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SONGS OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA AND TORRES STRAIT

RECORDED BY
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INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY
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MUSICOLOGICAL NOTES BY
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INDIANA UNIVERSITY
Archives of Folk & Primitive Music
Ethnomusicological Series

George List, editor



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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. R65-11

FOLKWAYS FE 4102

SONGS OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA AND TORRES STRAIT

NYANGUMARDA
Songs with didjeridu
Songs by Albert
Song by male group
NYAMAL
NYANGUMARDA
Songs by male group
Song by Kupangu

Songs by Kupangu with didjeridu
Song by male group
NYANGUMARDA,
male group
YINDJIBARRNDI
Male Solo
Female group
YINGGARDARDA

sung by Albert and Rosie
KOPOPERA
sung by Christopher Jeffrey
UMPIILA
sung by Peter Creek and Furry Short
MIRIAM
sung by John Bon

FOLKWAYS FE4102

Songs of Aboriginal Australia and Torres Strait

Recorded by Geoffrey N. and Alix O'Grady

Introduction and Notes by
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Alice M. Moyle, and Alix O'Grady

Edited by George List

Master tapes prepared in the Recording
Laboratory of the Indiana University Archives
of Folk and Primitive Music by Paul Douglas
Edson.

INTRODUCTION

I

Of the world's large land masses, Australia alone has remained continuously separated from the mainstream of life form development throughout a geologically significant period. The New World has intermittently been joined to the Old during successive ice ages, which has resulted in a sufficient fall in sea level for such present-day communication barriers as Bering Strait to become dry land. But Wallace's Line, the deepwater channel separating Borneo from Celebes and Bali from Lombok, has effectively isolated the development of life forms to the east, i.e. in Eastern Indonesia, New Guinea and Australia. The existence of such anachronisms as the dragons of Komodo, or the duck-billed platypus, kangaroos and eucalyptus trees of Australia, bears striking witness to the duration of the isolation of the area.

In view of the above considerations, it is no wonder that the Australian Aborigines occupy a unique place among the races of mankind, or that linguists have not so far

been able to demonstrate a genetic relationship between their languages and any other world languages—even those of nearby New Guinea. Within Australia itself, approximately 200 languages are distributed among more than a score of language families, all of which are probably relatable within a single Australian phylum. One of the language families occupies approximately seven-eighths of the area of the continent. The other twenty or more are crowded into the extreme north and northwest. This situation leads to two inferences: 1) that northern Australia has been occupied for an extended period—perhaps well in excess of 10,000 years, and 2) that migrations from northern into southern Australia took place in the relatively recent past.

II

When Captain Cook first sighted the southeast coast of 'New Holland' in 1770, an estimated 300,000 Aborigines were thinly and unevenly distributed throughout the continent—an area almost as large as the United States. Divided into numerous small bands, each closely bound to its own tract of land by totemic beliefs, the Aborigines led a nomadic existence, unburdened by the paraphernalia of a complex material culture. A remarkably homogeneous cultural pattern prevailed over the whole continent. Universally absent from the technology were domestication of animals (except the dog), agriculture, metalwork, pottery, and the bow and arrow. Technologically, the least developed area within Australia was the Southwest. Here Australian-type polished stone implements, canoes, certain types of clubs, and nets and hooks for fishing were entirely lacking. Throughout Australia, a hunting and gathering economy prevailed.

The material possessions of the Aborigines were few and simple. In contrast, their social organization was remarkably complex. An intricate web of kinship ties governed interpersonal behavior patterns, and defined the obligations of the individual to other members of his society. Even in some present-day Western Desert communities, a successful participant in a kangaroo hunt is specifically obligated to provide his wife's elder brother with the tail of the animal. In other parts of Western Australia, though class or caste distinctions are absent, a given request is couched in varying terms, depending on the relationship within the kinship structure of addressee to speaker. Thus in the Nyangumarda language, a request for food is expressed in the form MAYI YUWANYIPULA if the mother's brother is being addressed. The suffix "pula" is a marker of the dual number in other contexts, but denotes respect in a situation involving the mother's brother. To a brother-in-law one says MAYIKURA TYARUTYA "let the food become mine!", while in addressing a younger brother, a complete lack of deference is indicated by saying merely MAYI YUWANYA "give me food!".

From the estimated original 300,000, the Aboriginal population shrank after the coming

of Europeans to a mere 45,000. Much of the mortality was due to the introduction of smallpox and other diseases which in numerous instances decimated whole tribes. At the present time an increase to 47,000, attributable largely to the availability of modern medical treatment, gives rise to the hope that the former population trend has been permanently reversed.

Most Aborigines are now to be found in the northern areas of Australia. Throughout the southeastern third of the continent, and in the extreme southwest, a very small number of older people retain some knowledge of the language and song of their forefathers.

III

The forty-one secular songs contained within this album were recorded between 1954 and 1960 in the course of the author's investigations of Aboriginal languages spoken in Western Australia and North Queensland. Four of the seven different tribal groups represented in the album are found in the former area, two are in the latter, while the seventh occupies several islands in Eastern Torres Strait (see map). In the following paragraphs, these tribes are discussed in the order in which their music is presented on the disc.

