TIDE LINES

Music, Tourism & Cultural Transition in the Whitsunday Islands (and adjacent coast)

PHILIP HAYWARD

Music Archive For The Pacific Press
Cataloguing in Publication Data

Tide Lines: Music, Tourism & Cultural Transition in the Whitsunday Islands (and adjacent coast)

Hayward, Philip 1956-

Bibliography
Includes Index

ISBN: 0-646-41297-3


Published by The Music Archive For The Pacific Press
Southern Cross University
Box 157
Lismore
NSW 2480
Australia

© the author
All rights reserved
Published in 2001

Printed by Centatime, Rosebery, NSW, Australia
Design and setting by Hippopotamus Dreams, Sydney

Front cover photo from 'Unforgettable Hayman'
brochure (1962), photographer unknown
Dedicated to the Ngaro people,
the traditional owners of Whitsundays,
and their present-day descendants
Map of Whitsunday Islands and adjacent coast.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area, Project and Research</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating The Archipelago</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact, Corroborees and Exile</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impromptu and Al Fresco</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure and Interaction</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displacement</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Key and Festive</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Geography Has Gone’</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Every Night</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Changes in Latitudes, Changes</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Attitudes’</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resorting to ‘Tradition’</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 10</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polynesian Performance</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 11</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning to the Islands</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterword</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruins, Refrains and Repetition</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

Firstly, thanks to Marion Eaton, Ray Blackwood and Bruce Jamieson, without whose early co-operation this book would not have been written. At the other end of the process, Pam Pole identified several omissions in my final draft and provided valuable research assistance that enabled me to address these. Michael Hannan’s support for the project and its publication was crucial throughout.

Also thanks to Bryce Barker, Jeremy Beckett, Reg Braun, Jan Brazier, Matta Brown, Ian Buchanan, Irene Butterworth, David Colfelt, Chrissie Courtenay, Rebecca Coyle, Denis Crowdy, Jon Fitzgerald, Darren Hicks, Ron Hicks, Shuhei Hosokawa, Artie Jacobson, Bruce Johnson, Richard Kaal, Vimmi Kaptein, Margaret Kartomi, Junko Konishi, Helen Reeves Lawrence, Kieran McCarthy, Bua Mabo, John Marsden, Guy Morrow, Steve Mullins, Karl Neuenfeldt, Roy Nicolson, Dick Otene, Alan Pearson, Edgar Pope, Renarta Prior, Con Shears, Ailsa Reinke, Joseph Romano, Aline Scott-Maxwell, Tex Simmons, Graeme Smith, Neville Smith, Tim Taylor and John Whiteoak for various assistances.

The John Oxley Library (Brisbane), Archives of The Australian Museum, Mitchell Library and Macquarie University Library (Sydney), State Library of Victoria and the local library facilities run by Gosford City Council, on the Central Coast of New South Wales, also deserve commendation for their support and efficiency.

A two month visiting research scholarship in the Faculty of Sociology at Kansai University, Osaka in November-December 1999 gave me the opportunity to fine-tune my early chapter drafts for this publication – many thanks to Kansai University, and to my host there, Hiroshi Ogawa, for their support. Coralie Joyce, Mark Evans, Denis Crowdy and David Hackett, my colleagues in the Centre for Contemporary Music Studies at Macquarie University, who kept the Centre going during my various absences on research for this project, also deserve honourable mention.

Finally, my immediate family – my partner Rebecca, daughters Rosa and Amelia, and my parents, Ruth and Roy – deserve heartfelt thanks for their continuing enthusiasm for my chosen occupation and their resourceful adaptations to my frequent disappearances to the various locations necessary for me to pursue my studies.
Preface

The Music Archive for the Pacific is honoured to be publishing this study of music and tourism in the Whitsunday Islands. The Archive has been indebted over its short lifetime to Professor Philip Hayward for his expert advice as a management committee member and thus it seems fitting that its first publication is a book written by him.

The Music Archive was established in 1995 in the library at Southern Cross University, through the generous donation by Malcolm Philpott of a large collection of popular music recordings, artefacts and written publications from Papua New Guinea. From its inception it has had a Pan-Pacific purview, with a policy to collect recordings of indigenous popular musics of other South Pacific countries besides Papua New Guinea, including Australian indigenous popular music from non-coastal areas.

One of the main aims of the Music Archive for the Pacific is to encourage research into Pacific musics. This aspect of its charter has, however, been slow to develop. (A notable exception has been a BA Honours project by Maori singer-songwriter, Ora Barlow, entitled Te Tino Rangatiratanga: Self Determination in Research and Music Practice – completed in 2000). In order to stimulate Pacific music research, Southern Cross University appointed Philip Hayward as an Adjunct Professor in 1999.

Philip Hayward has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to research on Pacific music. Based at Macquarie University, he established Perfect Beat: the Pacific Journal of Research Into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture in 1992. Since then he has established a high profile as an author of books and articles on popular music and has conducted substantial research fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, Norfolk Island, Lord Howe Island, the Whitsundays and Japan.

Tide Lines is a unique history of an often-neglected aspect of musical activity. We are becoming accustomed to defining our music identity in terms of national or even global activities and forget that most of our actual contact with music making happens at a very local level, whether it be in a regional or urban context. This study focuses on musical practices that are typically ignored by popular music scholars and writers for the popular music press. Both these groups are invariably more interested in music that has visible success in the recording industry, or at least has the possibility of achieving it. However if studies of specialised musical practices such as those associated with tourism, local entertainment and community identity are not undertaken, then a significant part of our cultural history will be lost.

I believe Tide Lines will become an inspiration and a model for further studies of local professional and community music traditions that lie outside the music industry mainstream but are nonetheless critical to the cultural economy.

Michael Hannan
Director, Music Archive for the Pacific

July 2001
Foreword

AREA, PROJECT AND RESEARCH REFERENCES

This book examines the history of music, tourism and cultural transition in the Whitsunday Islands and adjacent coast from the 1840s-2000. The theoretical parameters of the book are detailed in the Introduction. This brief foreword provides a clarification of the geographical area of study, the specific project of this book and its principal research references.

I. Area

The Whitsunday Islands comprise an extensive archipelago located roughly parallel to the mid-north coast of Queensland in an area between latitudes 20 and 21 degrees south and longitudes 148 and 150 degrees east. While the majority of the islands are uninhabited, others, such as Hayman, South Molle, Hamilton, Long and Daydream, are now the bases for resort facilities of various sizes and degrees of facilitation. The majority of the archipelago falls under the jurisdiction of the Queensland Department of Parks and Wildlife and development in the region (outside of established facilities) is severely restricted. Since the 1980s the archipelago has been principally accessed by sea from Shute Harbour, located to the south of the coastal resort town of Airlie Beach. The principal airports serving the region are located close to Proserpine, the largest coastal town, and on Hamilton Island. Since its growth in the 1970s and 1980s, the coastal region immediately opposite the Islands, encompassing Cannonvale, Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour, has come to comprise a social, cultural and economic annex to the archipelago itself (and is regarded as such in this volume). While the towns of Proserpine, to the north, and Mackay, to the south, have also enjoyed periods of interaction with the archipelago, their histories and culture are largely separate from those detailed in this book and are, therefore, not included within the orbit of this study (except in those instances of most direct connection).

II. Project

In this volume I have been principally concerned to chart the changing nature and function of music in the region; to examine music’s role as a communicative medium between various communities; and to analyse the role of tourism in producing local music culture(s). Given that my topic spans 160 years, my account is necessarily a selective one. This is particularly the case with regard to my discussions of the period c1970-2000, a period when the musical activity in – and, as significantly, traffic through – the region expanded exponentially. Any attempt to document the involvement of every (amateur, semi-professional and professional) musician residing in the area or performing during short term and/or return visits over the last three decades would result in the production of a massive and unwieldy list that would not be conducive to the kind of analytical project I have attempted here.

viii
In this book I have concentrated on discussing the work of those musicians who have either performed most continuously in the Whitsundays and/or been held in particular regard by their peers. On no occasion have I omitted discussion of any performer who falls within these categories. While the boundaries of my inclusion are, of course, open to debate (and/or future revision) my focus has been based on the consensual perceptions of peer performers and previously published local accounts and is, as far as I have been able to ascertain, broadly concordant with participant experience.

III. Research References

All quotations from research interviews conducted by the author are referenced in the text in the following form – (interview, month year). All references to postal or e-mail correspondence received by the author are referred to in the text in the following form – (p.c. month year). Published references are expressed in a standard in-text format (author, year of publication, plus pages referred to) and are detailed in a collated Bibliography at the end of the volume.

Further References

For a detailed account of the geography and postcolonial history of the archipelago and adjacent coast see Blackwood (1997). For an archaeological account of Ngaro history see Barker (2001).

End Notes

1. It should be noted that the extent and designation of the Whitsunday Islands has been subject to modification (and occasional dispute) over the last two hundred years. See Barr (1990: 1) and Blackwood (1997: 9 and 224-225) for discussion of historical aspects of this issue and Murphy (1998) for discussion of a recent dispute.

2. See the introduction to Chapter 7 for further discussion of this area’s relationship to the archipelago.
Introduction

Navigating the Archipelago

The Whitsunday Islands, like any other archipelago, embody a duality. While the term archipelago refers to parcels of land scattered in a sea, the waters that surround them are also a defining element of the archipelagic space. While there is no precise term for such waters, their importance is inscribed in the name often used to refer to the area off the mid-North Queensland coast that is the subject of this study – the Whitsunday Passage. The latter term is particularly apposite since it emphasises the archipelagic space as one that can be passed through (by mariners) and emphasises the manner in which archipelagos can be regarded as innately permeable, liminal spaces. They exist between ocean and (main)land. Their passages (necessarily) lie between islands.

During the (known) history of the Whitsundays the coastal edges of the area, where land and sea meet, have been central to human experience. The archipelago’s various communities have clustered on the edges of its islands, or else commuted from – or along – the coast of the mainland in various daily, weekly or seasonal rhythms. These land edges, the waterways that connect them and the histories that have occurred on them, are scattered and impermanent, washed by tides (both actual and metaphorical). As a result, the history of music, tourism and cultural interaction in the Whitsundays I advance in this volume is a complex, shifting and multi-faceted one. Indeed so complex were the leads, distractions and/or ‘dead-ends’ I encountered during my research that the phrase ‘Mapping The Maze’ came to mind as a possible title for this Introduction. However the metaphor of a maze suggests a centre to be discovered and an area that, once mapped, allows a smooth process of (inward) discovery. The phenomena mapped here have no such centre and no such completion and consequently I opted for the (more appropriate) metaphor of navigation to describe the analytical history I introduce here.

My interest in the subject of this book dates from October 1993, when I collaborated with a colleague, Rebecca Coyle, on an interview she was conducting as part of her research into the history of Hawaiian-style music in Australia\(^1\). The interviewee was Bruce Jamieson, a (former) amateur Hawaiian lap-steel guitarist. While the discussion did not provide material directly relevant to my colleague’s main area of study, it opened a portal onto the resort culture of the Whitsundays in the 1930s that fascinated me. Other commitments blocked my research at this time and I put the interview’s disclosures on file for future reference. In 1997 I returned to Jamieson’s material and visited the Whitsunday shore to conduct further investigation into the subject. One outcome of this visit was correspondence with Marion Eaton, a long-time resident of the area, and local historian Ray Blackwood. Cued by their references and reminiscences, I began to develop the perspectives and orientations I required to proceed with my study.

