



THE
SOUNDSCAPES
OF AUSTRALIA

MUSIC,
PLACE AND SPIRITUALITY



EDITED BY
Fiona Richards

An **Ashgate** Book

THE SOUNDSCAPES OF AUSTRALIA



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The Soundscapes of Australia

Music, Place and Spirituality

Edited by

FIONA RICHARDS

The Open University, UK

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- 7 *The Stack Industrial Cylinder*, Southbank, 1999. Photograph Ros Bandt.
- 8 *Federation Bells*, Anton Hassell and Neil McLachlan, Birrarung Marr, Melbourne, 2001. Photograph courtesy of the artists.

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The initial impetus for this book was in many ways a curious and perhaps obscure one. While researching the biography and music of an English composer, John Ireland (1879–1962), I learned of his work creating the score for *The Overlanders* (1946), an historic film shot in Australia. Fortuitously, this film was shown on BBC television at the time of my research, and I was struck by the shots of a dramatic and remote landscape. At this time I had little knowledge of Australian music save for Peter Sculthorpe's *Sun Music IV*, which I had played as a teenage member of the Hampshire County Youth Orchestra, but the film awakened memories of this music. In 2000 I travelled for the first time to Australia with my partner and two-year-old daughter, and like many a visitor fell in love with the expanse, the ocean and the sweeping skies. The desire to return as soon as possible was realized the following year, when I developed a research project into the life and music of John Ireland's protégée, Helen Perkin (1909–96), a composer and one-time international piano star who had emigrated to Sydney and settled in Newport Beach in 1966. The staggering beauty of Lord Howe Island, visited fleetingly in 2001, inspired several years of focus on Australian music, and I was instantly ensnared by the energy of Ross Edwards's orchestral scores and the colouristic beauty of Gerard Brophy's music, to give but two examples. David Tacey has written of the amount of Australia that he carries around with him (1995: xi). While I cannot claim his Australianness of life and psyche I do now carry around bits of Australia in my mind, in the form of musical motifs and images of the country, and hope to visit many more times and to explore much more of the music.

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Introduction

Spirit of Place, Spiritual Journeys

Fiona Richards

This is a country that is at once staggeringly empty and yet packed with stuff. Interesting stuff, ancient stuff, stuff not readily explained. Stuff yet to be found (Bryson, 2001: 22).

The staggeringly empty country that is Australia is a powerful landscape of vivid skies, ‘blue as a coma’ (Winton, 2003: 193), ocean spray, mysterious boab trees (Figure 0.1), a dark red interior and the most dazzling of white sands – once seen, it remains etched in the mind (see Colour Plate 1). ‘The luminous dunes, the island, the lagoon with its seagrass and coral outcrops, the low, austere heath of the hinterland’ (ibid.: 17), ‘that cerulean blue water and above it the ultramarine sky’ (Carey, 2001: 39): these sights are singular even to the least rhapsodic of gazes. The country is also packed with music, much of which is yet to be found by a wide audience, and much of which takes landscape as a sound source, both literally and ritually (Boyd, 2004a). There is a verve and vitality in Australian music that is linked to the surroundings, and Australia’s brilliant, undiffused light casts its beams over the music.

This landscape has always been central to the visual arts in Australia, and equally acts as the potent condition against which many poems and novels unfold. In music too, composers have drawn inspiration both from the landscape itself and the fauna it supports. Not every composer connects strongly with the ‘Australian landscape and elegy approach’ (Smalley, 2004), but there is an overriding sense of musicians having an imaginative connection with the immediacy of the physical environment and a general acknowledgement that landscape has to play a part in shaping the music of the country. Carl Vine (*b.* 1954), for example, believes that looking out at the Indian Ocean as a child growing up in Perth has inevitably coloured his musical output. Vast journeys he has undertaken, such as the drive across Australia’s Nullabor Plain, bestow ‘a different sense of your place in the world’ (Vine, 2004), even though there might be no immediate and apparent connections with the ensuing music in programmatic terms.

There is no geographical or spiritual consistency in the landscape that is Australia, rather it is a diverse place stimulating a wide range of responses. Sydney-based composer Paul Stanhope (*b.* 1969), for example, sees himself as ‘relating to

time and place, that might not necessarily be the physical landscape of the outback or the bush ... but aspects of just what is around us physically' (Stanhope, 2004). He thinks of his music as a 'personal geography, personal dreaming sites' (ibid.) that he likes to explore, connecting with Australia's history, its cities and the sea. As an example, his song cycle *Sea Chronicles* (1999), concerns the relationships between people and the sea: its beauty, danger and immediacy.

The aim of this book then is to look at some of the ways in which composers and performers have attempted to convey a sense of the place that is Australia through musical means. It does not purport to be a comprehensive or historical account of music in Australia and its connections with place. More exactly, it offers 15 different perspectives on the ways in which music and the Australian landscape are intertwined, embracing diverse approaches, compositional styles and topographies, from north to south, Pacific to Indian coasts, island bays to inland bush, from open seas to rolling countryside and a colonial heritage (Colour Plate 2). It is an extraordinarily rich subject and one that has engaged not only the country's residents but which has also provoked views from immigrants and visitors (Michael Finnissy's evocative pieces with Aboriginal titles and Kate Bush's 1982 'The Dreaming'). Issues of national identity are an integral part of the study, with indigenous responses to place examined alongside music from the western symphonic, choral, operatic and chamber repertoires and film and ballet scores. Some chapters focus on a single figure (such as the study of Colin Bright's psyche of place in Chapter 2), or a single work (Chapter 7, which considers Peter Sculthorpe's opera *Quiros*). Others, for example Chapter 1, explore a range of musics. Chapter 8 moves into questions of place and performance, with a discussion of the importance of location in Dhaḷwangu ritual song, Dhaḷwangu people forging a sense of place in the heat of musical performances in an ongoing and dynamic process of social reproduction. Within this book there are of course numerous important figures, genres and styles omitted for reasons of space.

