Recovering musical data from colonial era transcriptions of Indigenous songs: some practical considerations

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Abstract

To date, fewer than 150 surviving musical transcriptions of Indigenous traditional songs have been identified from Australia’s colonial era (long nineteenth century). Most of these use standard Western pitch and rhythmic notation, although there are also three invaluable sets of sound recordings made at the end of this period (1898–1903). Many of the earlier notated transcriptions (1793–c.1850) are formatted as harmonised and sometimes varied arrangements of the source melodies, a standard practice in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British, European, and American editions of the ‘national music’ of non-European peoples (most notably also Chinese, Hindu, and Native American). After 1850, however, most of the melodic transcriptions are un-harmonised, and more attentive to details of pitch, rhythm, and word underlay.

But although earlier arrangements are often presumed to be unreliable, as unique musical evidence they cannot be simply ignored. The fortuitous preservation of versions of the Tasmanian song Popela both in an 1836 musical transcription and three sound recordings made in 1899 and 1903 was first reported by Alice Moyle in 1968, but the unexpected similarities revealed in comparing transcription and recordings have seldom been further explored since then. Digital streaming of some of the late colonial recordings, including one of Popela, offers us the means and impetus to again reconsider how a wide range of available evidence can be effectively used in song study and revitalisation. Also drawing on documentation presented in the Skinner and Wafer ‘Checklist’ in this volume (Chapter 17), this chapter offers some preliminary reflections on how musicologists, singers, and listeners might approach the task of extracting usable musical information from the often problematic, but potentially useful resources available.

Keywords: Indigenous Australian music in the colonial era, documentary history of Australian Indigenous song and dance, revitalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander song; European-Australian musical arrangements of Indigenous songs.
FOR ANYONE COLLECTING specific musical data on Indigenous songs in colonial Australia, the surviving documentation is conveniently bounded at the latter end by the neat coincidence of Australian nationhood in 1901 with the local advent of mechanical recording. Between 1898 and 1903, three or four years on either side of Federation, examples from three distinct Australian Indigenous song repertories were recorded in separate projects in Tasmania, the Torres Straits, and Central Australia. These were cylinder recordings made, respectively, in Hobart in 1899 and 1903 by Horace Watson of the singing of Fanny Cochrane Smith; at several sites from a large number of informants by members of Alfred Haddon’s Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Strait in 1898, musical transcriptions of which were published by the investigators in 1908 and 1912; and from Arrernte singers in Central Australia by Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen in 1901, of which three takes were transcribed by Percy Grainger in Melbourne in 1909, and two published in 1912. One restored recorded example from each of Tasmania and the Torres Straits, and half a dozen from the Arrernte, are now digitally streamed in Australia, and publicly accessible. Accordingly, all three of Grainger’s musical transcriptions and one of those by Charles Myers of a song from the island of Yam can be directly compared with the recordings they were made from.¹ Recording technology quickly transformed the practice of musical ethnography, largely rendering notated transcriptions redundant in much academic discourse. At the time, however, both the new recording technology itself, and the increased accuracy of written transcriptions made possible by mechanical reproduction, were ground breaking. Wax cylinder recordings had been first used by an American ethnographer in 1890 to record songs of the Passamaquoddy people of Maine.² The Cambridge team was the first British group to make systematic use of the technology, closely followed by Horace Watson in Hobart only a year later.

Yam song (1898)

A physician and psychologist, Charles Myers (1873–1946) is widely known for his 1915 paper on shell-shock. But as a key member of Haddon’s expedition who was also musically trained, Myers effectively served as its musicologist, recruiting Murray/Mer Islander singers to perform and record their songs on his Edison phonograph, and later transcribing and analysing these musical artefacts for publication.³ For his published account of songs from the Western Islands and Saibai, Myers relied on recordings made by his colleague, the linguist Sidney Ray (1858–1939).⁴ Ray’s recording of this Yam song is (as of 2017) digitally streamed both by the British Library and Australian Screen

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¹ A much larger selection of 30 recordings from the Cambridge Torres Strait expedition is now streamed in Britain (and accessible internationally) by the British Library: see ‘Australia’ under [http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Ethnographic-wax-cylinders](http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Ethnographic-wax-cylinders); the featured recordings are mainly traditional songs, also transcribed by Myers (see below), but include as well performances by Islanders of several European songs they had already appropriated and hybridised.


Recovering musical data

Online (ASO), and can be compared with Myers’s melody-only transcription (Musical example 16.1).\(^5\)

Audio example 16.1: ‘Yamaz Sibarud, sung by Maino of Yam’, recorded by Sidney Ray, Torres Strait, 1898 (British Library, Torres Strait Cylinder 77 T.S.);\(^6\) Canberra, National Film and Sound Archive, ASO, streamed online

Musical example 16.1: Yam II ['Yamaz Sibarud'], musical transcription by Charles Myers (1912, p. 263) https://archive.org/stream/reports191204cambuoft#page/263/mode/2up

Ray’s published notes give no information about the singer, or context of the performance, but he did gloss the opening words, *Yamazi barid*, as meaning ‘Along Yam Island cuscus’.\(^7\) In the digital restoration the tonality – defined by the upper and lower notes – is higher, closer to F sharp than F, but otherwise Myers’s transcription plots the roughly pentatonic contour of Ray’s recording reasonably accurately (note his use of the figures to pitch certain notes more closely in cents). For most listeners, however, the streamed sound alone is an eloquent enough account of the anonymous Yam singer and his song.

Tjitjingalla corroboree song (1901)

Grainger’s 1909 transcriptions of Arrernte songs are more problematic. Unlike Myers and Ray, Percy Grainger (1882–1961) worked in Melbourne, at a great distance from the recording site, and had no firsthand experience of the singers or the performance context.\(^8\) Vagaries of reproduction, both in

\(^5\) Throughout, every care has been taken in providing live links to web addresses of sources, to reference permanent archives and persistent identifiers; the Yam song is 30.26 in Skinner and Wafer, Checklist, this volume.

\(^6\) Also streamed by the British Library: http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Ethnographic-wax-cylinders/025M-C0080X1093XX-0100V0.

\(^7\) Myers, ‘Music’, 263, 269.

