

# 6 *Songs performed by Willie Rookwood at Woorabinda in 1965*

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## **Abstract**

An understanding of traditional song forms that is based on the study of recorded song performances can inform a model for any revitalisation of song traditions. Recordings of songs sung in the south-eastern Queensland languages by mother tongue speakers are relatively rare. This paper analyses four songs sung by Mr Willie Rookwood at Woorabinda Reserve (central Queensland) in December 1965 that were recorded by Elywn Flint, lecturer at the University of Queensland. Willie Rookwood was born on Coogoon Station via Roma around 1890 and his language was Gunggari, a southern Maric language. We discuss the words and meanings of the songs, drawing on Rookwood's own explanations. We identify the structure of the text, rhythm and melody and the relationships between these. We compare these structural features of the songs with songs from Central Australia, a region where the traditional songs are better documented. Despite similarities in the placement of vocables in line-final position, the tendency for lines to consist of a noun plus a verb and the matching of word boundaries with bar boundaries, the verse structures of the Maric songs differ from the common AABB pattern of Central Australian songs.

*Keywords:* Aboriginal song, verse, Maric language, Gunggari, Woorabinda

## **1 Introduction**

On the first of December 1965, at the Woorabinda Aboriginal Settlement in central Queensland, Elwyn Flint, a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Queensland, recorded a number of Aboriginal people speaking their traditional Aboriginal languages. Flint used the fieldwork guide devised by Arthur Capell (1945) to elicit vocabulary items and a range of morphological paradigms and sentence types. Among the people Flint recorded at Woorabinda were three elderly men and a woman who had been born and raised in different locations within the Maric-speaking area of Queensland (see Barrett 2005, Beale 1975 and Walsh and Wurm 1981). Judging by their conversations with Flint recorded during these elicitation sessions, the people interviewed also spoke English, the language they used in their everyday life. Other Aboriginal countrymen of these speakers were also present during some recording sessions and they participated in singing a traditional song; they were referred to from time to time in the course of the recording sessions but were not formally interviewed by Flint as part of his language elicitation.

Flint was at Woorabinda as part of his long-term research project known as the Queensland Speech Survey (QSS), the primary aim of which was to record and analyse the varieties of English spoken in Queensland, including those spoken by Aboriginal people.<sup>1</sup> He was also interested in ascertaining the knowledge of traditional Aboriginal languages in Queensland at that time. He was very excited by and supportive of the research program of the then recently established Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS)<sup>2</sup> situated in Canberra. He used his access to Aboriginal people living on the missions and government settlements he visited to meet people who had knowledge of their traditional languages, with whom other linguists might eventually work in order to document these languages for posterity. Flint was also in contact with anthropologists wanting to conduct research on various aspects of Aboriginal culture and encouraged them to contact those Aboriginal people he had met who had shown interest in explaining aspects of their culture and languages to researchers in order to have them recorded. These motivations emerge in his conversations with the Aboriginal people recorded at Woorabinda, and elsewhere.

The main three men from the Upper Warrego and Maranoa regions of Queensland whom Flint interviewed and recorded at Woorabinda on the first of December 1965 were Eddie Conway (EC) who was born at Springsure, Vivian Solomon (VS) who was born at Mount Playfair Station east of Tambo, and Willie Rookwood (WR), born at Coogoon Station near Roma around 1890.<sup>3</sup> Flint also interviewed Sadie Coombra (SC), whom he records in his notes as coming from Mitchell.<sup>4</sup>

While there is a striking similarity between the recorded vocabularies of these four speakers, there are differences in lexicon, pronunciation and some grammatical forms. This is compatible with the long-standing claim that these languages form part of a dialect chain stretching from the Springsure area in the north-east to the Roma and Mitchell area in the south (see Dixon 2002 and references therein). The vocabulary of Willie Rookwood – and of Sadie Coombra – is clearly very similar to that of the two more northerly speakers, Eddie Conway and Vivian Solomon. However, as is evident in the language recorded by Flint, the northern and southern varieties are distinguished by one striking phonological difference. Apart from a few terms, including the language name, Gunggari, words beginning with a velar stop (written *k* in song texts documented below) in the speech of the northern speakers (Eddie Conway and Vivian Solomon) lack an initial consonant in the speech of the southern Gunggari speakers (Willie Rookwood and Sadie Coombra).<sup>5</sup> This loss of initial \**k/g* is reflected in the name Ungorri (corresponding to Ungkari in the writing system used in this study) recorded by Howitt (1904:108) as the name of the language spoken ‘in the country comprising Saint

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<sup>1</sup> Flint’s QSS documents and recordings are archived in the Elwyn Flint Papers, Fryer Library, at the University of Queensland. Flint’s recordings of traditional Aboriginal languages have been digitised, and analogue copies of his original tapes are held in the AIATSIS collection. See Flint Papers catalogue at [https://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer-library/ms/Flint/flint\\_catalogue.html](https://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer-library/ms/Flint/flint_catalogue.html) with cross references to materials held by AIATSIS.

