that inspired and ignited the struggle for change in several important times and places in our recent history; and to show the full emotional range of forms that this music can take.
2006	Mare Profondo	Kavisha Mazzella, Therese Virtue, Katrina Wilson & Stephen Taberner*	As an island continent, the sea contains some of Australia's strongest images. Mazzella said 'the sea unites and divides us'. The concert therefore explored the many faceted relationships people have with the sea.
2007	MMC – Retrospective	Roger King, Therese Virtue, Katrina Wilson & Vicki King.	This concert was a retrospective enabling a celebration of the MMC concept which is committed to issues of social justice and has come to personify multiculturalism in an Australian context.
2008	Limpopo	Andrea Khoza & Valanga Khoza	This concert focused on songs from South Africa and included the Mafumani Secondary School Choir from Limpopo Province, the homeland of Valanga Khoza.
2009	Our Land Our Home	Lou Bennett	Discussed in detail in chapter.

\*Indicates either Artistic Concept or Development

**Table 2: Songs from the Melbourne Millennium Chorus (MMC) Concerts 1999-2009**

**1999: Melbourne Millennium Chorus**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Lingmarra (Calling all people)	Tom E Lewis	MMC, Margaret Maru, Russell Smith & Mal Webb (MW)	Melanie Shanahan (MS)
Maru Wehi	Traditional/Maori	Te Mana O Te Kotahi Tanga	
Bike	MW	MW & North Fitzroy Primary School	MS
Devoiko Blanco Li Ti E	Traditional/Bulgarian	Silvia Entcheva (SE)	
Elesa	Traditional/Georgian	Joseph Jordania (JJ), Gorani & MMC	JJ
Sombamba	Valanga Khoza (VK)/arr. VK & MS	VK, MMC & Colours of Pulse Drummers	MS
Angellare	Traditional/ Neapolitan	Kavisha Mazzella & La Voce Della Luna	
Wurzhorner Jodler	Traditional/Austria	Julia & Dieter Bajzek	
Hohenwarter Weis	Kurt Muthspiel	MMC	Dieter Bajzek
O cie da terra (The earth in heat)	Milton Naxcimento & Chico Barque	MMC, Diana Clark, Doug De Vries, MW & Scott Lewington/C: MS	
Homeless	Ladysmith Black Mambazo & Paul Simon	MMC, VK & Jo Malatji/C: MS	
Soko	Traditional/Guinea	Colours of Pulse Drumming & Dance Ensemble (CPDDE)	
Improvisation	Sue Johnson (SJ)		SJ
Two Wings	Tony Backhouse (TB)	TB & MMC	C: MS
Pilentze Pee Govori	Traditional/Bulgarian/arr Krassimir Kyurkchiyski	SE & Petrunka	
Walk with Me	MS	MS & Just Add Water	
The New Millennium	John-Paul Wabotai (JW)	JW, MMC & CPDDE	

**2000: Melbourne Millennium Chorus**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Singing the Land	Melanie Shanahan (MS)	MMC, MS, Russell Smith & Breee-an Munns	Vicki King (VK)
Saliote 'O Herani	Inoke Veamatahau	The Tongan Harmony Singers & Pauline Veamatahau	
Guruli Perkhuli	Traditional/Georgian	Golden Fleece & MCC	MS
I Got Rythm	George Gershwin	Mal Webb (MW) & Grant Swift	
Djole	Traditional/West Africa	Ebrima King Marong, Valanga Khosa, Percussion Ensemble "Safara" & MMC	MS
Adje Red Se redat Male/Nalajno? Tropnalo Ono	Traditional/Macedonia	Macedonian Women's Choir	Margarita Vasileva
Spin My Wheels	Lisa Young	Hurstbridge Learning Co-op Children's Choir, Rick Shaw, MW & Simon Lewis	MS
Todo Cambia	Julio Numhauser	Gioconda Vatsky, Rosamel Burgos Ensemble & MCC	MS
Khongoloti	Traditional/South Africa	Pyandleve Mnisi, Valanga Khosa, Colin Davison & Michelle Hines	
Konakkol	Lisa Young & Karaikudi R Mani	Lisa Young	
Rise Up	Alice Papademitriou	Luke Tonkin & MCC	VK
Ioskala la Rossa	De Marzi, arr. Geminiandi	Gruppo Coarle Adriatico	
Kdalalak	Traditional/East Timor Lyrics: Fransisco Borja Da Casta	Alex Tilman & Living Out Loud	
Aya Ngikaza	Traditional/South Africa	Pyandleve Mnisi, Ebram King Marong & MCC	MS