From composers, performers and communities there are many different, always vibrant approaches to place, spirituality and music, and a divergence between those perspectives that are local, precise, miniature and those that are national, generic and large-scale. Examples of the former include Aboriginal songs, which tend to be closely allied to a particular moment and a particular location. An example of the more global and large-scale might be Barry Conyngham (*b.* 1944), whose instrumental music, and particularly that for orchestra, frequently contemplates the 'intimidating grandeur' of Australia's landforms and 'the subtlety of its changes', his 1988 ballet score *Vast* depicting the oceans, coasts, deserts and cities of Australia. Chapter 1 considers both the precisely located and the broad perspective, looking at the music of four radically different composers in order to demonstrate how they have reacted in deeply spiritual and individual ways to the Australian landscape.

The art of observation is one that pervades the work of many composers, an art in which they are allied to their painter contemporaries, who see with a peculiar

intensity. Rather as a painter such as Western Australian artist Howard Taylor (1918–2001), for example, addresses the ‘particular visual problem of shadows and structures’ (Dufour, 2003: 14), a composer such as Peter Sculthorpe addresses the particular compositional problem of finding musical structures and means to capture landscape. Taylor’s primary interest was in ‘the simple use of materials ... to recapture experiences gained from a long-lasting absorption in forests and trees’ (Taylor, 1968 in Dufour, *ibid.*: 18). Similarly, Ross Edwards’s (*b.* 1943) engagement with the insect sounds of bushland on the New South Wales coast finds an outlet through tiny, repetitive motifs.

Fig. 0.1 Boab trees in Kings Park, Perth, 2004



While the use of rural Australia is a powerful image today, with many writers concentrating on what they term ‘earth language’, it is not a recent concept in Australian music. The composer, Fritz Hart, born in England in 1874, emigrated to Australia and in an interview of 1914 set out his view that somehow the spirit of the country, ‘its bushland, its hills, its delicate shades in landscape, colour, life, everything ...’ would come to infuse the creator and the creative process, to create works distinctively Australian. Ironically he also considered it ‘absolutely impossible for a school of Australian creative music to arise that is not founded directly upon British music’ (Hart in Hudson, 1914: 328). In the period from the late 1930s until the late 1950s, Clive Douglas (1903–77) consciously aspired to achieve a genuinely Australian musical idiom through his attempts to depict the character of the Australian landscape via the evocation of Aboriginal legend, language and music, as discussed in Chapter 5. Chapters 9 and 10 of this book consider the impact of a European and Celtic inheritance on music before 1950. Chapter 11 focuses on British responses to the Australian landscape in Ealing films of the 1940s and ’50s.

Much of the twentieth century has been concerned with the search for a musical identity that is unequivocally Australian. The earliest role models were European, with Australian composers studying above all in Britain and in Germany, with London and York attracting many figures in the 1970s, and still continuing to draw composers to live and work for short periods. Yet there are tensions in these relationships, and some Australian composers have an ambivalent attitude to Europe. Some look to Asia, others to indigenous Australian musics.

John Antill’s (1904–86) most famous work, *Corroboree*, which has been widely played since its first performance in 1950, is generally considered to be a significant moment in Australian music, based on Aboriginal rhythms as notated by Antill after first attending a ritual Aboriginal corroboree at La Perouse, south of Sydney, in 1913 and subsequently pursuing research on the subject of Aboriginal music and collecting recordings. His work and this piece established a growing awareness that this music lies at the heart of the country, and offers a valuable resource in terms of rhythm, melodies and timbres. For example, Stanhope’s early pieces use Arnhem Land fragments of melody re-imagined – the shapes are recognizable but radically reinterpreted, rather as Scottish composer Judith Weir (*b.* 1954) utilizes fragments of folk materials. The timbres of Aboriginal musics have also been highly influential, with the drone of the didgeridu assuming a widespread significance.

Asian music has had an increasing impact on Australian music, specifically south-east Asian approaches to pitch, such as the use of simple pitch sets within a harmonic language. It has become a ‘metaphor for saying this is really our geographical place in the world. We are much closer to Asia, therefore we should look to it, listen to it and be influenced by it’ (Stanhope, 2004). In terms of the Australian landscape, Asia and indigenous musics, Peter Sculthorpe (*b.* 1929) has been a central and seminal influence, even where he has not directly taught young

composers. Anne Boyd talks of his imprint as being ‘all over’ her work (Boyd, 2004a), not only in terms of his compositional influence but in the music he has introduced to her, notably Japanese *gagaku*, with which music she formed an instant relationship on account of its landscape of ritual and sorrow’ (Boyd, 2004a). Stanhope describes ‘aspects of harmony, texture and space’ (Stanhope, 2004) in his music as having been influenced by Sculthorpe’s aesthetic outlook and his attempt to find a way between two worlds – the European one and the country that is Australia, ‘being physically removed from Europe and its landscape’ (ibid.), close to the United States in some way, notably in the urban, bustling energy that can be heard in the music, and yet different.