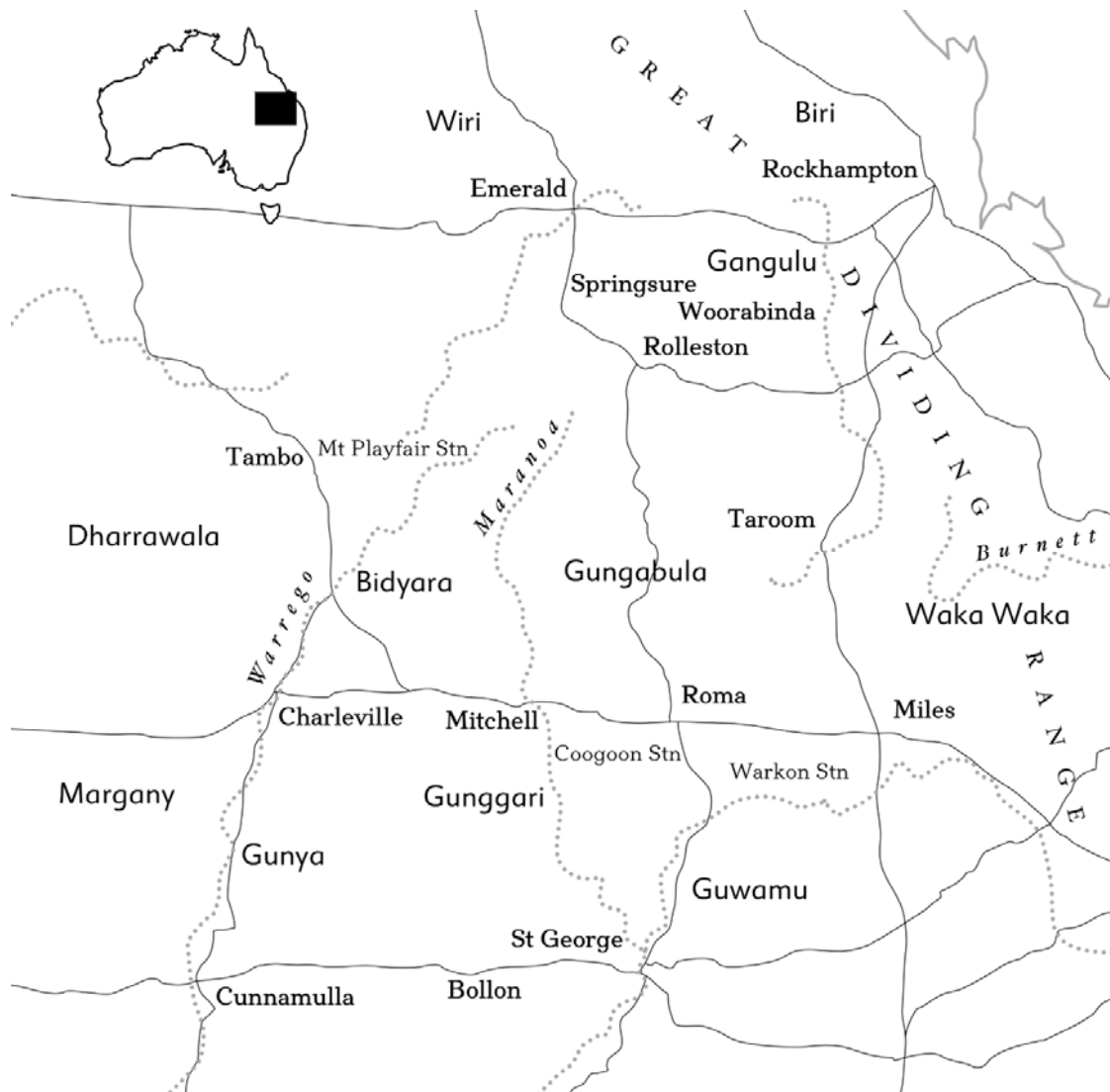
<sup>2</sup> Now known as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

<sup>3</sup> Flint kept meticulous recording logs. Each speaker (or group of speakers) was assigned a group number: EC = R. 329, VS = R.330, WR = R. 331 and SC = R. 332. Willy Rookwood may have gained his surname from Rookwood Station, established in the nineteenth century on the Maranoa River. Both he and Sadie Coombra were among the original inhabitants of Woorabinda (Clements 1977), Rookwood being moved there from the Taroom settlement when it was closed down.

<sup>4</sup> Flint records Sadie’s surname as ‘Cumbera’. In a personal communication to Mary Laughren on 24/11/2015, Mr Des Crump informed Laughren that both his great aunt Effie and her sister Sadie were from Coombra Station via Bollon, south of Mitchell, hence the origin of their surname. See also Clements (1977) for further information on both Willie Rookwood and Sadie Coombra.

<sup>5</sup> Breen (1973a:2) notes that this feature marks the distinction between the Warrego and Maranoa languages.

George, Charleville, Nive, Taroom, Surat and Condamine’, which Breen (n.d.) judges to be derived from Gunggari by the loss of the initial consonant.<sup>6</sup>



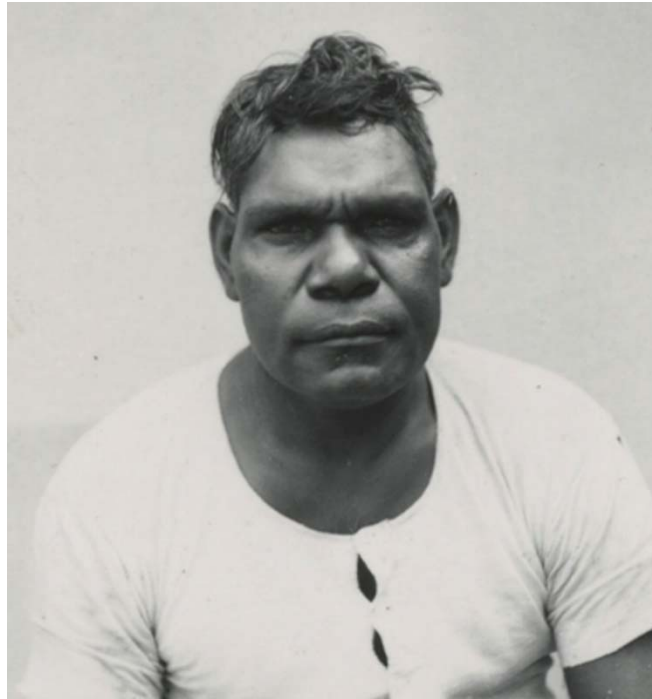
**Map 6.1:** The Upper Warrego-Maranoa region of Queensland. (Names of languages are in large font, towns in smaller font, stations in smallest font and rivers in italics.)

Willie Rookwood refers to his language as Gunggari.<sup>7</sup> He gives his Aboriginal (or ‘bush’) name as Wunkulala and explains that he is a *dhangurd mardi* or Possum (Dreaming) man. Referring to

<sup>6</sup> Given the pervasive nature of the dropping of the initial velar stop in the speech of Willie Rookwood and Sadie Coombra, it is clear that the language name ‘Gunggari’ entered the language after this change had occurred, from a language which preserved the word-initial velar stop. As Breen (n.d.) points out, this term derives from a cardinal direction term, meaning ‘east’ in some languages and ‘north’ in others. Thus it is possible that people to the west of the Gunggari-speaking (and Ungkari-speaking) areas used this term to refer to their eastern neighbours. In support of this claim, *kungkari* ‘east’ is recorded in Wangkumara, which is spoken to the west of the Gunggari speaking area.