**2001: Winter Dreaming – A Concert for Reconciliation**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Yil Lul	Joe Geia, arr. D Clark & D de Vries	Carole Fraser & MCC	Diana Clark (DC)
Mind	Peter Rotumah	Peter Rotumah	
Dance Piece (excerpt)	Traditional	One Fire Dancers – Jeff Tye & Phil Geia	
Walking Song & Alien Nation	Song: Andrea Watson & Verse: John Harding	MCC & John Harding	DC
Wa Warimor	Traditional, arr. Richard Frankland	Richard Frankland & Lou Bennett	
Malcolm Smith	Verse: Richard Frankland	Richard Frankland	
Our Home, Our Land	Lou Bennett	Lou Bennett	
Inanay	Traditional	Lou Bennett, MCC & Audience	
Lingmarra	Tom E Lewis	MCC & Liz Cavanagh	DC
Who Made Me Who I Am	Richard Frankland	Richard Frankland	
Koori Woman	Carole Fraser, arr. DC	Carole Fraser & Dianna Kiss Band & MCC	DC
The 3:08 Bus	Verse: John Harding	John Harding	
I've Been Moved	Kev Carmody	Kev Carmody	
From Little Things Big Things Grow	Kev Carmody	Kev Carmody & MCC	
Freedom	Kev Carody, arr.	Kev Carody, Great Southern Band & MCC	DC

**2002: Flight – Concert for Refugees**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Gurian Work Song	Traditional/Georgia, arr. Nino Tsitsishvili	Nino Tsitsishvili, Roger King, Mark Bradford, Peter Dalmazzo & MCC	Nino Tsitsishvili
The Boat	Traditional	Costas Tsicaderis & Jacob Papadopoulos	
Thula Mama	Traditional	Valanga Khoza & MCC	Melanie Shanahan (MS)
The Butterfly Man		Story by Arnold Zable, music by Le Tuan Hung	
River Chant (excerpt)	Traditional	Le Tuan Hung & Dang Kim Hien	
Need Some Care	Diana Clark & Doug de Vries	Diana Clark, Denis Close, Mark Grunden, Ariel Valent, Amy Valent & MCC	Vicki King (VK)
Dinka Song	Traditional	Ajak Kwai, MS, Valanga Khoza, Andrea Watson & Martin Tucker	
Muna Kana Nyina	Ebrima King Marong	MCC, King Marong, Scott Lewington & Max Sportelli	MS
Sea Song	Bagryana Popov	MCC	Bagryana Popov
A Sinking Boat off the coast of Java		Story by Arnold Zable	
World Citizen	Melanie Shanahan	MS & MCC	VK
Refugee Song for Aishya	Carmel Williams & Christine Sass	Siren's Breath, Gazi Yalcin, Omer Acar & MCC	Christine Sass
Dance (excerpt)	Traditional	Gazi Yalcin, Omer Acar & Claire Naffa	
Filoxenia		Story by Arnold Zable	
All God's Beggars	Kavisha Mazzella & Arnold Zable	Kavisha Mazzella, Greg Hunt, Rose Westbrook & MCC	KM
Traditional Dance		Afghan Performers for Hope	
Freedom is Coming	Traditional	Liz Manaka & MCC	Therese Virtue