The Nyangumarda (nYanumaṭa) tribe formerly occupied the hot and arid semi-desert adjoining the Eighty Mile Beach in the northwest of Western Australia. (This beach extends to the northwest from the point marked on the map for this tribe.) Numbering about 500, the members of the tribe are nowadays found over a wide area. Many are engaged in the mining and pastoral industries. Although all speak English, the Nyangumarda language is still in active use, even by the youngest children. Many indigenous customs, including circumcision, are still strictly adhered to. The effect of contemporary means of transportation on Aboriginal life is shown in the rapidity of the recent diffusion of the didjeridu, a musical instrument which usually consists of a hollow piece of wood about five feet long and two inches in diameter. In 1955 the didjeridu was not in use south of Broome in Western Australia. By 1960 it had been adopted by Nyangumarda people at Roebourne, 500 miles to the southwest!

To the southwest of the Nyangumarda is a tribe whose language is rapidly falling into disuse, the Nyamal.

West of the Nyamal, and sharing with them the most torrid part of Australia, are the Yindjibarndi (yinYtYipantj) who, like the Nyangumarda, have spread over a wide area in recent years. Some of the 200 or 300 Yindjibarndi even reside at Carnarvon, the tribal grounds of the Yinggarda, which is 500 miles distant from the Yindjibarndi tribal country. The Yindjibarndi tribal life is fast disintegrating, even though some of the children still speak the language. Further study of Yindjibarndi song is urgently needed before it is lost forever.

The Yinggarda (yĩḡkaṭa), inhabiting the



Nyangumarda in ceremonial costume.
Photograph by Mary List, Wallall Downs,
Western Australia, 1956.

country around the present town of Carnarvon, were already fast becoming detribalized when Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown visited them in the early years of this century. Like the coastal tribes to their north and south, the Yinggarda did not practise circumcision. At the present day, only a handful of "old-timers" remain to hand on what is left of their language and music. Most of the younger Yinggarda, having generally abandoned their old ways, are gradually becoming culturally indistinguishable from Anglo-Australians.

The Kokopera and Umpila are two tribes of Cape York Peninsula in northern Queensland. The former live about two-thirds of the way down the eastern shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria, while the latter are found at Lockhart River Mission, on the east coast of the Peninsula about 120 miles south of Cape York itself.

In the Murray Islands, situated in the eastern approaches to Torres Strait, are the Miriam, who are racially and linguistically Papuan. A sample of their present-day music is included by way of contrast to that of mainland Australia.

The modern music of Torres Strait and much of northeastern Australia appears to reflect a complex acculturational process, with the earlier diffusion of indigenous traits from the Torres Strait Islands into mainland Australia being followed by the introduction into the Strait Islands of modern Polynesian music by Samoan missionaries. A separate source of diffusion within the Cape York Peninsula may well have been the several mission stations situated in the area.

All bands on Side A were recorded with a Butoba battery-operated tape recorder at 3 3/4 ips. Bands 1-7 of Side B were recorded with a Wirek battery-operated recorder at 7 1/2 ips. An Emi battery-operated recorder was used in recording Side B, Bands 8-13 at 7 1/2 ips. Bands 14-20 were recorded with a line operated tape at 3 3/4 ips. Recording tape used was 1 mil or 1 1/2 mil Emitape. The entire collection from which the items heard on the disc were selected is on deposit in the Indiana University Archives of Folk and Primitive Music, Archives Tape Library Nos. 1759-1766.

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NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS

The textual transcriptions offered for Side B, Bands 15-20, were made with the assistance of informants. All but Band 17 were transcribed by the author. Band 17 was initially transcribed by Jeremy Beckett, Australian National University, Canberra. The version presented includes some changes made by the author. The texts of the songs heard on Side A were first tentatively transcribed from the recordings by Alice M. Moyle. The transcriptions were then completed by the writer. Since the text transcriptions for songs heard on Side A were made without the assistance of informants it is impossible to vouch for their complete accuracy.

SIDE A

The twenty songs presented on Side A were recorded at Roebourne, Western Australia, on several nights during the latter

part of March, 1960, while Kenneth Hale and the author were engaged in linguistic research. Although members of numerous tribal groups were present, the Nyangumarda predominated. Apart from Bands 9 and 10, all on Side A are Nyangumarda songs. Bands 9 and 10 are Nyamal songs but are sung by members of the Nyangumarda tribe.

A *didjeridu* is used as accompaniment in a number of songs. The instrument used in this case was a five-foot section of a hollow iron telegraph pole. The player is Albert, a man about 20 years of age, whose Yulbaridja homeland is in the desert several hundred miles east of the Eighty Mile Beach. Although the majority of the "words" sung are structurally similar to those of the spoken language, they do not seem to have meaning. Many songs are traded from tribe to tribe and their original significance has often been lost. This statement does not necessarily apply to sacred and secret chants. No examples of the latter are offered in the album.

Bands 1-3. Nyangumarda. Performed by a male group to the accompaniment of the *didjeridu* and small sticks used for beating time.

