

Screen worlds, sound worlds and school: a consideration of the potential of the ethnomusicology of Australian Indigenous film for music education

Michael Webb

Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, Australia

Thomas Fienberg

Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, Australia

Abstract

This article arises from the authors' belief that there is a need to develop motivating ways for students across Australia to meaningfully encounter Australian indigenous music, the breadth and richness of which is beginning to be conveyed via a diverse range of mainstream media texts. Engaging with theoretical insights from the ethnomusicology of film, specifically, by examining the notions of sound worlds and sound space, we consider ways Australian Indigenous film might be profitably employed in the classroom study of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and dance. We consider in some detail the films *Yolngu Boy* (2000) and *One Night the Moon* (2001), and suggest classroom approaches to the study of these films based on our own school experiences with them. The article demonstrates ways students might be led to develop analytical, musicological, and performance skills, in order to come to a better understanding of aspects of Australian indigenous musical cultures and Australian experience.

Key words: Ethnomusicology of film; Australian indigenous film; music video; media texts

Australian Journal of Music Education 2011:2,30-43

Introduction

In this article we discuss the potential of Indigenous film for meaningful classroom engagement with Australian indigenous music. Selected Indigenous films, we believe, can serve as a profitable starting point in educational encounters with Australian indigenous sound worlds. Drawing on a new sub-field, the ethnomusicology of film, we sketch out how Indigenous film might be brought into school music programs, by examining the sound worlds and sound space of the films, *Yolngu Boy* (2000) and *One Night the Moon* (2001)¹. We are prompted

by our own (differing) convictions regarding the urgent need to discover diverse, motivating, and authentic ways through which school students might experience Australia's indigenous musical culture. Our (again, different) personal experiences with *One Night the Moon* in particular, in school performance contexts, have convinced us of the positive learning benefits of such film study, which we believe deserves to be more

1. All films referred to in this article are available on DVD. The Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu music videos referred to are readily accessible on the Internet. Also see the Resources section of this article, below, for access to selected clips from the films.

fully developed. Additionally, we are interested in exploring ways to develop a more rigorous musicological methodology among students, since it is our opinion that this area of music education has been neglected in recent times.

We believe this novel approach is promising for a number of reasons. First, films comprise “screen worlds,” that is, they present human societies in microcosm, whereas in the school classroom, the totality of a culture and its music overwhelms. “Placing people in motion,” Slobin writes, “means you have to construct an integrated and logical society, music and all” (Slobin 2008, p. 4). As such, films can handily indicate ways music works in and as culture, and significantly, Indigenous films communicate insider understandings of a musical culture and exert a different kind of control over it to mainstream film. Second, approaching music through a screen world can help curb a tendency to objectify music since music is complexly woven into the social and cultural fabric of this “world”. Third, feature films, including the ones considered here, often present the range of musics of a society, thus conveying something of the richness and complexity of social and cultural reality. Fourth, films employ narrative as a way of knowing, in contrast with knowing by notion or rational approaches to knowledge. Not only is this approach to transmitting knowledge common in many indigenous societies; it may also have greater immediacy in classroom contexts. Finally, as Wood explains, Indigenous films are often made expressly to “transmit languages and cultures” (Wood, 2008, p. 85), that is, to “support the survival of the people depicted” (Wood, 2008, p. 72), and they also offer a corrective to views of cultures and societies constructed by dominant groups. As Langton (2006) notes, with films such as *One Night the Moon* in mind, “fictional or cinematic accounts have until recently depended on preconceived notions of people, place and culture” (p. 58).

Following a discussion of terminology used in the article and a brief synopsis of each film, we

set out a kind of introductory ethnomusicology of the film *Yolngu Boy* such as might be undertaken in the school context. Next, we discuss projects we have developed or co-developed involving adaptations of *One Night the Moon* for “live” performance. We bring additional film and video material into the discussion at several points, to emphasise that the possibilities for classroom study extend beyond our two “focus” films.

Terminology

Slobin (2008) proposes that from an ethnomusicological point of view, “every film is ethnographic” because it “presents the viewer with a human society,” and “every soundtrack acts like an ethnomusicologist” since the film soundtrack offers “sonic substance to the housing, clothing, language, and customs of the place” (pp. 3-4, emphasis removed). From Slobin’s perspective, an ethnomusicological approach to film highlights the “extroversive” elements of a film’s soundtrack – the music and sounds of the natural and social worlds – “since they signal and interpret most of the cultural and social content” of a film (p. 8).