**2003: Nongoma: Mother of song**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Umama Uyjabula (Mama is Happy)	South African (traditional), arr Jen Skate	Beverley Parker-O'Hagan & MMC	Jen Skate (JS)
Nnwomkro – Yeegu Nsa	Ghana (traditional Ashanti), arr JS	Kuukua Acquah, percussionists & MMC	JS
Zandile	Matthew Nfandiso, arr JS	Thula Sana	
Allah Aalem Ma Bia	Abdessadak Chakara	Chris Lesser	Chris Lesser (CL)
Emengi	King Bell & Dodo domingos, arr Barry Deenick	King Bell & MMC	Barry Deenick (BD)
Atumpan	Ghana (traditional Ashanti)	Kojo Noah Owusu & Kojo Sam Adjei	
Nalorah (Dream)	Carlos X Panguana	Carlos X Panguana	
Kwela	South African Township Jive	Musicians: Gavan McCarthy, Gus Rigby, Bruce Rigby, Matthew Weegberg & Joe Malatji; Dancers: Mzuri Dance Studio & Kronik Circus	
Mansa Mansa	Gambia (traditional Mandinka), arr Ebrima King Marong & Barry Deenick	Ebrima King Marong (EKM), Safara & MMC	BD
Si Si Mbom	Ghana (traditional Fante), arr JS & CL	MMC; Dancers: Jacqui Dreessens Brown & Kuukua Acquah	JS
Ndaibaiwa (I Survived)	Stella Chiweshe	Stella Chiweshe (SC)	
Paite Rima (Spiritual Lions)	SC	SC & MMC	JS
Sambala	Senegal/Gambia (traditional Mandinka), arr EKM & BD	Musicians: EKM, Safara & MMC; Dancers: Bintu Diatta & Kuukua Acquah	BD
Senzenina	South Africa (traditional), arr Ysaye Maria Barnwell	Beverley Parker-O'Hagan & MMC	JS
Mangara	Tanzania/Mozambique (traditional Makonde), arr David Marama	David Maram, MMC & percussionists	CL

**2004: Rongo - Voices of Australasia & Oceania**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Welcome		Herb Patten, Mga Manu Waiata & Sounds of Polynesia	
Manava Tatoua	Tahiti (traditional)	Andrea Watson, Vicki King & MMC	Stephen Taberner
Kahaipu He Merekara (We Are Miracles)	Shelley Dewes, arr Nga Manu Waiata	Nga Manu Waiata	
Waka Nini Yana	Lou Bennett	Lou Bennett, Alics Gate-Eastley & MMC	Kate O'Sullivan
Hana Lei	Hawaii (traditional)	Alfred Harua & Brian Fitzgerald	
O Le Mu	Samoa (traditional)	Sunga & MMC	Stephen Taberner (ST)
Teina Weku	Papua New Guinea (PNG)	Traditional dance from Western Province performed by the PNG Dance Group	
Traditional Cook Island Dance and Drumming		Sounds of Polynesia	
E Malie E Tagifa	Samoa (traditional)	Sunga	
Macapat	Javanese (traditional)	Ria Soemardjo	
Kecak	Balinese (traditional)	Poedijono and Ria Soemardjo & MMC	ST
Tagi Hina	Tokelau (traditional)	Rachel Hore, Vicky King, Andrea Watson, Maree Symons & MMC	Rachel Hore
Wilurara	Rachel Hore	Rachel Hore	
Moemoea Reka (Sweet Dreaming)	Mihirangi	Mihirangi, Nga Manu Waiata, Maree Symons, Ariel Valent, Jane Thompson & MMC	ST
Tue Tue Tue	Tonga (traditional)	Canterbury Tongan Choir	
Fakamaau	Tonga (traditional)	Canterbury Tonga Choir	
Traditional Pacific Song, Percussion and Dance		Mana Pasefika	
Distant Sun	Neil Finn, arr ST	MMC	ST
Sikh Devotional Hymn		Dya Singh and Ensemble	
My Island Home	Neil Murray, arr ST	MMC & all artists	ST