Melbourne in 1909 and today, only partly explain why the pitch level of his transcriptions vary so significantly from those of streamed recordings. Further complicating the evidence, simplified versions of his manuscript transcriptions appeared in print in 1912. One song must serve as an example here.\(^9\) In his spoken introduction to the recording streamed by Museum Victoria, Spencer tells us that the song is from the Tjitjingalla Corroboree, recorded at Stevenson’s Creek, South Australia, on 22 March 1901.\(^{10}\)

![Audio example 16.2](http://spencerandgillen.net/objects/4fac699d023fd704f475b641)

**Audio example 16.2:** Tjitjingalla Corroboree song, recorded by Spencer and Gillen at Stevenson’s Creek, 1901 (Adelaide, Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, RGSSA02; online at Museum Victoria)

![Musical example 16.2](http://spencerandgillen.net/objects/50ce72f5023fd7358c8a957d)

**Musical example 16.2:** Tjitjingalla Corroboree song, as transcribed by Percy Grainger, 1909 (Melbourne, Museum Victoria)  

As can be seen from the online image of his manuscript (Musical example 16.2), Grainger originally transcribed the four ‘verses’ separately three times (‘First time’, ‘2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) time’, ‘4\(^{th}\) time’), and noted:

Dadji dadji - Medium speed, flowingly . . . The 2\(^{nd}\), 3\(^{rd}\), & 4\(^{th}\) times seem to be more representative of the tune than the first times, the singularities of which are probably owing to the singer’s not having got thoroughly into the swing of the tune at once.

![Musical example 16.3](http://spencerandgillen.net/objects/50ce72f5023fd7358c8a957d)

**Musical example 16.3:** Transcription of first of two ‘corroboree songs’ (published version) by Percy Grainger; in Spencer and Gillen 1912, vol. 2, Appendix, p. 502

The 1912 printed transcription (Musical example 16.3, above)\(^{11}\) collapsed these variants into a single version, sacrificing accuracy and detail, but usefully imagining a single melodic model that withstands comparison with all four ‘verses’ of the streamed recording, allowing that first and last notes of the latter as currently streamed are not now pitched on D, but around B flat. In this respect,

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\(^9\) See Skinner and Wafer, *Checklist*, this volume, 33.3.

\(^{10}\) Museum Victoria, Spencer & Gillen: a journey through Aboriginal Australia (Reconstructing the Spencer and Gillen Collection Project): [http://spencerandgillen.net](http://spencerandgillen.net)

it can be appreciated that, for many attempting to learn or perform from transcriptions, those that are forensically more accurate (like Grainger’s ‘difficult’ manuscript version) might not necessarily always be as useful as more schematic generalisations (like the ‘easier’ printed version).

Of the performers and performance, in his announcement on the recording Spencer merely reported: ‘This corroboree was sung on the Stevenson River on March the 22nd, 1901’. But in his diary for the same day, he was more forthcoming:

At dusk 5 or 6 old natives came in and so we got our phonograph out and got them to sing corroboree songs into it. They were very much excited and interested especially as we let them hear the instrument repeating what they had said. The phonograph is a beauty: it was given to us in Adelaide and we can both take records with it and repeat them as soon as they are taken... Gillen & myself felt quite happy to amongst the blacks again & to hear the old corroboree songs once more and I don’t know whether we or the natives were the more excited.

But at this point in his edition of the expedition diaries, Jason Gibson helpfully mentions that Spencer later passed on a quite different recollection of the playbacks that day to his daughter, Alline:

This nearly ended in disaster... my father played the songs back to the natives, who were horrified and ran for their lives. He never let them hear themselves again and I don’t know how he calmed the fears of the first batch...

From a strictly musical perspective, the 1898 Torres Strait and 1901 Arrernte recordings are invaluable baselines against which later observations of their respective repertories may be objectively measured, compared, and analysed. But they also preserve important evidence of earlier, un-recordable practice both within and outside the host traditions. Compared with what Myers saw as the more ‘primitive’ cult songs of Murray/Mer Island that were the main focus of his study of the Torres Strait songs, he noted the ‘greater (to our [British] ears) tunefulness and tonality’ in some secular songs originating in the western islands, like Yam, where singers already had some contact with exotic instruments like flutes and jaw-harps. And Spencer, in his recorded introduction to the Tjitjingalla song, noted his belief that it derived from the same source as the Molonga/Mulunga corroborees Walter Roth had witnessed in Queensland in 1894. This song and dance complex is thought to have originated in the 1880s, perhaps as a ritual protest against white aggression and dispossession, and spread widely among peoples in the central, northern, and north eastern parts of the continent into the early years of last century. Questions will always remain as to how much of

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13 Gibson and Milton, Spencer’s diary, 8 note 21.

14 Myers, ‘Music’, 239, 266.

this unique early recording’s musical detail belonged to the shared ‘composition’, and how much was inherent in the singer’s distinctive Arrernte musical identity (how different or similar would the song as sung by different people, hundreds of miles away, actually sound?). Yet, as the only fully provenanced musical documentation of this then still quite recent travelling complex, the four short recorded Tjitjingalla verses are crucial to the understanding of one of the most powerful new productions of Indigenous shared songmaking traditions in the late colonial era. It is ironic, then, that Grainger’s minor role as transcriber has so far generated more interest among music historians than the songs themselves.

**Popela (1899)**

Already at the time they were made, the Tasmanian recordings were recognised as being evidence of a song tradition dating back at least to the 1840s. Subsequent scholarship traced documentation of one of the songs, *Popela* (or *Popeller*), back a further decade. Given the possibilities of transmission available, this Tasmanian song, alone of all colonial era survivals, ticks all the boxes. Beginning in 1831, there is the first of George Augustus Robinson’s two transcriptions of the words of the song, along with his observations on its dissemination, use, and meaning; next, there is a notated transcription of the music dating from 1835–36; several further independent text transcriptions and descriptions follow; and the transmission history culminates in three separate versions of the song mechanically recorded in 1899 and 1903 from the singing of Fanny Cochrane Smith (1834–1905). The contents of the first of the original cylinders (Tasmanian Museum 15685/M 3317) as recorded by Horace Watson (1862–1930) in the rooms of the Royal Society of Tasmania on 5 August 1899, are currently freely streamed in their entirety (approx. 2 minutes 23 seconds):

Audio example 16.3: Fanny Cochrane Smith singing ‘Popela’, recorded by Horace Watson, Hobart, 5 August 1899 (Hobart, Tasmanian Museum 15685/M 3317; Canberra, National Film and Sound Archive)

The first minute and a half of the clip consists of an introduction in English, declaimed into the recording horn by Mrs Smith:

I’m Fanny Smith. I was born on Flinders Island. I’m the last of the Tasmanians. I’ll (put this morning) a very long story about it. I’ll tell you the truth, to let you know a little

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For resources and documentation on Mrs Smith, see Trove public tag (curated by Australharmony): http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?l-publictag=Fanny+Cochrane+Smith; on the various iterations of the song *Popela*, see Skinner and Wafer, *Checklist*, this volume, 9, and 32.1.


about us. My mother’s name was Tanganitarra. I – we are some true born sisters from Flinders Island, where we were for seven years. And I’m here speaking to-day. [in answer to a question] Have we got for mother and my father? My father Noona. Noona (nitara-noota). (Sing a song. Noota, mother and me). My father Noona. My father was a (whaler). Lose-a my mother, all gone. [in answer to another question] My family? I’m married. Goodbye. My father [? family] no more.