<sup>7</sup> There are distinct western Queensland languages called by the same name which are usually distinguished by different spellings: Kungkari versus Gunggari (see Breen 1990, Breen n.d.). The Maric language of the

*dhangurd*, Willie Rookwood explains, ‘That’s not my name, that’s my religion that’s come through the bora ground’.<sup>8</sup> He also explains that the Dreaming of his countrywoman Sadie Coombra, whose Gunggari name is Mankulanyi, is *dhakany* ‘sand goanna’.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 6.1:** Willie Rookwood, aged 48 (taken by Norman Tindale, 1938, © South Australian Museum)

At a certain point in Flint’s interview with Willie Rookwood, the latter starts to question Flint about his religious affiliation and beliefs and the two men establish their mutual association with the Anglican denomination.<sup>10</sup> Rookwood then asks Flint if he would like to listen to and record a traditional song that the former would sing. Flint enthusiastically agrees that he would like to do so and Rookwood proceeds to sing a series of four songs. Other people join in the singing of the song ‘Red Kangaroo’, which we discuss in section 3. Rookwood’s initiation of this discussion of religion and song would seem to reflect the significance he attached to these subjects and the fact that singing and theological beliefs and practices are very much intertwined in Australian Aboriginal culture. Rookwood explains the meaning of the song texts and the more general context in which they were traditionally sung, laying out the cultural conceptual framework in which the song texts are to be understood, as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

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Maranoa area spoken by Willie Rookwood and Sadie Coombra is typically written as ‘Gunggari’ while the more westerly language is written as ‘Kungkari’. Although we use *k* as the symbol for a dorso-velar stop in our documentation of Flint’s Maric data, we retain ‘Gunggari’ as the spelling of the language name in a bid to avoid confusion with Kungkari – which Dixon (2002:xxxiii) includes in the Je subgroup of his Greater Maric Group – and to maintain continuity with established practice.

<sup>8</sup> Breen (1973a:154) records *wunku* as a Bidyara section name, which suggests that *Wunkulala* is built on the root *wunku*.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed account of the contents of Flint’s 1965 recordings made at Woorabinda (and a comparison with other sources which document these and closely related languages), see Laughren (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Flint, a non-Indigenous man from Brisbane, was ordained an Anglican priest in 1938 and served as an army chaplain during World War 2 (Edwards 1997).

Our primary aim here is to document the four songs sung by Willie Rookwood that were recorded by Flint in 1965. In the following sections we set out the lyrics and music of each song starting with *Dyindidyindi* ‘Willy wagtail’, for which Rookwood gave the most detailed explanation of the words and their meaning. In our discussion of the formal properties of the songs and the ways in which the lyrics are matched to music, we make some comparisons between the four songs and also with other Australian Aboriginal song traditions that we are familiar with, particularly Arandic and Warlpiri songs from Central Australia (henceforth ‘Central Australian song style’).

The structure of the remainder of this article is as follows: in §2 we discuss the ‘Willy wagtail’ song, the text of which is fairly transparent. In §3 we discuss the Red Kangaroo song and in §4 the Two Men Fighting song. In §5 we discuss the Farewell song, which is actually the first song on the recording but also the most different. In §6 we compare the four songs, noting that the different verse structures correspond to the different linguistic-geographic origins of the songs. We conclude by comparing the songs performed by Rookwood with the broader Central Australian musical style, as described by Alice Moyle (1966: xvii; 1974:i) and in our own research (Turpin & Laughren 2013, 2014). Note that the musical examples for each section are to be found in Appendix B.

## 2 *Dyindidyindi* ‘Willy wagtail’ (song 2)

This song is said to be about a man who appears in the form of a willy wagtail. From the singer’s interpretation of the song, we get a sense of how beings straddle the physical and spiritual dimensions and how an experience situated at the intersection of these realms can be encapsulated in a song.

- a. It come up to you. He come up as a bird. When he come up as a bird, then he turn into a human. Human, spiritual way. He come in spiritual way, you see. In the early days of Aboriginal people, well they come like that in a bird, image of a bird, image of a dog, image of a kangaroo, image of an emu. When they come up close to you, if they want to, they’ll turn into a man then. That’s how that corroboree come about (Willie Rookwood to Elwyn Flint 1/12/1965, 8’06-8’25).<sup>11</sup>

### 2.1 The rhythmic text

As in many traditional Aboriginal songs, the song is made up of a short rhythmic text that repeats over the course of a much longer melody. The singer gives a word-for-word translation of this text. This is shown in (1) with a broad rhythmic transcription.

	Line A		Line B	
(1)				
	<i>Dyin di dyin di</i>	<i>kurr ba la ba</i>	<i>Nga ya ngun di</i>	<i>ku dya la nga</i>
	<i>Dyindidyindi</i>	<i>kurrba-la ba</i>	<i>Ngaya ngundi</i>	<i>kudya-la nga</i>
	willy wagtail	come-PST <sup>12</sup> then	1SG appearance	strike-PST VOC
	‘A willy wagtail bird came up;		Only then did I recognise who he really was.’	

The rhythmic text consists of 16 syllables spanning 4 bars of  $\frac{3}{4}$  meter. Triple meter is evident from the accompanying clap beat (represented by crosses in Musical example 6.1, Appendix B). Each bar

<sup>11</sup> The time code refers to the archival recording UQFL173\_b54\_R311\_332A\_sideB.

<sup>12</sup> The following abbreviations are used in linguistic glosses: 1SG=1 person singular, 3DU=3 person dual, IMPF=imperfective, INST=instrumental, NEG=negative, PST=past, REC=reciprocal, REF=reflexive, VOC=vocable.

has the same rhythmic pattern. Based on parallel rhythm and syntax (noun + verb), the text can be divided into two lines, each of two bars.

The song is in a Maric language, although it is not clear which particular variety. The word *dyindidyindi* ‘willy wagtail’ is found in Gunggari, Gunya and Margany and similar words are found well beyond this region. The word may in fact be onomatopoeic. *Ngaya* ‘I’ is similarly widespread across the region. The phrase *ngundi kudya*- ‘appearance strike’ probably means ‘recognise’. *Kudya*- is a verb meaning ‘to hit with a missile’. According to Willie Rookwood *ngundi* ‘appearance, gait, image’ is a Gunggari word.

Other words in the song, however, appear not to be Gunggari. The ‘k’ initial words *kurrba-la* ‘came up’ and *kudya-la* ‘struck’ occur only in the northern Maric languages, while in the southern varieties such as Gunggari, these are *urrba-la* and *udya-la* respectively. We do not know whether the song is from a northern variety, or whether it originated in one of the southern varieties before these languages lost their initial velar stop. Perhaps the northern variety words were deliberately chosen to signal a northern origin of the bird; or, alternatively, to create a poetic rather than everyday sounding word. Another possibility is that, in this song tradition, syllables must be consonant-initial, especially if they fall on the beat. These ambiguities mean that it is best to think of the language of the song as Maric, rather than a more specific language variety.