In *Global Soundtracks*, Slobin (2008) presents a typology of “global cinema systems” (pp. x-xviii) that includes “subcultural cinema”, a term he uses for a “body of work produced by minority filmmakers within a multicultural society” (Slobin, 2009, p. 153). Relatedly, in *Native Features*, Wood (2008) refers to “Indigenous film” and concentrates on films from “North America, the Arctic, Oceania, and Australia” by (for the most part) indigenous directors, which tell indigenous stories (Wood, 2008, p. 4). While Wood’s identification of regions and aspects of his categorization of Indigenous film are problematic (as he acknowledges [see Wood, 2008, pp. 66-67, 83-85], and as we will see), we borrow his more accessible label for use in the music educational context.

Wood (2008) views “Indigenous and non-Indigenous films as labels at the extreme ends of

a continuum" (pp. 66-67) and he does not "try to specify exact degrees of indigeneity" (p. 67). He considers as Indigenous both of the films under discussion in this article. *One Night the Moon* is Aboriginal director Rachel Perkins' retelling of an incident in the career of an Aboriginal tracker that was first told in a documentary film by another Aboriginal filmmaker, Michael Riley. *Yolngu Boy* presents a different case. As Wood explains:

Neither director... nor scriptwriter... are Indigenous, but the film was produced in part by Galarrwuy Yunupingu, the lead singer of Yothu Yindi. The Yothu Yindi Foundation, established to support the development and teaching of Yolngu culture, even partially funded the film. The Yunupingu brothers brought the filmmakers together with the Arnhem Land Indigenous communities that the film depicts, and many community members were involved in both the development of the script and in monitoring the daily shooting production. (Wood, 2008, p. 189).

Given this background, Wood includes *Yolngu Boy* among his list of Indigenous films.

It is also helpful to define the terms "sound world" and "sound space". We use the term sound world (or worlds) to refer to the total sonic environment of a culture or cultures as represented in the film, including all of its sound practices and music making. Sound space refers to the soundtrack of a film and how its "space" is proportionally allocated – over the film as a whole, or within a scene – to what kinds of sounds (and silences) and which kinds of music, and whether this serves as diegetic (source) or non-diegetic (score) sound and music. As we will see, analyzing an Indigenous film soundtrack's treatment of sound space can tell us much about the social and cultural values ascribed to particular sounds and kinds of music.

The films

Yolngu Boy (2000), directed by Stephen Johnson, is the story of three Yolngu youths who dreamed of becoming great hunters like their forefathers. Two are chosen by an Aboriginal elder to

"receive ceremony" – to be initiated into the ancestral belief-system. The boys grow apart in their teenage years, and one falls into crime and faces a prison sentence, while another becomes fixated on football. The one who most cherishes the tribal traditions and beliefs convinces the other two to trek with him to Darwin through the rugged terrain of North East Arnhem Land (the bush and tribal practices contrast sharply with shopping malls and suburban living) to seek protection from the law through an Aboriginal elder.

One Night the Moon (2001), directed by Rachel Perkins, is based on the real life experiences of tracker Alexander Riley in the Dubbo area of New South Wales. One evening in the early 1900s, a young girl climbed through the window of her home and wandered off, apparently in search of the moon. Her parents call in a police search party that fails to find her before she perishes. The film follows the emotional journey of the white settler and his wife, and the tragedy of the settler's refusal to allow an Aboriginal tracker on 'his' land to retrace the footsteps of the child.

We concentrate on these particular films for a number of reasons. As will be seen, in thoughtfully engaging and evocative ways, both films centre on the idea of cultural difference and distinctiveness, and on living in balance with the natural environment. *Yolngu Boy* presents the continuity of Arnhem Land Aboriginal culture, including music, from ancestral times to the present, while contrasting ancient and contemporary spaces and practices. With innovative use of song and sound, *One Night the Moon* throws into relief Aboriginal and Western colonial understandings of land and community, and ultimately, spirituality. According to Langton (2006), in the film director Perkins "at once heightens and represses the power of race symbolism by entwining universal human emotions of distress and concern through the variety of characters, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal" (p. 63).

Ten Canoes (2006), a short detour

Diverting our attention for a moment from these two films, we propose that the opening scenes of Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr's film, *Ten Canoes* (2006), is an excellent place to begin a study of both indigenous music and an ethnomusicology of Indigenous film. Set in the remote, mythological past, the film eschews the elegiac quality often associated with films treating indigenous subjects. Visually, the viewer is transported (almost literally, by helicopter) to the remote Arafura Swamp in Arnhem Land, where the story takes place and where the film was shot. In the special features section of the DVD version of *Ten Canoes* is a film sequence where the viewer is taken, via satellite imagery, from "space" as it were, zooming in ever closer to the earth, then Australia, then Arnhem Land, then the Arafura Swamp. This film segment provides a sense of differentiated time and space, allowing the viewer to readjust her or his imagination historically and geographically.