**2005: Azadi - Songs of Liberation**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Overture – Els Segardors	Spain (traditional)	The Azadi Liberation Quintet	
Laydown	Melanie Safka, arr Stephen Taberner	Jeannie Lewis, Vicki King & MMC	Stephen Taberner
Somewhere – Part 1	Bagryana Popov	Bagryana Popov (BP)	
I'm on my way to Canaan Land	Traditional Spiritual, arr ST	Tracey Miller	
Saman Dance	Aceh (traditional)	Rentak Nusantari	
Cry Freedom	Richard Frankland	Richard Frankland and band	
Bukgo Looi	Ajak Kwai	Ajak Kwai	
The Worker's Song	E Pickford	Chris Wilson & Shannon Bourne	
Somewhere – Part 2	BP	BP	
Soyiwela; Thula Sizwe; Sobashiya Abazali Exhaya	Medley: Xhosa, Zulu & Zulu (traditionals)	Valanga Khoza & MMC	ST
Three Hours of Happiness	Arnold Zable	Arnold Zable & Martin Tucker	
Bella Ciao	Italian, arr Kavisha Mazzella	Kavisha Mazzella, Irine Vela, the Azadi Liberation Quintet & MMC	ST
Capoeira	Brazil (traditional)	Filhos da Bahia Capoeira School of Melbourne	
San Vicente	Milton Nascimento/Fernando Brant.	Revolutionary Cadre	ST
Overture Two - Silence	Charlie Haden	The Azadi Liberation Quintet	
Santiago Penando Estas	Violeta Para, arr ST	Jeannie Lewis & MMC	
El Pueblo Unido Jamas Sera Vencido	Sergio Oretaga/Traditional, arr ST	The Azadi Liberation Quintet & MMC	ST
Embrace All Elements	N Ashby & D Sorono	Demiliton Bgirl, Nikki Ashby & Mal Webb	
Wahkurdistan (Pity Kurdistan)	Dursun Acar	Dursun Acar	
Bulgarian Folk Song	BP	BP	
Bread and Roses	J Oppenheim & Mimi Farina	Therese Virtue, Jenny Candy, Heather Russell & Vicky King	
Tis thikeosinis Ilie Noite (Intelligible Sun of Justice)	Odysseus Elitis & Mikis Theodorakis	Irine Vela, Archilles Yiangoulli, Anthea Sidiropoulos & Mulaim Vela	
Beds are Burning	Midnight Oil, arr ST	The Azadi Liberation Quintet & MCC	ST
High Heeled Shoes	BP	BP	
Finale (Collage of three songs)		Full cast & audience	ST



**2006: Mare Profondo**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
The Sea	Melanie Shanahan, arr Vicki King	Katrina Wilson & MMC	Bagryana Popov
Jewels of the Sea	Nardi Simpson & Kaleena Briggs	Stiff Gins	
Won't you Help me to Raise 'em Boys	Northern Neck Chantey Singers, sourced: Danny Spooner, arr Tracey Miller	David Williamson & MMC	Tracey Miller (TM)
Old Ship of Zion	Thomas A Dorsey, arr TM	TM & the Mare Profondo House Band	
Mamma Mia Dammi Cento Lire	Italy (traditional), arr Kavisha Mazzella	Kavisha Mazzella & MMC	Kate O'Sullivan
The Farthest Shore	Lucas Michailidis	Lucas Michailidis	
Mar E Morada de Sodade (The Sea is the home of Nostalgia)	Amando da Pina, arr Stephen Taberner	The Mare Profondo House Band & MMC	Stephen Taberner (ST)
Niga Sum (I am black)	Kavisha Mazzella	Kavisha Mazzella, Richard Tedesco & MMC	Kate O'Sullivan
Flamenco	Arte Kanela		
Sea Song	Bagryana Popov (BP)	Linda Laasi & MMC	BP
Ox Pexinhos do Mar (Fish in the Sea)	Milton Do Nascimento	Bec Rigby & Lucy Wise	
Mes Tou Egeou (In the Aegean)	Traditional	The haBiBis	
Ena me Ti thalassa (At one with the sea)	A Georgiou, arr Irine Vela	The haBiBis & MCC	BP
Shellfish and Abalone	Nardi Simpson & Kaleena Briggs	Stiff Gins	
Anchor Me	Don McGlashen, The Mutton Birds, arr ST	Chris Blain & MMC	ST
Mar E Morada de Sodade	reprise		