The last syllable *nga*, for which no speech equivalent was given, is almost certainly a vocable.<sup>13</sup> A vocable is a sequence of speech sounds from a given language which form one or more syllables, but does not represent a word of the language (cf. Fabb 1997:104). The evidence for this analysis is that *nga* is a vocable in other songs on this recording and beyond (Austin 1978: 531); also it is in line-final position, and in songs from Central Australia rarely do such vocables occur in any other metrical position. Furthermore, the *nga* syllable is omitted when a breath is taken at this point in the text cycle. This can be seen in bars 4, 16 and 20, for example, in Musical example 6.1.

## 2.2 Song structure and melody

The song consists of 16 cycles of the rhythmic text, ending at the penultimate syllable, omitting the vocable *nga*. There is very little variation of the rhythmic text throughout the course of the song. In the transcription of the song in Musical example 6.1, each repetition of the rhythmic text is signalled with a boxed number and the circled number represents each iteration of the melody. The melody consists of four sections, each of which maps on to one statement of the rhythmic text and so the melody as a whole is 16 bars. From Musical example 6.1 it can be seen that the first section of the melody is a descent from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to a repeating tonic, E (e.g. bars 1-4). The downward movements are characterised by glissandi, as is the case throughout all the songs. The second section is an ascent from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> descending back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> (e.g. bars 5-8). The third section is only minimally different from the first section, with a step down to the second, F#, and back to the third (e.g. bar 9). The final section is a repeated tonic (e.g. bars 13-16). The melody spans four lines and so can be likened to a stanza.

This melody is sung four times over the course of the song (indicated by the numbers in circles in Musical example 6.1). The third stanza (iteration of the melody) is interrupted by the singer’s coughing (bar 46). It seems reasonable to assume that without interruption, the underlying structure of the song is 64 bars.

## 2.3 A comparison with Central Australian song style

As is common in the songs of inland Australia, the ‘Willy wagtail’ song consists of two lines, with the number of rhythmic notes determined by the number of syllables (Ellis 1968). The song also has

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<sup>13</sup> Holmer (1983) analyses the Gunggari verbal suffix *-nga~ -na* as variants of the imperfective aspect inflection which contrasts with the perfective suffix *-la*. In the song *nga* follows *-la*, ruling out this option.

a repeating melody that is much longer than the rhythmic text, which is a feature of songs from ‘a vast area of the continent, from western Cape York to most of inland WA’ (Moyle 1966:xvii).<sup>14</sup> The song departs from the Central Australian style, however, in its fixed relationship between rhythmic text and melody: the melody always corresponds to four cycles of the text, and each melodic section is one statement of the text, beginning and ending at the same point. In contrast, Central Australian songs show variability in the alignment of the rhythmic text and melody in the course of a single song (and also across multiple performances of a song).<sup>15</sup>

### 3 *Bawurra* ‘Red kangaroo’ (song 3)



Following the ‘Willy wagtail’ song, Willie Rookwood, accompanied by others, sings a song that is said to be about a red kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*). The kangaroo wakes up at the sound of a happy family bird (*Struthidea cinerea*)<sup>16</sup>, who heralds the approach of a hunter. Rookwood explains the event that the song portrays as follows:

b. Well this here, that’s Happy Family now see, that kangaroo asleep see, so there’s a person sneaking for it see, so he heard this bird singing out now, you know them happy family birds? They singing out now. Well that fella got up now with a fright, he see that fella, he look around, he see that *mardi* [man] coming for him to kill him see. No good, he went. (Willie Rookwood to Elwyn Flint 1/12/1965, 12:09-12:38).

In an explanation of the song’s theme Rookwood provides the phrase ‘*bawurra, ngula yurdi kuthi-kuthi*’ (red kangaroo, that red animal). *Bawurra* is a widespread term for this macropod in Maric languages. The speech equivalents of the rest of the text remain somewhat of a mystery. However, we can say much about the structure of the song, which is similar to ‘Willy wagtail’ in many respects.

#### 3.1 The rhythmic text

As in the song ‘Willy wagtail’, the rhythmic text of ‘Red kangaroo’ consists of two lines of four bars, as shown in (2).

Line A	Line B
<p>(2) </p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla nga</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>binbirruru ngalka-la nga</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">? h.f. bird<sup>17</sup> speak-PST VOC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">‘A happy family bird called out;</p>	<p></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>bo rra ba dhi li la ya</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>bawurra badhi-li-la ya</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">red_kangaroo ? -REF-PST VOC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The red kangaroo . . .’</p>



<sup>14</sup> Moyle qualifies this by noting that ‘north-western central Australia, Cape York and inland NSW have not been studied in detail’ (Moyle 1966:xvii).

<sup>15</sup> Another feature of much Central Australian music is that either text line may commence a song. But without other performances for comparison, it is not possible to determine if this might apply to the song under consideration here.

<sup>16</sup> Also commonly known as an apostlebird.

<sup>17</sup> Breen (1981:351) glosses *binbira* and *binbida* as ‘budgerigar’ in the related Maric languages Gunya and Marrgany.

Unlike ‘Willy wagtail’, there is no accompanying clap beat, yet the meter of this song feels as if it is a duple compound meter (6/8); that is, the beat subdivides into three quavers rather than two. This song has a much slower tempo than the other three songs, which are all in simple meter.

The rhythmic text can be divided into two lines based on parallel rhythm and the syllables *nga* and *ya*, which occur in bar final position, and so are prime candidates as vocables. The rhythmic text has 15 syllables, one less than ‘Willy wagtail’, and so its two lines differ rhythmically in that Line A sets a three-syllable unit to the first beat , whereas Line B sets a two-syllable phonetic unit to the first beat .<sup>18</sup> There is a tendency for musical phrases to end in a long note (this is not unique to Aboriginal songs), so on purely musical grounds the division into phrases can be perceived as in (3) in which the vocables are phrase initial while still at the end of a bar. A similar mismatch between units of text and units of rhythm is also encountered in some Arandic songs (see, for example Figure 1 in Turpin in press).

(3)



ya bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla nga bo rra ba dhi li la

### 3.2 Song structure and melody

Like ‘Willy wagtail’, ‘Red kangaroo’ consists of 16 cycles of the rhythmic text, plus an extra half. The song commences with the second syllable *bi* and ends with Line A. The repetitions of the verse throughout the course of the song show little variability in the text; only the final syllable of Line A, *nga*, is sometimes sung *ya* (three times, bars 18, 34 and 46 in Musical example 6.2, Appendix B) and sung once as *ka* (bar 10).