Aurally, *Ten Canoes'* soundtrack is unconventional, indeed as Wood (2008, p. 193) observes, *Ten Canoes* "creat[es] a cinema experience that is almost as aural as it is visual". It immerses the viewer/listener in a pre-colonial indigenous sound world, merging "incidental music of traditional Aboriginal instruments" (Starrs, 2006) and the "alien sounds of chirrups, croaks and slithers" (Fitzgerald, quoted in Starrs, 2006). When well "set up" by the teacher, watching the opening 10 minutes of *Ten Canoes* can serve a valuable "ear cleaning" function, as it introduces a unique sound world, one simultaneously sparse (with few musical sounds) and dense (with the roar of nature). Such an aural environment contrasts markedly with the sound world in which many students are immersed. Handled sensitively, such an undertaking can enhance considerably the subsequent study of indigenous music as represented in Indigenous film.

Yolngu Boy sound worlds

Let us now consider ways the ethnomusicology of film might be put into practice. We set out an ethnomusicological approach to the film in the form of a number of exploratory activities. The initial goal is to make an inventory of the sound worlds of the film, *Yolngu Boy*. As they do this, students are required to determine whether the various "worlds" form part of the natural and social worlds of the Yolngu, or whether they function as scored accompaniment. As we shall see, these two (often) distinct aspects of film sound can overlap.

Activity 1

A class might be set such a task before watching the film; this can be achieved by visiting the *Yolngu Boy* website on the Internet and working through the "Music" section on the menu bar. The soundtrack features:

- traditional musicians performing traditional songs, including for each of the animals identified in the film – manta ray and crocodile (baru) songs, hunting songs, goanna songs and turtle hunt songs
- contemporary Aboriginal rock songs by the bands Nokturnl and Yothu Yindi
- song by Aboriginal singer, Kelli Howell
- song by Australian rock band, Regurgitator
- soundtrack cues, some incorporating Aboriginal instruments and rhythms, composed by Australian musician, Mark Ovenden
- sounds of the bush/imitation of such sounds
- sounds of the languages spoken

Next, selecting a sequence from the film (using the DVD version of the film, we recommend beginning at chapter 9 and ending at chapter 14 of the film, between [approximately] the 35 and 55 minute marks), make a list of "events," scene by scene. Students could do this in class, or the teacher could prepare it before hand (see Figure

1). As students watch the sequence, their task is to make jottings in the right hand column in Figure 1, taking note of which sound world is deployed where and why. Figure 2, resulting from a trial of this activity by one of us (Thomas) in a Sydney school in March, 2011, indicates the kind of outcome of the activity. Note the student's use of the genre label, "Ambient", as well as the "insider" term, "epic music", the meanings of which could be fruitfully discussed. Further, note down how the sounds/music are used, that is, as source or score or both (this aspect of the activity is not indicated in Figure 2).

This whole process could be simplified or shortened in accordance with the level of student capability – it could be broken down into segments and be undertaken over a series of classes, between other activities. The aim is to train the viewer to be more attuned to or

more consciously aware of the juxtaposition or alternation of the various Yolngu sound worlds. Following this task, students are ready to discuss the allocation of sound space.

The ethnomusicological analysis of several other, much shorter sequences from *Yolngu Boy* can be used to build on what has been learnt in this study of sound worlds and the allocation of sound space. The following two short activities are based on a segment of the film (clip 1) on the Australian Screen website (see Resources section) (on the DVD version of the film, this segment can be found in chapter 1, between 2:46 and 3:28)

Activity 2

In the brief scene (40 seconds long), Lorrpu is dreaming of the three friends together as children, painted for ceremony, being carried on

Figure 1: Exemplar sound worlds allocation and screen world function inventory sheet.

Narrative sequence	Sound world represented	'Cue'/film function – Yolngu world or screen world
Lorrpu, Botj and Milika begin their journey towards Darwin, by sea in a traditional canoe		
The three rest on the beach		
Officials discuss searching for the boys		
Night falls on the beach		
The Maralitja (<i>baru</i> or crocodile) man		
Sunrise on the beach		
Spear fishing		
Canoe journey continues		
Manta ray		
Canoe capsizes/helicopter overhead		
The journey continues by land		
Lorrpu on his own		
The three continue		
Making fire		
Hunting		
Night falls		
Botj is "visited"		

their fathers' shoulders. This scene is fascinating for the way the sound space is organized. Students could make a detailed list of the discreet kinds of sounds heard in the sequence, and as they list them, they should write down where they occur in the sound space – distant, or close up, "approaching" or "receding", and so on. For example:

- cockatoo squawks
- a male voice "whooping" begins, with echo, and continues intermittently
- clapping sticks (with delay effects), continuing intermittently

- "orchestral strings" begin to fade up, and continue sounding
- Lorrpu's voice over begins
- Sparse piano (continuing)
- Group male voices singing ceremonial music begin
- Male solo voice emerges
- All this begins to fade as Milika calls to Lorrpu.