Aware of the fluid, shifting phenomenon I was pursuing, I derived my conceptual and methodological navigation from three disparate strands of contemporary theory: Cultural Anthropology, Ethnomusicology and Popular Music Studies. From the first disciplinary
strand, James Clifford’s *Routes* (1997) offered a number of productive points of orientation. In particular, I was interested in his engagement with the work of Greg Dening (1980) and Mary Pratt (1992) and Clifford’s emphasis on the importance of analysing the history of those “local/global historical encounters, co-productions, dominations and resistances” which arose as a result of “concrete mediations” between “the cultural figure ‘native’ and the intercultural figure ‘traveller’” (Clifford, 1997: 24).

With reference to Dening’s *Islands and Beaches* (1980) – an ethnographic history of the Marquesas Islands (1774-1880) with parallels to my own study – Clifford argued that “[b]eaches, sites of travel interaction are half the story” (my emphasis) of the particular local encounters described (1997: 24). Clifford’s engagement with Dening’s work reflects his conviction that cultural “contact zones” are a key site for contemporary ethnographic and cultural study. Clifford takes the term “contact zone” from Pratt (1992: 6), who uses it as an alternative to the notion of the frontier (which she regards as reflective of an imperialist expansionist perspective). Pratt uses the term in an attempt to invoke:

> . . . the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctions, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term “contact” I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted within and by their relations to each other . . . [It stresses] copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (ibid: 6-7)

Pratt’s notion of contact zones is one singularly apposite to this study. Indeed, it is so apposite, that the concept she advances is as much in accord with the demonstrable history of the Whitsunday archipelago I offer here, as it is something that can be applied to it. However, unlike (Clifford’s characterisation of) Dening’s study, the “transgressive intercultural frontiers” (Clifford, 1997: 7) of the Whitsundays’ beaches, ports, islands and passages provide more than “half the story”. They are the “story” – the fluidity, materiality and symbolism of the archipelagic space define the history related in this book.

As Dening acknowledges (in a passage not cited by Clifford):

> ‘Islands and beaches’, of course, are everywhere – in a jungle clearing, in a desert oasis, in an urban ghetto, within a social class. Everywhere where space and action are limited by boundaries which screen comings and goings there is an island and a beach. (Dening, 1980: 31)

But as he also goes on to assert:

> The Pacific, however, is a total island world . . . Every islander has had to cross a beach to construct a new society. Across those beaches, every intrusive artefact, material and cultural, has had to pass. Every living thing on an island has been a traveller. Every species . . . on an island has crossed the beach. In crossing the beach every voyager has brought something old and made something new. The old is written in the forms and habits and needs each newcomer brings. The new is the changed world, the adjusted balance every coming makes. [E]ach new intruder...
develops, fills unfilled niches [and] plays a thousand variations on the themes of its own form. (ibid: 31-32)

This characterisation was one that I sought to explore with regard to the kinds of cultures created by travellers who crossed beaches and went on to establish societies on individual islands. This focus led me to consider a second theoretical orientation, one which derived from Helen Reeves Lawrence’s ethnomusicological case study of the music/sound culture of another Pacific Island environment, Manihiki atoll (located in the north of the Cook Islands group). In an article published in 1995 Reeves Lawrence attempted an analysis of the relationship between the (natural, environmental) soundscape of Manihiki and various indigenous cultural practices occurring upon it. Her discussion focused on the concept of henua, a Manihikan word she defined as referring to “the land, the people, the home island” (ibid: 15). As she explained, the term refers “both to the atoll itself (its physical attributes) and to the concept of ‘place’ and belonging to that place” (ibid). Reflecting the centrality of place, of henua, to Manihikan life, she identified the manner in which “[t]he juxtaposition of land and sea, both real and symbolic, is expressed through the artefacts of music and dance” on Manihiki (ibid).

The concept of an expressive culture premised on such a juxtaposition pre-occupied me in the early stages of my study of the Whitsundays and provided an important conceptual prism through which I attempted to refract the approaches I drew from Clifford. In several senses I felt that Reeves Lawrence’s summary description of a central aspect of Manihikan cultural life was equally applicable to the subject of my study. But the shifting, mutating, multi-cultural phenomena I was analysing were obviously very different from the discrete and self-contained ones she was concerned with. Consequently, one question that motivated my research was whether the concept of henua was relevant to the processes and histories I wished to examine.

This line of inquiry became fruitful when I shifted perspective. Drawing back, it became apparent that Reeves Lawrence’s holistic, ecological model of sound space and human community was essentially similar to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s notion of humans forming part of an interactive ecology. One of the central notions that Deleuze and Guattari employ is that species (of various kinds), society and the material world operate in an integrated, holistic manner – a process Guattari (1993) has referred to as “machinic heterogenesis”. Being elements within this, sound and music are therefore deeply connected to, interdependent with and expressive of the whole system. But for Deleuze and Guattari music is not simply a form that embodies and/or reflects aspects of territories (and the machinic heterogenesis of cultures) but also one that has the capacity to modify, destabilise or even deracinate ‘territories’ (i.e. physical-geographical spaces, the socio-cultural interactions that occur in them and the holistic interaction of these). Deleuze and Guattari refer to such activities as *deterritorialisations* and conceive of these as the necessary precursors to subsequent *reterritorialisations* that transform the territories.³

In order to attempt to understand and analyse music’s role in establishing and – as importantly – reiterating new social-cultural regimes, I departed from Deleuzian and Guattarian orthodoxy and re-drafted the de-/re- territorialising paradigm in another form; one crystallised in a single term and process, that of *recreation*. For an author engaged in
critical analysis, the word/concept cleaves enticingly. Its first aspect is the commonly understood notion of recreation as an activity that refreshes and revives individuals or groups, (implicitly) regenerating energies sufficiently to allow participants to return to everyday normalities of work and regular domicile. (This characterises the ostensible raison d’etre and intended experience of tourism.) The second meaning, which has slipped into the etymological shadows, roughly in parallel with the ascendancy of the first (as Capitalism has increasingly structured work and leisure), is – more literally – that of re-creation, of revising and making anew in order to facilitate recreation⁴. The two are obviously associated and complementary but their relationship is highly specific; it involves a set of assumptions about the purpose, practice and results of re-creation engineered for recreation that this book addresses, in various ways, during its account. Indeed, the dual emphasis (recreation/ re-creation) characterises the fundamental nature and dynamic of the cultural phenomena I describe and analyse in Chapters 2-11.

The conceptual reference points referred to above enabled me to gain enough of a purchase on the subject of this book to present some preliminary hypotheses on its subject at the Pacific Inter-Science Congress in Suva in late 1997 (in the somewhat unlikely form of a contribution to a panel addressing the topic of Tourism and Sustainable Development in the Pacific⁵). But while the early period of my historical study was coming into focus, I was still struggling for a way of understanding and approaching the nature of the post-War music culture of the Islands’ resorts. Fortuitously, another research project provided the final keys with which to unlock and unravel aspects of the cultural history that I attempt to animate in the following pages.

The project in question was my editing of an anthology of new critical writing on the subject of exoticism in post-War popular music (which was published in 1999 under the title Widening The Horizon). The musical auteurs, albums and performances analysed in the volume shared a common aspect of their being premised on the allure and frisson of cultural otherness communicated within a comfortable and entertaining context. My experience of working with Shuhei Hosokawa, Rebecca Leydon, Karl Neuenfeldt and Tim Taylor, the authors of individual chapters; of co-authoring two chapters with Jon Fitzgerald; and of writing a historical/theoretical overview for the book’s Introduction, provided with me a set of theoretical perspectives from which the Whitsunday histories discussed in this volume began to appear far more approachable and comprehensible. In particular, the authors’ analyses of the character, routes and impulses of various exoticist practices (enacted by different groups and individuals in different cultural and industrial positions to markedly different ends) alerted me to the potential plurality of exoticism and the need to analyse the character of individual articulations rather than assuming homogeneity to the phenomenon. Another facet of the book with which I immediately engaged was that of musical archipelagism.

The notion of archipelagism, and its relevance and applicability to understandings of music culture, has been explored in the music and writings of Japanese composer/performer Haruomi Hosono and, in a consideration of his work in Widening The Horizon, by Japanese cultural theorist Shuhei Hosokawa. In a critical survey of Hosono’s (so-called) ‘Soy Sauce Music’ trilogy of albums, Hosokawa summarised Hosono’s interest in archipelagoes in the following terms:
The isolation of islands, surrounded by seas, can facilitate degrees of cultural autonomy but, at the same time, their very accessibility allows them to act as cultural crossroads where hybridisation frequently occurs. (1999: 121)

Hosono identifies such locations as productive of a type of “island music [shima uta]” which he characterises as “a melange [gottani]”, “a music made up of heterogeneous elements, blended by local people within a local milieu” (1975: unpaginated). Hosokawa characterises this viewpoint, later expanded by Hosono (1984, 1992), in terms of the archipelago idealised as “an alchemical place of cultural plurality” (1999: 121).

Many of these characterisations are relevant for considerations of the Whitsundays as a specific archipelago. But again, similarly to using Reeves Lawrence’s paper as a comparative study, there is a mis-fit. The paradigmatic archipelago that inspired Hosono in the 1970s was that of Ryukyu (Okinawa)⁶, a chain of islands in the far south of Japan, close to Taiwan. Ryukyu has fought to preserve its distinct culture – and the musical style which has recently reasserted itself through the work of artists such as Shoukichi Kina and Nenes – once, against Japanese imperialism and, more recently, against the North American culture which has flooded into the main island of Okinawa since the establishment of a major US military base there in 1946. In this sense, Ryukyu can be seen to embody the dynamics between cultural heritage (and purity) and outside influence (and, of course, the emergence of hybridity). Again, the contemporary Whitsundays slip out of this (idealising) archipelagist frame by virtue of lacking a residual core culture – but again, at least part of the archipelagist frame pertains (with regard to the continuation and re-creation of Ngaro culture in a series of displaced contexts).

Despite the differences in subject cultures, aspects of Hosono and Hosokawa’s ideas of archipelagism gave me a further point of purchase on my specific project. Retaining the fragmented – “alchemical” – sign of the archipelago proposed by Hosono and Hosokawa, it is possible to propose an archipelagist frame that does not require such a (continuing and resistant) cultural core. Syncretising my referent theories, throughout this volume I retain a perception of the manner in which “the juxtaposition of land and sea, both real and symbolic [can be] expressed through the artefacts of music and dance” (Reeves Lawrence, 1996: 15) and, simultaneously, how “the isolation of islands, surrounded by seas can facilitate degrees of cultural autonomy but, at the same time . . . allows them to act as cultural crossroads where hybridisation frequently occurs” (Hosokawa, 1999: 121).