The melody of ‘Red kangaroo’ is sung four times, summarised in Table 6.1. Each iteration of the melody aligns with the start of the rhythmic-text. The length of the melody is not fixed; each time it varies by either repeating the final tonic for an extra line or half-line (as in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> iteration) or it omits the first melodic phrase (as in the 1<sup>st</sup> iteration).<sup>19</sup> In this way the melody expands and contracts to accommodate different lengths of rhythmic text, in a similar way to Central Australian songs (Barwick 1989, Treloyn 2007, Turpin & Laughren 2013). However, unlike Central Australian songs, expansion and contraction in ‘Red kangaroo’ always accommodates the entire rhythmic text and never just a section of it.

**Table 6.1:** Text-melody setting ‘Red kangaroo’ (song 3)

Melody	Duration	Text
1 <sup>st</sup> iteration, bars 1-12	12 bars	rhythmic text x 3
2 <sup>nd</sup> iteration, bars 13-28	16 bars	rhythmic text x 4
3 <sup>rd</sup> iteration, bars 29-48	20 bars	rhythmic text x 5
4 <sup>th</sup> iteration, bars 49-66	18 bars	rhythmic text x 4.5

We describe the melody drawing on its second iteration, bars 13-28 in Musical example 6.2. The melody consists of four phrases, defined by where a breath is usually taken. The first phrase is a descent from the fifth to the second (bars 13-14). The second phrase is a repeated upper tonic

<sup>18</sup> The first syllable [bo] derived from the underlying two syllables [ba-wu] is linked to the longer of the notes making up the first beat. We have noted the same reduction of two monomoraic syllables separated by a glide to a single syllable linked to a relatively long note in Warlpiri *yawuhyu* songs (Turpin & Laughren 2013:404).

<sup>19</sup> It is possible that the recording began after the singing had commenced, or possibly the singer had hummed to himself the first bar of the song.



descending to the tonic (bars 15-21). The third phrase is characterised by ornamentation on the 4<sup>th</sup> and then 5<sup>th</sup> pitch after which it descends to the tonic (bars 21-25). The exact point at which the breath occurs varies. The fourth phrase is a repeated tonic.

Breaths sometimes replace the final syllable *ya* (e.g. bar 12) and *nga* (e.g. bar 14). An additional point at which a breath is taken is before the fifth syllable of the verse (*ngal*); however this syllable is never omitted (providing further evidence of our interpretation of *ngalka-la* ‘speak-PAST’ as the speech equivalent). This said, the failure to align the first (stressed) syllable of *ngalkala* with the rhythmically prominent left boundary of a bar distinguishes this song from the other three, as well as from Central Australian songs. In the spoken form, it is the word-initial syllable which is prominent, whereas in this song the initial syllable of the verb is aligned with the weakest rhythmic position.

The ornamentation in ‘Red kangaroo’ is more complex than that of the other three songs and implies a higher level of difficulty, in particular by comparison with songs 2 and 4, which are executed quite simply. Bars 6 to 8 demonstrate this, as complex melisma is combined with portamento to provide one long flowing line (reminiscent of Indian classical sung ornamentation). The same passage repeated in bars 22 to 24 shows the same level of complexity but a different melismatic pattern (omitting the final vocable *nga* of Line A), indicating that ornamentation is an important vehicle for variation and expression on the part of the singer. The technical execution of these passages indicates a high level of vocal expertise, which raises the question as to why Mr Rookwood sang this song so differently. This could imply either that he was more secure in the song style, that he had learnt it from a singer with a higher level of skill, that the song itself was in a different genre to the others or that he had simply sung it more often, so that the variety of melismatic figures was more easily recalled.

#### 4 *Unimila* ‘Two men fighting’ (song 4)

The last song sung by Willie Rookwood is said to be about a white policeman walking towards two men who are in a fist fight, to see what they are fighting over: ‘*Buliman mandala* [Policeman went]. He wanna catch them two *mardi* [man], see what they fighting over’ (16’32”). Flint goes on to ask what happened, and Rookwood replies that it ‘came to nothing, it just came to that corroboree’ (16’46). Rookwood explains the meaning of the song using a few Maric words and phrases, including the following:

- (4a)     *Mardi*     *bula*     *uni-mi-la*  
man         3DU     hit-REC-PST

‘Two men fought one another.’ (15’06”)

- (4b)     *Murra-ngku,*             *that means knuckles.*  
fist-INST

‘with (their) fist.’ (15’18”)

- (5)       *Widhu-wula*             *manda-lala*  
Whiteman-two         go-PST:IMPF

‘Two Whitemen (policemen) were going.’<sup>20</sup> (16’02”)

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<sup>20</sup> It is not clear whether both the Whitemen are policemen or just one of them.

#### 4.1 The rhythmic text

Only two words in his explanations can be tentatively matched with words in the song: *uni-li* ‘hit each other’ and *marda* ‘hand’, although *mardi* ‘man’ is also a possibility for this same portion of the song text. For some parts of the text we could find no speech equivalents with meanings compatible with those provided by the singer. The rhythmic text and putative speech equivalents are shown in (6).<sup>21</sup>

	Line A		Line B
(6)			
	<i>dhu rra no li</i>	<i>no li nga</i>	<i>dhu wa lin dyi</i>
	<i>dhirra ?uni-li</i>	<i>?uni-li nga</i>	<i>dhiwa-li-ndyi</i>
	NEG hit-REF	hit-REF VOC	?wake-REF-?
			<i>ma rda yi nga</i>
			<i>marda yi nga</i>
			hand ? VOC
			<i>dhuwa-li-ndyi</i>
	?Don't fight		?be.alive-REF-?

Like ‘Red kangaroo’, this song consists of 15 syllables spanning four bars. Its rhythm is almost identical to that in the ‘Willy wagtail’ song. Triple meter is again evident from the accompanying clap beat (see Musical example 6.3, Appendix B). The text can also be divided into two lines, based on parallel rhythm and the recurring syllable *nga*, which, as we have seen in previous songs, is a line-final vocable. The only rhythmic difference between the two lines is that in Line A, the first beat of bar 2 is occupied by a single syllable, *no*, whereas in Line B the first beat of bar 2 is divided into two syllables – *marda*. The long syllable *no* suggests a speech equivalent with an internal glide initial syllable that has been elided, such as *nawuli*; however, we can find no speech equivalents for such a postulated form.

As in the previous song, on musical grounds the division between lines A and B could also be made before the upbeat *nga*. Such a division is illustrated in (7).