Fig. 0.2 Paddington houses, Sydney, 2004



While Sculthorpe has chosen to live in the Woollahra district of Sydney, which, like its neighbour Paddington, has streets of beautiful colonial houses (Figure 0.2) and periodically to take trips to the wilderness of Tasmania and the Northern Territory, or to dream the landscape, other figures may have more immediately physical affiliations with place. Composer and environmentalist Ron Nagorcka (*b.* 1948) has immersed himself in the heart of the Tasmanian rainforest, living in a solar-powered, self-built house in Birralee, where his garden is the surrounding forest (Figure 0.3).

Many composers talk of relating to a specific place. Ross Edwards spent seven years living in a village in Pearl Beach, on the New South Wales coast:

those seven years were absolutely crucial for me because we lived near a National Park – Brisbane Water round the Hawkesbury Estuary – I walked through the park all the time and that actually defined my soundworld ... from the sounds and events and relationships that took place in the National Park a language has gradually built up ... I was very aware of creating a periodicity, of rhythmic cells ... so that is the place I relate to ...' (Edwards, 2004).

The Blue Mountains have become a region of great significance to Edwards and he often travels there to focus on composition.

Several chapters in this book thus explore the intimate connection that people have with the land. Chapter 4, for example, explores how public unrestricted or secular performances such as *walaba* and restricted or sacred Dreaming songs called *kujika* are used by the Yanyuwa people of the Northern Territory as a mechanism to name and know their country through musical expression.

Fig. 0.3 Ron Nagorcka's forest surroundings, Tasmania, 2004



It is not only the look of the land that entices: it is impossible not to listen to the land, when the ‘paddocks thrum with cicadas, crickets, birdwings. Up from the creek comes the chirr of frogs’ (Winton, 2003: 86). It is a ‘great all-embracing sound ... a layered music, dense but deeply flowing, that was clipped insects rubbing their legs together, bird-notes, grass-stems chaffing and fretting in the breeze’ (Malouf, 1999: 11). David Malouf, a creator of finely-wrought moments in time and place, goes on to describe the transformation of a visible place into ‘another form and made accessible to a different sense. An expansive monotone, its excited fluting and throbbing’ (ibid.). The fact that he relates the aural to the visual and literary is something that poet Les Murray does too, using musical terminology to convey the sense of sound inherent in the landscape.

Anyone who has ever been to Australia will be aware that this ‘all-embracing sound’ is a constant, both in the country and in the city. On a hot night the sounds of the undergrowth reverberate all around you, and resonate too in recorded real-time soundscapes, such as those created by David Lumsdaine (*b.* 1931) in New South Wales, for example, *Lake Emu* (1990); in the use of recorded insect and bird sounds within broad musical frameworks; in sampled insect sounds; in specified and quite exact representations in the tradition of Messiaen; in the transformation of natural sounds into non-specific melodic and rhythmic patterns; and in songs whose texts engage with insect life, most notably Aboriginal songs.

Birdsong, too, has a very distinct place in Australian music, and for Aboriginal songmen birds are often the form in which their spirit ancestors speak to them. Some composers think of birdsong not in literal terms, but as a metaphor, and attempt to convey shape rather than transcribe a particular birdsong in the manner of Messiaen. Thus in the music of Ross Edwards, for example, it is clear that a sudden melodic interjection is the essence of birdsong, though not a specific named bird. Birdsong can also be the sound that marks the point between life and death – in Sculthorpe’s 1979 *Mangrove* the sudden appearance of birdsong after a period of marked time, and subsequent move to a different musical time, indicates a transition to a different spiritual place, the movement between worlds. In David Lumsdaine’s music the birds are there in a sense ‘almost to create musical organization through social organization, through all the interrelationships between the birds and their environment which sets up a structural quality...these birds too are emblematic of the spiritual relationship between himself and the Australian country...’ (Boyd, 2004a), while Ron Nagorcka names specific birds in the titles of his compositions and is fascinated by the intricate detail of different bird calls, insect noises and the sounds of tree frogs.

The Australian landscape is often used as an icon for spiritual and sometime political concerns. Mystical relationships are played out not only with the land but also with muse-like figures. Anne Boyd, for example, has been drawn to the words and experiences of Lady Sarashina, a middle-class Japanese woman born in 1008 who made spiritual journeys to visit temples across Japan and wrote of her experience, published in English as *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams: Recollection*

of a Woman in Eleventh-Century Japan (Sarashina, 1989). This is a work that Boyd has returned to repeatedly, and which has inspired a musical work of the same name. David Tacey has written of the preoccupation with a search for an Australian spirituality (1995: viii), particularly on the part of poets such as Les Murray. This book goes some way towards addressing the quest for spirituality in music, with Chapter 3, for example, arguing that the new spirituality inclination in the music of three women composers is intimately connected to the place of its composition, recognizing the spiritual power of the Australian landscape and its association with the feminine.

While many composers look to the land, others, such as Matthew Hindson (*b.* 1968) and John Peterson (*b.* 1957), have turned to the city and the industrial history of Australia. Hindson's 2003 string quartet, *Industrial Night Music*, is a response to the steelworks at Port Kembla, near Wollongong, south of Sydney, with a 'mecchanico machismo' intended as a musical articulation of mechanical and industrial processes.

Bush and city have been cited as being two of the principal concerns of composers. The dualisms of mountain and valley, populated east coast and empty interior, light and dark, pale and rich, body and spirit, reality and unreality are an essential part of the makeup of Australia, its words and its music. David Tacey has written of the oppositional attitudes towards the landscape as being either demonic or paradisaical. The prevalent white attitude to the bush in the 19th and early 20th centuries was inherently fearful, with the Australian inland perceived as alien, desolate, brooding:

For the bush as heaven (or Arcadia, a lesser kind of heaven), we have 'Banjo' Paterson, Henry Kingsley, Katherine Pritchard, and the Heidelberg School of painters. For the bush as hell we have Henry Lawson, Marcus Clarke, D.H. Lawrence, Patrick White, and the paintings, for instance, of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan (Tacey, 1995: 111).