History wrote the final section of this volume. At penultimate draft stage I was informed of the inaugural ‘Paddling Through History’ festival being held in the Whitsundays in November 2000, an event that returned Ngaro descendants, their music and dance to the archipelago. This sublime historical loop suggested that the Whitsundays had an alchemy as potent as that imagined by Hosokawa for Ryukyu. The moment enabled me to revisit themes and associations from earlier periods (and chapters) in the concluding section of the book. In particular, the final passages of my analysis explore the notion of an historical reclamation and reassertion in which the proponents are involved in re-creating a cultural presence in a modern syncretic context. The project here is of the forging a new henua appropriate to an archipelagic context split between the resort industries and new authorities of the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
Authority. As this should underline, this volume should be subtilled ‘Volume One’, since the complex history outlined in its pages is still in a vital, vibrant phase in which cultural identities are being developed and communicated through music, dance and the expanded cultural environment of the Islands.

End Notes
2. Clifford’s discussion combined this identification of a research “task” (ibid) with another associated emphasis, that of regarding “hybrid cosmopolitan experiences” as just as worthy of serious analysis as “rooted, native ones” (ibid). Interpreting “cosmopolitan” in its widest sense, this emphasis also appealed.
3. My discussions here draw on the work of Andrew Murphie (1996) and also reflect a dialogue with Ian Buchanan on a previous draft of this Introduction.
5. I had originally submitted a paper to this conference at the behest of Barbara Smith, from the University of Hawai‘i, who was attempting to organise a music panel there. In the event, my paper was the only one on music to be offered and accepted. Panel-less, my paper was redirected to a Tourism Studies strand organised by David Harrison. Here I was required to address the theme of ‘sustainable development’. While the audience was polite enough to listen to my paper and respond; my topic was, to say the least, somewhat tangential to the main focus of the panel it was presented in. To my surprise it was also chosen for inclusion in an anthology of papers collated and edited by Harrison. Due to various delays, Harrison’s anthology has not yet appeared in print. The reader curious to compare both versions of my Whitsundays’ research will be principally struck by the awkward nature of my engagement with the concept of sustainable development in the earlier piece. Given that each and every debate on an issue contributes to the formation of ideas I should acknowledge Harrison’s various attempts to persuade me refigure my work to fit his Tourism Studies frame as a contribution to this monograph.
6. It is also pertinent to acknowledge that Hosono’s interest in the archipelagic space of the Ryukyu Islands was initially inspired by the Caribbean as imagined and explored by Van Dyke Parks on his albums Discover America (1972) and Clang of the Yankee Reaper (1975). (See Fitzgerald and Hayward [1999: 94-113] for further discussion.)
Contact, Corroborees and Exile

ABORIGINES AND EUROPEANS ON THE MID-NORTH QUEENSLAND COAST (FROM THE 1840s-1930s)

North Queensland has long been a frontier province of Aboriginal Australia and, in many ways, it still is... It was the last area of Eastern Australia to be colonised and was settled largely by experienced colonists from the south where settlement had begun over two generations previously... In far North Queensland, fishermen in the pearlshell and bêche-de-mer industries needing the labour of previously uncontacted or little contacted Aborigines made a frontier of the sea which was in many ways the most interesting of all. Thus there was in North Queensland a frontier contact situation unparalleled elsewhere in Australia.

(Loos, 1982: xvii-xviii)

At the time of initial British exploration of northern Queensland, the Whitsunday Islands and adjacent coast were inhabited by members of the Ngaro Aboriginal clan¹ and also appear to have been regularly visited by members of the Gia clan, from the area south of (present-day) Bowen. Other Aboriginal groups in the vicinity included the Juru, in the area north west of (present-day) Bowen, and the Biria, around the (present-day) area of Collinsville. Archaeological evidence, surviving rock art and early accounts suggest that these clans, while distinct, enjoyed a considerable degree of interaction. The Whitsunday coast clans also appear to have regularly participated in larger regional events with clans from further north, including the Wulgurugaba people, who lived on Palm Island, the adjacent coastal strip down south to (present-day) Townsville and on Magnetic Island. Historical accounts indicate that Cape Upstart, between the (present-day) towns of Ayr and Bowen, appears to have been a regular site for such gatherings. The broad regional community which participated in these events, and subsequently interacted in various other contexts (see Chapter 4), is now commonly referred to as the Birrigubba².
Archeological evidence suggests that Ngaro were based on Whitsunday, Hook and South Molle Islands but led a semi-nomadic life, moving to and between other islands and the mainland to fish, hunt birds and mammals and to collect fruit (Barker, 2001). The Whitsunday Islands began to be regularly visited by British ships in the 1840s. At this time contact between the Ngaro and mariners was brief, exploratory and (seemingly) incident-free. It was not until the late 1850s, with the establishment of the towns of Bowen and Rockhampton and the development of sugar-cane farming in the region, that Euro-Australians had regular contact with Whitsunday Islanders and adjacent Aboriginal clans. In the period 1860-80 friction arose when smaller vessels were met by Aborigines who resented and/or distrusted their presence, provoking several violent incidents including attacks on a landing party on Thomas Island in 1859, on Lindeman Island in 1861 and on a ship near Cid Island in 1878. Following the later incident a detachment of native police were sent from Bowen to ‘pacify’ the region. Given that the 1878 incident was the last reported attack by Aboriginal groups upon settlers or passing vessels in the area, the native police’s forceful presence and actions appear to have had the effect the Queensland authorities desired.

I. Corroborees and the Exploration of Difference in the 1840s-1850s

The principal written record of aspects of Aboriginal culture in the mid-north coast region of Queensland during the 1840s-50s is that provided by James Morrill. While subsequent chapters of this book describe and analyse the nature of various musical interactions facilitated by organised tourism in the region, the first musical contact and communications between local indigenous people and Euro-Australians resulted from the sustained and involuntary ‘tourism’ of Morrill and a group of five other individuals who survived the wreck of the merchant ship Peruvian on Horseshoe Reef and came ashore near Cape Cleveland, to the west of (present-day) Townsville, in 1846. The group were discovered and befriended by a local Wulgurugaba community and resided with them for approximately one year.

Morrill and his companions left their Wulgurugaba host community after attending a major ceremonial gathering of mid-north coast Queensland communities, which he described as “number[ing] over a thousand souls” from “about ten different tribes” (1896: 22). Believing that European settlers resided further south, Morrill and his three surviving companions made the acquaintance of a “tribe” from the north of the Whitsunday coast attending the gathering (possibly the Juru or Gia) and “stole away” with them with them (ibid). Morrill then resided with a group based around the area of the present day town of Bowen for two years before returning north, after his companions died of ill-health, and residing with another group of Wulgurugaba Aborigines until 1861, when he located a Euro-Australian settlement and, to the apparent disappointment of his hosts, re-entered colonial society. In 1865 he became one of the first residents of the newly established town of Bowen and died there shortly after. In his final days he resided close to the increasingly dispossessed and marginalised Gia and Juru clans, members of whom were reported to have lamented his decline and demise in a traditional manner:
Crowds of aborigines, hearing that his end was near, congregated in front of the cottage, and their wailing went on until he passed away. (Reid, 1954: 66)\(^5\)

An account of Morrill’s experiences, transcribed and edited by Edmund Gregory, was published in 1863 (with a subsequent, revised and annotated version appearing in 1896\(^6\)) and includes several descriptions of the reaction of Aboriginal groups to the arrival of the alien Europeans in their territory (and, indeed, cosmology).

The first of Morrill’s accounts describes how, after a few weeks ashore, the castaways encountered a group of local Aborigines “from two tribes” who indicated to Morrill and his party that they wanted them to accompany them back to their main camp. As Morrill recorded:

> On signifying our intention to go with them to their camp they were very glad, and wanted us to join with them in a corroboree, but we were too weak; thinking, however, it might please them to sing something, I gave out the words of a hymn I knew:

> God moves in a mysterious way  
> His wonders to perform, &c.

> to the end, which we sang, and which amazed them much. (1896: 19)\(^7\)

Before proceeding to discuss Morrill’s account in greater detail, it is pertinent to consider his usage of the term ‘corroboree’. Its Australian-English usage appears to derive from a word identified by colonists as spoken by an Aboriginal clan in the Sydney region. Jakelin Troy (1994) has identified the original term as *garabara*, referring to a style of dancing, which became modified to the (similar sounding) *corroboree* in English language usage during the 1800s. In its original sense, as a word adopted by both Euro-Australian settlers and, through a process of pidgin transmission, communicated to other Aboriginal language groups outside the Sydney area, it embodied the ambiguity of colonial perception, describing Aboriginal activities, which were either celebratory or warlike (or, presumably, both). By the mid-late 1860s, as the term became more widespread within Australian-English, it was usually used in the former sense – i.e. to describe various kinds of song and/or dance activities performed by groups of Aborigines (and perceived as celebratory by outsiders) – and, more generally, to describe a range of festive get-togethers\(^8\). In this usage the term appears to have denoted two different kinds of events: the first a traditional, sacred ceremony, often restricted to a particular group (such as male initiates, or women) and the second, a more topical, inclusive community occasion.

Morrill’s account of the first corroboree he witnessed clearly refers to one of the latter forms. His account is notable in that it describes the Aboriginal group’s invitation to their visitors to participate in a communicative, inclusive musical and dance activity, the Euro-Australians’ refusal to participate and their alternative presentation of one of their own sacred performance rituals, the singing of a Christian hymn, as a compensatory gesture. Given their nervousness, and (presumably) desire to keep on good terms with their new hosts, the grounds for the substitution appear to those of a lack of conversance with the dance and/or vocal performances required for the corroboree. Quite what the Aborigines made of the (very different) activity of Christian hymn singing performed for them is difficult to imagine.

The corroborees described by Morrill in his account appear to have had a more complex communicative function than the term’s common use to describe a festive occasion
would suggest. The second corroboree that Morrill refers to, which the Europeans also declined to participate in, took place at the main camp of the group who had discovered them. This occasion was one in which the difference of the shipwreck party appears to have been explored through processes of imitation (and misinterpretation):

... we halted for awhile and they wanted us to join in a corroboree again, but not being able they had it amongst themselves. Some of them dressed themselves very fantastically, with shirts, trousers, coats, &c., which we had saved from the wreck, and a more ludicrous scene could not be imagined; one with only the sleeve of a shirt on, another with a pair of trousers – his legs put through the bottoms, and another hind part before. They tore the leaves out of the books and fastened them in their hair and on their bodies: altogether they were a strange medley. (ibid: 20)

The transformation of book pages from items of stored cultural data to bodily decoration aptly symbolises the lack of mutual knowledges between the cultures (and recalls a myriad of similar encounters in western anthropological literature and readings of the nature of non-western artefacts and practices in general). The donning of unfamiliar garments and the usage of foreign objects as ornamentation also represents a form of exotic display – a means of exploring, enjoying and (ultimately) ‘taming’ the challenge of difference inherent in their form.