Listing sound events sequentially like this does not convey how they overlap and interflow.

The purpose of this activity is to consider how in *Yolngu Boy*, Yolngu social reality is depicted

Narrative Sequence	Sound world represented - cine/film track
Lorrpu, Botj and Milika begin their journey towards Darwin, by sea in a traditional canoe	Water, music: Aboriginal singing, Percussion beat
The three rest on the beach	sea waves, speaking
Officials discuss searching for the boys	Oridaks, speaking
Night falls on the beach	sea waves, captive crawling
The Maralitja (baru or crocodile) man	Djiruidoo, Aboriginal singing
Sunrise on the beach	talking, waves
Spear fishing	Water splash, grunting, talking
Canoe journey continues	talking, rock music,
Marla ray	Singing (ambient) talking, water
Canoe capsizes/helicopter rescued	water waves, gasping for air, helicopter, wild animals
The journey continues by land	wild animals, talking
Lorrpu on his own	birds, epic music
The three continue	Wild animals, talking, epic music
Huntj	Crickets, suspended music, laughing
Night falls	talking,
Botj is "visited"	Thunder, djiruidoo, beat,

Figure 2: Example of student response to sound worlds documentation activity.

through the interaction of sound worlds and in the construction of sound space. So, here we have a boyhood dream depicted through the intermingling of score (strings and piano) and source sounds (ceremonial percussion sticks, whooping, and singing). Visually, this effect is enhanced by close-up shots and the use of slow motion. Students draw a circle and within it, attempt to graphically depict how the sound space is constructed in this short segment. They discuss the effect on the viewer of combining the source and score sounds and music.

Activity 3

In the very next sequence of the film (in the Australian Screen clip 1, beginning at the start of chapter 2, at the 3:40 mark, continuing to around the 4:45 mark), where the three main male characters are introduced, traditional indigenous sounds of didgeridu and clapping sticks combine with a rock percussion groove, to provide a standard soundtrack function. Here we hear how the score music can draw on Yolngu sound worlds for musical material. Watch and listen closely and discuss what film soundtrack conventions are being employed in this sequence [the driving soundtrack, to which the didgeridu is well-suited, propels the story forward; the rock groove provides a contemporary/"present" feel].

Comparing *Yolngu Boy* with Yolngu music video

As may be ascertained from the clip sequence discussed immediately above, prior to directing *Yolngu Boy*, Stephen Johnson shot music videos for Yothu Yindi, whose music is incorporated into his film's sound world. Aaron Corn speaks of the "musical revolution that Yothu Yindi ushered in" when they took "sacred songs about country and blend[ed] them stylistically and thematically, tak[ing] not only musical materials like the melody or distinctive rhythms out of the *manikay* [ceremonial songs] but even tak[ing]

the language out of the *manikay* and blend[ing] it with styles like rock" (Corn, 2010). "[E]verything since this genius idea", he continues, "everything we've heard since with Geoffrey Gurrumul, The Saltwater Band, or even going further west into Arnhem Land and The Nabarlek Band, has come out of this new way of composing in a way that is, I think, so genuinely Australian that nothing else really surpasses it" (Corn, 2010). As though paralleling this musical revolution visually, as Wood points out, in *Yolngu Boy*, Johnson "intercut shots of Yolngu symbols and ceremonies", and has "[i]mages of Baru, the Gumatj tribe's revered crocodile spirit, recur throughout *Yolngu Boy*" (Wood, 2008, p. 189).

Such images are also included in a more recent music video by Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, a former member of Yothu Yindi. Gurrumul's "Bapa" (2009) music video clip could be used comparatively, while studying this sequence from *Yolngu Boy*. The visual realization of "Bapa", Gurrumul's lament over the loss of his father, alternates simple line animation of the singer performing the song, with fleeting images of the animal realms of sky, sea, and land, as well as a dancer, glimpses of ancestral faces, idyllic images of a child splashing by the ocean, hunting, and so on. More abstractly, it also features light refracted from diamond-shaped designs patterned after the crocodile's skin.

A worthwhile activity would be to have students watch the clip and list and categorise the creatures that appear, as a prelude to a general discussion of Aboriginal cosmology as represented in both the *Yolngu Boy* film sequence studied above, and the "Bapa" video (see the Resources section below for material on indigenous cosmologies and film clip analysis). As noted, the significance of Baru, the crocodile spirit, is also represented in this clip (see Figure 3) – the forms of representation could also be compared (especially also with the visualization of the totemic significance of the crocodile in *Yolngu Boy*, chapter 1, between 2'18" and 2'45").



Figure 3: Screenshot from the “Bapa” video clip, where the singer’s shadow changes shape into that of a saltwater crocodile.