While hell and heaven are perhaps an extreme manner of describing musical dualisms, Ross Edwards has himself categorized his music as falling into two contrasting styles, the one austere and hermetic, his 'sacred' style, the other 'characterized by rhythmic buoyancy and obsessive, chant-like repetition', his 'maninya' style (Edwards, 1992a: 25). He talks of having grounded his music in the natural environment, and having 'evolved a highly subjective method of topographical symbolism' (*ibid.*). Writers have connected with the radical contrast between stasis and movement as a way of evoking extremes of sensation, with thrumming sand dunes inducing a 'sort of overheated swoon while the world teemed.' (Winton, 2003, 193).

This sense of contrast is apparent in the music of Paul Stanhope, whose 2001 *Two Movements for Solo Violin* comprises two oppositions: 'Dance for the White Spirits' and 'Lament'. The dance is based on the Aboriginal belief that the first westerners that were encountered were 'white spirits'. The piece is deliberately ambiguous – maybe a welcoming dance, perhaps one of warning. The lament is a

looking back and weeping on some of the more shameful elements of the history of the country – and an attempt to apologize and provoke thought at the time of writing, the centenary of Federation. The opening bars of the first movement were reworked into Stanhope's Second String Quartet, *Dancing with Strangers* (2004), based on the history of the first meeting between Captain Arthur Phillip and the local Mermaid Aboriginals. The initial optimism of that meeting eventually failed miserably, and the piece is a metaphor that the two cultures should keep on dancing in conciliation.

One of the quintessential examples of dualism in music as discussed in this book is Sculthorpe's 1977 work, *Port Essington*, which features in Chapter 12. A further dualism is the opposition of the populated big cities of Australia and the emptiness and the loneliness of the wide open spaces beyond those cities. This sense of isolation can be experienced even on the populated Queensland coast:

Over behind him, where all this swampland drained into the Pacific, were dunes, shifting sand held together with purple-flowering pigweed and silvery scrub; then the surf – miles of it. You could walk for hours beside its hissing white and never see a soul. Just great flocks of gulls, and pied oyster-catchers flitting over the wet light, stopping, starting off again; not at random but after tiny almost transparent crabs....He had a map of all this clearly in his head...(Malouf, 1999: 2).

For figures who grow up in isolation, such as Anne Boyd, who spent her childhood in the outback, the landscape can assume a Mother role, on to which ideas are projected. Where the sense of space is enormous, and where landscape becomes inspirited, every tree, every bird becomes significant. Boyd's subsequent journey towards meditation and Buddhism is perhaps a natural outcome of that early isolation. Barry Conyngham too has always been acutely aware of Australian isolation, a topic that is discussed in Chapter 13.

Music's affinities with the visual aspects of the Australian landscape are often manifest in timbral terms. Perth-based, Polish-born Dominik Karski (*b.* 1972) describes his music as being 'about quality of sound' (Karski, 2004), his interest being in timbre, and he exploits instrumental registers and techniques. Many of his works explore movement in a broad sense, 'exploring the nature of life' (*ibid.*), whether this is through stillness or movement, as in works such as *Streams of Consciousness* (2000). Colour through timbre has been an essential part of the work of Gerard Brophy (*b.* 1953). A different use of colour can be seen in the scores of Ron Nagorcka, where sampled natural sounds are combined with synthesizers using 'just intonation' and sometimes didgeridu, as seen in his score for the piece *Galah*. These works are written using essentially ordinary notation, coloured according to pitch alterations, bringing the sparkling sounds of the forest into an otherworldly arena. 'What I generally do is get the bird on to the keyboard, listen to it slowed down and get an idea of the rhythmic patterns, the sort of melodies it's singing, do an analysis, and after I've done that for a while there are musical ideas in it, and once there are enough musical ideas in it I just forget about

it and write the music' (Nagorcka, 2004). Actual bird sounds thus become transformed into musical patterns woven into a rich timbral web.

Many of the examples given in this Introduction concern the music of native-born Australians, working in the western art music tradition, but there is also a rich vein of music, some of which features in this book, that has come from immigrants or visitors. Chapter 6 draws on an extraordinarily rich archive of photographs, recordings and memories to portray the music of the Jewish community of Shepparton, Victoria, where *Lubavitch* traditional and ritual melodies were imported from Russia and Poland, and which have been retained into Melbourne's present-day Yeshiva community. The volume ends in Chapter 15 with a penetrating examination of how singing mediates Yolngu understandings of spiritual experience in north-east Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory of Australia. It explores how the power of ritual singing and dancing emanates from an ancestral landscape and seascape and extends a spiritual awareness of ecology in Christian musical genres. In particular, it examines the nature of *place-essences* and how these are conveyed through musical structures in traditional and Christian Yolngu songs. The argument takes as foundational the fact that all Aboriginal knowledge is practised and thus spirituality is embodied, experiential and performative, arising from an indigenous ecological awareness; that the compartmentalization of traditional Aboriginal song genres from Christian songs does not appear in a dualistically exclusive fashion in Arnhem Land; and that Christian musical discourses arise directly from an inherently unique Yolngu 'spirituality' that is distinct from New Age concepts of spirituality. Thus, the chapter questions whether understandings of Aboriginal Christian music and dance can ever be considered apart from a prior appreciation of the particularities of Aboriginal identities and relationships to place. Thus the book ends where it began, with a consideration of the complex connections between music, place and spirituality.