The corroboree described above preceded a larger scale and more complex communicative event described by Morrill as a “grand corroboree” (ibid). As Morrill detailed, this event was staged by the original group of Aborigines who had encountered his party for the benefit of a gathering of various regional clans at a camp some eight miles away from the scene of the performance described above. This grand corroboree included song, dance, costume, body-decoration and dramatic revelation:

The first thing they did was to lay us down and cover us over with dried grass, to prevent our being seen till an appointed time. They then collected from all quarters to the number of about fifty or sixty – men, women and children – and sat down in a circle; those who discovered us stepped into the centre, dressed up in our clothes, with a little extra paint, danced one of their dances, at the same time haranguing all present, recounting how they discovered us, in a rude sing-song tone, from whence they had brought us, and all they knew about us, all of which greatly surprised them. (ibid)

Having constructed a multi-faceted performance, in which the Euro-Australians were invoked and described, the performers then executed a coup de theatre, switching from a representational/descriptive mode (and discourse) to a direct physical presentation of their subject. As Morrill describes:

... and then as a finale we were uncovered, and led forth into the centre in triumph... The first sight of us – having white skins and being fully dressed, produced a panic, and they scattered in all directions. After a little while, however, being reassured, they returned in twos and threes, and a few of the more courageous ones came near to look at us; by and by they came nearer, felt us over, examined us more minutely, and satisfied themselves there was no need to fear. (ibid)
In theatrical terms, the performance invites comparison to Christopher Marlowe’s play *Dr Faustus*, which was banned from public performance in Switzerland shortly after its initial presentation in England in 1594, after terrified audiences fled performances, convinced that actual devils had appeared on stage at a climactic point in the narrative (when thunder-flashes went off and costumed actors leapt through the smoke). There are obvious parallels between this response and the corroboree described by Morrill but the Aboriginal performance had the greater *coup de théâtre* – their ‘devils’ were real.

While the only commentary that Morrill makes upon this performance is that the songs were “rude” (which we might understand as meaning ‘limited in melodic appeal to western ears’), the overall performance appears to conform to the tendency identified by Reed whereby:

> Although a performance was often impromptu, providing a choreographical presentation of daily life, events of history [etc.] it was often planned well in advance . . . Mime was an essential ingredient in the performance. The effect was heightened by the representation of animals . . . It was an imitative and expressive art which had the effect of linking human beings with the animal creation in a cosmic brotherhood [sic] which emphasised the unity of men [sic], the animals who were the cultural heroes of the Dreamtime, and their common descendants. (1969: 47)

Reed’s characterisation of processes of imitation, communality and bonding appear to have been manifest in the corroboree in question, albeit expanded to include novel players into the “cosmic brotherhood”.

As described by Morrill, the performance seems to have been a remarkably sophisticated one. Indeed, continuing comparisons to European theatre, it has close similarities to those early plays, ballets and operas which recounted (sensationalised and exoticised) versions of the adventures of European mariners, such as captains James Cook and William Bligh in the South Seas, for European audiences. These included the stage spectacle *Ornai, or a Trip Round the World*, which ran at London’s Covent Garden for two years (1785-87); the French ballet *La Mort du Captaine Cook*, performed in Paris in 1788; and the pantomime *The Pirates, or The Calamities of Captain Bligh* performed in London in 1790. While Australia played little part in these western fantasies, which principally focused on Tahiti as a realm of ‘uncivilised’ sensory bliss, these entertainments all included representations of Pacific peoples, their clothes, gestures, argot, music and dance based on the interpretation of secondary references to actual Pacific cultures. Drawing the parallel further in this regard, it is intriguing to speculate whether the “rude songs” performed at the “grand corroboree” that sounded so uncouth to Morrill’s ear included the mimicry of the voices of the Euro-Australians heard earlier by their discoverers singing Christian hymns (the sounds of which were presumably as odd in melody and delivery to Aboriginal ears as their speech and songs were to the Euro-Australians).

What is also significant in Morrill’s report is the combination of the ‘explanatory’/representational account and the revelation of the ‘real’ Euro-Australians. If the purpose of the performance presented in the corroboree was solely to communicate the information that the Euro-Australians had been encountered and brought to the main camp, simply showing them would have sufficed. Instead, the purpose of the performance appears to have been
twofold. Firstly, to provide a representation and interpretation of the Euro-Australians which could be assimilated by the audience prior to their actual presentation (with these representations and codings then available to be ‘projected’ on to them); and second, to simply prepare the audience for the shock of racial/cultural otherness they were about to experience.

The mimicry involved in the corroboree also merits comment here. In his study of the refracted musical exoticism of Japanese composer/performer Haruomi Hosono, Shuhei Hosokawa invokes Homi Bhaba’s discussion of mimicry as a strategic response of the colonised to colonial power (and its appearances) (Hosokawa, 1999: 116). Hosokawa’s invocation of Bhaba precedes a discussion of the different role of mimicry in Japan, a culture not (so clearly) colonised by the West but which nevertheless has aspects that can be understood as “strategic responses of the ruled occasioned by mimetic desire” (ibid). Given the Aboriginal performers’ negligible knowledge of the nature (and power) of the trans-national institution of the British Empire that the (seemingly hapless) castaways emanated from; the representational strategies and mimetic desires evident in the corroboree obviously cannot be represented as:

... the representation of a difference that is in itself a process of disavowal ... a sign of a double articulation: a complex strategy ... which “appropriates” the Other as it visualises power. (Bhaba, 1994: 86)

In this brief, all-too-sweet, pre-colonial moment, no such “disavowals” of colonial “power” were necessary. Rather, the Euro-Australians were exotic ‘others’ of ambiguous origins, the shock of whose foreignness – introduced in the corroboree’s “representation of a difference” (ibid) – soon wore off as they were examined and “felt over” by Aborigines at the camp. In this sense then, being initially represented in exotic approximation by fragments of clothing donned by the performers as they re-enacted their discovery, Morrill and his companions were, more simply, a novelty; their unusual garments and appearance, an exotic visual sign (of uncertain significance), their presence essentially unthreatening, their attraction one which waned as their difference was examined. But, as Morrill detailed, the grand corroboree described above was not a one-off event, its success led to a series of subsequent re-stagings.

While the directors of the original (and subsequent) corroboree performances were not motivated by the financial ambitions of the European entrepreneurs who mounted shows such as Omai and The Pirates on European stages in the late 1700s, or those who later profited from tourist entertainment in the Whitsundays following the region’s Euro-Australian settlement, they clearly gained some kind of ‘cultural capital’11 from the event. As Morrill noted, on the evening after the first performance, many attendees returned and:

... brought numbers of their relations and friends from the near tribes, and in the evening they had another corroboree, explaining all about us. When they had finished they came and fetched us into their midst, as on the previous evening, for exhibition. This was repeated on six or eight successive evenings as members of the more distant tribes heard of the finding of white people and were anxious to see them. (1896: 21)

Indeed so predictable was the routine of the performance that its cast:
. . . became weary of it, and we expressed our disinclination to appear; but it was no use, they would not be denied, and threatened to kill us; so we thought it prudent not to put them to the test, although we did not think they would do so but only intended to frighten us. (ibid)

But, as with all entertainment which relies heavily on novelty elements, the show soon satiated its local audience and, as Morrill recounted:

Eventually matters assumed their usual course at the camp . . . As the novelty of the situation wore away, and as our strength became established, we began to join them in their search for roots and other kinds of food, and so learned our first lesson in bush life. (ibid)

As the reader will be aware, the Aborigines attending the novel corroboree performances described above were soon to experience different shocks to these performances’ principal coups de theatre – shocks of a far greater magnitude engendered by the very objects of their exoticist representation, as their complex culture and hold on traditional territories were rapidly undermined by the steady encroachment of Euro-Australian settlers (and the various individual acts of violence and dispossession perpetrated by them). By the early 20th Century the majority of the clans encountered by Morrill had been exiled from their traditional lands. Most were relocated to the outskirts of developing regional towns such as Proserpine, Bowen and Townsville. Some young men also entered the marine resource industry, working away from home, usually further up the north coast, and others were removed to remote inland settlements\(^\text{12}\).

\[\text{II. Ngaro Songs and Performance (1900-1930)}\]

While the Aboriginal clans of the Whitsunday archipelago and adjacent coast were increasingly exposed to contact with Euro-Australian settlers, traders and authorities in the fifty years following the period during which Morrill lived with coastal clans, little appears to have been written of their culture and customs. Contemporary knowledge of Aboriginal culture in the archipelago and adjacent coast is principally derived from observations made of the remnant groups of Island Aborigines who lived on Lindeman Island and adjacent to the lighthouse on Dent Island\(^\text{13}\) until the 1920s. The only details of a specific song in extant accounts from the period are those noted by Joseph Hawkes, who lived on South Molle Island around 1900, managing its grazing lease for Burns, Philip & Co. In an account written in 1901 he recalls meeting a Ngaro male named Goolgatta who stopped at South Molle in a bark canoe whilst travelling between Double Cone Island and Whitsunday Island. Hawkes noted that Goolgatta was transporting a turtle to take over to present to the main camp on Whitsunday and that Goolgatta informed him that when:

. . . my tribe see the big turtle I bring them they will be glad and may sing the old corroboree song:

Goolgatta, the smart fellow,
Goolgatta the good fellow,
Goolgatta brings the big turtle,
and now we will all eat until it is finished,
Boongooner Goolgatta, bookoo boongooner Goolgatta

and the piccininnyes\textsuperscript{15} will all dance and be happy, and I Goolgatta, will be happy too,
because it makes me feel good inside when I see the people of my tribe happy and
laughing, for then I know that their bellies are getting full. (1901: np\textsuperscript{16})

From this account, the “old corroboree song” referred to would appear to be a lyrical
(and unrecorded melodic) fragment into which the name or names of the food providers
could be inserted. This suggests a dual function for the song, as both a formal ‘vote-of-
thanks’ for the provider of the food and as a festive expression of the pleasure of receiving
and consuming it.

Shortly after Hawkes recorded this account, the Ngaro presence in the archipelago was
undermined by a series of factors arising from the development of the Islands and adjacent
coast by Euro-Australian settlers. In a classic example of assumption of ‘terra nullius’\textsuperscript{17}, the
Queensland Government ignored the presence of the Ngaro and blithely leased the islands
of the archipelago (at minimal, tokenistic cost) to almost anyone who could be bothered
to apply for one. Through such measures, the archipelagic nomads found themselves
trespassers on their ancestral lands.

In the early 1900s the remaining Ngaro population of Whitsunday Island were relocated
to the mainland following the declaration of the (entire) island as a timber reserve in 1902\textsuperscript{18}. One group, which was relocated to Bell’s Gully, near Bowen, comprised the five children of
Wungu, a Ngaro woman (known by Euro-Australians as ‘Nell’)\textsuperscript{19}; her sons Charlie, Toby, Tom
and Willy and daughter Leonte (who were given the surname ‘Prior’\textsuperscript{20} by Euro-Australian
authorities upon their relocation)\textsuperscript{21}.