As for how music functions filmically in the clip, Gurrumul’s recording in general serves as a soundtrack to the moving images, although it is not as straightforward as this due to depictions of the singer performing. As students will quickly determine, this brings a new meaning to the idea of a film sound world (see Webb, 2010). In turn, this clip could be compared with the Gurrumul and Blue King Brown music video, “Gathu Mawula Revisited” (2011). Arnhem Land’s Chooky Dancers feature in this second clip. The inclusion of dancers and dance, as well as sung performances in both the clips, reveals how the musical sound world of each functions as both source and score, a key point for study and reflection. The visual/aural synchronization between the dancers’ movements and the music’s rhythms, make the source function of the music especially clear, even though the video “world” (the view of human society – see Slobin, quoted above) is less realistic than that of the film.

In summary, a broad question for reflection in the music classroom – one that might steer this whole investigation – might be: What can be learnt from *Yolngu Boy* and the Yolngu music video clips about Yolngu sound worlds, and the ways these connect with Yolngu cosmology?

One Night the Moon, which we now discuss, provides a quite different opportunity to learn about Australian indigenous sound worlds. As screen writer John Romeril notes, it is “an ‘historical story’, [which] allows today’s audience to say ‘it’s not us, it’s a story from a while ago; let’s just calmly look at it and not feel on the spot” (Chandler, 2009). As we will see, in quite complex ways, through music, *One Night the Moon* positions the non-indigenous and indigenous Australian in particular kinds of relationship.

***One Night the Moon* soundtrack performance**

As Langton (2006) explains, *One Night the Moon* “broke new ground” when it cast its “strangely subversive morality tale in ballad or aria form rather than in dialogue” (p. 63). Of considerable symbolic importance is the way the film “reintroduces song into the Australian landscape. For Indigenous peoples, song has been one of the central means of land management” (Australian Screen, no date). Wesley Enoch, who directed the 2009 stage adaptation for Melbourne’s Malthouse Theatre, referred to the “cultural clash”, the “history of Australia” that can be heard in the

kinds of music and the way they are caused to interact within the film (Enoch, 2009).

Before we discuss our performance experiences, take note of the sound worlds of *One Night the Moon*:

- vernacular Australian folk-like music (composed and sung by Paul Kelly, and the white female characters)
- Aboriginal folk-country (composed and sung by Kev Carmody and also sung by actor Kelton Pell)
- Subtle use of the didjeridu as a 'sound emblem' in some song accompaniments
- Celtic and Greek instrumental music and Celtic choral vocalising performed by Mairead Hannan (and others)
- traditional Anglo-Celtic hymn sung by Ruby Hunter

The music works in complex metaphoric ways, as Probyn and Simpson (2002) point out:

[T]he music's polyphonous and hybrid form signals the effectiveness of harmonies which both acknowledge and celebrate differences of viewpoint, producing what might be called reconciling harmonies that rely on a sympathetic discordance of voices and sound.

As we indicate below, students' initial responses to the music and story were not encouraging. However, narratively there is much more to the music and the ways it works in the film than is at first apparent. The music's subtlety, we suggest, is a contributing factor to film's gradual and profound impact on audiences.

Performance participation has long been germane to ethnomusicology's methodology. In applying the ethnomusicology of film to music education contexts, both of us, at different times and in different ways, have worked with students on performance projects related to the film's soundtrack. While some of the film's songs in a folk-country style present an emotional challenge, all are technically manageable by student musicians. In our experience then, the film's music offers an opportunity for direct

engagement through performance with history, story, characters, and music styles not widely familiar to most Australian school students.

In the discussion that follows, Michael outlines challenges he and visual and performing arts colleagues encountered and solutions they developed, in adapting the entire film for stage performance with school students. Working in an urban school with an indigenous population, Thomas tracks the shift in student attitudes towards the film's narrative and music, as they worked towards and adapting and performing segments of the film for the school public.

Michael's experience

In 2003, I [Michael] and a group of visual and performing arts teacher colleagues secured permission to adapt *One Night the Moon* for stage as a musical theatre work which included dance. I provide some descriptive details in order to convey methodologically, how we adapted the film for live theatre performance.

Our initial challenge was in pitching it to the student singers and actors. Once they agreed to be involved – some rather reluctantly – there were a number of additional challenges. Some of these were:

- developing a script that complemented the film's aesthetic;
- finding a satisfactory way to have non-indigenous students play indigenous roles;
- extending and supplementing the existing film music, to offer more solos for individual characters, and especially to involve the full cast and subgroupings in ensemble musical performance;
- incorporating dance;
- treating the difficult theme of suicide, and emphasising the more "redemptive" aspects of the narrative.