**2007: Melbourne Millennium Chorus – A Retrospective**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Lingmara	Tom E Lewis	Lou Bennett, Stephen Costello, Ron Murray, Liz Frencham & MMC	Vicki King (VK)
Manava Tatou E	Tahiti (traditional)	MMC	VK
Breathe into Time	Diana Clark	Diana Clark & Doug de Vriew	
Wave Building	Tali White	MMC	VK
Miholo	Valanga Khoza	Valanga Khoza and Andrea Watson	
Thula Mama	Xhosa, South Africa (trad)	Valanga Khoza & MMC	VK
Walking Song	Andrea Watson	Akasa & Simon Lewis	
We are Different	Lou Bennett	Lou Bennett	
Sol Negro	Caetano Veloso	Diana Clark, Kavisha Mazzella, House Band & MMC	VK
Light by Light	Liz Frencham	Liz Frencham	
Beds are Burning	Peter Garrett	House Band & MMC	VK
Give me a Home Among the Gum Trees	W Johnson & B Brown	House Band & MMC	VK
Let Me Through/Just Because I Wear This Foolish Tie	Stephen Taberner	Stephen Taberner & Men in Suits	
Merdeka		The West Papuan Cultural Group	
O Hele Le	East Timor (traditional)	Paulo Almeida, House Band & MMC	VK
Walk with Me	Melanie Shanahan	Vicki King & MMC	VK
Elegy for Rita/Astoria	Doug de Vries	Doug de Vries	
Rise Up	Alice Papademitriou	Dani Fry & MMC	VK
Amore	Kavisha Mazzella	Kavisha Mazzella & Irine Vela	
Nigra Sun	Kavisha Mazzella	Kavisha Mazzella	
O Cio De Terra	M Nascimento & C Buarque	Diana Clark, House Band & MMC	
Elesa	Georgia (traditional)	MMC	
My Island Home	Neil Murray	Lou Bennett, House Band & MMC	
Beds are Burning	Reprise	MMC & entire cast	
Solmychko	Russia (traditional)	Zulya Kamalova & Doug de Vries	
Badi Gari Ngamu	Deline Briscoe	Deline Briscoe	
Tsxnosnuri	Georgia (traditional)	Gorani	

**2008: Limpopo – MMC “singing in harmony with the” Mafumani Secondary School Choir (from South Africa)**

<b>Song</b>	<b>Composer</b>	<b>Performer/s</b>	<b>Conductor</b>
Vuma (Sing)	Zulu (traditional)	Valanga Khoza, Limpopo House Band & MMC	Andrea Khoza (AK)
Malwandle (Beyond the Oceans)	Tsonga/Valanga Khoza	Valanga Khoza (VK), Limpopo House Band (LHH) & MMC	AK
Mafumani	Tsonga (traditional)	Mafumani Secondary School Choir (MSSC)	
Sobhuza (Ode to the Chief)	Tsonga (traditional)	MSSC	
Xihanya Nomu (Talkative)	Tsonga (traditional)	Miehleketo Mikansi & MSSC	
Mama Nguwe (Mother you are the one)	Zulu (traditional)	VK, AK, MSSC & MMC	AK
Phansi Kwalo Mgodini (Down in the mines)	Zulu (traditional)	Sakhile Kumalo, Basi Mahlasela & MMC	AK
Ho Va Lolo Xana (Are we that lazy?)	Tsonga (traditional)	VK, AK, LHH & MMC	AK
Matolo (Last night)	Tsonga (traditional)	VK, AK & LHH	
U Ta Ti Kuma Tinyandza (What you sow on earth you reap in heaven)	Tsonga/Anonymous	AK, LHH & MMC	AK
U Nga Nyanyuki (Do not be excited)	Tsonga (traditional)	Ndhuma Foster Khosa & MSSC	
Lomu ka Valungu (In these modern times)	Tsonga (traditional)	Ivan Ngobeni & MSSC	
Mahodimong (In the heavens)	Suthu (traditional)	VK & MMC	AK
Milo (Fire)	Zulu/Valanga Khoza	LHH & MMC	AK



## Appendix 4

### Madjital Moorna's Vision Statement



#### Singers of Aboriginal Songs

Noongar: Magical sounds of movement in the bush.