The Bell’s Gully settlement was populated by families and individuals from various clans
from the Whitsunday Islands and the areas around Bowen, Strathmore, Nebo, Collinsville
and Ayr (clans which were part of the regional Birrigubba community whose “grand corro-
borees” of the mid-1800s were described by James Morrill [above]). Despite differences in
dialect, song and dance repertoire, the Birrigubba can be characterised as an extended
culture and language group that maintained both an internal cultural diversity and a
collective identity enacted and affirmed by regular inter-clan gatherings.

The Bell’s Gully community appears to have operated on a reasonably stable basis
between the early 1900s and 1912, with individuals working for outside employers on farms
or, in Tom Prior’s case, at the Whitsunday Island sawmill. For reasons unknown, local
authorities decided to disband the camp in 1912 and achieved this by sending in a police
detachment that managed to apprehend around 100 residents, including the Priors and their
children. Other individuals and families retreated into the bush, some – as discussed in
Chapter 11 – eventually establishing themselves as permanent residents around Proserpine.

Residents seized at Bell’s Gully were transported by horse-drawn wagon to Bowen. They
were then crowded on to a small ship and transferred to the Yarrabah Aboriginal mission,
near Cairns. At Yarrabah they were housed in cramped conditions with Aborigines from
areas of far North Queensland (such as Coen, Bloomfield, Daintree and Mapoon) whose lan-
guages were unintelligible to them. After a month the Priors and several other Birrigubba
families escaped and headed south towards Bowen, only to be detained by Euro-Australian
armed troopers and interned at the Hull River station, twenty miles east of Tully. Following the devastation of the camp by Cyclone Leonta in 1918 the inhabitants were relocated en masse to a new settlement on Palm Island, located close to the town of Ingham, three hundred kilometres north of the Whitsundays. (See Chapter 4 for discussion of the Ngaro/Birrigubba community on Palm Island during the 1920s-1930s.)

While the number of Aborigines residing in the Whitsundays in the early 20th Century was insufficient to mount corroborees of the scale described by Morrill in the mid-1800s, these earlier events were perpetuated in local folkloric memory. Lachlan Nicolson, who lived on Lindeman Island in the 1920s, recorded in his (incomplete and unpublished) memoirs that one of the Island’s Aboriginal community, known as Frank, was well known as a community storyteller and often related accounts of the large-scale corroborees of his ancestors (and other aspects of Aboriginal folklore). While Nicolson did not describe details of Frank’s accounts, the topic alone suggests nostalgia for a time before the decimation and dispossession of regional clans.

Nicolson’s memoirs also record that a local Aborigine known only as Percy, who resided on Lindeman Island during the 1920s and early 1930s, commemorated aspects of the region’s history. Percy was a skilled mimic and, in addition to a repertoire of animal impressions, was known for his imitation of Captain Cook. Over 150 years after Cook’s ‘voyage of discovery’ along the coast, and some eighty years after Morrill and his fellow shipwreck victims were ceremoniously presented to a gathering of coastal clans, Percy entertained the Aboriginal community with a burlesque impression of Captain Cook. This appears to have been largely conveyed by vocal performance with Percy adopting a “superior manner” (ibid), a high-pitched voice and a frequent use of long, obscure words. This historical caricature was also inserted within a particular narrative that further underlined early cultural mis-communication, relating the story of how Cook’s expedition had given flour to a group of Aborigines as a gift, only to have them mix it with water and daub it on their bodies as a decoration. Despite their declining numbers, the Aboriginal community’s cultural heritage, and their ability to comment on the culture of the European aliens who had dispossessed them, evidently remained strong. Some 135 years after European theatrical representations of Cook’s voyages had briefly entertained audiences on the stages of London and Paris, the legacy of Cook’s intervention into Aboriginal history was clearly evident in the increasing Euro-Australian colonisation of the Whitsunday Islands. His historical presence cast a powerful shadow.

Another notable local Aborigine who continued to live on Lindeman Island in the 1920s-1930s after the departure of the Island’s last group of Aboriginal residents was an individual commonly referred to as Billy Moogerah. While there are conflicting accounts of his place of birth and parentage, it is now generally agreed that he was born on the coast, separated from his parents in infancy and moved to Bowen, where he was taken into foster-care by local family named Mackenzie and given the forename Billy. ‘Moogerah’, the name by which he appears to have been referred to by other Aborigines, is a Birrigubba language term for ‘bush man’. In the early 1920s Billy Moogerah lived on Lindeman Island as an employee of the Nicholson family, who acquired the Island’s lease in 1923 and began one of the region’s first tourist operations, catering for occasional visitors. In addition to his general duties Billy Moogerah was popular as an entertainer. Lachlan Nicolson’s memoirs record that
Billy Moogerah frequently performed “native songs” (a description which presumably refers to a local Aboriginal language repertoire) and that he was a talented instrumentalist. Nicolson lists Billy Moogerah as performing on the accordion, mouth organ and a homemade “violin” constructed from a kerosene tin, with a wooden neck and strings made from fishing line. Nicolson noted that Billy Moogerah performed upon the latter instrument “with great gusto” and formally introduced each number as if on stage. Even from this sketchy account it is possible to see Moogerah as a figure performing in a bi-cultural context, one in which his formality in presenting performances on an home-made instrument suggests, at very least, a slightly arch impression of Euro-Australian cultural traditions.

During the mid-late 1920s several Torres Strait Islanders also entered into the Nicolson family’s employ, working alongside Billy Moogerah on Lindeman Island. As Chapter 3 details, at least one of these, Dicky Lahou (also known as Dicky Poid), knew and was able to perform a considerable repertoire of Torres Strait Island songs and dances. It is probable – given the minuscule population of Lindeman Island at the time, their personal friendship and shared musicality – that Billy Moogerah’s acquaintance with Lahou exposed him to Torres Strait Islander songs and that these may have entered the repertoire he entertained guests with.

Aside from Nicolson’s memoirs, one of the few other accounts of Aboriginal cultural performance in the Whitsundays is a brief description provided by an unidentified author who resided in the region prior to World War Two. This relates that:

A popular member of one of the early tribes was Cobbo, a full-blooded Aborigine who composed some of the songs which were sung at the corroborees performed after the white mans coming. Cobbo’s most famous effort was his Farewell Song which was still being sung by the Torres Strait Islanders Awati and Sarli who worked for Captain and Mrs Burt Hallam in the early 1940s. (nd quoted by Eaton, p.c. July 199731)

While ‘Cobbo’ does not appear to have been a name associated with Billy Moogerah, the use of ‘Cobber’, and various derivatives, from the late 1800s on in Australian English to describe a friend and/or likeable person, in combination with the other descriptive references provided by the anonymous writer, suggests that the individual referred to may have been Billy Moogerah32. But whatever the identity of the individual, the reference to his “composing” songs, and specifically the Farewell Song, is significant. In particular, the reference to “his” Farewell Song tends to confirm Cobbo’s identity as Moogerah, since the Farewell Song wasn’t simply sung later by Torres Strait Islanders on Hayman Island; it was – as Chapter 3 discusses in detail – a song popular in the Torres Strait during the 1920s-1940s which Lahou would probably have known (and could have been able to perform)33. An acceptance of this account (in advance of its detailed corroboration in Chapter 3) does not constitute a denial and/or effacement of Billy Moogerah’s/Cobbo’s authorship of the song, but rather suggests that this authorship comprised an adaptation of an existing song in a manner entirely congruent with the multiple modifications and adaptations of the Farewell Song discussed in Chapter 3 (and of those songs discussed in Chapter 4).

Whether Billy Moogerah was the “Cobbo” referred to above or not, his contribution to the music culture of the Islands’ emergent tourist industry appears to have been the last
instance of a local Aboriginal performer working in the archipelago in this capacity until the 1990s. Subsequent entertainers were primarily recruited from Torres Strait Islander, Euro-Australian, European or Polynesian communities, and brought their own songs, dances and stories to the region, re-creating elements of their source cultures on the beaches and resort stages of an increasingly popular tourist zone. Despite the lack of awareness of any of their participants, many of the tourist-facilitated ‘corroborees’ staged in Whitsunday resorts from the 1930s on both attempted to foster a communality and represent and construct entertainment from cultural difference in ways which resembled aspects of the Aboriginal corroborees described by Morrill and the ‘cabaret’ of Percy on Lindeman Island (described above). Despite the crucial difference between the Aboriginal expression of deep connection to place, environment and lifestyle through culture and the fluid deterritorialising and reterritorialising of facilities, institutions and populations in the 20th Century tourist zone of the archipelago; the performative strategies involved in elaborations of cultural difference discussed above invite comparison to the practices analysed in subsequent chapters.

End Notes

1. Also occasionally referred to in historical records as the Googaburra or Ngalindi. Ngaro is now the standard term.

2. Also referred to as Birragubba or Birri Gubba in various sources.

3. A force composed of Aborigines from outside the area, commanded by Euro-Australian officers.

4. There is some confusion as to this individual’s surname. In his preface to a revised version of Morrill’s account of life with Aboriginal clans in the 1850s and 1860s, Edmund Gregory stated that: “[t]he subject of this singularly interesting narrative, who gave as his name James Morrill . . . ultimately proved to be Murrells” (1896: v). Whatever Gregory’s reasons for asserting this, ‘Morrill’ remains the most commonly cited version of the individual’s name and is used throughout this volume.

5. Although Reid states that his account derives from “old residents of Bowen who remembered the day Morrill died” (ibid), his attempt to identify Morrill’s “last thoughts” appears to suggest a significant degree of subjective interpretation to his account.

6. To which all references in this text apply.

7. As Morrill also described, the group also read the Bible, prayed and sang hymns at night to keep their spirits up in the early period of their association with the Aboriginal party who escorted them to the main camp (ibid).

8. This etymological discussion derives from Wilkes (1978: 93).


10. The performance of Omai included a sequence of choral singing set in Tonga that was accompanied (on-stage) by players performing on exotic percussion instruments.

11. A term coined by Bourdieu to refer to a cultural benefit or ‘profit’ gained from ‘investment’,
performance of and adjudged knowledge/competency in the cultural 'economy' which forms
an intersecting sphere with the (fiscal) economy of Western civil society.

12. As Eric Loos has argued, this recruitment disrupted and demoralised Aboriginal communities
in both core marine resource areas, such as the Cape York Peninsula, and more marginal
ones such as the Whitsundays, Palm Island and Dunk Island. Such employment accelerated
the decline of traditional societies by depleting communities, as young men departed, and by
the introduction of various diseases upon their return (Loos, 1982: 153). The traditional cul-
ture of these communities was further eroded as a result of the "intimate contact with
Europeans, Asians, South Sea Islanders" and Aborigines who had established themselves in
the marine resource industries at this time (ibid: 155). As Loos emphasises:

Aborigines who had never left their tribal area found themselves stranded in Cooktown or
on Thursday Island. Direct evidence as to the effect of such new experiences on the
Aborigines is lacking but the effect must have been profound. (ibid)

13. Constructed in 1879.

14. These are not translated.

15. Children.


17. Terra Nullius was a doctrine held by the early colonial government that assumed that there
had been no prior ownership of land prior to European settlement (and, consequently, that
Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders had no land rights).

