1 Introduction and Historiography of Music in Australia

AMANDA HARRIS AND CLINT BRACKNELL

The library shelves for Dewey number 780.994 are populated by books about 'Australian music' or with some combination of 'Australian' and 'composers' or 'composition' in their titles. A casual observer might glance through these books and be left with the impression that 'Australian music' is a story of white Australians of European heritage who use the instruments and vocal techniques of Western art music (often called classical music).[1] Several of the history books in this field, such as that by Lorna Stirling, open by telling readers that music arrived on the Australian continent 'at the very moment' of colonisation.[2] Performer and music broadcaster James Glennon suggested in his 1968 volume that '[i]t could be said that the story of Music in Australia began in 1790, when the HMS *Sirius* sailed into Port Jackson, Sydney, and landed the Colony's first piano'.[3] Most books dealing with the music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are to be found on other shelves entirely – in 781.62 – a classification dominated by what has often been called 'World Music'.[4]

The notion that Indigenous music might belong to the world, while Western art music characterises Australia, is not just a quirk of library classification systems; rather, those systems reflect widespread understandings in academic music departments, schools and cultural institutions.[5] This understanding is steeped in imperial fantasy, where the culture of white European empires has aesthetic value, evidences genius and virtuosity and is built on linear histories of progress, while the cultural practices of the colonised world exist in a timeless moment of unchanging tradition and belong to a generic category of exotic music.[6] Still, the category of 'Australian music' also inadequately describes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music when so many Indigenous peoples make music to maintain distinctive cultural identities and assert sovereignty.[7] Although Indigenous music is not always experienced or understood by most other Australians, it is certainly created in Australia.

As a companion to 'music in Australia', rather than 'Australian music', this book simultaneously acknowledges the dynamic, fluid nature of music

itself and the complexity and contestation inherent in the term 'Australia'. At the time of writing this book, the Australian public was poised for a referendum on whether to alter the Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Widespread diversity of opinion on the merits of this initiative and the referendum's ultimate defeat are symptomatic of the unreconciled nature of Australia's deeply racist history, involving Stolen Generations of Indigenous children and a White Australia immigration policy until at least the 1960s, alongside long unfulfilled promises of a treaty with Indigenous peoples.[8] As the settler-colonial nation was only established in 1901, 'Australia' indicates the geographical scope of this book, but not our temporal scope.[9] Ongoing Indigenous music practices arising from intimate connections with land presently called 'Australia' existed long before that name was applied.

In this book's chapters, authored by experts on a variety of musical topics, we seek to demonstrate the breadth of musical practice that flows through Australia and to emphasise the diversity of musical experiences. This means that rather than structuring the book around the creative achievements of individuals – such as pioneering composers in the European art music tradition – as many books on 'Australian music' have done before, we regard art music composers and the performance of their works by orchestras, opera companies, chamber music ensembles and soloists as a community of practice, much as we treat Australian country music or the history of Chinese musical forms practised in Australia. This is not an attempt to minimise the importance of art music composers, who have tended to be treated with attention to individual particularity and creative style in ways that musicians of other genres have rarely been, but rather is an effort to understand music in Australia as a rich soundscape of musical practice. In this sense, music that is scored and printed but may be heard in only a handful of performances is not privileged over Indigenous songs sung regularly over millennia across Country, or indeed over songs that have constituted the musical vocabulary of several generations of Australian children.

We also make a resolute departure from any notion of music being brought to this continent with colonisation, instead exploring understandings of music before European arrival and its continuous expressions ever since. Graeme Skinner stated in 2015 that though considerable documentation of Indigenous music existed from the earliest days of colonisation, music historians have largely overlooked it, while general historians have overlooked settler music in favour of Aboriginal history – 'Oddly, it has seldom occurred to anyone to try to do both.'[10] The music of Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander people on this continent is, in this book, very much at the 'heart of things'[11] and exists both in 'extra-colonial histories'[12] as well as ongoing entanglements with non-Indigenous cultural practices in the current moment.[13]