**Our Aims**, in conjunction with Aboriginal musical directors:

- To sing in and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait **language** songs and **compositions** by indigenous artists from around Australia.
- To acknowledge and embrace the **stolen generations** and their journey of healing.
- To **generate healing** within the community through the vibrations of our harmonious songs.
- To **increase** our **Aboriginal and Torres Strait membership** at every opportunity.
- To **create** a warm, sensitive, safe **environment** to encourage members to express the joy and beauty of music.
- To promote and embrace **reconciliation** through the multicultural blend of our members.
- To **share** the joy of singing to and with **Aboriginal communities and country towns**.
- To encourage Aboriginal communities and people from remote regions to form **similar singing groups** to enhance the healing process.
- To have **no singing pre requisites** for membership, apart from the will to receive and spread the joy in songs and camaraderie.
- To use **practise methods** and materials that allow for members to learn to sing or develop their confidence to sing in a nurturing and supportive way.

“Aunty” Karl Mourach, Dec 2007

**Poem by Della Rae Morrison 2010:**

*Caretaker of Country*

Long shadows contrast between shades of green  
An unforgotten journey in a morning's dream  
Where jagged edges of rock abound you  
Untouched beauty radiates ochres hue

A red dirt track disappears between cracks  
Tell me what is beyond that beauty  
I shall keep walking and never look back

Oh the land how it nurtures my soul  
Guides, protects and whispers stories of old  
Let us all be the flame carrier and protect her too  
And live off the richness offered at birth to you

Here I stand before you my country of colours  
Gazing upon hills that change from orange to gold  
Unspoken silent waters reflect skies of blue

Forever in this lifetime and the next one too  
I am Caretaker of Country  
Forever of You  
As You are of Me

## **Appendix 5**

### **Asante Sana Songbook 2010**

#### ***African Songs:***

*A-si-kha-ta-li*

*Bamthatha*

*Chon-go Lan-ni*

*Hamba Nathi Mkhululi Wethu*

*Ke Arona*

*La-la-sa-na*

*Mahodimong* (Suthu language – composer unknown)

*Mother Africa*

*Nkosi Sikelele’I Africa*

*Sensenina*

*Shosholoza*

*Thula Baba*

*Tula Mama*

*U Ta Ti Kumba* (Tsonga)

*Vuma*

*We Shall Not Give up the Fight*

*Zin Jeh Jeh Jeh*

#### ***Indigenous and Pacific Songs:***

*Alice, Alice it’s You*, by Lettie Scott (2006)

*Don’t Worry be Happy* (Blekbala Mujik)

*Ngurawatjilpa* (Frank Yama)

*Oh Bawa*

**Estonian:**

*Arkamise Aeg (Awakening Time)*, by Rene Espere

**Other songs and ballads:**

*Alexandra Leaving*, by Leonard Cohen (2001)

*All God's Beggars*

*Angel*, by Sarah McLachlan

*Desert Lament*, by Morris Stuart

*Dona Nobis Pacem*

*Hallelujah*, by Leonard Cohen

*I am/We are Australian*, by Bruce Woodley and Dobe Newton (1987)

*Let It Go*, words by Michael Leunig, music by Suzanne Frisk

*One Love*, by Bob Marley and Curtis Mayfield

*Tomorrow*, by John McCormack

*We are the World*, by Michael K Jackson

*Why We Sing*, by Greg Gilpin

*You Raise me Up*, lyrics by Josh Groban

**English poetry:**

*Fear No More the Heat of the Sun*, words by William Shakespeare, music by Morris Stuart