Chapter 1

Landscape, Spirit and Music

An Australian Story

Anne Boyd

In his book investigating the concept of ‘belonging’, Australian writer Peter Read quotes the words of poet Judith Wright (1915–2000):

These two strands – the love of the land we have invaded, and the guilt of the invasion – have become a part of me. It is a haunted country ... It was not ‘wilderness’ to the people who lived by it and through it, but the source of their very life and spirit; and to those of them who somehow survived our invasion, it remains so. And for us, too, it can be a place where we find some kind of rest, joy and even forgiveness (Wright in Read, 2000: 14).

Similar strands can be found within the music of living Australian composers Ross Edwards (*b.* 1943), Peter Sculthorpe (*b.* 1929), David Lumsdaine (*b.* 1931) and Aboriginal songman, the late Tommy Barrtjap (Barandjak) (*b.* ?1931–91), examples of the numbers of Australians whose music reflects not only their individual responses to landscape but, sung in very different voices, articulates a vibrant relationship with the essence of country. Each loves this land, is acutely sensitive, in different ways, to the issues surrounding white ‘invasion’ and each looks to the Australian earth as a source of life and spirit (inspiration), rest and joy. While Judith Wright in her poetry shows eloquently how the ‘earth-sky-water-tree-spirit-human continuum’ (see Tacey, 1995: 148), summarized in the inadequate word ‘landscape’, exists as a basis for the spiritual relationship of human kind to the unique Australian environment, it is the composers who sing the inspired land into the present – ‘a haunted country’ but not a ‘wilderness’.

The process of establishing a sense of belonging and identity in Australian culture has been investigated by Read, David Tacey (particularly in *Edge of the Sacred* and *ReEnchantment*) and within John Cameron’s collection of essays, *Changing Places* (2003), mostly through an examination of literature, and to a lesser extent painting, but music has been largely ignored, something this book endeavours to begin to put to rights. For in music, while it is difficult to talk about, especially in terms an intelligent layman might understand, the process of

articulating cultural identity, of bonding with the earth and with each other, is perhaps at its most elemental and therefore possibly at its most powerful.

I have written elsewhere (Boyd, 2001) of music's special capacity to tap into what Tacey calls 'earth language', described by him as 'the main language of Australia' (2000: 96), and its potential to give form to the feelings which arise in the deep world of the psyche. Defined in Jungian terms, this deep world of the psyche, Tacey points out, 'is really "nature" inside us' and 'directly influenced by the forces of nature "outside" us'. He goes on to say: 'In Australia, where land and aboriginality are fused, this means that white Australians, virtually in spite of themselves, are becoming slowly aboriginalized in their unconscious' (Tacey, 1995: 135). This is also the view of Germaine Greer, who believes that Australia's future as a healthy nation, rather than being trapped in 'a strange nightmare of alienation', depends upon its becoming Aboriginal (in Ellinsen, 2001). While this notion of 'aboriginalization' may be contentious, and even resented by some, evidence of music's power in conveying the spiritual is everywhere around us. An example can be found in the description by Peter Read of his chance encounter with Ross Edwards's *Dawn Mantras* (1999) while taking the long flight across Australia from Melbourne to Perth:

I wake to find the in-flight film nothing but explosions and car chases. Turning to see if the 'concert hall' channel is worth listening to, I am enraptured by the sustained boom of the didgeridoo forming a slow drone bass, a long insistent phrase built on a deep rhythm. It's a bit like the beginning of the *Ring Cycle*, where the basses are the deep currents of the Rhine from which the Rhine maidens emerge; but this rhythm is different, it is more secure, it is of our own continent. It neither swells nor falls. Surely this bass has been there from the beginning. Enter the tenor instruments, cor anglais, and – what's that plaintive mid-register? The Japanese bamboo flute, the shakuhachi ... The instruments catch and repeat the phrase, they intertwine, frolic solemnly, touch and interdrift like clouds, float apart on the landscape, sustained by the didgeridoo ground bass, at once geographical and musical, not quite meditating, nor ritual dancing, not laughing, not mourning, like movement of airs, or themes, or histories, or spirit forces. Enter the human, first the collective voice, the choir; now the individual, the child soprano, leaps and soars. This is no longer music, it is spiritual Australia (Read, 2003: 226).

Dawn Mantras was commissioned for the millennial telecast, first performed from the sails of the Sydney Opera House in the grey dawning of 1 January 2000. Australia's greeting to the world, it was heard by an audience estimated in the billions. Written for shakuhachi, alto saxophone, two percussion (playing six crotales and two Burmese gongs), child soprano soloist, children's choir, men's choir and didgeridu, the ensemble reflects contemporary Australia's multiculturalism, while the use of children's voices gives expression to its youthfulness. The choice of shakuhachi and tuned percussion relates to Australia's Asian neighbours. The text of the work, too, draws upon words in Japanese and Indonesian, acknowledging Australia's geographical position within Asia.

The droned character of the music has a special significance in Edwards's musical language: a stylistic crisis in the mid-70s led him to reject European modernism in favour of the development of a musical language based upon his acutely sensitive listening to Australian bush sounds – to frogs, insects and birds. In his own words:

I clearly recall the moment when I found myself questioning the validity of this course of self-destruction and at the same time that of *accredited* post-war European art music. What, ultimately, was the point of all those neurotic convulsions so meticulously ordered? Did they do anybody any good or were they just self-indulgent?