While bringing Indigenous music-making into the centre of the frame and considering music through communities of practice are key objectives of this book, we acknowledge that similarly urgent imperatives underpinned previous approaches to writing histories of music in Australia. Musicologists since the 1960s have been driven to demonstrate that music in Australia was more than a derivative history, putting the tools of music analysis to the task of creating a vocabulary to describe the distinctiveness of Australian art music practice. The subsequent generation's use of ethnographic methods was in turn a departure from models centred only on music analysis. These methodological choices are also political gestures that impact what we see and hear, and what goes unseen and unheard. Even in this book's attempt to broaden the scope and diversity of stories about music in Australia, we imagine future scholars critiquing what our generation omitted. This is then not so much a corrective as a vision for an inclusive future in the mode of what Mark McKenna describes as 'history as a conversation of hope'.[14]

'Australian Music' and 'Music in Australia' Historiography

One of the key objectives of books published up until the present day on musical life in Australia has been to draw the bounds of what we might think of as Australian in music. In 1952, choral and orchestral conductor William Arundel Orchard titled his book *Music in Australia: More than 150 Years of Development*. With his training and career forged in music schools and universities in England, Orchard's account of musical development in Australia focused on new arrivals from England who contributed to new Australian institutions. Orchard does not mention Aboriginal music across the book's 211 pages, but then includes, with no explanation, an appendix of scores for two Ngarigu and one Ngarrindjeri song notated by John Lhotsky and Isaac Nathan.[15]

Other early books sought to include discussion of Indigenous music, even while positioning the importation of an early piano as the founding moment of Australia's musical culture. Performer and historian Isabelle Moresby's 1948 *Australia Makes Music* devoted a full chapter to Aboriginal music, suggesting in a forward-looking spirit that '[s]ongs that will be

handed on perhaps for centuries are still being composed by Aborigines'.[16] In a preface to Moresby's book, conductor and later director of the NSW State Conservatorium Bernard Heinze welcomed this conceptualization of music-making, suggesting it reflected 'this stage in our musical development'.[17] These early accounts also offered detailed profiles of performers, conductors, instrument makers, broadcasters and ensembles as drivers of Australian musical culture who were just as important as composers.[18]

In the decade or so from 1965, Orchard's and Moresby's early efforts at forming a body of Australian music history writing were built upon in an expanding field of publications that increasingly understood 'Australian music' to be an account of individual art music composers. In this new swathe of publications by Larry Sitsky (1965), Donald Peart (1966), Andrew McCredie (1969), James Murdoch (1972), Frank Callaway and David Tunley (eds., 1978) there was a shift away from discussion of Australia's musical cultures as they were performed, heard and produced through cultural institutions, venues, instrument makers and ensembles, towards music as generated and innovated through schools of compositional practice.[19]

The most renowned of these early histories, the 1967 *Australia's Music* by music historian and critic Roger Covell, continues to assert its presence as a field-defining text. *Australia's Music*'s opening statement positioned the book as concerned with 'a European musical culture transplanted by Europeans to a country not in Europe'.[20] However, it also featured Aboriginal music, devoting 17 of its 290 pages to discussion of the topic, drawn from the scholarship of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists, especially Alice Moyle and Catherine Ellis, along with a substantial section on Anglo-Celtic folk musics in Australia (30 pages).[21] Within a musicological field shaped by the composer-focused studies of the 1960s onwards, the parts of Covell's book focused on Aboriginal music and folk musics have been largely forgotten.[22] By contrast, Covell's evaluation of the relative value of a range of art music composers has continued to be widely contested, and his writing on colonial music-making is frequently cited. *Australia's Music* continues to shape the form of the musicological field.[23]

Covell evaluated current composers' works, suggesting directions in which music might continue to flourish, favouring composers including Margaret Sutherland, Malcolm Williamson, Don Banks, Felix Werder, Larry Sitsky, Peter Sculthorpe, George Dreyfus, Richard Meale and Nigel Butterley, and passing over others.[24] The ongoing influence of Covell's

evaluation of art music composers remains in evidence in the most recent musicological writing about individuals or groups of composers. Kate Bowan shows how many subsequent writers followed Covell in characterising Australian music prior to the 1960s as both provincial and, simultaneously, too indebted to the culture of Britain.[25] Many narratives about Australian music mark the 1960s as key, with some aiming to recuperate music prior to this date, and others defining it as the beginning of a new era of Australian culture.[26] Building on Covell's detailed writing on individual composers, Michael Hooper suggests that treatment of composers of this era has tended to be ahistorical and largely inattentive to the 'form of Australian Music that was built on difference, difficulty, and argument' in the 1960s and 1970s. In comparison to Covell, however, the boundaries Hooper draws around the musicological field arguably define 'difference' in the narrowest of terms, focusing only on modernist composers of 'Australian music' over these two decades.[27]