18. This designation followed forty years of sporadic logging on the Island, producing timber for
the development of Bowen, and the establishment of a sawmill by John Whitnall in 1895.

19. Wungu remained on Whitsunday Island and later died there.

20. 'Prior' is also spelt 'Pryor' in early accounts. I have used the spelling as adopted by Renarta
Prior as a standard throughout. Tom Prior, in particular, has regularly been referred to as
'Pryor' (although not in his autobiographical account edited by his daughter Renarta Prior
[1993]).

21. Despite their previous residence in the archipelago the family appears to have experienced
some degree of contact with outside communities over the preceding 20-30 years since Tom
Prior's son Peter has identified his father as of mixed Ngaro and Malay parentage and his
mother Emily of mixed Birrigubba and Melanesian parentage. (Prior, 1993: 1). (NB the term
'Malay' does not necessarily indicate [present-day] Malayan/Malaysian identity since it was
also used to refer to a broader South Asian/Indonesian archipelago identity in early 20th
Century Queensland.)

22. The present-day site of the Mission Beach resort area.

23. All references to these in the text are taken from (unpaginated) extracts provided by his son
Roy Nicolson, who now holds the manuscript.

24. The son of a Whitsunday Aborigine known as Ginny and a local (Euro-Australian) fisherman
Daniel (Bob) Dewar.

25. Despite his residence with the Ngaro community on Lindeman in this period Percy's birth-
place is unknown and it is unclear whether (either of) his parents were Ngaro.
26. A similar ‘mistake’ to that of the use of the book leaves described by Morrill (above).

27. In the form of *Omai* (London, 1785-87) and *La Mort du Capitaine Cook*, (Paris, 1788) referred to above. (See Wharples [1998] for further analysis of early European musical and theatrical representations of exotic – i.e. non-European – cultures.)

28. One account gives his father as the Ngaro elder known as Old Saturday and his mother as a Whitsunday Islander known only as Ginny (also mother of Frank, discussed in footnote 24 above). Thora Nicolson, who resided on Lindeman Island in the 1920s and 1930s, has given a different account, identifying his birthplace as Mackay (Bryce Barker, p.c. August 2000). Irene Butterworth also identifies his birthplace and community origin as on the coast (interview, August 2000).

29. This name might be interpreted as referring to his birth on the coast, distinguishing him from the Ngaro – the ‘sea people’.

30. Another employee at this time was a Ngaro woman named Daisy (who later married Euro-Australian and adopted Dudley as a surname). She worked with the Nicolson family until she got sick and returned to the mainland in the 1930s.

31. While I have not been able to source this quotation, it may derive from one of the many magazine articles William Lamond wrote about his life in the Whitsundays in this period.

32. Ngaro elder Irene Butterworth has no recollection of an individual known as ‘Cobbo’ ever being mentioned in any account from the 1920s and 1930s and concurred with the hypothesis that the individual might have been someone usually known by another name (interview, August 2000).

33. Also see Chapter 11 Section II for another aspect of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander musical communication.
CHAPTER TWO

Impromptu and Al Fresco

(MUSIC AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANISED TOURISM FROM THE 1930s–1950s)

When I walked up the beach that night, and it was a beautiful moonlit night, with the moon rising across the passage between Hook and Whitsunday Island . . . the moonlight was playing on the front of the resort main building and sitting on the steps were three people playing Hawaiian guitars, and I will never forget that scene. There was such a naturalness about it, and everything was just perfect.

(Henry Darwin, describing a visit to the Whitsundays in program one of the ABC Radio National series From Huts to Highrise [1990]?)

During the 1920s a number of Euro-Australians took up residence in the Whitsunday archipelago, keen to experience the joys of isolated self-sufficiency in what was (then) a pristine natural environment. While living conditions were not always as easy as were anticipated, many of the early settlers remained on their chosen islands for extended durations. One such resident was Henry Lamond. Lamond lived on South Molle Island from 1927-37, the period that saw the end of Aboriginal occupancy in the Islands and the first phase of organised tourism. In various books and newspaper and magazine articles, written during and after his period of residence, Lamond painted a picture of a simple, charming existence in a maze of islands where fruit and fish were plentiful and the days rolled on in a lazy, subtropical idyll. Such stories were ideal promotional material for the emergent Whitsunday tourist industry.

From the mid-1920s on a small number of travellers visiting the Islands during the summer season were accommodated at early (proto-) resort facilities established by the Nicolson family on Lindeman Island and the Busuttin family on St Bees Island. The facilities provided were basic, comprising dormitory-style bedrooms and communal dining/leisure areas, and were mostly advertised locally by word-of-mouth. Organised tourism began in earnest during the 1928/29 summer vacation period, in the form of a wildlife exploration camp (an early predecessor of contemporary ‘eco-tourism’) organised by the New South Wales school teacher and amateur marine biologist Edwin Montague (‘Monty’) Embury.
Embry had first visited the Whitsundays in 1927 as a member of a small scientific expedition organised by Sydney zoologist E.F. Pollock. Impressed by the natural beauty of the archipelago, Embry approached the Nicolson family about using the facilities on Lindeman as a base for a (commercially packaged) tour group. The first of these camps took place from mid-December 1928 to mid-January 1929, catering for a group of around one hundred tourists, many of whom were school teachers. The party was too large to be accommodated in the available buildings and the majority of guests slept in tents erected close by. During the day Melbourne Ward, an honorary associate of the Australian Museum in Sydney, introduced guests to local flora and fauna. At night they were entertained by musically proficient members of the party, who were organised into an ad hoc combo by the versatile Mr Ward.

While the repertoire of Ward’s ensemble was not recorded for posterity, we know a little about its musical style. A reporter from The Sydney Mail newspaper present at the camp described the group as an “up-to-date jazz band” (J.C.F., 1929: 12). Although the journalist’s description might appear somewhat surprising to the contemporary reader (given its time and the ensemble’s place of performance), some degree of qualification of this description can be provided with regard to the usage of the terms “jazz” and “jazz band” in 1920s’ Australia to describe (almost) any style of animated, medium-fast paced popular music (rather than jazz as the specific form we know today). However, as discussed in Section III below, Ward’s “jazz band” may well have been jazzier than might be assumed.

Although largely overlooked in the histories of Australian music, Ward was a notably versatile individual. He was born in Melbourne in 1903 to American parents. His father, Hugh, was managing director of J.C. Williamson’s music hall enterprise and his mother, Grace, was a professional pianist and singer known for her heartfelt rendition of ‘negro spiritual’ songs. As might be expected, given this background, Ward became a stage performer but, although a keen and competent musician, he initially pursued a career as a dancer. In his teens Ward also learnt the saxophone and clarinet and, influenced by the variety of jazz musics circulating in the US in the late 1910s/early 1920s, went on to perform with various ensembles in Sydney.

Ward had developed an avid interest in the natural sciences during his school years and continued to pursue this, when circumstances permitted, during his stage career. He joined the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales in 1926 and, after collecting and donating a series of specimens and field reports to the Australian Museum in Sydney, was made an honorary associate of the Museum in 1929. During the late 1920s he withdrew from all but occasional stage performances and became a full-time (and largely self-funded) naturalist. In 1928 he furthered his research interests by travelling to the Whitsundays to work with Embry on his summer camps.

Due in no small part to Ward’s energy, enthusiasm and versatility, responses to the 1928/29 summer vacation camp were positive and Embry went on to organise similar ventures on North West Islet (in the Capricorn group) in 1929/30 and in the Whitsundays in the early 1930s. Aside from their natural historical emphasis, one of the notable aspects of Embry’s early camps was the close, relaxed contact between male and female members of the groups (and the possibilities such contact engendered). On his first camp, for instance, Ward had a significant encounter with the human fauna of the region. As a later report – headlined ‘They Mix Their Science With Romance’ – summarised it:
Mel Ward was searching for crabs when he first saw the girl he was to marry. She was interested in shells, searching on the Great Barrier Reef. It was love at first sight. (unattributed, 1938: np)

The presence of young women on Embry’s island nature camps, far from the environs and mores of metropolitan society, evidently constituted a major attraction for male tourists. In 1931, for instance, Milton Kent and Les Winkworth described their experience of island camping in the following terms:

Soon the gear came ashore and the erection of quarters was commenced. Conventional garb was discarded for something more suitable to the surroundings, and to ‘castaways’ . . . The great adventure had started, and pride was manifest among the males as they saw the imported dusky maidens parade the white sand beach in soft shirts and shorts. Dusky because of many seasons suntanning on southern surf beaches, and very charming as fellow castaways on our island. (Kent and Winkworth, 1932: np)

After detailing daytime activities, Kent and Winkworth went on to describe how:

. . . at night in the warm wind and moonlight, the strains of music drew us . . . On the concrete floor we danced and had community and other concerts . . . Later at night the romantically minded strolled around the island. (ibid)

While the male members of the party were drawn from various backgrounds (Kent and Winkworth being seasoned adventurers and members of the Aero Club of New South Wales), a significant number of the women were final year students from Sydney high schools Frensham and Sydney Church of England Girls’ Grammar School, or, in later years, first year university students; whose attendance on such camps (and with seemingly limited supervision) is, at very least, curious given the social conventions of the early 1930s.

In 1932 Embry purchased the lease on Hayman Island and relocated his activities there, expanding the Island’s accommodation facilities and establishing a dancehall and communications centre (comprising a radio set and mail counter). In an attempt to upgrade the image of his summer camps Embry took a cue from the success of Ward’s early impromptu ensembles and began to organise and publicise entertainment as part of his holiday packages. Retaining the (ostensible) scientific rationale and flavour of his earlier ventures, a press report published in December 1932 announced that Embry had appointed a “knowologist” to work alongside the various other “ologists” (ie bio-, entym- and zo-) on the camps. As the report explained, the “knowologist” in question, Nell Perkins, was employed as entertainment coordinator and afforded herself the unusual appellation on the grounds that:

. . . she finds that it is essential to everyone’s enjoyment to know all about [the guests], psychologically anyhow, so that she can cater for their likes and protect them from their dislike. (unattributed, 1932: np)

The development of organised entertainment (and general frivolity) in cruises and camping in the (formerly) quiet northern coastal waters was not, however, to everyone’s liking. An editorial published in the Sydney Morning Herald on Boxing Day 1932, under the header ‘Summer Cruises’, for example, began with the proclamation that:
This Christmas holiday season has seen a development in catering for tourists from which there is not likely to be any turning back. (unattributed, 1932: 7)

The piece discussed cruises along the Queensland coast/Barrier Reef departing from Sydney and commented that:

The growth of great cities and the loss of personal liberty in them impel the individual enslaved there through the year to seek the utmost change in refreshment of mind and body within the limited time allowed to himself (or herself). Yet it is a captious mood, for modern civilisation of the city has enslaved more than his working energies, and there are many things he cannot or will not throw off. (ibid)

before concluding:

In fact, the outing of a week or ten days is not so much a voyage of travel as a glorified mammoth house party, and those who seek their holidays in that sort are legion. (ibid)

Although many of those attending Embury’s camps travelled up to the Whitsundays on cruise boats, and might therefore be included within those characterisations made above, their experience of island camping differentiated them from the more sedentary liner passengers. As one observer wrote, describing a cruise ship heading south to return its passengers to their “enslaved” existences:

The hundreds of passengers who lined the decks of the Canberra on her last trip down from Cairns will not soon forget the scene as she hove to off Hayman Island while two small vessels came alongside, their decks closely packed with members of the main party of the Embury expedition, who were taken on board for Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne at the conclusion of their stay.