Band 1

- (1) mandagada gə məda'pada gə
da'pada gə da'pada gə
da'pada gə da'pada
- (2) da'ngalima gubagalima
da'ngalima gubagalima
pada pime ga'yi
- (3) pada pada nə'ye
pada pada nə'ye
pada pada nə'ye
pada pada nə'ye
pada pada nə'ye

Repeat in toto

- (4) andagayinara nəyi'ɔŋ
dagayinara nəyi'ɔŋ
dagayinara nəyi'ɔŋ
dagayinara nə

Band 2

- (1) garimba garimba
garimba garimba
- (2) garimba garimba
garimba garimba
- (3) dyalan dyalan biradya
garimba garimbaga
imaidala dimimio
- (4) imaidala dimimio
imaidala dimimio
imaidala dimi
- (5) ayinayinara dimimio
inayinara dimimio
inayinara dimimio
inayinara

Repeat in toto

Band 3

- (1) dida lima limayamba
dida lima limayaŋa
dida lima limayaba
dida lima limaya
- (2) da daa da daa
le li
le li
le li

Repeat in toto twice

- (3) andagayinara nəyi'ɔŋ
dagayinara nəyi'ɔŋ
dagayinara nəyi'ɔŋ
dagayinara nəyi'ɔŋ
dagayinara



Rosie, Yinggarda, playing two boomerangs.
Photograph by Alix O'Grady, Carnarvon,
Western Australia, February, 1958.

Bands 4-7. Nyangumarda. Sung by Albert.

In Band 5 capitalization denotes whispering. In the word *wandady* in Band 6 the last syllable *dy* is a palatal stop, hence *wandady* has two syllables only.

In Band 7 three different tempos of stick beating are heard. The succession of single beats is called TIMPILYTIMPILY, the succession of double beats TIMPIRIRRI, and the concluding roll or rattle of sticks TITYITITYI.

Band 4

- (1) walybi' dyinḁa walybi' dyinḁa
waŋara' luḁano waŋara' luḁane
walybi' dyinḁa walybi' dyinḁ
- (2) waŋara' luḁana' waŋara' luḁana'
walybi' dyinḁa walybi' dyinḁa
waŋara' luḁana' waŋara' luḁana'
walybi' dyinḁa walybi'
dyinḁa waŋara' luḁano waŋara'
- (3) walybi' dyinḁa walybi' dyinḁa
waŋara' luḁana' waŋara' luḁana'
walybi' dyinḁa ui
- (4) i' dyinḁa waŋara' luḁana' waŋara'
walybi' dyinḁa walybi' dyinḁa
waŋara' luḁane' waŋara' luḁ

Band 5

- (1) waḁgaḁida ŋara waḁgaḁa
waḁgaḁida ŋara waḁgaḁa (he stops)
malyari' ŋaŋaŋa
- (2) waḁgaḁida ŋara waḁgaḁo
waḁgaḁida ŋara waḁgaḁo
gura baŋa baluŋa
madyari ŋaŋaḁo

- (3) wəŋgəliɖa ɾara wəŋgəŋo
wəŋgəliɖa ɾara wəŋgəŋ
məɖyari ŋaɾaŋaɾa
- (4) wəŋgəliɖa ɾara wəŋgəŋa
wəŋgəliɖa ɾara wəŋgəŋa
məɖyari ŋo'
- (5) Repeat 2
- (6) Repeat 2
- (7) WAKAɖa ɾara wəŋgəŋo
wəŋgəliɖa ɾara wəŋgəŋo
ŋura baŋa baluɾa
məɖyari ŋaɾaŋo
- (8) wəŋgəliɖa ɾara wəŋgəŋo
wəŋgəliɖa ɾara wəŋgəŋo
ŋura baŋa baluɾa
məɖyari ŋaɾaŋo
wəŋgəliɖa ɾa

Band 6

- (1) yimara naɾaŋi maŋa
wandady məɾɛla imbəri
ɖyilba ɾɛla ɖyilbəŋga
- (2) wandady məɾɛla imbəri
ɖyilba ɾɛla ɖyilbəŋga
- (3) Repeat 2
- (4) wanda imbəri la imbəri
ɖyilba ɾɛla ɖyilbəŋga
- (5) Repeat 2
- (6) Repeat 2
- (7) wandady məɾɛla imbəri
a ɾɛla ɖyilbəŋga
- (8) Repeat 2
- (9) Repeat 2
- (10) Repeat 2
- (11) wanda imbəri le
imbəri ɖyilba ɾɛla ɖyilbəŋga
wandady məɾɛla imbəri

Band 7

ŋaɾa malyana
ɖyiri malyana

Repeat twenty times

Band 8. Nyangumarda. Sung by male group,
accompanied by the subdued scraping
together of wax match tins.

Bands 9-10. Songs of the Nyamal tribe sung
by a group of Nyangumarda men. Same
accompaniment as on Band 8.

Bands 11-13. Nyangumarda. Sung by male
group. Some of the words on Band 11
are recognizable as belonging to the Nyan-
gumarda spoken language.

Band 14. Nyangumarda. Song by Kupangu,
a man about 55 years of age.