In a snapshot of the discourse between European Australian composers of this era, composer Malcolm Williamson argued in 1970 that new Australian music

> is nationalistic music . . . because it implies a collective plea to bring to birth a real nation that can absorb both the Asiatic and the European in its blood, and can flourish as a Southern Pacific culture, able to meet its geographical neighbours on friendly terms, without having its hands held by two white parents.[28]

Composer Anne Boyd developed these ideas further, suggesting 'a distinctive characteristic of the modern Australian composer is his pan-cultural awareness of music as a world phenomenon, not simply a European one'.[29] Both Williamson's and Boyd's accounts imagined Australian multiculturalism not as distinctive and valuable on its own terms, but rather as a fount for inspiration – a toolbox from which new innovations could be fashioned to inform composers in the Western art music tradition.

Yet, Skinner suggests that while composers considered their composing movement as a kind of culture-defining rebirth in the 1960s, for most of the Australian public, this era would bring to mind a far more diverse selection of musical experiences that might have included:

> Johnny O'Keefe and The Seekers as well as Richard Meale and Malcolm Williamson, Little Pattie and the Australian Ballet, Slim Dusty and Joan Sutherland, Jimmy Little's 'The Royal Telephone', and George English's *Death of a Wombat* – and into the 1970s, George Dreyfus's *Rush*, the Australia Council, and the National Anthem referendum.[30]

Ethnomusicologists focused on localised practices of Indigenous music-making have played an important role in bringing the diverse repertoire of Aboriginal song to wider attention and building a foundation on which the hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musical traditions of the Australian continent can be written into current music histories. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS, later AIATSIS) was founded in 1964 and spearheaded a programme of recording Aboriginal music that funded the work of ethnomusicologists who would bring encounters between Aboriginal musicians and non-Indigenous scholars and composers into academic institutions across the country. The Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music's (CASM's) programme of appointing Aboriginal knowledge holders as senior lecturers in the 1970s is also noteworthy. Some of the early work published in the same era as composer-focused studies of Australian music was summarised by Alice Moyle in 1964 and included Moyle's own work on Aboriginal songs from Tasmania, E. H. Davies' work on South Australian songs, Trevor Jones' studies of music from Arnhem Land and Catherine Ellis' analysis of Central Australian song.[31] In subsequent years the ethnomusicological study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander song traditions would flourish, while remaining distinct from the study of 'Australian music'.

Genre and Australian Music

The range of this literature on Australian music highlights the ways that some kinds of music-making have shaped the writing of the national story and others have remained peripheral to this story. In 1994, Bruce Johnson provocatively suggested that 'the conventional reading of Australia's musical history can only be sustained by excluding most of the music that has actually happened in this country'.[32] Johnson's claim rested on the musicology discipline's focus on art music and consequent exclusion of the full range of jazz, folk and popular music forms, a point he illustrated through the career of performer and composer Don Banks. Johnson showed that musicological narratives of Banks' career begin with his relocation to the United Kingdom to pursue a composition path in modernist art music; they ignore his influential role in jazz experimentation in Australia in the decade before his departure.[33] This parallels scholarship in literary studies and history, where, as Melissa Bellanta points out, writers such as Vance Palmer, H. M. Green, A. A. Phillips and Russel Ward 'were schooled in a discourse which disdained mass-produced culture . . . This

selective nationalist approach gave rise to a skewed vision of Australian culture that in many ways persists to this day.'[34]

Shane Homan shows that 97 per cent of participants in a 2017 national survey reported listening to, and around 15 per cent reported 'creative participation' in, popular music.[35] Such wide-ranging engagement with this broad category of music suggests that any consideration of music in Australia must pay it more than casual attention. Scholarly research focused on popular music forms is less likely to coin the term 'Australian music', without the genre-specific word 'popular' inserted, than musicological writing focused on art music. However, scholarly interest in what might be distinctive about popular music in Australia is strong.