	Line A		Line B
(7)			
	<i>nga dhu rra no li</i>	<i>no li</i>	<i>nga dhu wa lin dyi</i>
			<i>ma rda yi</i>

#### 4.2 Song structure and melody

The song consists of 19 cycles of the rhythmic text, which is three more repetitions than in the previous songs. This is also the longest song, and its tempo is similar to that of the ‘Willy wagtail’ song. Unlike the previous songs, this song commences and ends with the final bar of the verse, *mardayi*.<sup>22</sup> From Musical example 6.3 we can see that throughout the course of the song the verse shows consonant variability in three places:

- the final syllable of both lines varies between *nga* ~ *ba* ~ *ma* ~ *ka*
- bar 4 varies between *mardayi* ~ *marlayi*
- the interdental sound *dh* in both lines is pronounced as a fricative, stop or nasal

<sup>21</sup> *Dhuwa*- ‘be alive’; *dhiwa*- ‘wake’ (vt) and *dhirra* ‘NEG’ are documented by Breen (1973a & b) in Bidyara.

<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the recording began after the singing had commenced, or possibly the singer had hummed to himself the first bar of the song.

The variability in the rhythmic text may reflect the uncertainty surrounding the phonology of words in this song.

The melody of ‘Two Men Fighting’ is sung six times, summarised in Table 6.2. In most cases the melody lasts for three cycles of the verse; however, the fifth iteration of the melody is longer, as the tonic extends for an extra cycle of the verse. As mentioned in relation to ‘Red Kangaroo’, such an extension of the melody to accommodate more rhythmic text is reminiscent of Central Australian songs, although there it is much more common and variable. In this song the rhythmic text and verse are always coterminous (with the exception of the first iteration of the melody), unlike much Central Australian song. Expansion of the melody occurs, but as in ‘Red kangaroo’, only for the duration of the entire verse and never for just a section of it.

**Table 6.2:** Text-melody setting in ‘Two men fighting’ (song 4)

Melody	Duration	Text
1 <sup>st</sup> iteration, bars 1-9	9 bars	rhythmic text x 2.5
2 <sup>nd</sup> iteration, bars 10-21	12 bars	rhythmic text x 3
3 <sup>rd</sup> iteration, bars 22-33	12 bars	rhythmic text x 3
4 <sup>th</sup> iteration, bars 34-45	12 bars	rhythmic text x 3
5 <sup>th</sup> iteration, bars 46-61	16 bars	rhythmic text x 4
6 <sup>th</sup> iteration, bars 62-73	12 bars	rhythmic text x 3



The melody itself consists of two simple phrases. The tonic is A. The song makes no use of the 7<sup>th</sup>, so we don’t know whether it is sharp or not, or in fact whether the scale is hexatonic. Here we describe the melody drawing on its second iteration, bars 10-21. The first section is a descent from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> over three bars (e.g. bars 10-12) and the second section is a descent from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the tonic, with the descent over two bars and the tonic over seven bars (e.g. bars 13-21). Breaths are taken at the end of the first melodic section in place of the syllable *dyi*.<sup>23</sup> Breaths are also taken in the second melodic section, in place of the verse-final vocable *nga*, both during and at the end of the repeated tonic. This provides further evidence that this syllable is a vocable.

## 5 ‘Farewell’ (song 1)

The first song sung by Willie Rookwood on the recording is the one that is the most different. It is said to belong to the Burnett River district, and to be in a language different to that spoken by the singer. We suggest that it may be in the Wakawaka language, which belongs to a different subgroup (Wakka-Kabic), to the east of the Maric languages (see Laffan 2003). Rookwood sings through the lines of the song, trying to catch a hint of its meaning. After singing the second line he says, ‘It’s just like there is a person going away’, so Flint calls it a ‘Farewell corroboree’. The rhythmic text of this song is shown in (8).

<sup>23</sup> With one exception in bar 27 where no breath is taken and the syllable is sung to a melody that steps upwards from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

### 5.1 The rhythmic text


<p>Line A</p> <p>(8) </p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Bi nal bu rran do nga rri ya</i></p>	<p>Line B</p> <p></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Ngun ja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi (ya)</i></p>
---	--

We could find no sure speech equivalents with meanings compatible with those provided by the singer.<sup>24</sup> The rhythmic text consists of 17 syllables, one more than in the ‘Willy wagtail’ song. Like the other songs, this one consists of four bars which divide into two lines: eight syllables in Line A and nine syllables in Line B. In Line B the third beat is divided into two syllables (*ngayu*), whereas it is only one syllable in Line A (*rran*). A significant difference in the song ‘Farewell’ can be seen in the patterning of the two lines throughout the song, as shown in Table 6.3. Each line repeats either four, six or seven times before moving on to the alternate line, which also repeats before moving back to the other line. Only the last line of the song, Line B, is not repeated.

**Table 6.3:** Verse structure of ‘Farewell’ (song 1)

A1	<i>Binal burrando ngarri ya ’</i>	A2	<i>Binal burrando ngarri ya</i>
	<i>Binal burrando ngarri ’</i>		<i>Binal burrando ’ngarri ya</i>
	<i>Binarl burrando ngarri</i>		<i>Binarl burrando ngarri ’</i>
	<i>Binal burrando ngarri ’ <b>ngaya</b></i>		<i>Binal burrando ngarri ya</i>
B1	<i>Ngunja nginngayukwa nyingi</i>		<i>Binarl burrando ngarri ’</i>
	<i>Ngunja nginngayukwa nyingi ’</i>		<i>Binarl burrando ngarri</i>
	<i>Ngunja nginngayukwa nyingi ya</i>		<i>Binal burrando ngarri ’ <b>ngaya</b></i>
	<i>Ngunja nginngayukwa nyingi ’</i>	B2	<i>Ngunja nginngayukwa nyingi</i>
	<i>Ngunja nginngayukwa nyingi ’ <b>ngaya</b></i>		

Before repeating a line, a breath can be taken replacing the last syllable, (e.g. bar 4); or alternatively, the singer can continue without taking a breath, either singing *ya* or extending the duration of the previous syllable (*rrri* or *ngi*). Bar 2 has both *ya* and a breath, and consequently it has an extra beat.

Unlike the other songs, ‘Farewell’ has a two-syllable ‘bridge’ that always leads into the alternate verse – *ngaya* , and this is always preceded by a breath (e.g. bars 8 and 20). This creates an anacrusis, as if *ngaya* ‘1sgNOM’<sup>25</sup> were part of the following line, as illustrated in (9).

<sup>24</sup> *Burrando* may be an inflected form of verb *burra* ‘get up, go away’ documented in Maric languages by Holmer (1983:231 & 331) and Breen (1973a:§6.12). Breen (1981:358) records *ngundyā* ‘face’ in Maric language Gunya, which may correspond with *ngunja* at start of Line B.