The film contains very little dialogue, however in the absence of the film's panoramic landscapes, we felt some narration at least was necessary to assist in telling the story. We addressed this by

developing a number of extremely brief narrator statements, which we used to link scenes. The following is an example, and occurs early in the performance, Act 1, Scene 2:

In the harsh New South Wales outback farming is a struggle, yet in their small settler homestead the family is close and contented. [Pause] The scrub-littered desert is both a challenge and a source of fear (St Paul's Grammar School, 2003, p. 4).

We addressed the issue of non-indigenous actors playing indigenous roles through costuming: the production's colours were subdued, and Aboriginal characters wore clothing that was predominantly shades of blue and grey, whether checked, striped or plain, and so on. White characters wore shades of khaki and brown. Additional items of clothing such as hats were

further used to distinguish the ethnicity and role of specific characters.

We had to solve the question of providing enough songs for individual characters and chorus to sing. This must also have been an issue for the 2009 Malthouse production, as the song list from a Music Deli radio program broadcast in November 2009 following that production's season in Melbourne indicates (see <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/musicdeli/stories/2009/2730747.htm>). Our stage adaptation used all of the music from the film, as well as some that was discarded, which we picked up from the special features section of the DVD version of the film (see Figure 4 for a transcription of such a piece). Further, we supplemented the film soundtrack with the songs, "All men choose the path they walk," as

Figure 4. Snippet of "Emily's Song" by Mairead Hannan, cut from the film version of *One Night the Moon*. Transcribed by Andrew Tredinnick (with working annotations) from the Special Features section of the DVD version.

Emily's song

Mairead Hannan

Handwritten musical score for "Emily's Song" by Mairead Hannan. The score is in G major, 4/4 time, and consists of four staves of music. The lyrics are: "Here I lie curled up in the clay cold. I cried so hard but now the pain has gone a-way. That old man in the moon he beckoned me a-way to the cold cold clay cold." The score includes handwritten annotations such as "half des" and "half closer". Chord symbols include Gm(add9), C, Dm, and Ebmaj7(#11).

sung by Archie Roach on the soundtrack of the Rolf de Heer film, *Tracker* (2002), and “Gathering storm” by Paul Kelly, from his bluegrass album, *Smoke*. The former became the production’s “theme” song, which was reprised several times, while the latter was arranged for women’s quartet including the farmer’s wife, sung to portend the grim outcome of the farmer’s pig-headedness.

A music teacher colleague, Andrew Tredinnick, transcribed most of the music and I arranged the vocal and choral parts. (Transcription is another important component of ethnomusicological investigation). Filling out harmony parts, we arranged the songs “Black and White” and “Moonstruck” as company numbers. Together Andrew and I rehearsed the ensemble, while I rehearsed the cast singing, mostly separately. Our instrumental ensemble, a mixture of student and professional musicians, featured fiddle, cello, baglama, Irish flute, didjeridu, accordion, mandolin, acoustic, electric and bass guitar, and pared down drum kit.

Our dance teacher developed the idea of having the little girl “abducted” from her bedroom by dancers, who played the role of “moon spirits”. The search party was also choreographed to provide the production with contrast in visual rhythm.

In the film, the white farmer takes his own life. In contrast, we had the farmer wander off into the wilderness, mad with grief, rage, and despair. During the funeral scene in the film, Ruby Hunter sings the hymn, “Breathe on me, breath of God” to the traditional tune, St Columba. We created a folk harmonization of this hymn and had the whole cast eventually join in, attempting to convey a sense of resolution and hope for a shared sense of community.

The production ran at the Q Theatre in Penrith in the western Sydney region, and was well received by the school community. Following the final performance the confident student singer and actor who played the role of the racist

white farmer, explained to me, within earshot of his parents (who were visibly moved by the production):

When we [the students] first saw the film and heard the songs we were disappointed that this was going to be the “musical” we were doing. And to be honest, we were “over” the whole Aboriginal thing – we’d had enough of it throughout our schooling. But I ended up totally surprised and overwhelmed. I found the whole experience to be so moving, singing those songs and reflecting on those people’s experiences. I felt like I went through a transformation myself!

Thomas’s experience

One Night the Moon and its music were far from the tastes of the Year 9 elective music class at the school where I [Thomas] teach music.

The film was introduced following a series of short activities based upon excerpts from other indigenous films. The class watched the entire film without interruption and discussed its key issues of attitudes to land and racism. The initial reception was not positive:

S: At first I didn’t like the film. I don’t know why. Just didn’t appeal to me and the music didn’t appeal to me.

S: I thought it was boring. ‘Cause it’s like outback and it was like Aussie.

S: Yeah, I just couldn’t relate to it. I’m being honest.

S: It was a bit annoying, because it just repeats itself – with its annoying tunes.