*Invictus*, words by William Ernest Henley, music by Morris Stuart



## Appendix 6

### Hymns and Songs of the Aboriginal Ladies Choirs

#### ***Godanya Nganampa (123)***

*Petrina Windy, Caroline Windy and Hollie Webb. Music by Petrina Windy (2003).*

1. Godanya nganampa Mayatja nyinanyi  
Paluru nganampa Mukulya nyinanyi ngaltunytju
2. Jesu kanyinmani Nyuntumpa marangka  
Kana nyuntunya Rawangku wal-kunma Mayatja
3. Kurunpa Milmilpa Nintinmani iwara  
Nyuntunya wanantjaku Tilini ungama pitaltji
4. Godanya Mamanya Godanya katjanya  
Kurunpa Milmilnga Mankurpa kutjutu ngaranyi

#### ***The Lord's My Shepherd (Psalm 23) (222 [NI/PHB 5, Arr 225, Lur 49, TIS 10, LH 38] Psalm 23)***

*Scottish Psalter (1650) Tr. Pitjantjatjara Church Council 1978*

1. Mayatjaluni kanyilpai, Nyuyuni ungkupai.  
Wirungkanitju tjunkula Katinyi pilunta.
2. Kurunpanitju palyaji, Pitjalinanyini.  
Iwara tjukarurunga, Iniku kulira.
3. Nguwanpa ilurampa, Kuraku nguluwiya.  
Panyan ngayula nyinanyi, Mununin katuni.
4. Ngalkuntjakutju tjunanyi, Tjanala mirangka.  
Katani palyarunguni, Ipilyarinytjaku.
5. Palyangku, ngaltunyungku, Nyaku katirinku.  
Godalana titutjara, Ngurararikulta.

#### ***Jesunya nganampa, Tili winki pitjangu (339)***

*Words Stephanie Donald, Petrina Windy. Music Petrina Windy*

1. Jesunya nganampa Tili winki pitjangu  
Palunya wa`kunma Mayatja pu`kanya  
*Aliluya Mayatja Jesunya Aliluya Mayatja mukulya.*
2. Jesulu wangkangu Ngayulu]a iwaranya  
Ngayunya wanara Mamala wirkanu

#### ***Ngayulu Mamaku pataningi (367 [NI 310])***

*Anon.*

Ngayulu Mamaku pataningi  
Ngayulu Mamaku pataningi  
Jesunya malaku pitjaku

Jesunya malaku pitjaku  
Aliluya wal<sub>i</sub>kunma

Aliluya wal<sub>i</sub>kunma  
Aliluya wal<sub>i</sub>kunma  
Aliluya wal<sub>i</sub>kunma

**Mamanya wanka** (God come closer to us)

**Father Bless Us As We Go 289 (Arr 342, Lur 302, ATN 90)**

*Words and Music: Robin Mann. © 1977. All rights reserved. Used by permission. V2. Tr. M.Wheeler & D.Roennfeldt 1990 V3. Tr. L. Lester 1991.*

1. Father, bless us as we go!  
Jesus, walk beside us!  
Holy Spirit, guide us!
2. Kaartai, nurnanha ntarntarai!  
Jesua, nurnaka-lela nai!  
Enka, nurnanha kaltjinhai!
3. Mama nganananya kanyinma!  
Jesu tjungula anama!  
Kurunpa Milmitu katima!