The calmness of the night, the deeply tanned skins of members of the expedition, garbed in the shorts to which they had become accustomed during their life on the island, and the dark masses of mountainous islands in the background, lent a romantic glamour to the occasion, and as the motley crew swarmed aboard it almost seemed as though the liner had fallen into the hands of pirates. (Wigmore, 1933: np)

While members of Embury’s camps may not have experienced a “glorified mammoth house party”, entertainment was a key aspect of tourism in the Whitsundays from the early 1930s on. During this period the most common form of divertissement at Hayman Island was musical. Despite his main duties in running offshore pleasure cruises, the principal entertainer during this period was Bruce Jamieson.

I. Bruce Jamieson

Jamieson was born in 1897 and grew up in South West Rocks, a coastal village in northern New South Wales. He was a keen amateur musician from an early age, playing guitar, violin, mandolin and banjo. He also played organ, acted as a major (i.e. lead player) in a bagpipe and drum ensemble and sang in a local choir that performed arrangements of Hawaiian and South Sea Island songs for their own amusement. Jamieson first visited the
Whitsundays in 1927/28 attending Embury’s inaugural summer camp (and taking his bagpipes with him\(^9\)). Attracted by the location and its lifestyle, he returned to work for Embury when his operation relocated to Hayman Island.

In the 1930s one of Jamieson’s favourite instruments was the steel-bodied Dobro guitar, which he played in both slide and strummed chordal styles\(^11\). He took up guitar in the mid-1920s after hearing Hawaiian music on the radio and being attracted by its tone and by the social associations of the music\(^12\). The connection between the gentle mellifluiy of the Hawaiian sound and relaxed, beach-side life-styles had been fostered in Sydney in the late 1920s\(^13\) and was promoted in the 1930s by the national activities of the Hawaiian Club\(^14\). In addition to solo performances (and impromptu jams with any guests who had brought instruments with them), Jamieson also entertained guests as a member of an occasional guitar trio. The other members of this ensemble comprised two locals from Proserpine, Dicky Harris and Freddy Wilgert (on rhythm guitars and vocals). Jamieson has recalled that the trio’s standard repertoire included popular, easy-to-play tunes such as *Frankie and Johnnie*, *Abdul the Bul-Bul Emir* and *Clementine* (Jamieson, nd: 120). In addition to these standards, the trio also performed several original songs (apparently written by Harris and/or Wilgert). One of these, a humorous composition concerning Monty Embury and Hayman Island’s resident fauna\(^15\), appears to have been the first (English language) song written about the archipelago. The lyrics to this, as noted by Embury, were:

William goats of Embury,
Roaming over the hills so free,
Bang! Goes Monty’s 303,
Now you’re meat for Embury
William goats of Embury,
How your odour clings to me,
In spite of hours in the sea,
You William goats of Embury

Along with its irreverent references to Hayman’s owner/operator, the song, at least as represented by its lyrics\(^16\), is notable for avoiding the romanticism of all subsequent compositions about the Islands.

As Darwin’s prefatory quotation to this chapter suggests, specific musical styles – particularly the contemporarily popular style of *hapa haole* (i.e. Hawaiianesque) guitar and vocal music\(^17\) performed by Jamieson – played an important role in ‘setting the tone’ of the tourist experience on offer at the time. But Jamieson’s other instrumental skills were also frequently employed, particularly when the (500 berth) cruise liner *Katoomba* called in at Hayman over the Christmas period. In a letter to his mother written in January 1934\(^18\), for instance, Jamieson noted that the musical aspects of his (short) cruises on his boat the *Cheerio*\(^19\) were being somewhat over-stretched:

The only trouble is that the [bag]pipes and the banjo and the mando[lin] are becoming too popular altogether and there is generally a competition between the young people . . . as to whether Bruce shall bring out the pipes or the banjo and I have had to sing ‘Tell Me Tonight’ on the calm evening return . . . easily a dozen times and a fair few special requests . . .
Similarly, he noted that pressures on Hayman Island itself were no less marked:

Pianists are not in abundance and I have to stand my trick at the piano too. Monty [Embury] is shaking hands with me every day – says 'Atta boy Bruce', go to it, you and Cheerio and the pipes, the banjo and your songs are making a great impression. (ibid)

Indeed, along with hapa haole balladry, several observers have identified Jamieson’s bagpipe playing as a signature sound of Hayman Island tourism during the 1930s. In some contexts, such as Euro-Australian New Year’s Eve celebrations, this marked a simple continuation of traditional use in a new environment. As Jamieson has recorded, recalling a particularly lively party on Hayman Island in 1933:

Personally I had a secret weapon reserved for this occasion – a very good set of Highland Bagpipes and, at about 15 minutes to midnight, after the party had really warmed up to full blast, I started on the ‘Cock o’ the North’ and led a small procession through the hall.

Everyone joined in and formed a long serpent which wound through the trees, through the huts and tents – especially where anyone had retired early, back to the hall and down to the beach where a huge pile of pandanus palms, dry as tinder, were set alight. I had to stop piping, I couldn’t hear what I was playing for the singing and shouting. I think it was Frank McNeil who managed to organize a big ring round the fire for ‘Auld Lang Syne’. Then the piper played a lament for the old year and ‘Scotland the Brave’ for the new year – what a night! (Jamieson, nd: 63)

This account details a traditional Scottish (‘adopted British’) New Year’s Eve celebration transplanted to the (far warmer) seasonal environment and locale of the semi-tropical Southern Hemisphere. Jamieson further adapted such performances to give different significations. In particular, he utilised the skirl of pipes across the water of the Whitsunday Passage to give the arrival and departure of his cruise boat the Cheerio an evocative sonic ‘signature’. As one tourist recalled:

The Cheerio has a captain, whom nothing delights more than to serenade the liner as she approaches with wild skirl of bagpipes from his deck; and I had never really understood their sentimental appeal till I heard ‘Auld Lang Syne’ floating over the stillness of a starlit night of departure. (Wigmore, 1934: nd)

In 1934 Jamieson left Embury’s direct employment and started running independent holiday cruises around the Whitsundays, taking parties of between ten and twelve passengers on the Cheerio for trips lasting up to ten days. In the evenings he regularly entertained passengers with songs and instrumental performances, encouraging guests to join in (vocally or instrumentally). One guest recalled these occasions in particularly fond terms:

One of the most enjoyable times of the day was after the evening meal, when everyone went ashore and a huge camp fire was lit, rugs and cushions were commandeered, and the fire was quickly encircled by a band of happy revellers, tired after the exploits of the day and ready to enjoy the hours round the fire, ‘neath a moon, which full at the beginning of the trip and shedding a soft radiance over everything, had
gradually waned away towards the end, leaving stars in full sway. The Commander-
owner and his assistant22 were accomplished musicians and often beguiled the hours
with songs, accompanied by the violin23 and other instruments. Some members of
the party had excellent voices and many were the songs old and new in which these
voices harmonised. Indeed so restful and enjoyable were these camp fires that it was
well after midnight before they broke up. (Anderson, 1932: 2)

Jamieson also seems to have managed to introduce a musical element (and charm) into
the most mundane of activities. Marion Eaton, for instance, has recalled that:

When he took tourists on cruises through the islands, he would end each day on a
beach of a deserted island around sunset, where tents were erected and the evening
meal prepared over an open fire. A sing song usually followed after which the men
would leave the women to the tents (since, in those early days the sleeping arrange-
ments for men and women were segregated) and the men would row back to the
boat to the strains of a popular song called “Goodnight Ladies” with the first line being
“We’re going to leave you now, merrily row away . . .” [the ‘go’ of the original being
substituted by ‘row’ to complement the context] – the male voices fading away as the
dingy disappeared into the darkness. (p.c. July 1997)

The significance of Jamieson’s endeavours to the conceptual focus of this book is com-
plex. His musical styles, interests and performances are strikingly catholic. His interest in
Hawaiian-style music (and his performance of it in the Whitsundays) links him to the broad
international vogue for Hawaiian-derived music in the 1920s and 1930s that arrived with a
pre-set association with the kind of locales which he performed in. In this sense, he was
primarily a local agent of the style’s more general global diffusion. The music’s status and
function as an exotic element in the Whitsundays was, in this regard, a local instance of a
wider cultural tendency. Jamieson’s bagpipe playing, by contrast, was a highly personal and
idiosyncratic pursuit. While it can be understood as an ‘organic’ aspect of Jamieson’s
cultural heritage and upbringing as an Australian of Scottish descent, its lack of previously
established associations with the locales (and climate) of the Whitsundays rendered it an
exotic element. While the cultural tradition of Hogmanay/New Year’s Eve24 can perceived to
have temporarily deterritorialised the sub-tropical archipelagic space (and thereby minimised
the incongruity of the instrument’s refrains); the other uses and contexts (referred to above)
were more clearly exotic. Although ‘exotic’, they cannot be understood as exoticist (in the
manner discussed elsewhere in this book), in that they were resignified in the environment,
in which they were performed, incorporated into a bricolage of archipelagic luxuriance,
rather than serving to sonically territorialise the space as (somehow) Scottish/esque.