At 1 minute 49 seconds, the first of Mrs Smith’s three renditions of versions of the song begins; this one, the shortest, only 33 seconds long. A very approximate musical transcription of the melody appears as Musical example 16.4; made specifically from the digital sound-clip, it may be compared with Alice Moyle’s transcriptions of this and the other versions, taken from earlier analogue transfers at slightly differing speeds and pitches, that she published in 1960 and 1968.19

Musical example 16.4: Musical transcription of first recorded version of Fanny Cochrane Smith’s song ‘Popela’, based on the sound clip at the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra (original held in Hobart, Tasmanian Museum 15685/M 3317); the transcribed section runs from 1:49 to the end (as the rests in the first bar are intended to suggest, the roughly 6/8 song sometimes appears to be sung against a 4-in-a-bar beat).

As Murray Longman and Alice Moyle showed in 1960, all three takes were versions of the same ‘master’ song, which they traced to multiple mid-nineteenth century transcriptions of the words alone, the earliest by George Washington Walker in 1832. Longman first reported on the existence of an early colonial musical arrangement of the song made by a ‘Mrs. Logan’, while Moyle believed she had traced Logan’s informant to the ‘Mifs’ mentioned in an added inscription to the manuscript, ‘an Aboriginal woman living in the Bothwell district between 1840 and 1850’. By 1968, Moyle had

tentatively identified Mrs Logan as a music teacher who had arrived in the colony in February 1835.

Brian Plomley shared with Moyle his opinion that, based on his knowledge of the Indigenous visitors to the Hobart area around that time, Logan was most likely to have met her informant (whether or not the putative ‘MiFs’) before September 1835. The clinching piece of evidence, also discovered by Plomley, was an entry in George Augustus Robinson’s journal, made in Hobart on 22 October 1836, which recorded:

Spent the evening at [Charles] Logan’s in Macquarie Street. Mr[s]. Logan set to music a song of the aborigines, POPELLER etc., the first ever attempted.

Moyle first compared her own music-only transcriptions of two of the sound recordings of the song with the melody line of Logan’s arrangement in her 1960 paper, and repeated the process more thoroughly in 1968, making new words-and-music transcriptions of all three sound takes, and printing a facsimile of the Logan manuscript. Brian Plomley had, by 1966, also published two more transcriptions of the words from Robinson’s journals, the earlier taken, with partial translation, at Mount Cameron on the north east coast on 13 August 1831.

Moyle’s partial identification of Mrs Logan was correct. We now know that she was Maria Logan (1808–86), daughter of Dublin music-seller Andrew Ellard and his first wife Ann, sister of the Sydney music-seller and publisher Francis Ellard, and a first cousin of the composer William Vincent Wallace and of the singer and teacher Eliza Wallace-Bushelle. Maria’s husband, Charles, had organised two shiploads of female emigrants from Dublin, and the Logans accompanied the first of these, as superintendents on the Sarah, to Hobart, arriving there on 15 February 1835. Having moved to Sydney with her family in 1842, Logan was one of Sydney’s leading piano teachers for many decades.

Two colonial era manuscript copies of Logan’s lost original arrangement survive—each consisting of a vocal transcription of the melody and words, with a harmonised accompaniment for piano. Both copies contain glaring musical errors, especially in the added accompaniment, and differ from each other at many points; but they largely agree on the essential details of the melody and words. For ease of comparison, Musical example 16.5 is a modern edition of the melody and words only, as given in the two copies, transposed to the same approximate pitch as the streamed 1899 recording and its transcription in Musical example 16.4. In the 1960s, Longman and Moyle knew of, and reported on, only what is clearly the earlier and cleaner of the two copies (‘Logan 1’ in Musical example 16.5), which Moyle thought was probably the 1835–36 original, albeit ‘inexpertly done’ (more on this, and the later copy, below).

A very simplified melodic analysis of the basic elements of the song is added above the staves in the two Musical examples 16.4 and 16.5, by means of the large letters R (recitation), M (mediation), E (ending), LM (lower mediation), and LE (lower ending). Even allowing for the absence of the LM and LE elements in both copies of the Logan transcription (Musical example 16.5), which merely repeat M and E at the same pitch, the similarities with the transcription of the 1899 recording (Musical example 16.4) are clear. Pitch and timbre are surprisingly well represented in the streamed recording, though phonemes are not. Nevertheless, in her 1968 paper Moyle hazarded an attempt to fit words from Walker’s 1832 text transcription to her music transcriptions of all three recorded

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versions. Rather than vainly trying to add words to the transcription of the streamed recording (Musical example 16.4 above), Table 16.1 presents Plomley’s edition of the two Robinson text transcriptions (neither of which Moyle or Longman collated) in parallel columns with the Logan text. Though only enough material for a temporary and very partial ‘revitalisation’ are presented here, further important evidence may be found along with their transcriptions in Moyle’s and Longman’s papers, while solutions of more permanent value may well flow from a systematic use of all the available evidence, if and when all of the Smith recordings are made freely accessible.