**Farewell Song**

Ngula-la nyaku-ku  
Nganana ngurpa  
Godalu nyuntunya altiku  
Nganana ninti  
Godalu nyuntunya  
Mukulya pulkanku kanyilku

Chorus:

Nganana tjapilku (Nganana tjapilku)  
Godalu nyuntunya (Godalu nyuntunya)  
Witulya pulkaku (Witulya pulkaku)  
Kanyilku  
Paluru nyuntunya (Paluru nyuntunya)  
Mukulya pulkaku (Mukulya pulkaku)  
Ngaltutjunku, Kanyintjaku

Nganana ngula  
Wiyaringkula  
Ngura wirunka nyinakulta  
Jesula tjungu  
Waltja tjutanka  
Pulkulpa tjungulta nyinaku

***Ingkaarta Pitjai (Kumbaya)***

*Traditional, Tr. L Mocketarinja 1991*

Ingkaarta pitjai, nuk-urna! Ingkaarta pitjai, nuk-urna!  
Ingkaarta pitjai, nuk-urna! Ingkaarta pitjai!

Relha intima, Ingkaartai! Relha intima, Ingkaartai!  
Relha intima, Ingkaartai! Ingkaarta pitjai!

Relha ingkama, Ingkaartai! Relha ingkama, Ingkaartai!  
Relha ingkama, Ingkaartai! Ingkaarta pitjai!

Relha lyilhama, Ingkaartai! Relha lyilhama, Ingkaartai!  
Relha lyilhama, Ingkaartai! Ingkaarta pitjai!

***Nyanpi Matilda (Waltzing Matilda)***

*Tr. D Puntjina Burton 197?*

Ultytjatjara kutjungkku urungka ngura tjunu  
Kulpingka wilytjankga unngu panya  
Munu nyakula inkangi billy pailiringytjaku  
Nytuny natimlda npanyi ngayula

Chorus:

Nyanpi matilda  
Nyanpi matilda  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula  
Mumu nyakula inkangi billy pailiringytjaku  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula

Verse 2:

Tjiipi kutju wirkana mina tjikintjikitja  
Watingku pakara witunu  
Munu yakutjangka tjunkula pukultutu inkangi  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula

Chorus:

Nyanpi matilda  
Nyanpi matilda  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula  
Munu yakutjangka tjunkula pukultutu inkangi  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula

Verse 3:

Maytatja pitjangu nantjunka tatiralta  
Pulitjamanukulu 1, 2 3  
Ngaanakun tjiipi ulytjanga tjabatjunu  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula

Chorus:

Nyanpi matilda  
Nyanpi matilda  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula  
Ngaanakun tjiipi ulytjanga tjabatjunu  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula

Verse 4:

Watingku wangkara wankanin witalwiya  
Urungka warara katingu  
Munu kuruntu kuwari urungka wangkanyilta  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula

Chorus:

Nyanpi matilda  
Nyanpi matilda  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula  
Munu kuruntu kuwari urungka wangkanyilta  
Nyuntu matilda nyanpi ngayula

## **Appendix 7**

### **The Big Sing in the Desert**

#### **Big Sing 2010**

*Song of Karguru* (a round), by Dianne Watson: words, Rachel Hore: music

*Ngayulu Mamaku Pataningi* (Hymn no. 367 [NI 310] Anon, in the Pitjantjatjara Lutheran Hymnal).

*Farewell Song*

*Meet me in the Middle of the Air*, by Paul Kelly, arranged by Rachel Hore

*Why We Sing*, words and music by Greg Gilpin

*La-la-sa-na* (South African)

*Vuma* (South African)

*Ingkaarta Pitjai* (Kumbaya in *Arrernte*, translated by L Moketarinja)

*Lyarta Nurna Worlerrama*

*Tuma Mina*(South African)

*Nyanpi Matilda*(Waltzing Matilda in *Pitjantjatjara*, translated by Daphne Puntjina Burton)

*Bring me Little Water Sylvie* (Gospel, traditional)

#### **Big Sing 2012**

*Let Them Sing* (a round)

*Lay Your Burden Down*, by Christie Johnston

*Darkwood Road*, by Tanya Sparke

*All You Need is Love*, by John Lennon and Paul McCartney

*Ukuthula* (Zulu)

*U Ta Ti Kuma* (Tsonga)

*Shona malanga* (South African)

*Vuma* (South African)

*Pitjai, Ingkaarta-urna* (Lutheran Hymn in *Arrernte*)



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