<sup>25</sup> *Ngaya* ‘1sgNOM’ in the relevant Maric languages, but *ngay* or *ngee* in Wakka-Kabic languages (Laffan 2003).

(9)

nga ya Ngu nja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi

nga ya Bi nal bu rran do nga rri

## 5.2 Song structure and melody

The melody of this song is sung three times, summarised in Table 6.4. As in ‘Red kangaroo’, the length of the melody is not fixed; each time it varies in length by either repeating the final tonic for an extra line (as in the 2<sup>nd</sup> iteration) or omitting the line of repeated tonic (as in the 1<sup>st</sup> iteration).

**Table 6.4:** Text-melody setting in ‘Farewell’ (song 1). ‘|’ represents a melodic phrase boundary.

Melody	Duration	Text
1 <sup>st</sup> iteration, bars 1-12	12 bars	AA AA BB
2 <sup>nd</sup> iteration, bars 13-26	14 bars	BB BB AAA
3 <sup>rd</sup> iteration, bars 27-36	10 bars	AA AA B

The melody itself can be divided into three phrases based on where a breath *always* occurs. We illustrate this with the 3<sup>rd</sup> iteration of the melody in Musical example 6.4 (Appendix B). The first phrase is a 2-bar descent from the fourth to the tonic followed by two bars of repeated tonic (bars 27-30).<sup>26</sup> The second phrase is a 2-bar stepwise passage 5–6–5 followed by a 2-bar descent to the tonic (bars 31-34). The third phrase commences on the fifth (with the upbeat *ngaya*) leading into the same 2-bar descent to the tonic as in the second phrase. In the first and second iterations, this is followed by two bars of repeated tonic, although not in this final iteration.

## 5.3 Summary of ‘Farewell’

The verse structure of this song differs dramatically from that of the other three songs. In this song, line repetition occurs before moving on to the alternate line (AAA...BBB... rather than ABAB etc.). While this resembles Central Australian song style to some extent, a major difference is that the number of line repetitions is fixed in Central Australian songs (usually once, i.e. AABB). The ‘Farewell’ song has no set number of line repetitions. It is perhaps for this reason that the melody involves an upbeat *ngaya* to herald the change of line, in the way a cue from an improvising soloist in a jazz band might herald the return to the head. The insertion of a disyllabic unit (i.e. *ngaya*) at the end of the melody is rarely, if ever, encountered in Central Australian song.

There are, however, other aspects of the rhythmic text of this song that resemble the other three songs sung by Willie Rookwood, as well as the broader Central Australian song style. First, the verse consists of two lines with the number of rhythmic notes determined by the number of syllables. Second, the relative lengths of the verse and melody differ in that the melody is longer than the rhythmic-text. Finally, in relation to pitch, ‘Farewell’ has an ascending phrase within a melodic section, similar to ‘Willy wagtail’ and ‘Red kangaroo’.

## 6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to show how an understanding of the structural features of song can inform efforts to revitalise ancestral song traditions. For example, the placement of vocables in line-

<sup>26</sup> The first bar of the song starts somewhat differently, centred around the 3<sup>rd</sup> pitch rather than the 4<sup>th</sup>.

final position, the tendency for recurring noun + verb line structure, and the matching of word boundaries with bar boundaries, can help weigh up the arguments in favour or against proposed speech equivalents. The style of ornamentations used are also noteworthy. We have also suggested that different verse structures, particularly as A/B versus AA+/BB+, and different degrees of ornamentation may reflect differences in the origins of songs, and thus their linguistic-geographic affiliation.

To date, nothing has been published on the songs of this region. However, linguists Gavan Breen and Margaret Sharpe recorded both speech and a few songs from this part of Queensland. Breen recorded Bob Toogler singing a song said to be in the Margany language, traditionally spoken to the west of the Gunggari language (Breen\_G10-001586A). Margaret Sharpe recorded Willy Rookwood, Sadie Coombra and Eddie Conway in April 1966 (ms1353). Her recordings include *Bawurra* ‘Red kangaroo’ by Willie Rookwood (AIATSIS SHARPE\_M02-003086A, 7’51”) and one additional song about an old blind woman searching for something she has dropped on the ground (5’45”).<sup>27</sup>

Since working on these songs, we have compiled them onto a CD that has been circulating in the descendant community since 2015 (Figure 6.2), mostly through Tom Kirk and Aunty Ruth Hegarty. Some community members were unaware of the existence of these recordings, and the Fryer library at the University of Queensland is currently working to connect the Flint recordings with descendants of the speakers on the collection.<sup>28</sup> The analysis and recirculation of the recordings have inspired moves to revive songs of the Warrego-Maranoa region.<sup>29</sup> Tom Kirk, who is involved with language revitalisation, spent time in the emotion-laden task of analysing and engaging with the songs. A descendant of Aunty Ruth Hegarty has been working on a version of ‘Willie wagtail’ for performance. It is hoped that such performances will bring the songs of this region into the contemporary world.