So ended my angry young man phase (Edwards, 1992a: 25).

Describing the natural environment of the bushland on the Central Coast of New South Wales, where he settled in the coastal village of Pearl Beach with his young wife Helen in the mid-70s, Edwards writes:

The summer days were swathed in the drones of cicadas with their mysteriously abrupt starts and stops and, at evening, the insects would start up. I was entranced by the insect chorus because it seemed to be on the verge of conveying some profound message which was ultimately elusive. All the temporal relationships in my music – the relative lengths of phrases and sections – are influenced by these ancient voices, whose near-symmetries and inconsistently varied repetitions often seem close to our inherited musical syntax. I don't doubt that, over the millennia, such voices have generated much of the world's music and it's not hard to detect their presence in various surviving folk and religious traditions (Edwards, 1999a).

And:

During this time my only serious listening was done sitting in the bush, listening more carefully than most of us get a chance to do to the natural sounds. It helped me come to terms with the fact that all of the world's music must have originated, in some way from the sounds of nature ... And later, when I started writing again, it was especially the insect patterns and rhythms I'd heard that helped me (Edwards, 1992b: 40–42).

Since this stylistic crisis Ross Edwards's musical output has fallen into two basic styles: his slow and ritualistic 'sacred' compositions of which *Yarrageh-Nocturne* for Percussion and Orchestra (1989) is a superb example (*Yarrageh* being an Aboriginal word meaning 'the spirit of spring'), and his lively, rhythmic, dance-chant *maninya* style spawned in works such as *Laikan* (1979) and fully developed in his much played *Maninyas* Violin Concerto (1988). The special characteristics of these styles have been discussed by Hannan (1986, 1990), Powells (1988) and Stanhope (1994). The works of the 90s show a gradual merging of these two styles, a development which has been extensively examined by Philip Cooney (2002).

A pitch analysis of this example shows the material to be modally conceived, based upon a droned C in the didjeridu: this low resonant C sounds from beginning to end, forming a meditative framework from which the rest of the fabric of the composition draws its significance. This droned characteristic reflects the Australian bush insect chorus to which Edwards listens so attentively. In a mythical and mystical sense the drone acts in the work as the creative presence of God. The use of the Aboriginal wooden trumpet is especially significant for two reasons: first, the sound of the didjeridu, in the minds of most listeners, evokes the sacred feeling of Australian landscape – its vastness, its monotony (note *mono-tone*), its brooding grandeur, its static, eternal time-feel; second, this is a special acknowledgement by Edwards of Aboriginal precedent – far from an act of appropriation this is a very public and subtle gesture towards genuine reconciliation and healing.

Dawn Mantras returns us to a primal conception of music. In terms of its notes it is very simple, based upon a cycle of fifths fanning from C, both upwards (C–G) and downwards (C–F–B \flat), complemented by the note E sounding as the strong major 3rd in relation to the fundamental (the 4th partial). Spread out as scale these intervallic relationships produce the notes of a five-note pentatonic scale, C–E–F–G–B \flat , a scale which makes some claim to universality as it occurs in the folk traditions of all the world's musical cultures, though more usually constructed around a minor rather than a major 3rd. Adding the decorative pitches D and A into this scale transforms it into a mediably conceived Mixolydian mode beloved of the early Christian composers of plainsong, the basis of Western conceptions of sacred melody from around the sixth century and possibly before. In modern Western theoretical terms the scale of *Dawn Mantras* might also be described as a C major scale with the all-important 7th degree flattened (i.e. B becomes B \flat). Why all-important?

Modern Western tonality works on a scale system in which degrees of tension are established which need resolution to a neighbouring or home pitch, providing a sense of fulfilment and rest, however temporary, and eventually, at the end of a musical work, producing a sense of arrival at a destination and permitting closure. The flattening of the leading note, therefore, because it is the most active degree of the scale, divests that scale of its intensity, setting up a modal feel which evokes a sense of antiquity and, because of its special acoustical relationship to the fundamental drone, of tranquillity. Conceived in a modern harmonic sense as a dominant 7th in F major (the key with B \flat in its signature) the effect of the 7th is always to fall, just as in *Dawn Mantras* the primary melodic contour always falls, arriving on one of the primary 5ths (G or F) or on the tonic (C) signalling resignation (rather than upward striving), providing a sense of peace and obedience to the dictates of the droned sense of an eternal God-like Being. This droned sense of God is further reinforced from the beginning of the work where the low male voices intone a G. C–G makes up the interval of a perfect 5th, which signals the divine presence. The use of a major rather than a minor 3rd in relation to the

fundamental (i.e. E instead of E♭) has a similarly profoundly consequential effect, projecting a radiant major sonority and capturing what sounds and feels like typically Australian light – brilliant, harsh even. The words intoned by the God-like male voices are the Latin ‘aurora’ meaning dawn and the Aboriginal words *dhilbi-dhilbi* which in the Bundjalung language of north-east New South Wales also means dawn.

The music grows as an accumulation of texture and colour. Over the droned 5th between the didjeridu and the male voices, the shakuhachi (the traditional Japanese bamboo flute associated with Buddhist meditation) and tenor saxophone (associated with the low throaty warbles of American jazz) intertwine in a conversational relationship based upon the articulation of a kind of sighing, singing shared plainsong-like melodic phrases anchored around the drone and its 5th (C and G) (see Ex. 1.1).