Musical example 16.5: Edited transcription of the melody and words only, from the two manuscript copies of ‘Song of the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land arranged by Mrs Logan’
Table 16.1: Textual comparison of three versions of ‘Popela’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robinson 1831(^{23})</th>
<th>Robinson 1834(^{24})</th>
<th>Logan 1836</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pop.per.</td>
<td>pap.el.er</td>
<td>popela ranea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rane.nen.er</td>
<td>rane.er</td>
<td>gonne ne popela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goen.nen.er</td>
<td>gun.nen.er</td>
<td>ranae gone ne na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lur.me.</td>
<td>lur.me.gun.ne</td>
<td>lea me gonne a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gun.ne.yer</td>
<td>take.er.me.gun.ne</td>
<td>lea me gonne a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toke.her.me.</td>
<td></td>
<td>to kea me gun ne a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gun.ne.yer</td>
<td></td>
<td>to lea me gun ne a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni na te pea</td>
<td>ni na te pea</td>
<td>lea me gune ne a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neen.nar nee.nar</td>
<td>nar.er</td>
<td>ni na te pe a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pone.nen.ner</td>
<td>pape.er.rane.ner</td>
<td>ra nea po na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rone.nen.ner.neen.ner</td>
<td>rone.nen.ner</td>
<td>ni na te pe a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pue.wil.le parn.ner</td>
<td>nar.er</td>
<td>ra ne ni na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pue.wil.le bal.ler.hoo</td>
<td>bue.mel.er.par.ner</td>
<td>ra ne bu wil la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bal.ler.hoo</td>
<td>bal.ler.hoo</td>
<td>pa ne na ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bal.ler.hoo</td>
<td>bal.ler.hoo</td>
<td>bur wil la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>drue.de.cum</td>
<td>bal la hoo!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mine.dim</td>
<td>bal la hoo!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of the above touches on the song’s meaning, function, or cultural context, upon which, anyway, colonial reporters vary. They variously described it as a dance song ‘in honour of a great chief’, as belonging to the ‘Ben Lomond tribe’ or to the whole of ‘north east Tasmania’, and even as ‘a favourite song chiefly of the men - stated to be learned from the Sydney blacks, but known by most of the aborigines of V.D. Land.’\(^{25}\) Robinson, in 1831, described its subject as ‘indelicate’ – according to his gloss, it concerns expelling evil spirits from the feet by defecating; though, in 1899, that evidently did not unduly trouble Mrs Smith, a devout Methodist since her younger days.\(^{26}\) But even without unmediated access to its context, the survival of the song’s words and music in multiple formats is by itself of unparalleled significance.

\(^{23}\) Plomley, *Friendly mission*, 469.
\(^{24}\) Plomley, *Friendly mission*, 470.
\(^{26}\) In 1908, Herman Ritz reviewed three other documented early text versions of the song, and proposed ‘translations’ for each; see ‘ABORIGINAL SONGS’, *Daily Post* (21 November 1908), 10: [http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article181621319](http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article181621319), and Hermann B. Ritz, ‘An introduction to the study of the Aboriginal speech of Tasmania (read November 16, 1908)’, *Papers and proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* (1908), 73-83: [http://eprints.utas.edu.au/16462](http://eprints.utas.edu.au/16462); Robinson’s transcriptions, and probably more accurate translations, were then still unknown and uncollated.
On Mrs Smith’s own say so, she was taught the song by her family, probably as a child at Robinson’s station, Wybalenna, on Flinders Island in the years around 1840. Thus, a song that was widely sung by the surviving Tasmanians in the early 1830s and 1840s, and which was then plausibly very much older, survived into the recording age. Having recorded Popela and another song in August 1899, Mrs Smith appears not to have had been troubled about treating these vocal remnants of her cultural heritage as discrete musical artefacts in the European manner. She sang one song at a Wesleyan social a few months before the 1899 recordings (the audience reportedly found it ‘very amusing’), and two songs at a public ‘entertainment’ organised by Watson for her benefit a couple of months later (they were, The Mercury said, ‘simple and melodious’).27 Many years afterwards in 1949, an 82-year-old friend, Emily Keens, did however recall that Mrs Smith had some initial misgivings when Watson first played the recordings back to her.28

She cried: ‘My poor race. What have I done.’ We could not pacify her for a long time . . . She thought the voice she had heard was that of her mother.

As complete a documentary profile of Popela as we will probably now ever possess was in place by 1968. Writing in that year, of records of Tasmanian Indigenous music generally, Alice Moyle concluded that:29

the chances of adding to these meagre remains are now slight. But even today more than a hundred years after the last full-blood Tasmanians performed their songs and dances, might it still not be possible to find a second or third generation descendent still able to recall tribal song-fragments which have been learned and passed on by older relatives?

Yet Moyle’s ‘faint hope underlying this question’ was in fact partially fulfilled. In 1972, financed by a $720 grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (later AIATSIS), Robert Dixon and Terry Crowley made further investigations, during which Crowley ‘tape recorded five words and a short song’ from two grand-daughters of Fanny Cochrane Smith.30 Crowley’s recording of Dot Heffernan’s singing contained ‘a fragment of a lilting corroboree song, the meaning of which is not remembered’.31 Moyle made an unpublished transcription of it32, and it proved not to be any of the

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29 Moyle, *Tasmanian music, an impasse?*, 1.


three songs recorded by Fanny herself at the turn of the century – *Popela*, a ‘spring song’, and a
‘hymn improvisation’ – but another one, a ‘bird call song’, that Fanny had taught her grand-daughter
around the same time. The jazz singer Judy Jacques taught herself to perform it from Moyle’s
transcription, and, having done so, was inclined to believe that the ‘primary triad structure’ of the
song, as Heffernan sang it ‘in a nursery rhyme or sailors’ hornpipe style’, projected a ‘westernised’
flavour typical of Fanny’s upbringing in the mixed race community at Wybalenna, ‘where she
arguably absorbed the musical hybridities of settler hymns, folk and whaling songs’. Jacques herself
was descended from a convict arrival, some of whose family were, like Mrs Smith’s father, Bass
Strait whalers, and in a fascinating account of her own practical attempts at creative revitalisation,
did conclude that the song’s ‘western traits . . . do not in themselves discount Tasmanian provenance’.
Yet, in the absence of enough independent musical evidence to draw such comparisons, perhaps we
should ask again if we can really be so sure of these ‘western traits’ and ‘hybridities’ as to identify
them reliably.

Looking a little more closely at Logan’s *Popela* arrangement, and considering it in isolation from
the recordings, even the earlier and slightly more musically ‘correct’ copy (the opening shown as
Musical example 16.6, below) looks and sounds about as unpromising as any colonial transcription
could be, were it not for the additional musical evidence of the second copy, dating from late in the
century, and apparently made in Victoria. This second copy appears slightly more accurate in some
details (for instance, the syllabification of the words), but is worse in some other respects (notably
in details of the added accompaniment). Both are, anyway, sufficiently problematic for it to be
doubtful that either of them is a reliable record of the first intentions of a reasonably experienced
musician like Maria Logan. Nor can we be sure that Logan ever issued only one ‘authorised’
version of her arrangement. Perhaps she altered and ‘improved’ details over time, and this accounts
for some of the differences in the copies (as for instance in the vocal-line setting of the final
‘ballahoos’ in Musical example 16.5).