Bands 15-19. Nyangumarda. Songs by
Kupangu, accompanied by didjeridu.

Band 15

- (1) binana' rindyɖ damba
binana' məɾiyəbə
- (2) Repeat 1
- (3) binanara rindyɖ damba
binanara ni ni ni ni ni
ni ni ni

- (4) Repeat 1
- (5) Repeat 1
- (6) Repeat 1
- (7) Repeat 3
- (8) andagayinara ŋəyi'yɔŋ
daigayinara ŋəyi'yɔŋ
daigayinara ŋəyi'yɔŋ
daigayinara ŋəyi

Band 16

- (1) ba' ganala ganala
ba' ganala ganala
ba' ɾɛdi ba'
ba' ɾɛdi ba'
- (2) Repeat 1
- (3) Repeat 1
- (4) Repeat 1
- (5) ʔa ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ʔa ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ʔa ʔe ʔa ʔo
- (6) Repeat 5

Band 17

- (1) rimimbi rimimbi
bida rimimbi rimimbi
bida rimayo rimayo
bida rimaya rimayo
bida rimimbi rimimbi
bida rimimbi rimi
bida rimaya rimaya
bida rimayar
- (2) bida rimimbi rimimbi
bida rimimbi rimimbi
bida rimaya rimaya
bida rimaya rimaya
bida rimimbi rimimbi
bida rimimbi rimimbi
bida rimaya rimaya
bida rimaya
- (3) ah ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ahə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ahə ʔe ʔa ʔo
- (4) ahə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ahə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ahə ʔe ʔa ʔo

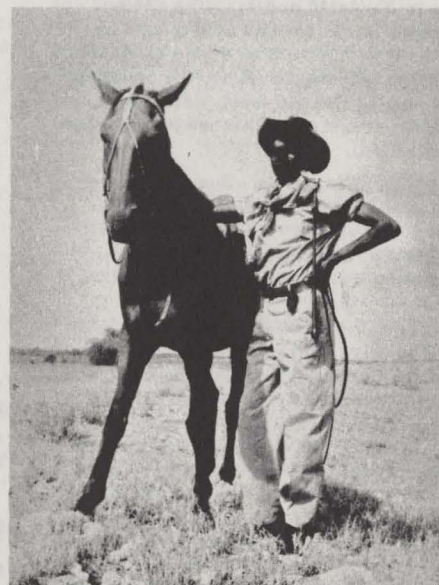
Band 18

- (1) dəma dəma dəma lə
dəma dəma dəma la
yagari boudi də də də yəgə
dəma dəma dəma lə
dəma dəma dəma lə
dəma dəma dəma lə
dəma dəma də
- (2) dəma dəma dəma də
dəma dəma dəma la
yagari boudi də də də yəgə
dəma dəma dəma lə
dəma dəma dəma lə
dəma dəma dəma
- (3) ahə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ahə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ahə ʔe ʔa ʔo

Band 19

- (1) ma' ŋənəl' gad biriga
gana ganalɪɪ ɟuri gad biriga
gana ganala hə gad biriga
gana ganalɪɪ ɟiri'n biriga

- (2) māʔ
ahə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
hə ʔa ʔa ʔa
hə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
- (3) ahə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ahə ʔɛ ʔɛ ʔɛ
ahə ʔe ʔa ʔo
- (4) Repeat 3



Nyangumarda herdsman standing next to his horse. He is in the employ of an Australian of European descent. Photograph by Mary List, Wallal Downs, Western Australia, 1956.

Band 20. Nyangumarda. Male group singing to the accompaniment of stick beating.

Band 20

- (1) mangarala wagudyari ɾaɖa
məɟerilili'li wiɾima ɾi'ɾula
mangarala wagudyari ɾaɖa
məɟerilili'li
- (2) ɾi'ɾula mangaralawa wagudyari
ɾaɖa
məɟerilili'li wiɾima ɾi'ɾula
mangaralawa wagudyari ɾaɖa
məɟerilili'li
- (3) Repeat 2
- (4) ɾi'ɾula mangaralawa wagudyari
ɾaɖa
məɟerilili'li

SIDE B

Bands 1-7. Nyangumarda. Sung by a male group accompanied by the clapping of boomerangs. Recorded by the author on a single night on August, 1955, at Minguel, Wallal Downs, Western Australia. Apart from Bands 5 and 6, each song is concluded with the staccato roll of boomerangs (TITYITITYI). Band 6 concludes with the syllable AI which rises in pitch. (It is interesting to note that some songs of the nearby Yindjibarndi close with a sustained voice bilabial trill which gradually falls in pitch.) The informants were unable to give the meaning of the words of the songs, describing the latter as having been introduced "from the south".

Bands 8-11. Yindjibarndi. Bands 8-9 are sung by a man, Bands 10-11 by a group of women. Recorded by the author and his wife, Alix O'Grady, on one night in February, 1958, at Onslow, Western Australia. Weather conditions were particularly adverse for recording purposes. Temperature and humidity were high and there were strong winds and dust. Wind interference is heard especially in Bands 10 and 11. The abrupt beginning to Bands 8 and 9 was caused by the author's failure to turn on the tape recorder quickly enough prior to the commencement of singing (the flywheel mechanism of the recorder required a few seconds to gain full momentum).