The entrance of the children’s voices adds another layer of meaning:

Hei-wa, Hei-wa, Ake gu-re,
Hei-wa, Hei-wa
Hei-wa, pen-yem-buh-an,
Su-buh, u-tuh.

Heiwa: Japanese for peace.
 Ake gure: Japanese for dawn.
 Penyembuhan: Indonesian for healing.
 Subuh: Indonesian for dawn.
 Utuh: Indonesian for whole.

This text is an invocation for understanding and harmony between the culturally diverse regions of the Pacific, a message that is given special hope and poignancy by the pure voices of children. The culminating moment of radiance in this beautiful and powerful work is the entry of the child soprano, intoning in the stratosphere the words of the Latin Pentecostal chant ‘Sancti Spiritus adsit nobis gratia’ (‘May the grace of the holy spirit be with us’), the Introit from the Mass of Pentecost, the season of the Christian calendar that celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit. To Edwards, the Holy Spirit signifies ‘the life force, the imagination’ (Edwards, 1997). The message of *Dawn Mantras* is one that it shares with his Symphony No.2 – *Earth Spirit Songs* (1997–98): ‘Renewal’. This same soaring music, orchestrated in trumpets, forms the climax to the third movement of Edwards’s Symphony No.3 – *Mater Magna* (1998–2000):, signifying ‘Earth Mother’, a concept synonymous for Edwards with the Christian Mary. It is common in Edwards’s musical output of the 1990s to contrast music in his ‘sacred’ style with a *maninya* dance-style movement in the same work, for example in his *Enyato* series. In this sense *White Ghost Dancing* (1999), a short orchestral work in a predominantly *maninya* style, can be viewed in a paired relationship with *Dawn Mantras*, having been composed only slightly beforehand. Despite the contrast of a lively with a slow tempo, the works share a number of features in common, not the least being the presence of droned fifths in significant sections of the piece, as well as references both to Aboriginal song and medieval European chant. The ‘white ghosts’ of the title of the orchestral work refers to the Aborigine’s first perceptions of the white skins of Europeans whom they believed to be the ghosts of their own

ancestors who were thought to be light coloured because in cremation ceremonies they had observed that burnt flesh turned white.

Edwards explains: 'As I composed *White Ghost Dancing*, the concept of a "white ghost" came to symbolize non-indigenous Australia's innate Aboriginality – its capacity to transform and heal itself through spiritual connectedness to the earth' (Edwards, 1999a). Elsewhere, Edwards has gone so far as to say that 'as a composer of European origin working with, to the point of ritualizing, the sounds of the Australian landscape, [he] may be identified as a "white ghost"' (Edwards, 1999 in Cooney, 2002: 259).

An examination of the opening bars of this composition (Ex. 1.2) shows its composer drawing upon material derived directly from nature: the irregular pulsating of horns represents the unpredictable insect drones with their abrupt starts and stops; the punctuating combined woodwind, harp and strings chords are the joyous shrieks of birds; the hocketing trumpets are the patterns of croaking frogs; while the bassoon drones here relate to the irregular and noisy singing of cicadas (Arter, 2002).

When he is composing, Edwards spurns precompositional planning, working intuitively, as though in a dream, responding to the promptings of his very richly developed musical unconscious mind. Although complex inter-relationships can be found criss-crossing and connecting all his work, every new composition is a voyage into the unknown whose destination can never be predicted at the outset, but serving an aesthetic in which music functions as a spiritual and healing art. In this sense his composing might be thought to be not so very different from that of the Aboriginal songman for whom 'dreaming' is an integral part of his creative process. As we have seen, Edwards has a profound respect for Aboriginal culture. In his own words in the preface to *White Ghost Dancing*:

I believe that Australia has a great deal to learn from the profound wisdom of the Aboriginal peoples it has dispossessed, and that the time has come to seek reconciliation for the misunderstanding and consequent mistreatment they have suffered as a result of European colonisation (Edwards, 1999a).

Understanding of the impact of landscape upon musical forms in Australia is deeply enhanced by giving some consideration to Aboriginal song. In itself a vast field in which expert knowledge is limited to a handful of scholars, Aboriginal music has nevertheless exerted and continues to exert an important and enduring influence upon non-Aboriginal Australian composers. An investigation of this repertory is made somewhat problematical by the secret/sacred nature of its ceremonial purpose and its lack, therefore, of public availability. Fortunately, the work of ethnomusicologists, especially Alice Moyle, Cath Ellis and Allan Marett, has made available some of the public repertory, for, as pointed out below, Aboriginal music constitutes the only authentic classical musical tradition of Australia. Many of these songs are immensely beautiful and deserve to be much better known.

Ex. 1.2 Ross Edwards, *White Ghost Dancing*, bars 1–7, 1999 (© Ricordi & Co., London)

to David Forcelijn
WHITE GHOST DANCING

ROSS EDWARDS

Animato, ♩ = 132

The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Fl. 1 & 2
- Ob. 1 & 2
- Cl. 1 & 2
- Bn. 1 & 2
- Hn. 1 & 2
- Tr. 1 & 2
- Tbn. 1 & 2
- Harp
- V. I
- V. II
- Vcl. (Violoncello)
- Db. (Double Bass)

Key features of the score include:

- Tempo:** *Animato*, ♩ = 132.
- Time Signature:** 5/4.
- Key Signature:** One flat (B-flat major / D minor).
- Dynamics:** *f*, *sf*, *p*, *mp*, *con sord.*, *(p)*.
- Articulation:** *non. arp.* (non-legato arpeggio).
- Rehearsal Marks:** 51, 7, 81.
- First Ending:** Marked with "1." and a repeat sign.