One thing that we might reasonably infer from the existence of two copies made some decades
apart, however, is that the Logan arrangement had some continuing currency, probably first among
her Hobart music pupils, and later considerably more widely. Yet even after allowing for apparent
errors in one or other of them (the obviously corrupt introduction for piano alone in the earlier copy,
seems to appear more correctly in the later), the copies agree sufficiently for us to be certain that
Logan’s arrangement was always going to be considered something of an oddity. Judged by the basic
conventions of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Western musical syntax, the added piano
accompaniment must have seemed barely coherent tonally, and the pervasive lilting rhythm
(according to the earlier copy, in 3/4 time, but actually in 6/8) implausible. Yet, in dressing up the
song melody in Western guise, Logan’s arrangement did surprisingly little to make it sound less

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11-16 July, 2004 (Melbourne: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Australia New
Zealand Branch, 2004), 11-19.

33 Judy Jacques, ‘Passing the torch: commemorating the songs of Fanny Cochrane Smith’, in Denis Crowdy
(ed.), *Popular music: commemoration, commodification and communication: proceedings of the 2004
IASPM Australia New Zealand Conference, held in conjunction with the Symposium of the International
Musicological Society, 11-16 July, 2004* (Melbourne: International Association for the Study of Popular
Music, Australia New Zealand Branch, 2004), 11-19.

34 The second copy (Royal Society of Tasmania, University of Tasmania Library Special and Rare Materials
Collection: [http://eprints.utas.edu.au/id/document/2752](http://eprints.utas.edu.au/id/document/2752)) appears to have been made by Henry Lloyd, a
violinist, in the late 1890s. Lloyd, who died in 1910 aged 78, had been professionally active in Castlemaine
since the late 1860s, before moving to Prahran in 1895, where he also worked as a photographer.

35 A song composed by her, *The vow that’s breathed in solitude*, published in Hobart in 1839, does not survive.
However, another manuscript piano setting by her, of the song *Those evening bells* (from Thomas Moore’s
*Irish melodies*), does exist in a copy made Sarah Cross Bingle in Sydney in January 1853. A perfectly
respectable, if uninspiring arrangement probably made for her own piano pupils, it is now in a bound music
album in the Bingle Family papers, State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 7115/2-3:
monotonous to colonial ears. Pointedly omitting to take advantage of a fuller range of possible harmonisations, Logan limited her accompaniment to a very occasional alternation of only two repeated and functionally unrelated chords, A major (root position) and F sharp minor (second inversion), in effect using them as harmonic drones, thereby underlining and accentuating, rather than dressing-up and disguising (‘colonialising’), the song melody’s non-Western traits. Such planned ‘primitivism’ might today seem almost of a piece with post-Stravinsky minimalism, but in 1836 the arrangement must simply have appeared to many to border on the musically illiterate. Yet it is so determinedly ‘illiterate’ that Logan must surely have known what she was doing. Might not it reflect Logan’s desire to document the spirit, if not the letter, of the ‘primitive’ performance as she heard it? And adding in the corroborative evidence of the 1899 recording, Logan’s arrangement does, in fact, appear to be a far more reliable musical account of Popela in its essential details than we might otherwise have dared to imagine.

Musical example 16.6: Song of the Aborigines of Van Diemans Land [sic] arranged by Mrs. Logan.

Maranoa songs (c.1890, 1937)
Arguing from necessity, music historians wanting to reimagine the actual sound of Aboriginal song in the colonial era have little choice, anyway, but to come to terms with such transcriptions. So too, for Indigenous people and the editors of this book: non-Indigenous documentation, however
obviously flawed, needs must be pre-supposed to be of at least some use in revival of broken song traditions or the revitalisation of endangered ones, and in the ‘resuscitation’ of actual songs long supposed to be dead, but perhaps merely only sleeping. A Gunggari elder, Ethel Munn, gave eloquent testimony to a recent instance of song reclamation on a video for First Language Australia. She recounted how she has treasured for over 40 years a copy of Harold Lethbridge and Arthur Loam’s *Australian Aboriginal songs* (1937)\(^{36}\) as a tangible but mute record of the language and music of her people in the Maranoa area of south-west Queensland. Finally, on camera in 2014, she got the chance to sing the *Maranoa lullaby* with a group of friends.\(^{37}\)

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**Video example 16.1**: Ethel Munn and friends from south-east Queensland singing the ‘Maranoa lullaby’, 2014; streamed by First Languages Australia (Vimeo), and Queensland Indigenous Languages Advisory Committee (QILAC)

The singer Harold Blair (1924–76) had already publicly ‘reappropriated’ the *Lullaby* in the early 1950s, on behalf of southern Queensland Indigenous people (Blair was born at the Cherbourg mission), performing it in Australia and abroad in concerts and recordings.\(^{38}\) But Ethel Munn’s video returned the song much closer still to its origins. Though Harold Lethbridge (1880–1944) did not write them down until the 1930s, his transcriptions were made from his own and his sister’s memories of Indigenous songs they’d heard, and been taught to sing themselves, by traditional singers at Forest Vale station on the Maranoa in the 1890s.\(^{39}\) As he told *The Australian Musical News* in 1937, Lethbridge himself considered that his transcriptions, despite their late date, nevertheless gave a true account of Indigenous music at Maranoa in the late colonial era.\(^{40}\)

Station life in Western Queensland in the 80s was very different from present conditions. No wireless – no cars, we lived a life centred round our own home. My father always liked the blacks and they would do anything for him. As boys they were our playmates – we used to hunt with them and eat witchetty grubs with them. We knew their language and sang their songs and even learnt their corroborees. A love of music and a retentive memory have given me the opportunity of knowing these songs still. I can therefore speak truth when I say the words, rhythm, melody and tempo of these songs is as they sang them and absolutely unaltered. Therein lies their value.

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Despite this line of authority back to the colonial era, the transcriptions have often been tacitly assumed to be unreliable, and even fatally flawed, probably largely because of a failure to consider the melodies and original words in isolation from Arthur Loam’s harmonised accompaniments, and Lethbridge’s well-intended, but unfashionably prosy English translations. Among Lethbridge’s five transcriptions the most firmly provenanced are the three strophes that make up The Bingo Corroborees, which he identified as ‘compositions’ – words and music – of Boss Davey, or Mundâlo, dating from ‘about 1900’.41 According to Lethbridge:42

The Bingo Series. These I know well. They were the result of a renaissance in music that occurred among the Maranoa Tribe in the 80s. I knew the composer, one Boss Davey. I saw these corroborees night after night and we sang them with the blacks. The translation is quite correct in meaning.