Bands 12-13. Yinggarda. Sung by Albert and Rosie, a married couple, both at least 50 years of age. Recorded in February, 1958, by Alix O'Grady at Carnarvon, the location indicated for the Yinggarda on the map.

The remaining songs on this side of the disc are of three different groups living over 1,500 miles to the northeast of the Yinggarda. They were recorded by the author at the Anthropology Department, University of Sydney, in May 1960. The informants were in Sydney for the purpose of learning various trades. All songs except the one heard in Band 17 contain words which are intelligible in the respective spoken languages.

Bands 14-15. Kokopera. Sung by Christopher Jeffrey, a man 20 years of age.

Band 15

- (1) pakáw pulu kówaṭara·wiñ
eaglehawk two were facing each other

indé· yahé·
(a man) was lying on his back
- (2) é· pulu kélem
they both from the west

awáṭandé·
were coming
- (3) pá·tətYirítYa pá· kəníkəní·
clear sky high up

kú·ndaRimá kú·ndaRimá
they both fought they both fought

kəní yahé·
high up
- (4) ku·tí kəníkəní·i pá·təwálkə
dive high up they both getting homesick

pí·nəṭkə wítYirm púluwé·
(?) took they both
- (5) Repeat 4.

Not evident from the word by word translation are some additional details gleaned by ancillary eliciting from the informant. These make it possible to state the gist of the song as follows:

A man was lying on his back and watching two eaglehawks fighting over a tortoise which they had carried high up into the sky and which they eventually took back to their nest. He decided to compose a song about what he had seen.

Bands 16-17. Umpila. Sung by Peter Creek and Furry Short, both about 30 years of age.

Band 16

- TI' TI "Christmas Headdress"
- (1) ṇaná ṇié·
we(are) here
 - (2) ə ṇaná ṇié·
we(are) here
 - (3) ə ɬarí ṇanáṅku
headdress our

kí·kimpú·
you all look at!
 - (4) ɔ· wé·
(meaningless syllables)
 - (5) mará ṇánán ṇampa
(too) closely us don't

má·paṭampú·
you all scrutinize!

The words as sung differ in some respects from the spoken forms. For example, the spoken form of the word meaning "here" is ṇí·i, the sung form is ṇié·.

Band 17

Sung by Peter Creek and Furry Short. The song was described as a bora or initiation song. According to the informants the song relates the wanderings of a saurian culture hero who swam from Pascoe River on the Australian mainland via various small islands to his final home at Murray Island in eastern Torres Strait. The meanings of the individual words are not known to the informants. Several of the words do not conform to the interphonemic specifications of Umpila. The song is probably not in the Umpila language.

- (1) sagúlpalán itiná· litiná· malwá·
- (2) Repeat 1
- (3) wá·ki wá·ki wá·ki wá wutwá·
- (4) wá·ṭa wá·ṭa wá·ṭa wánan žwá·
- (5) uá· múṭalalá· má·wiṭalá wei wá
- (6) uá· múṭalalá· má·witalá wei wó

Bands 18-21. Miriam. Sung by John Bon, about 20 years of age, who accompanies himself with his guitar. Notable in the sample of Miriam songs heard is the combination of what appear to be indigenous themes with Polynesian style music.

Band 18

WAY KERIBA GED "This is Our Island"

- (1) way keriba ged
this(is) our island
- (2) ma ge nardidawa
you you recline
- (3) ikide mari natkamie
mist you covers
- (4) no ki mara gogob
only we your facial outline

dasmereda
we see
- (5) way keriba ged irdi
this our island reclines

Repeat twice in toto, then repeat 5.

Band 19

A 99

- (1) ey nayntinayn keriba nare
A ninety-nine our boat
- (2) ma pe eyp karem
you to the deep blue ocean

larzag
white water from shoal of fish

areglam teperdari
having eaten flew
- (3) inzinbruk i ma
Hinchinbrook Reef intended you
(outside Cooktown)

epu detagri
middle approach anchorage

batagri
get anchored
- (4) pa ma barapi
then you furled your sails

able paserge
near that hill
- (5) a wesi derge
where the waves were breaking on the sand

egimu
you stopped

Repeat twice in toto, then repeat 4 and 5.

The song is called "A 99" after the registration number of a pearling lugger. The pearling lugger is spoken to as if it were a bird.

Band 20

KEYP YOK ADUD GED
"Cape York is a Bad Place"

- (1) kebi gergerge mari nakayreta
small daylight-at you we forsook
(= just at sunrise) (= Cape York)
- (2) keyp yok adud ged
Cape York(is) bad place
- (3) mena nardidawa
still you remain (visible)
- (4) mabi dawdayge natirkedi
your position-in buried

guli o basameda
dark/obscure disappear
- (5) ki bakyawda kolera
we went white people's

gedim e
place-to

Repeat twice in toto, then repeat 5.