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A statement emerging from the 2002 Garma Symposium on Indigenous performance, a gathering convened at Gunyara, Gove peninsula, Arnhem Land, which brought together senior Aboriginal leaders and non-Aboriginal academics from across Australia, explains the centrality of music in Aboriginal culture:

Songs, dances and ceremonial performances form the core of [Aboriginal] cultures in Australia. It is through song, dance and associated ceremony that indigenous people sustain their cultures and maintain the Law and a sense of self within the world. Performance traditions are the foundation of social and personal well being, and with the ever-increasing loss of these traditions, the toll grows every year. The preservation of performance traditions is therefore one of the highest priorities for Indigenous people.

Indigenous songs should also be a deeply valued part of the Australian cultural heritage. They represent the great classical music of this land. These ancient musical traditions were once everywhere in Australia, and now in danger of being lost forever. Indigenous performances are one of our most rich and beautiful forms of artistic expression, and yet they remain unheard and invisible (Garma, 2002).

If the process of ‘inspiring’ landscape, at work in the music of all three composers of European descent discussed in this chapter, is viewed as a stage in establishing a ‘sense of belonging’, then the Aboriginal relationship to country as a spiritual entity is much more complex and sophisticated and, as indicated in the Garma statement quoted above, central to their very survival. James Cowan has pointed out that landscape for the Aboriginal peoples is ‘a complex and luminous spiritual edifice reminiscent of an open-air cathedral’ (Cowan, 2001: 38). There is a landscape already richly inspired from the Dreamtime, reaching back across some 50,000 years, inhabited by ancestral beings moving through the cycles of death and rebirth to emerge as conception spirits from totemic sites in the land itself to be reborn in human form. Spirits, intimately connected with land, are omnipresent. This creates a highly evolved living bond between country and its human inhabitants expressed actively in ceremony in which music and dance are central and intertwined as can be observed in the *wangga* song series researched and recorded by University of Sydney ethnomusicologist, Allan Marett (see Marett, 2005).

‘*Wangga*’, Marett tells us, ‘is a genre of *didjeridu*-accompanied song centred on the Daly region in the north west of the Northern Territory’ (Marett, 2000: 18). These songs, which are taught to the sleeping songman in dreams by ancestral ghosts, are used in *kapuk* ceremonies designed primarily to separate the ghost of a deceased person from human society. The *kapuk* is a mortuary ceremony held ‘in order to conduct the spirit of a deceased person away from human society and return it to the country from which it emerged’ (ibid.). ‘Ka’ + ‘puk’ – literally he/she washes, refers to the purification of participants by washing that occurs towards the end of the ceremony.

In the title of his paper ‘Ghostly Voices: Some Observations on Song-Creation, Ceremony and Being in NW Australia’ (Marett, 2000), Marett’s ‘Ghostly Voices’

refers both to the songman himself and to the spirit ancestor who has taught him the song in the first place. The ambiguity between the voice of the ghost and that of the living songman is important in that it delineates a liminal space between life and death where the spirit of the deceased can fully absorb its ghostly form and let go of attachment to the living in order to make its journey back through the cycle of reincarnation. In learning ceremonial singing in Aboriginal culture, the apprentice songman will frequently imitate the voice of his teacher as closely as possible, thus adding yet another level of ambiguity in performance.

In the course of his research Marett has worked closely with a small number of significant songmen in Australia's 'top end' among whom was the late Tommy Barrtjap from the Belyuen community, not far from Darwin. As a famed and respected ceremonial leader, Barrtjap's songs have been recorded across five decades. Marett's transcription, given as Ex. 1.3, is of the first vocal section of Barrtjap's song *Yagarra ngabindjang ngami*, as recorded by Alice Moyle in 1968. As with Edwards's *Dawn Mantras*, the momentum of this song is established by the entry of the didjeridu drone. The song as a whole has two clearly identified vocal sections, each of which can be further subdivided into the two melodic subsections as labelled above. The overall form of the song is as follows: (i) a didjeridu introduction; (ii) the first vocal section; (iii) an interlude characterized by the entry of a steady clapstick beat pattern; (iv) the second vocal section which reiterates the melody of the first; (v) a closing section in which the clapstick pattern of the interlude is repeated and then extended under the re-entry of the singer's voice intoning upon the fundamental pitch.

The text is in a mixture of ghost language, vocable text with no particular meaning, and Batjamalh, the everyday language of the singer. Marett has described the process whereby some of the ghost's language is 'turned over' or 'twisted over' by the singer into human language. The text of this song is especially fascinating, showing something of the process of its creation. It is unclear in the song text whether the 'I' is the singer, or the ghost who has taught him this song. The text, which can be read in several ways, contains the presence of both. This coexistence of the living and the dead is essential to Aboriginal survival and reflects the role *wangga* plays in *kapuk* ceremonies, the efficacy of which depend upon conducting the *maruy* spirit of the recently dead safely away from human society so that it may be incarnated as a ghost – essential if it is to be freed to return to the country from which it emerged and thus be able to re-emerge as a conception spirit (Marett, 2002: 9–10).

The melodic contour of this song, as can be seen in Ex. 1.3, is the tumbling strain commonly found in Aboriginal song. Beginning a ninth above the drone the line falls modally via G, which acts as a secondary tonic, to cadence upon the fundamental C¹. The treatment of the text is largely syllabic, yet the melisma at the end of what Marett identifies as Subsection i, in each of the Melodic Sections is particularly beautiful and for some reason lingers in the memory long after the rest of the song has faded. The modal implications of the pitch series are interesting,