The composer was probably the ‘Davey’ described in local police records as a 50-year-old ‘full-blood’ working at ‘scalping’ at Forest Vale in 1904; and certainly the ‘Boss Davey’ who, in 1914, Lethbridge’s father called upon the police to remove to Taroom Aboriginal Settlement. Boss Davey died there on 25 March 1916 of ‘senile decay’, some months short of witnessing the ‘coloured Queensland Pug’ [pugilist], Jerry Jerome, lead some of his fellow inmates in the famous 1916 Taroom strike for pay.43

Had Lethbridge stopped at naming Davey as the ‘composer’ of the Bingo Corroborees, we might think he meant ‘owner’, were it not for the added mention of the songs resulting from a ‘renaissance in music’ among the Maranoa people in the 1880s, itself an interesting, if as yet unverifiable, cultural and historical proposition. Perhaps one other song Lethbridge remembered from the time of this ‘renaissance’ may yet be found to have some musical connection with the anti-white millennialism of the Tjitjingalla/Mulunga corroborees.44 War dance-songs execrating ‘the whites’ are, so far, hard to identify among colonial era word-and-music, or even words-only, transcriptions; but perhaps The Warrego Lament (‘Introduced from the Warrego Tribe. It is the anguished cry of a doomed race – stricken by disease brought by the invading white man’) is one of them. And if Lethbridge’s designation of it as a ‘lament’ seems to sit oddly with the indicated Allegro con brio tempo, his translation, though hum-drum, leaves very little to the imagination:45

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Happy hunting ours before,} \\
\text{Happy hunts we know no more:} \\
\text{Sick and sad are we} \\
\text{Broken hearts wasting till we die,} \\
\text{Curse the whites! Curse the whites!}
\end{align*}
\]

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41 Lethbridge, *Australian Aboriginal songs*, 6-9:
43 Mitchell Police Letterbook 1889-1921; QS 636/1 (3) and (11), Queensland State Archives:
http://www.cifhs.com/qldrecords/qldmitchell.html; Chief Protector of Aborigines, Register of Aboriginal Deaths 1910-1928, A/58973, Queensland State Archives:
44 Swain 1993, and see footnote 15 of the present chapter.
45 Lethbridge, *Australian Aboriginal songs*, 10-11:
A Cape York song (1876)

Another case of apparently flawed transcriptions whose potential may yet be more fully realised are the four Cape York songs written down in France in 1876 by the composer, critic, and musicologist Edouard Garnier, from the singing of the famous ‘castaway’, Narcisse Pelletier (1844–94), and published that year.46 Perforce, Pelletier spent 17 years on Cape York from 1858 to 1875, living as an adopted member of a family of Uutaalnganu speakers (Sandbeach people, Pama Malngkana), going by the name of ‘Anco’.47 Sixty years earlier than Loam, though in remarkably similar style, Garnier added harmonised accompaniments to Pelletier’s songs, believing them to be essential to European reception:48

Musical example 16.7: Edouard Garnier, ‘Observations musicales sur les chants de Narcisse Pelletier (1876), plate 2

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46 Edouard Garnier, ‘Observations musicales sur les chants de Narcisse Pelletier’, appendix in Constant Merland, Dix-sept ans chez les sauvages: aventures de Narcisse Pelletier (Paris: E. Dentu, 1876), 127-35 (commentary), and four plates (music); on the 4 songs, see Skinner and Wafer, Checklist, this volume, 22.1-4.


Recovering musical data

Ces airs, avec leur seule ligne vocale, auraient peu de signification. Présentés avec cette partie accompagnante, ils acquièrent, croyons-nous, un certain caractère; ils prennent une sorte de saveur lointaine, et, à ces différents titres, peut-être offriront-ils quelque intérêt aux lecteurs musiciens.

These airs, given with their single vocal line alone, would have little meaning. Presented with the accompaniment, they acquire, we believe, a certain character; they take on a distant flavour; and, as such, perhaps will be of some interest to musical readers.

There has been no detailed musical historical discussion or analysis of the music Garnier transcribed from Pelletier’s multiple performances. Garnier explained that his task was not easy: Pelletier had no Western musical knowledge, would alter his rendition each time, his rhythm was often hard to discern. However, Garnier claimed to have been meticulous in notating what he heard Pelletier singing. He also transcribed the sung text as best he could, inventing the spelling. Perhaps of greatest interest is the second song, which appears to have been composed for, and about, Pelletier himself. Based on Garnier’s account and transcription, anthropologist David Thompson reconstructed the likely original words of song, which Pelletier said was ‘sung at night’ (see Musical example 16.7).

Yunthu kalinan, kalinan, yunthu kalinan, kalinan, para kalinan, kalinan, para kalinan, kalinan.

Waterlily root carry-we, carry-we. Waterlily root carry-we, carry-we. White man carry-we, carry we. White man carry-we, carry we.

Reconsidering the making of transcriptions and arrangements

The diaries of George Augustus Robinson, among others, give some insight into the process of the transcription, transliteration, and translation of song text. But most transcribers of music are silent on precisely how they went about the process. Some, like Lethbridge, merely reported that they had been taught them as children. In Garnier’s case, though there was no actual ‘field work’ involved, he relied totally on what he could glean from the singing of his sole informant, Pelletier. Percy Sheaffe, who settled on the south coast of New South Wales in the mid-nineteenth century, learned the song Tshemer burra buna in the field, and found the right pitches to notate using his flute, something we can only regret that George Augustus Robinson – who also took his flute with him on his Tasmanian and Victorian expeditions in the 1830s and 1840s – did not also do. Occasionally a report hints at how Indigenous people went about ‘teaching’ whites their songs in the first place. Numerous colonial reports attest to Indigenous Australians’ acuity as mimics generally and copiers of European songs,

49 Garnier, ‘Observations musicales’, 127: ‘Ces airs ou ces chants – est-ce bien là le nom ambitieux qui leur convient – n’ont pas été faciles à recueillir, car Pelletier, ne possédant aucune connaissance musicale, variait à chaque reprise ses formules, à tel point qu’elles devenaient d’un choix fort embarrassant. Sa voix, quoique assez juste, n’avait rien de fixe; par suite, la version s’égarait et se présentait constamment différente. Le rythme, cet élément pourtant naturel, constitutif, prédominant dans toute musique rudimentaire, était lui-même le plus souvent difficile à démêler par son manque de franchise.’

50 Anderson, Pelletier: the forgotten castaway, 357 note 2; music example, Garnier, ‘Observations musicales’, plate 2

51 See Skinner and Wafer, Checklist, this volume, 31.
but, as George Bass observed at Moreton Bay in August 1799, mimicry and copying was, quite naturally, crucial to how Indigenous people taught, as well as learned, their own songs:

Observing that they were attentively listened to, they each selected one of our people, and placed his mouth close to his ear, as if to produce a greater effect, or, it might be, to teach them the song, which their silent attention might seem to express a desire to learn.