When the informants were asked to speak the text the vowels o and e (lines 4 and 5) were omitted. They apparently are without meaning.

Band 21

A song relating to Gelam, a youthful culture hero.

MUSICOLOGICAL NOTES

I

The recordings on this disc represent a number of surviving Aboriginal groups

whose tribal affiliations are to be found on opposite sides of the Australian mainland. Coming from peoples living west and east of better known music areas, they make a valuable adjunct to collections already in preservation and offer at the same time useful comparative material for ethnomusicological study.

The first attempts to record Australian Aboriginal music were made on wax cylinders within the first decade of the century. About twenty years later there were additions from areas north and north of the centre. It was not until the Australian-American expedition to Arnhem Land, North Australia, in 1948, sponsored jointly by the National Geographic Society, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Australian Government, that a wider coverage utilizing improved equipment commenced. Since then field work by anthropologists and other scholars, especially those connected with the Universities of Sydney in New South Wales and Adelaide in South Australia, and, more recently, with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies of Canberra, has resulted in the recording of a fairly comprehensive selection of music of the Aborigines on the basis of which the present estimates are made.

From the socio-cultural point of view, the recordings presented in this album might be seen as musical documents which do more than hint at change. Two different contact areas are brought together on this disc. One is in North Queensland where, in addition to regular contacts with European culture, the Aborigines have direct and indirect coastal association with Pacific Islanders. The other lies within the continent itself, relatively close to the junction of didjeridu-playing groups to the north and non-didjeridu-playing groups to the south and southeast.

The profusion of traditional and semi-traditional songs plus those in imitation of island styles which are sung by younger Aborigines in parts of Queensland at the present time marks off this area of Australia from the remainder. And, as is the case with Polynesian music, the immediate impression is of a residue of nineteenth century Christian evangelicalisms or of out-moded popular music which have affected both the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic aspects of the music.

The guitar strumming (Side B: 17-21) and two-part singing in thirds, fourths, and fifths heard on this disc may be thought "modern" by the young singers from Queensland. So far most Australian recordings showing these European accretions have come not from Western Australia, nor from Arnhem Land, but from areas east and northeast of the Cape York Peninsula. The popularity of these styles among the Australian Aborigines continues to gain ground. Recently at Yirrkala and Oenpelli, respectively northeast and west of the Arnhem Land Reserve, songs allegedly originating in the Torres Strait were heard sung by teenage Aboriginal boys. The link between the islands and the Northern Territory is the supply boat which plies between Thursday Island and a number of mission settlements bordering the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Arafura sea. The so-called "Bora" singing (Side B: 17) is closer in melodic style to contemporary "island dance", as many Queensland Aborigines call their secular songs.

Correlative with the present language situation as outlined by Geoffrey O'Grady in

the Introduction, the concentration of differing musical styles in the north of the Northern Territory and to the northwest may be contrasted with the more widely diffused style found chiefly among groups further south and inland bordering the desert regions. Close cultural ties between inhabitants of the latter regions are reflected in more consistent modes of musical performance.

Australian stick-beating accompaniments are not, so far as it is known, used in sounding alternation, nor in sequences which resemble in any way the chiming idiophones of Southeast Asia. The combination of drone accompaniment, continuous percussion rhythm, and clearly etched melodic line heard west of the Northern Territory brings to mind only fleetingly the smaller musical ensembles of Central Asia. Musical parallels outside Australia are difficult to find.

II

The personnel of the ceremonial "dance orchestras" in Arnhem Land and in the northwest of the continent consists of a drone player and two or more stick-beating singers, one of whom is probably the leader and owner of the song series. Onlookers during the dance sessions contribute shouts, calls, and handclap accompaniments in time with the beating sticks. In contrast to the above, inland singers and their leaders usually perform in larger groups. According to reports concerning ceremonies performed earlier in central Australia, the participants were seated in one or two circles and sang to a regular clattering of beats by boomerang-shaped clappers. In 1955, the Nyangumarda people of Roebourne would have been more familiar with the latter procedures. By 1960, when the present recordings of didjeridu-accompanied singing were made, the same people were found practising a different type of music. Geoffrey O'Grady's collection has thus provided direct evidence of the south-bound "invasion" of didjeridu-accompanied singing.

Didjeridu accompaniments heard on the disc (Side A: 1-3 and 15-19) are modelled on a "northwestern" style of relatively continuous droning. This is to be distinguished from a "northeastern" style—of which no examples are contained in the disc—where an upper harmonic note is introduced. At the present time one would scarcely expect the same brilliance of execution from a Western Australian player as from the drone masters of Arnhem Land. Considering his own southern background, the efforts of Albert are musically enterprising. Whatever the male or female superhuman associations still attached to it in Western Australia, the drone tube from the north has brought a challenge of a new and fascinating musical skill. Its development into a solo instrument is not likely. As a popular sound effect it may travel further, and its use may perhaps be integrated into written music.