In her historical account of popular culture since 1945, Michelle Arrow opens with a vignette about the formation of chart-topping Australian band The Easybeats from recently arrived Dutch and Scottish migrants, whose song 'Friday on my Mind' would be voted the best Australian song of all time at the 2001 Australian Performing Rights Association Awards.[36] In their conceptualisation of Australian popular music, Smith and Brett focus on three key genres of music that 'enact a distinctive desired relationship between individual, community, state and nation'.[37] Their three genres – folk, country and 'public multicultural music' – draw our attention to musical realms that not only enact relationships between individuals and the nation but have also attracted wide participation.

Dibley and Gayo show that 'the presence of a distinctive 'Australian sound' has been hotly contested in critical accounts of local popular music'.[38] Jon Stratton's work over several decades has profiled a distinctive Australian beat-driven rock; country-influenced rock ballads; and the combination of poprock, Oz rock and alternative rock in the 1970s and 1980s as popular music sought to understand itself 'in the terms of a national culture'.[39] Country music has been particularly influential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians, and Peter Dunbar-Hall and Chris Gibson suggest that an overlapping 'musical cartography' defines both Indigenous and non-Indigenous country music outside of the major east coast cities.[40] Dunbar-Hall and Gibson also define a breadth of music by Aboriginal musicians that defies classification in any particular genre. Similarly, Clint Bracknell opens his chapter about the field of Indigenous music in Australia with a determination to resist prescriptive definitions of 'Indigenous Australian music', asserting that '"Indigenous music" is not a musical genre'.[41]

Correctives to the narrow conceptualisation of 'Australian music' that Bruce Johnson identifies have also sought to include music that reflects the

multicultural characteristics of contemporary Australian society. Dan Bendrups argues that popular music scholars and ethnomusicologists are driven by similar interests in Indigenous musics and those of migrant communities, and (following Johnson) suggests they have ethnographic methods in common.[42] John Whiteoak, whose jazz scholarship is mentioned by Johnson, has contributed perspectives on music in Australia focused not only on jazz but on German dance bands; Italian-Australian accordionists; Argentine tango; and Hawaiian, African American and other folk and popular musical forms.[43] Aline Scott-Maxwell's research on connections between Asian and Australian musics, especially the music of Indonesia and China, has also advanced this field, and Scott-Maxwell and Whiteoak's co-edited *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia* offers a comprehensive approach to documenting the scope of musical activity on the Australian continent.[44]

Cultural Institutions

In parallel to these written accounts, the institutions for supporting a musical culture were also burgeoning from the mid-twentieth century onwards. An act of Parliament in 1932 established the nation's first major cultural institution – the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC, later Australian Broadcasting Corporation).[45] From the outset the ABC was not only a broadcaster but also seeded musical infrastructure that centralised and ultimately supplanted the dispersed cultural activities of the early decades of the twentieth century.[46] The Broadcasting Act of 1932 articulated a mission to form ensembles of musicians that would enable the rendition of high-quality performance. Within a year of its establishment, small permanent orchestras had been established in Sydney and Melbourne, eventually moving towards professional orchestras in each state.[47] As new arts institutions developed, the defining of cultural boundaries was a regularly recurring topic of discussion. In a lecture series given on the ABC in 1934, expatriate composer Percy Grainger had advocated attention be given not just to orchestral, chamber and experimental music in European musical forms but also to non-Western musics, and in his opening lecture, he pointed to the 'tunes that are lithe and graceful as snakes, and highly complex in their rhythmic irregularities' to be found in Australian Aboriginal music.[48] Increasingly, the ABC stood at the centre of a range of cultural activities; from the 1940s the ABC began employing composer/conductors on its full-time staff, chairing the boards for festivals

and adjudicating composition prizes.[49] In 1967, Roger Covell suggested that '[i]ts federal directors of music have affected the whole movement of professional music-making'.[50]