The most thorough and systematic colonial account of the transcription process was that given by George Torrance (1835–1907), an Anglican priest and professionally trained musician, in his description of dictation sessions near Melbourne in the mid 1880s with his sole informant, Wurundjeri man and Ngurungaeta headman, William Barak (1824–1903). Before commencing the song-taking proper, Torrance administered a series of ear tests to the singer, from which he observed that Barak’s voice was ‘a baritone of average compass’, and his ear ‘quick and accurate’. Barak chose his own starting notes, and Torrance, conscious of the constraints of the semitone scale, was scrupulous in registering slight changes in pitch, sometimes including portamentos (‘a curious sliding of one sound into another, not unlike the slow tuning of a violin string’). Notably, he did not force his transcriptions of the three chant-like songs into readymade tonal or metrical schemes. Even one corroboree song, sung to a regular clapping and stamping beat, Torrance transcribed in an irregular mix of duple and triple bars. The sessions probably took place at Barak’s home, Coranderrk Station; we know that Barak and Torrance had an audience, and Torrance attests that Barak’s ‘patience, good temper, and evident pleasure at seeing his song committed to paper, were very remarkable’.

Torrance self-consciously presented his published transcriptions of these very simple, and apparently formulaic chants as a scientific report, with critical apparatus, but without doing anything further to encourage future performances; though when his paper was read, in his absence, to the Royal Anthropological Institute in London late in 1886, it was reportedly ‘illustrated vocally by the assistant secretary’, George W. Bloxam. Many earlier transcriptions were also largely scientific in intent, starting with Barron Field’s 1823 unharmonised transcription of Harry’s song and Lesueur and Bernier’s 1802 transcriptions, belatedly published in 1824. And after 1850, unharmonised (‘scientific’) transcriptions seem to have become the norm.


54 Anon., ‘Ethnological notes’, Science (8 April 1887), 335: ‘Torrance gives three tunes, which he has divided into bars, according to the style of our music. This, however, is not correct, as the irregular accent does not allow their being arranged in this way. Fortunately the study of aboriginal poetry and music is being taken up now by several students.’

55 Torrance, 1887, 336.


57 Charles Alexandre Lesueur and Nicolas-Martin Petit, Voyage de découvertes aux terres Australes. Historique, atlas par MM. Lesueur et Petit, seconde édition (Paris: Chez Arthus Bertrand, 1824), plate 32,
Apart from the Pelletier songs already discussed, George Taplin’s *Narrinyeri Corrobbery* was the only new, harmonised arrangement to appear in the second half of the nineteenth century. Taplin claimed that it was ‘a specimen of the music of a genuine aboriginal “corrobbery”, or song, written down as it was sung by the aborigines about eighteen years ago [c.1861]’; but his arrangement, which he imagined being best performed accompanied by a ‘couple of clarionets, with a flute, and, for the bass, a drum’, appears to be more like a picturesque sketch than a detailed pitch specific account of a sung melody. By the 1860s and 1870s, if there was any remaining colonial ‘market’ for Indigenous song arrangements, its demands were increasingly being met by settler-colonist composers, with popular faux-Indigenous imitations. ‘Aboriginal songs’ were occasionally encountered in the theatre as early as the 1830s, a notable example from the 1840s being *Merry-jig, me sing*, ‘written’ by the playwright James Ruthven McLauglin in Melbourne. Though only the words survive, it must presumably have been sung to some sort of concocted melody by the ‘black-face’ professional actors who eventually performed it on stage in McLauglin’s play, *Arabin; or, Adventures of a settler*, in 1849.

Another notable example was the ‘corroboree chorus’ from the lyric masque *The South-sea sisters*, by Charles Edward Horsley (1822–76). So effective was it evoking ‘all the grotesque points’ of its subject matter that the chorus was ‘three times encored’ during the masque’s premiere at the Melbourne Exhibition of 1866. Horsley’s music is lost, and was probably, anyway, little more than an imaginative confection, despite the claim of his librettist, Richard Horne (1802–84), to have borrowed ‘the rhythm of the Song-dance . . . of the blacks on Goulburn river’ (the Taungurung, or Daung wurrung, people) for the words, which do survive.

*From creek of Worooboomi – boo!*
*And sheep-run Woolagooloo – goo!*
*Come Dibble Fellow dancing in fog!*
*All over Mount Wooloola – yah!*
*And earth holes of Worondi – wah!*
*Till he vanish in the yellow Wog-wog!*
*Old chief of Woolonara – nah!*
*From the great river banks, far – far!*
*Hasten here with spear and boomerang –*
*Then to snowy Woologoomerang –*
*For white fellow comes to make war.*

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59 For further details of Taplin’s transcription, and a synthesised sound-clip of it, see: http://sydney.edu.au/paradisec/australharmony/checklist-indigenous-music-1.php#020.


An atmospheric and exhilarating instrumental example was the orchestral *Danse aboriginale* (1889) by Walter James Turner senior (1857–1900), then organist of old St Paul’s Cathedral, Melbourne, and father of the future poet and music critic of the same name.62

But what of the rest of those earlier, and presumably more or less authentic songs that were not only shoe-horned into European tonal and metrical schemes, but fitted out with harmonised accompaniments with the obvious intention that they be sung and played by colonists or homeland Europeans, whether for education, edification, or entertainment?63 In the case of the very earliest, taken down in London in 1793 from the singing of two Wangal men, Bennelong (c.1764–1813) and Yamroweney (c.1775–1794), but not published until 1811, the transcriber, Edward Jones (1752–1824), actually printed two versions, one with the melody un-harmonised and accompanied by a single note bass line representing the singers beating time with sticks.64 The second version he harmonised in a manner suited to either being played on a piano or, plausibly, on his own first instrument, the Welsh harp. Which leads one to wonder whether, during the process of ‘learning’ the tune from their no doubt repeated performances of the song, Jones might at some point have joined in with the two Australians by improvising a similar harp accompaniment? Or, if not, whether he at least played his version of the song back to them later? How consultative, in other words, was the process? Was it just a one-direction transaction, whereby Jones took down the song from dictation, or were the singers themselves also somehow further involved in the generation and performance of the arrangement?65 No colonial transcriber ever says as much, though most of them say little or nothing anyway about the transfer process. But an 1834 account by George Fletcher Moore, of witnessing two men from King George’s Sound perform a ‘kangaroo dance’ in a Perth settler’s parlour to a grand piano accompaniment, is suggestive.66

On the 10th I rode to Guildford; walked thence to Perth, which I did not leave until the 12th; at Mr. Leake’s, and enjoyed the grand piano which Mrs. Leake, who had recently arrived, had brought with her. The two natives of King George’s Sound (who are on their return) were greatly delighted with the music; they danced the kangaroo dance . . . Afterwards they seated themselves in arm-chairs, with the greatest self-complacency, and drank tea.