Earlier reports of a hollow wooden "trumpet" played during Aboriginal ceremonies in areas of North Queensland point to a wider spread of the didjeridu, although as such it may have been short-lived. Today the settlement at Borroloola, south of the Gulf, may mark the easterly terminal of the musical instrument's distribution. It is possible that the idea of blowing through a hol-

lowed branch or length of bamboo came to Australia in the first instance from New Guinea where wind instruments of various kinds and sizes abound, especially in Sepik River areas. Even so, Australian Aboriginal methods of producing sound on this absurdly simple aerophone are probably unique.

Traditional accompaniments still to be heard in some of the more isolated parts of the eastern states are of the stick-beating or hand-clapping variety. Song accompaniments by the skin drum, which was in use during the hero cult ceremonies shared by Cape York Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, are rarely heard in any form today.

III

Almost every type of tribal singing in Australia has been connected in some way with ritual practice. Song ceremonies of a sacred nature are still performed in a number of regions by walkabout groups who associate themselves periodically with owners of cattle stations, government settlements, or church mission outposts. Secret or closed rituals, with one or two rare exceptions, have evaded the microphone. They are performed by the older men well versed in tribal lore who are still concerned with proper re-enactment of First Events, ceremonies which are usually concerned with fertility. It is from these commemorative contacts with the mythical inhabitants of the creative or "dreaming" world that mortal benefits supposedly accrue.

Recordings are more easily obtained of the performances of secular or open ceremonies and of the fragments of ceremonial singing heard in the camp. Even the music of these "corroborees", as most Australians call them, is not without totemic or sacred significance, although Aboriginal women and children are not prevented from hearing it. It is not easy to draw a firm line of demarcation between "sacred" and "secular" Aboriginal melodies *per se*.

During much of the singing heard on this disc, an atmosphere of suppressed excitement cannot be missed, especially among the women who are always shy performers. The recordings of songs sung by women (Side B: 10-11) are proof enough of the rapport established with the Aborigines by the collector and his wife.

Field collectors of recordings of Australian Aboriginal music would agree almost unanimously on the difficulty in obtaining a song title from an Aboriginal informant, especially when the singing is divorced from the ceremony of which it is a part. A singer's explanation of what he is singing may be made at a number of different levels of meaning. He may be describing his song in the context of its "dreaming" or mythological associations, within the circumstances under which he may have allegedly received it from an ancestral, totemic being; or he may be attempting to explain it in terms of the ceremonial "acts" to which the song, or song item, provides accompaniment. Not only the title but the term "song" itself is difficult to apply to Australian Aboriginal singing. Most of the shorter sections or items are part of a longer song series which, during ceremonies, might go on for days or nights at a time. To the outsider these melodic units are separable not so much by their individual tunefulness as by the short cessations of singing and playing which separate them.

Insofar as the older men still remember

the appropriate song words—which may or may not be literally translatable—the believed order, the hallowed sequence of these almost countless items, is maintained. Interruptions of the singing for argument and consultation are not, however, uncommon.

IV

As previously indicated, non-indigenous contacts have left a number of different melodic traces in the songs sung by the Queensland singers (Side B: 14-21). For instance, the same European commencing formula of the rising fourth is to be found in Kokopera (Example 1) and Umpila (Example 2) singing as well as in one of the Miriam songs (Example 3). In the Western Australian items the only sample which commences in this manner, from the Nyangumarda (Example 4), has a different tonality and form. Few melodic or rhythmic parallels may be drawn between songs from Eastern and from Western Australia heard on this disc.

It will be noted that key signatures may be affixed without incongruity to transcriptions of the tunes sung by the Queensland singers. Tonalities are recognizably "major" and phrase divisions are clearly apparent. In both the Umpila and the Miriam songs sustained tones occur at cadence points. The chromatic descents in the guitar-accompanied WAY KERIBA GED (Side B: 18) belong to a melodic vocabulary best described as "music hall," that is, older than "night club" (Example 5). The Kokopera melodies are not unlike acculturated songs which may be heard today in the Solomon Islands, from some of which emanates an elusive French "folk" flavour.

In the singing by the Western Australians little trace of harmony-engendered melody is to be found, though consistent intervallic relationships are discoverable between the ground tone and those gravitating towards it. Items sung to the accompaniment of various types of stick-beating are in more or less syllabic style. The "texts", when considered non-lexically merely as sequences of vocal sounds, appear to be composed of alternating sets of syllables allied to pairs of recurring rhythmic patterns. Examples of these "inland" musical forms are to be found on both sides of this disc (see especially Side A: 4, 6 and 7 and Side B: 1-5).

The first three *didjeridu*-accompanied melodies (Side A: 1-3) are clearly divided into sections. In Band 1 (Example 6) the glissando-like fall at the beginning (A) is difficult to reproduce accurately on a five-lined stave, though tonal and rhythmic contrasts between this and later sections (B and C) are clearly demonstrable in this manner. It will be noted that Side A: 2, in which "diatonic" sequences follow "pentatonic", the singing is of a more consistently syllabic type, i.e., one tone to a syllable (Example 7). In Bands 1 and 3, as in the other examples of *didjeridu*-accompanied singing (Side A: 15-19), occasional slurs, i.e., one syllable shared by more than one musical tone, are to be detected.