While the unfamiliar country-style music presented a barrier for these students, the indigenous students in the class were far more focused on the themes and characters in the film. Similar feelings were felt when other indigenous students watched the film with the school’s Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO):

S: It felt sad; it felt really wrong. I just think people underestimate indigenous people to what they really are.

AEO: After watching the movie there was silence. And then when we sat down and talked about it. Personally, it gave me an insight to how, back then the white man was sort of “my land, I’ll take

everything and do what I want to do with it”, [while] to an Aboriginal man, back then the land was everything to him. It was his grocery store, it was his story telling.

When I instructed the students that they would have to learn and record one of the songs featured in the film, the class’ resistance reached a new peak. Using principles of informal learning, students reluctantly went off in groups to begin the task. In between bass riffs from the White Stripes, and Metallica guitar licks, the groups slowly grew into the task:

S: It was pretty boring but it was all right, I guess. Like, as we got more into the music side of things, we were interpreting what was sort of going on in the film.

While the students quickly grasped the technical side of learning the pieces, they struggled to bring cultural sensitivity to their renditions of the songs. Perhaps this was due to group “chemistry”, or the informal approach to learning the songs.

S: Of course, performing with mates you’re going to muck around a bit and stuff.

S: In front of your mates, of course it’s going to be a bit of a joke, you know. You’re not really doing it for anything serious at the time.

To counter this attitude, I shifted the task focus to performing the works for NAIDOC (National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee) Day. As opposed to presenting the songs by themselves it was decided to link them together with footage from the films. This was seen as critically important for one student:

S: I think you wouldn’t actually understand the music if you didn’t watch it [because] you wouldn’t know what it’s talking about.

In an effort to involve the whole class (30 students) in the production, students not willing to perform were given the opportunity to contribute to the production in other ways. Some worked on designing a PowerPoint containing screenshots and clips from the film, while others helped write the script connecting the three chosen songs: “One Night the Moon”, “This Land is Mine/This Land is Me”, and “Unfinished Business”.

S: I did start performing...but [then I] chose to introduce the songs instead ... [my role was] to tell a bit about the scene that was going to be shown and then...describe the songs and where they fit in the movie.

A critical element to the production was the involvement of the school’s AEO. She worked closely with the students to help develop the script and was present at several rehearsals. Her presence and that of other local indigenous leaders at the NAIDOC school assembly helped remind the students of the film’s meaning and its importance to indigenous and non-indigenous people today:

AEO: I just sat there and went, Wow this is amazing, that young people from other cultures can come in and perform this...because I know you would have shown them the movie before and discussed how important land was and talked about the racism...So when they sang it, they sang it with meaning at the same time. I was blown away with just the rehearsal. But then, performing on the actual NAIDOC Day was mind blowing, it was magnificent...I think we all live in this world together and it’s great that we can even sing and adapt to someone else’s culture.

S: ...because NAIDOC Day is an Aboriginal sort of holiday I tried to treat it with more respect and more meaning, because it’s something that relates to [the indigenous people] in general.

S: I took this [performance] more seriously especially at the assembly because it was a special sort of time for Aboriginals...You need to treat it with a lot of respect and approach it in a serious manner, because you could insult some people in a way of not even knowing.

S: It made [the performance] like, heaps serious, yeah, because we were performing it in front of the [Aboriginal] elders.

While the production was greeted warmly by the indigenous community members present, the change in student attitudes towards the music was even more fruitful. Again this was closely linked with the extended performance time given to the work. Once the class had forgotten that they were performing country music, they began to understand the music on a far deeper level.

S: When you perform it, you actually get a feel of what it's about and the lyrics.

S: [Performing] really makes you think about it... It's different from just watching it on screen because you're actually singing it and you can feel what they're feeling when they sing it.

Summary

In both our situations, once students began to invest in the performance, they came to some extent to "live" the story, that is, it began to work on their imagination, providing them with some sense – some experience – of our history and of the tenor of social relations of the time. In both cases, the songs and music became the "glue" that allowed the narrative to "stick" and accumulate personal meaning. Our experiences of working outwards from the film were exciting, revealing to us the potential of music working in tandem with narrative for shaping and changing attitudes.

Conclusion

As we see it, the absence from the classroom of a firm theoretical and methodological grounding for the study of music often results in less than satisfying learning experiences. At the outset we stated that there is a great need to develop ways for students to meaningfully engage with Australian indigenous music, the breadth and richness of which is only now beginning to be conveyed via a diverse range of mainstream media texts. We have attempted to demonstrate ways the ethnomusicology of Indigenous film is relevant to school music education, while emphasizing how students could be encouraged to develop their analytical, musicological, and performance skills, in order to come to a better understanding of indigenous musical cultures and aspects of our history.