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63 On what is probably the first musical song transcription ever to be published, *A New-South-Wales Song* (c.1805), see Graeme Skinner, ‘The invention of Australian music’, *Musicology Australia* 37/2 (2015), 289-306: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2015.1076594](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2015.1076594).

64 See Skinner and Wafer, Checklist, this volume, 2.


66 Martin Doyle (ed.), *Extracts from the letters and journals of George Fletcher Moore: Esq., now filling a judicial office at the Swan River settlement . . .* (London: Orr and Smith, 1834), 224-25: [https://archive.org/stream/extractsfromlet00doylgoog#page/n252/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/extractsfromlet00doylgoog#page/n252/mode/2up).
Moore’s account at least challenges us to think twice before entirely rejecting even such a highly unlikely sounding arrangement as, for instance, bishop Rosendo Salvado’s only slightly later transcription of a Western Australian dance song, as ipso facto inauthentic.68

And a final word on Isaac Nathan

The much-discussed arrangements by Isaac Nathan (1792–1864), sometimes called the ‘father of Australian music’, probably do, on the other hand, remain open to that charge. Nathan, uncharacteristically, stopped short of claiming that any of his arrangements were based on his own transcriptions (albeit he did claim to have been ‘an eye-witness [to corroborees] on more than one occasion’). Neither did he leave any evidence that he envisaged, let alone actively enabled, direct Indigenous participation in the performance of his arrangements (though he did once claim that ‘one of them … alternately laughed and wept from excessive joy, at hearing his own native, melody, sung and accompanied by us on our Piano Forte’). For the first of his arrangements, Nathan ‘found’ both the words-and-melody already in print, John Lhotsky’s 1834 publication, A song of the women of the Menero tribe.69 And in ‘correcting’ and repackaging Lhotsky’s earlier transcription as The Aboriginal father,70 Nathan merely registered that he had since heard ‘the same melody sung in all its genuine purity and simplicity, by one of the Maneroo tribe.’ Henry Tingcombe (1810–74), an Anglican priest who had been a station manager in the Monaro area in the late 1830s, provided Nathan with the two other short, but attractive word-and-tune song fragments that he later reconfigured, by a process of repetition and simple variation, into the more elaborate Monaro arrangements, Koorinda braia and Wargoonda minyarrah.71 And since Tingcombe is on record as being a skilled musical amateur, he may well have made the original transcriptions himself.

Nathan does not say how he came by the two song fragments ascribed to the Wellington Valley people, Ah! Wy-a-boo-ka, and Dital dital baloonai, likewise worked into arrangements.72 Perhaps they were somehow associated with the Wellington Valley Mission, or collected by one of the men or women of the Montefiore family, landholders in the district, and of whom Jacob Montefiore (1819–85) was also the librettist of Nathan’s 1847 Sydney opera Don John of Austria. Given Nathan’s own uncharacteristic silence on their mechanics of transmission, it also seems unlikely that he himself received either of these two songs directly from Indigenous informants.

For all that, Nathan was quite evidently guided by a belief that his five published Indigenous song arrangements (music for a sixth is lost) were not only intrinsically valuable as musical and ethnographic artefacts, but also potentially of some local interest and practical use to colonists. As such they belong among a larger body of work from the mid 1840s that he called ‘Australian

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68 See Skinner and Wafer, Checklist, this volume, 14; for more on Salvado’s transcription, and a synthesised sound-clip of it, see: http://sydney.edu.au/paradisec/australharmony/checklist-indigenous-music-1.php#014.

69 A song of the women of the Menero Tribe arranged with the assistance of several musical gentlemen for the voice and pianoforte, most humbly inscribed as the first specimen of Australian music, to her most gracious majesty Adelaide . . . by Dr. J. Lhotsky, colonist N. S. Wales (Sydney: Sold by John Innes, [1834]): http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/album/albumView.aspx?itemID=846215&acmsid=0.

70 The Aboriginal father, a native song of the Maneroo tribe . . . the melody, as sung by the Aborigines, put into rhythm & harmonized with appropriate symphonies & accompaniments . . . by I. Nathan (Sydney: T. Bluett, [1843]): http://trove.nla.gov.au/version/19363034; Skinner and Wafer, Checklist, this volume, 8.

71 Skinner and Wafer, Checklist, this volume, 10.1-2.

melodies’. Also including several entirely original compositions, he clearly hoped they might win him a similar measure of colonial popularity to that which his London theatre songs and *Hebrew melodies* had earned him back in homeland Britain in the 1820s. Nathan notably claimed in 1848 that, in the five and a half years since he first published it, *Koorinda braia* had become ‘as popular and as well known to every Australian, as God Save the Queen to every Englishman’.

But this was patently little more than spin, yet another example of Nathan’s self-promotional streak that so riled some of his colonial contemporaries. Meanwhile, his collaboration with the radical poet Eliza Hamilton Dunlop (1796–1880) on some original songs on Aboriginal subjects, as well as on his Lhotsky re-arrangement (for which she supplied a versified singing ‘translation’), probably also earned him further critics among the squatters’ party, smarting from Dunlop’s pro-Indigenous public stance on the Myall Creek massacre. In any case, Nathan’s practical engagement with Indigenous song appears to have lasted no more than four or five years (1842–47), while his comparatively brief involvement in Mrs Dunlop’s Aboriginal causes already took an unexpectedly unfortunate turn with the publication in February 1845 of the last of his self-styled ‘Australian melodies’, a scurrilous – and scabrous – ‘comic’ song to words by naval lieutenant J. W. Dent, *A good black gin*.74 Yet even this outright fall-from-grace need not – does not – call into question the likely authenticity of the original Indigenous song transcriptions Nathan drew upon, the last of which he worked up for publication in his eccentric and idiosyncratic anthology, *The southern Euphrosyne*, released on New Year’s day 1848. And in so far as some usable details of melody and rhythm can be recovered, or reconstituted hypothetically, by stripping out their ‘improvements’, even the most unpromising cases of colonial arrangements – like Nathan’s, Salvado’s, and Taplin’s – potentially retain real value for song revitalisation.75

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74 *A good black gin, an Australian melody, an Australian melody, inscribed with great deference and profound respect, to the loyal subjects of his late most gracious, highly accomplished, and revered, antipodal majesty, king Bungaree; poet, Lieut. J. W. Dent, R.N.; composer, I. Nathan* (Sydney: W. Baker, 1845), copy at State Library of New South Wales, DSM/Q784/N.

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