Songs which are accompanied by *didjeridu* droning of the "northwestern" type do not as a rule utilize syllables or syllable groups that are translatable, although the syllable groups nevertheless maintain a recognizable order or sequence. At the end of each example

heard on Side A of this disc it will be noted that a concluding section or coda is plainly audible. It is confined to the lowest of the vocal tones approximately one octave above the main pitch of the drone. In these concluding vocal sections, especially in those of Bands 1 and 3, the syllables appear to differ from those in the previous sections of the same item (see transcriptions of these texts on pp. 6 and 7). In Bands 16-19 the gulf is even wider. Here the concluding vocal sounds are merely vowels (Example 8b). From what is known to date of singing styles in the northwest, these final short vocables, carefully accompanied by sticks and *didjeridu*, may be a Nyangumarda invention. They differ from more familiar concluding formulae, such as NGE-NGE-NGE, with which Wagaitj people from further north near Darwin end the items in their *corroboree* or dance songs (Wonga).

Band 19, with its haunting little melody (Example 8a), stands apart from the previous four *didjeridu*-accompanied items. Bands 15-18 are related tonally to each other, being hexatonic in character and similar in organization to the major mode. They consist of two song-descents, each separated by the rise of a "fifth". The mode of descent in Band 19 is more aptly described as "pentatonic".

Song terminations in the "inland" styles almost invariably consist of repetitions of the verbal metres on the "ground" tone. A stronger termination is marked by a brief lowering of approximately an octave of the vocal level of pitch (cf. Side A: 4-6 and 20 and Side B: 7) and/or a rapid roll or tremolo of the accompanying sticks. These rapid stick reiterations may also herald the commencement of the vocal line and subsequent repetitions of it (Side B: 7). The AI sound, which rises in pitch at the conclusion of another example (Side B: 6), is a short though notable mode of termination in the Nyangumarda collection. More familiar vocal terminations of a longer, melodic order are to be found in the songs sung on the eastern side of the mainland. Such refrains usually consist of verbal and melodic repetitions of the last phrase of the song.

As in Side A: 15-18 above, many other songs heard on the disc constitute rhythmic variations on the same basic tonal structure. It is probable that they would be performed in sequence during the course of one ceremonial ritual. Note the items accompanied by stick only sung by Albert, a Western Australian musician of some versatility (Side A: 5-7), the last of which includes several variations in the mode of stick-beating. Each song item is tonally, though not rhythmically, similar, and covers more than an octave span. The interval of a "minor third" above the "ground" tone, and also above the upper octave, is clearly outlined, as is the "fifth" degree which dominates the second of the two song-descents (Example 9).

In his book *The Wellsprings of Music*, Curt Sachs refers to the "tumbling strains" of the "oldest music", the crudest style of which he says, "seems to be preserved in Australia". The present recordings demonstrate a variety in descents which is not haphazard. Moreover, prefixed *ascents* do occur (see Side A: 5-7 and 12, also Side B: 5-6 and 13). Tonal modes of descent are aurally recognizable as "pentatonic" or "dia-

tonic" and, more often, as a mixture of each, "gapped", and then "filled".

The rising form of the two Yinggarda songs on Side B cannot escape notice. Band 12, (Example 10), with its alternations of six and seven time units within a curving range of a "fifth", is unlike the Nyangumarda, Nyamal, or Yindjibarndi items. A more extended form is to be found in the two friction-accompanied Nyamal items (Side B: 9-10) which, although still "tumbling strains", are modally distinctive. These melodies are not without some resemblance to "plain chant" in one of the plagal modes.

Quasi-singing, difficult to capture in "lines and spaces" marks the item by an Yindjibarndi singer (Side B: 8). In contrast to the melodic style of the male singing are the "pentatonic", even "triadic", outlines revealed in the two items by the women singers (Side B: 10-11).

In the group of Nyangumarda songs, allegedly "from the south", paired song metres are to be found. Note the regular change from four to five beat measures in Side B: 2 (Example 11) and from three to four beat measures in Side B: 4 (Example 12). These alternating rhythmic motives proceed along a fixed tonal course until the "ground" tone is reached. The patterns then continue in monotone or chanting fashion.

Comparable forms abound in the "inland" styles, some of them extremely complex. Where they are not discoverable the reason may well be that the singers themselves are no longer "past-masters" in these ancient mensural arts.

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Group of Nyangumarda men in ceremonial paint and dress. They costume themselves thus three or more times yearly. Photograph by Mary List, Wal-lal Downs, Western Australia, 1956.



Yinggarda couple, Albert and Rosie, in front of their dwelling. See Side B, Bands 12-13. Photograph by Alix O'Grady, Carnarvon, Western Australia, February, 1958.

Example 2 (Side B: 17)

Example 2 (Side B: 17)

Example 3 (Side B: 21)

Example 4 (Side A: 14)

Example 5 (Side B: 18)

Example 6 (Side A: 1)

7

Example 7 (Side A: 2)

Example 8a (Side A: 19)

Example 8b (Side A: 19)

Example 9 (Side A: 7)

Example 10 (Side B: 12)

Example 11 (Side B: 2)

Example 12 (Side B: 4)