In 1954, the visit of Queen Elizabeth II prompted discussion of a new phase in Australian cultural life that could build on the momentum of celebrations for the royal tour. Accordingly, a new cultural institution was founded – the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT), which aimed to cultivate 'in the arts in Australia a new Elizabethan age, as productive and inspiring as the first Elizabethan age in England in the sixteenth century'.[51] Just some of the important ensembles formed by the AETT were the national opera (1956) and ballet companies (1962) and their associated orchestras (1969), the National Institute for Dramatic Arts (NIDA, 1958), and the Australian Chamber Orchestra (1975).

The AETT also toured an extraordinary range of performing arts ensembles from all over the world, including offerings as diverse as African American jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald, a production of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* cast with African American and Māori performers, Peking Opera ensembles, a Zorba Song and Dance Company and the English vocal ensemble the Swingle Singers.[52] The Trust's leasing of key performance venues such as the Princess Theatre in Melbourne and the Elizabethan Theatre in Sydney also made the staging of concerts possible throughout this period.[53] As Richard Waterhouse has shown, the AETT both promoted 'high' culture and lessened the high–low distinctions in cultural forms, foreshadowing the diverse musical practices that would come to be supported by the Australia Council decades later.[54]

Alongside the Trust, performing arts were also supported by Arts Councils. The Arts Council of Australia formed as a national body in 1948, bringing together Arts Councils across the states and territories (later renamed as Regional Arts Councils). The 1943-founded NSW Division (formerly Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA)), led by Dorothy Helmrich, was particularly active in programming nationwide touring events.[55] The Arts Councils also toured international ensembles characterised by a similar variety to those brought over by the AETT.

Official institutional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musical ensembles was not widespread in the early twentieth century, leaving Aboriginal people to form more community-oriented performing troupes, such as the many gumleaf bands that toured throughout New South Wales.[56] In the 1940s, community-organised localised events

brought Indigenous people together to play music and to dance, at venues such as the Coolbaroo club in the south of Western Australia, house parties in northern Queensland, and events organised in Redfern and Fitzroy in the eastern cities by musicians and community leaders such as Bill Onus and Col Hardy.[57]

The mid-century saw establishment of institutions focused on Indigenous performing arts, though these were driven by non-Indigenous people due to the limits placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's self-determination during the 'assimilation era'.[58] Many Aboriginal performers nevertheless took up opportunities to publicly showcase their musical talents through NADOC (the National Aborigines' Day Observance Committee, formed in 1956, later NAIDOC), when it began staging an annual talent quest featuring Aboriginal musicians from across New South Wales.[59] NAIDOC later transformed into a key national organisation for the celebration and recognition of Aboriginal creative arts. Other Indigenous-run music institutions would flourish once the 1967 referendum removed discriminatory powers from the Australian Constitution, such as CAAMA (Central Australian Media Association), the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation, the Australian and Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT, later NAISDA), the Aboriginal Artists Agency and training institutes such as Western Australia's Abmusic and New South Wales' Eora Centre.

Though centrally organised and supported cultural institutions characterise the mid-century, smaller-scale music organisations continued to diversify the musical landscape, with rarely heard opera staged by UNSW Opera from 1968,[60] the Renaissance Players at the University of Sydney creating a performance context for early music from Western Europe with players also crossing over into newly flourishing 'multicultural folk music',[61] and locally funded groups such as the Ethnic Music Centre of Western Australia (1983), the Brisbane Ethnic Music and Arts Centre (1987), Multicultural Arts Victoria (1983) and Sydney's La Peña supporting a growing multicultural music scene the 1980s.[62] Various folk and popular music festivals – including the National Folk Festival (founded 1967), Sunbury Pop Festival (1972–5), Tamworth Country Music Festival (founded 1972) and classical music festivals such as Musica Viva's festivals (from the late 1960s) and the Four Winds Festival (first staged in 1991) – have also cultivated opportunities for homegrown traditions, though Indigenous and non-Indigenous music festivals largely remained distinct until the mid-1980s (see chapters in this volume by Duffy and by Brown and Treloyn).[63]