Clearly, there is much work to be done in more coherently developing such an approach to Australian indigenous music. There are other films and videos to explore for example, and other ways to engage with the films and videos

discussed here. We conclude with a cautionary reminder from Wood, that film study is only the beginning of the kind of deep and committed learning process we need to undertake as music educationists. He states:

[p]eople who sincerely wish to learn about Indigenous peoples should first earn permission to enter those communities and, then, commit the time necessary for difficult learning. Indigenous feature films can be for seekers of wisdom at best but a prefatory moment in a much longer and more arduous process. (Wood, 2008, 81)

Acknowledgement

Our thanks to Mairead Hannan for permission to include "Emily's Song" originally composed for the film, *One Night the Moon*, and to Andrew Tredinnick for permission to reproduce his transcription of the song. Thanks are also due also to the Visual and Performing Arts Department of St Paul's Grammar School, Sydney, for permission to quote from the manuscript of the *One Night the Moon* script.

Resources

Websites

Australian Screen website

For *Ten Canoes*: <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/ten-canoes/>

For *Yolngu Boy*: <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/yolnguboy/>

For *One Night the Moon*: <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/one-night-moon/>

Ten Canoes resources website: <http://www.tencanoes.com.au/tencanoes/links.htm>

Yolngu Boy official film website: <http://www.yolnguboy.com/directory/htm/index.html>

Books

Aaron Corn et al. (2009), *Reflections and Voices: Exploring the Music of Yothu Yindi with Mandawuy Yunupingu*. Sydney: Sydney University Press.

Fiona Magowan (2007), *Melodies of Mourning: Music and Emotion in Northern Australia*. Crawley: University of Western Australia Press.

References

- Chandler, J. (2009, 19 September). One Night The Moon: Malthouse Theatre, *Australian Stage*, [http://www.australianstage.com.au/200909192854/reviews/melbourne/one-night-the-moon-\[-\]malthouse-theatre.html](http://www.australianstage.com.au/200909192854/reviews/melbourne/one-night-the-moon-[-]malthouse-theatre.html). Accessed March 14, 2011.
- Corn, A. (2010, July 9). Yothu Yindi's Tribal Voice [transcript of radio interview], *The Rhythm Divine*, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/rhythmdivine/stories/2010/2947119.htm>. Accessed May 3 2011.
- Enoch, W. (2009, December 12). [Transcription of excerpts of ABC Radio National interview with Andrew Ford], *The Music Show*.
- Langton, M. (2006). Out from the shadows, *Meanjin*, 65(1), 55-64.
- Probyn, F. & Simpson, C. (2002). This Land is Mine/ This Land is Me: Reconciling harmonies in One Night the Moon. *Senses of Cinema*, 19, http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/19/this_land.html. Accessed March 14, 2011.
- Slobin, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- St. Paul's Grammar School, Sydney, Australia. (2003). *One Night the Moon* script (MS) 21 pp.
- Starrs, D. (2006). The Audience as Aurator Again? Sound and Rolf de Heer's 'Ten Canoes', *Metro Magazine*, 149.
- Webb, M. (2010). Re viewing listening: 'Clip culture' and cross-modal learning in the music classroom. *International Journal of Music Education*, 28(4), 1-28.
- Wood, H. (2008). *Native Features: Indigenous Films from Around the World*. New York: Continuum.
- Film, DVD, Video*
- De Heer, R., & Djigirr, P. (Dir.). (2006) *Ten Canoes* DVD. Madman Entertainment.
- Johnson, S. (Dir.). (2002). *Yolngu Boy* DVD. Fox Entertainment.
- Gurrumul, G. (2009). *Bapa*. Official music video. Skinnyfish Films.
- Gurrumul, G. & Blue King Brown. (2011). *Gathu Mawula Revisited*. Official music video. Skinnyfish Films.
- Perkins, R. (Dir.). (2002). *One Night the Moon* DVD. Siren Visual.

Michael Webb is an ethnomusicologist with expertise in Melanesian musical cultures, and a music educationist. He is Senior Lecturer in Music Education at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the University of Sydney. He is co-author of *Music in Pacific Island Cultures: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*, a volume in the Oxford University Press Global Music Series. Michael also co-authored a chapter for the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, and has recently published in the *International Journal of Music Education* on multimodal literacy and YouTube.

Thomas Fienberg completed his Honours (1st Class) with a thesis on canonic thinking within the NSW secondary music curriculum. He is currently undertaking a PhD in Music Education where his research focuses on approaches to and the inclusion of contemporary Australian indigenous music within secondary education contexts. Thomas teaches music at JJ Cahill Memorial High School and has also contributed to the delivery of several courses at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the University of Sydney. He has presented at *Australian Society for Music Education National Conference* (2009) and the *Cultural Diversity in Music Education Conference* (2010) on issues relating to the fields of musicology and music education.