## Acknowledgements

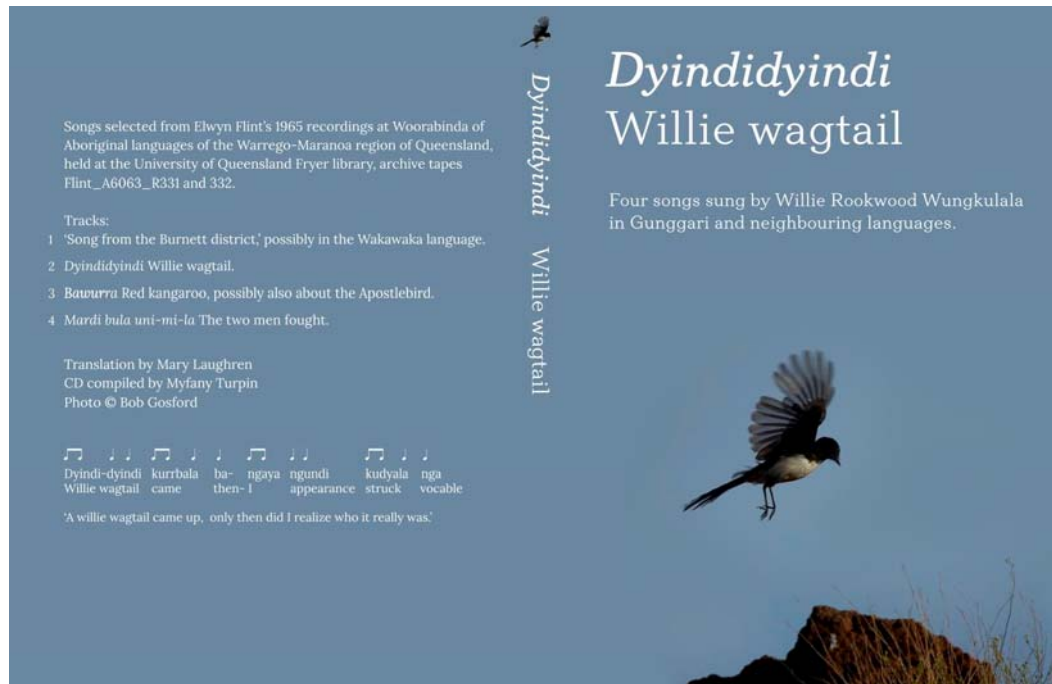
We thank Elizabeth Alvey at the Fryer Library for locating the digitised versions of these recordings and Kathy Seton and Andrew Fahey for helping us connect with descendants of Mr Rookwood. We also thank Des Crump, as well as Mr Rookwood’s descendants Aunty Ruth Hegarty and Tom Kirk, for providing contextual information about Willie Rookwood and Sadie Coombra, feedback on an earlier draft of this article, and for granting permission to reproduce the photo. We thank Ben Foley for production of the CD cover and map. We gratefully acknowledge the Australian Research Council for funding this research (FT140100783, DP1092887).

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<sup>27</sup> Willie Rookwood passed away later that same year (Clements 1977).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer-library/indigenous-voices/>.

<sup>29</sup> There was a sheet music publication based on five traditional songs of this region titled ‘Australian Aboriginal songs: melodies, rhythm and words truly and authentically Aboriginal / collected and translated by H.O. Lethbridge, accompaniments arranged by Arthur S. Loam’ (originally published 1937. For further details, see the Skinner and Wafer ‘checklist’, entry 27, online at <http://sydney.edu.au/paradisec/australharmony/checklist-indigenous-music-1.php#027>). We have been unable to identify any similarities between this sheet music and the songs discussed here. We thank Aunty Ruth Hegarty for bringing this to our attention.

**Figure 6.2:** CD cover of Willie Rookwood's songs from the Flint recordings

## Appendix A: Recording details

**Table 6.5:** Details of recordings analysed in this chapter (Flint Collection, University of Queensland UQFL173\_b54\_R311\_332A\_sideB)

Song 1	<i>Burrandu</i> 'Farewell'	2'32 - 3'41	1'09 seconds
Song 2	<i>Dyindidyindi</i> 'Willy wagtail'	5'09 - 6'24	1'15 seconds
Song 3	<i>Bawurra</i> 'Red kangaroo'	9'51 - 11'31	1'41 seconds
Song 4	<i>Unimila</i> 'Two men fighting'	13'05 - 14'36	1'29 seconds

## Appendix B: Musical examples

Musical example 6.1: *Dyindidyindi* 'Willy wagtail' (song 2)

(MM ♩ = 152) 1'15"

1 1

dy ndi dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la etc.

5 2

dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la nga

9 3

dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la nga

13 4

dyin di dyin di kurr ba la nga ya ngun di ku dya la

17 2 5

dy ndi dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la

21 6

dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la

25 7

dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la

29 8

dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la

33 3 9

dy ndi dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la

37 10

dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la nga

[continued over]



41 11

8 dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la nga

45 12

8 dyin di dyin di coughs

47 4 13

8 dy ndi dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la

51 14

8 dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la

55 15

8 dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la nga

59 16

8 dyin di dyin di kurr ba la ba nga ya ngun di ku dya la

Musical example 6.2: *Bawurra* 'Red kangaroo' (song 3)

(MM ♩. = 80) 1'39"

① 1

bi rru ru ngarl ka la nga bo rra ba dhi li la ya

5 2

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla nga bo rra ba di li la ya

9 3

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla ka bo rra ba di li la

13 ② 4

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla bo rra ba dhi li la ya

17 5

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla ya bo rra ba dhi li la ya

21 6

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla bo rra ba dhi li la ya

25 7

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla nga bo rra ba dhi li la ya

29 ③ 8

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla bo rra ba dhi li la ya

33 9

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla ya bo rra ba dhi li la ya

37 10

bin bi rru ru ngarl ka rla nga bo rra ba dhi li la ya

[continued over]

41 11 ,

**Musical example 6.3:** *Unimila* 'Two men fighting' (song 4) (MM ♩ = 149) 1'28"

① 1

ma rda yi nga dhu rra no li

3

no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rda yi nga dhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rda yi etc.

10 ② 4

dhu rra no li no li (a) dhu wa lin ma rda yi ba dhu rra no li

15

no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rda yi nga dhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rla yi

22 ③ 7

dhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rda yi ba dhu rra no li

27

no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rda yi nga dhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rla yi

34 ④ 10

dhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin ma rda yi nga dhu rra no li

39

no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rli yi ba dhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rla yi

46 ⑤ 13

dhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin ma rla yi ba dhu rra no li

14

[continued over]

y y g y y

51 , 15  
no li ka dhu wa lin dyi ma rla yi ndhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rla yi ba

58 16 , cough  
dhu rra no li no li nga dhu wa lin dyi ma rla yi

62 ⑥ 17 , 18  
no li no li nga dhu wa lin ma rla yi la dhu rra no li

67 , 19  
no li bi dhu wa lin dyi ma rda yi nga dhu rra no li no li bi dhu wa lin dyi ma rli ya

Musical example 6.4: 'Farewell' (song 1) (MM ♩ = 109) 1'29"

① **Parlando**

3 **A tempo**

5

7

9

11

13

15

17

19

21

Bi tal bu rran do nga rri ya

Bi nal bu rran do nga rri

Bi tal bu rran do nga rri ye

Bi nal bu rran do nga rri nga ya

Wun ja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi

Ngun ja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi

Ngun ja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi ya(u)

Ngun ja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi

Ngun ja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi

Ngun ja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi Nga ya

Bi nal bu rran do nga rri ya

[continued over]

23 ,  
Bi nal bu rran do nga rri ya

25 ,  
Bi nal bu rran do nga rri

27  
Bi nal bu rran do nga rri ya

29 ? ,  
Bi nal bu rran do nga rri

31  
Bi nal bu rran do nga rri

33 ,  
Bi nal bu rran do nga ri nga ya

35  
Ngun ja ngin nga yu kwa nyi ngi ya

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