II. Isolation and Entertainment

As the result of the impressions conveyed by Lamond, and press publicity accruing to
Embry’s early camps, tourist expectations of the facilities which might be offered in the
Islands were as modest as their expectations of natural beauty were high. During the 1930s
few visitors came expecting the kind of sophisticated amenities the up-market resorts of the
mainland could offer; and, indeed, particularly during the Depression years of the early-mid 1930s, few tourists of any kind visited outside the summer season. Aside from the brief, busy weeks of the annual Christmas vacation, Whitsunday Islands’ residents led a quiet and sometimes lonely life in which entertainment was often lacking. Staying on Grassy Island for an extended period in 1933, shark fisher and author Norman Caldwell noted that the absence of island leaseholder, Boyd Lee, on sailing trips was particularly arduous for his wife:

When her man was away and her children abed, she had long periods of loneliness during the evening, and her capable hands were not idle. The gramophone too was a big thing in her life. Big, in capital letters. (Caldwell, 1936: 33-34)

In this context, visits by tourists were appreciated since the visitors often provided entertainment for residents. Writing about a trip to Lindeman Island in 1935, for instance, one tourist recalled that:

After dinner we participated in a concert held in the hall on Lindeman Island, but most of the entertaining was left to us, and we congratulate those who sacrificed themselves to make the evening a success. (Watson, 1935: 7)

Similarly, describing a visit to Grassy Island two years after Norm Caldwell’s stay, two visitors presented themselves as entertainers of an isolated family:

. . . the happy hospitable folk were cheered by the visit, and the efforts at entertainment provided by the voyagers with the aid of the old piano in the tiny cottage dining room. (‘Pandion’ and ‘Pandanus’, 1936: 26)

Valda Busuttin-Winsor, who resided on Brampton Island in the 1930s, in the early days of its resort development, recalled an occasion when a party of close to 400 visitors came ashore unexpectedly from the cruise ship S.S. Katoomba in 1937 and “shattered” the Island’s “dreaming quietude” (Busuttin-Winsor, 1982: 56). Hot scones and tea were hastily prepared in large quantities by the Busuttin family and served in the “overflowing” dining/dance hall where:

Someone discovered a “Community Favourite Song Book” on top of the piano . . . They swooped on it joyfully, a girl sat down at the piano and began belting out numbers from the book, and a semi-circle of people sang them enthusiastically. (ibid)

Even guests visiting the more developed Hayman Island resort out of season found that their presence provided a significant diversion for Island residents:

The most hospitable two days and nights were spent at Hayman Island with a fine tourist organisation there. Only a few visitors were being catered for on our arrival . . . Singing and dancing, topped off with a reasonable supper, were enjoyed in the big dining room-reception hall, and piano and gramophone were sadly strained to provide music for the merry makers. We departed from Hayman feeling that we had lightened the hearts of folk who too infrequently have opportunities to meet and relax in frolic with their fellow human beings. (‘Pandion’ and ‘Pandanus’, 1936: 26)

Visitors from the area around Proserpine also appear to have fulfilled a similar function. A photograph taken around 193425, for instance, shows a quartet of local amateur Italian migrant musicians, comprising accordionist Luigi Fiorito26 (a popular entertainer in
Proserpine’s Italian community\(^\text{27}\), Minot Magnetti (guitar), Pinot Magnetti (trombone) and Tony Lucco (clarinet) performing on the beach at South Molle Island. While the visitors may have taken these instruments to the island for family entertainment, their proximity to South Molle’s resort (visible to the right of the picture) suggests that residents and guests would also have attended their performances.

The accounts and records discussed above provide a valuable reminder that organised entertainment was a highly seasonal phenomenon during the 1930s. It was not until the post-War redevelopment of tourism, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, that the seasonal duration and facilitation of the industry began to approach its contemporary levels. Destabilised by the departure of the Ngaro and the tentative establishment of Euro-Australian tourism and settlement, the Whitsundays was in its most distinctly transitional period during the 1920s and 1930s. The music provided by performers such as Jamieson, the Wards or (as discussed in Chapter 3) visiting Torres Strait Islanders, took place in an impromptu communal context that stressed participationalism and reciprocality.

The principal exception to the tendencies discussed above – and one of the few moments in which pre-War tourism anticipated its costlier, glitzier late 20th Century form – occurred on Lindeman Island in 1934.

III. ‘Hot Cha’ – Christmas on Lindeman Island (1934)

*Take these Australians; with the Barrier Reef at their door, they go rushing like lunatics all over the world, always thinking that anything outside is better.*

(Annette Kellerman, cited in Wigmore, 1934: 8)

In 1933 film and swimming star Annette Kellerman visited the Whitsundays on an extended visit and proclaimed the charms of the region in various radio and press interviews. Kellerman was born in Sydney in 1888 and moved to England in 1902, where she acquired a reputation as a long-distance swimmer and occasional stage performer\(^\text{28}\). At the age of nineteen she relocated to the United States and became an immediate success, performing at Chicago’s White City amusement park for three months (diving from a high board and performing underwater balletics in a glass tank). Her celebrity was enhanced later in the year when she was arrested for public indecency while wearing a one-piece, figure-hugging swimming costume (as used in her stage shows) on a Boston beach. The notoriety that followed increased her celebrity and led to a contract with Vitagraph films and her debut screen role in *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1909). She subsequently appeared in a string of films, many of which emphasised her lithe physique and considerable aquatic skills – most notably *Neptune’s Daughter* (1914)\(^\text{29}\), *Queen of the Sea* (1918) and *Venus of the South Seas* (1924)\(^\text{30}\).

After arriving in Sydney with her husband and producer, US film maker J.R. Sullivan, Kellerman travelled to the Whitsundays in August 1933 and remained there until April 1934, staying at the Nicolson family’s resort on Lindeman Island. During their residence the couple was involved in the production of (quasi-) documentary footage about coral reefs that featured extended sequences of Kellerman, swimming underwater styled as a mermaid
(complete with prosthetic tail)\textsuperscript{31}. Despite the rigours of this project Kellerman also made a spectacular intrusion into the (otherwise low-key) climate of regional tourism by coordinating and performing in a series of entertainments for tourists visiting Lindeman Island during the Summer vacation period (including fancy dress balls on Christmas Day and New Year’s Eve)\textsuperscript{32}.

Capitalising on her name, and the continued fashionability of all-things American, a travel company based in Mackay organised special Christmas holiday packages to Lindeman Island. Kellerman’s role was emphasised in publicity that stated that she was personally inviting guests from Lindeman over to nearby Seaforth Island (where she and her husband were camped during the Christmas vacation period) for a “jazzarino” party\textsuperscript{33}. Responding to such an unusual attraction, forty five Mackay residents signed up for the package.

Advance publicity for the package also featured various terms derived from the word “jazz” (understood in this context to mean exciting, modern and somewhat risqué). An advertorial item in the \textit{Mackay Daily Mercury} on December 13th, for instance, announced, “for the lads and lassies who like their fun ‘jazzed up’, the Fancy dress dance will surely fit the bill” (unattributed, 1933: 8). Melbourne Ward, who, as previously discussed, had performed on Hayman Island in 1928/29, provided the jazz music for these events\textsuperscript{34}. His presence was highlighted by the advertorial, which declared that Ward:

... should certainly stagger the folks when they hear him jazz things up on the saxophone. As they say in the United States, it looks as though Christmas on Lindeman this year is going to be “hot cha”. (ibid)

\textit{Figure 1. Harriet and Melbourne Ward, c 1936}
Although overlooked by the writer, music for the festivities was provided by the duo of Ward and his wife Harriet. Since meeting on one of Embury’s camps two years earlier, the couple had developed a repertoire of duets for clarinet and guitar. (While the Wards’ repertoire does not appear to have been documented, Melbourne Ward was a keen admirer of Duke Ellington’s band during the period that clarinetists such as Rudy Jackson and Barney Bigard were playing a prominent role in Ellington’s ensembles, suggesting that the Wards’ jazz style followed [at least some of] these models.)

The Wards stayed on at Lindeman after the 1933 Christmas season and resided there until September 1935, collecting and writing accounts of marine life, running a small museum for tourists and supplementing their income by performing for guests. While their performance of jazz on Lindeman in the early 1930s (and, as previously discussed, Melbourne Ward’s performances there in 1928/29) might be seen to be akin to that of Jamieson’s performance of Hawaiian-style music (which I previously described in terms of his being primarily a local agent of its more general global diffusion), there are significant differences between the two practices.

Unlike Hawaiian music, jazz (until at least the rise of cocktail jazz and allied forms of western musical exotica in the 1950s) was never promoted or popularised as a relaxed and relaxing musical style suitable for al fresco, (sub-) tropical leisure. Indeed, in terms of Australia, at least, its presence and performance in the Whitsundays in the 1920s and 1930s rendered it a doubly exotic form – once as an Afro-American form imported to Australia and secondly as an Australian metropolitan form imported to the archipelago. With regard to its presence in the Whitsundays, a further level of complexity can be ascribed to the territory of its performance in that Melbourne Ward, at least (his partner’s views on the matter appear to have gone unrecorded), appears to have placed particular emphasis on understanding the original context of the “mentality, environment and history of the race concerned [in jazz’s origination]” (Ward, 1937: np). While such an admirably contextual approach to musical appreciation and analysis is somewhat offset by Ward’s identification of the “melancholy depths” (ibid) of the music he admires as originating in the jungles of West Africa (ibid) (rather than the trauma and tribulations of slavery and racism); his sense of what might be termed ‘locational aesthetics’ is pertinent to this study. In many ways the relocation of the (kind of) jazz music that the Wards performed on Lindeman is more akin to that of Jamieson’s bagpipe performances than his renditions of hapa haole standards. Whatever its degree of (subjective) resignification by the performers and tourists who experienced (and, presumably, remembered it), the Wards’ jazz performances essentially comprised a novel and fashionably exotic element of the resort experience and jazz did not become established as a continuing musical presence in the beaches, bars or cocktail lounges of the Islands.

**End Notes**

1. Emphasising the musical aspect here – and its Hawaiian association – the program accompanies this interview sequence with a (prominently mixed) version of the Hawaiian standard *Aloha Oe* played on ukulele and lap-steel guitar.
2. See Lamond (1953 and 1960) for overviews of his experiences of living in the Whitsundays in the 1920s–30s.

3. Ward made his professional debut in 1919 on Broadway, as a member of Gus Bluett’s troupe in the show ‘The Bing Boys’, and went on to perform “every kind of dancing from Russian ballet and adagio to eccentric and ballroom” (unattributed, 1951: 26). While apparently an admirer of ‘serious’ ballet, Ward was particularly known for the quality and energy of his ‘eccentric’ dancing styles. One writer recorded in 1967 that: “Mel is still remembered by old theatre-goers for his acrobatic and eccentric dancing, in which he was a master” (unattributed, 1967: 16). The label ‘eccentric’ described a variety of dances at this time including the overtly comic, the novelty-popular (such as The Charleston, which one writer has credited Ward with introducing to Australia [Clarke, 1961: np]) through the (parodic) ‘exotic’ to so-called ‘jazz’ dancing (of a kind probably derived from imitation ‘blackface’/’coon’ minstrelsy). (See Whiteoak, 1993 for further discussion of minstrelsy in Australia.)

4. None of which appear to have attracted journalistic recognition. (Consulted as part of the research process for this book, leading Australian jazz historians Bruce Johnson and John Whiteoak had no awareness of Ward, and their [generous] checking of other research sources failed to uncover any reference to his work. Although one writer has made the claim that Ward “was a member of the first jazz band to play on the Sydney stage” [Clarke, 1961: 28], this seems untenable. Johnson has identified a performance by Billy Romaine in Sydney in 1918 as “the earliest advertised jazz performance” [2000: 8]).

5. During the late 1930s and early 1940s Ward became increasingly interested in comparative anthropology, an interest he pursued in depth after moving to the Blue Mountains (west of Sydney) in the late 1940s, where he set up his own small museum and resided until his death in 1967.

6. Their account (suitably) being published in the magazine The Motor in Australia and Flying.

7. Cited in Carr (1933).

8. A press cutting from Ward’s scrapbook held in Australian Museum Archives, no page number noted.

9. Which Jamieson remembers as “quite the thing at the time” (interview, October 1993).

10. A photograph accompanying a full-page report in the Sydney Mail newspaper (J.C.F.: 1929: 12) also shows one tourist, Bruce Jamieson - whose subsequent musical activities are detailed in Section I – playing his bagpipes on the beach.

11. ‘Slide’ style here refers to the guitar being played horizontally, with the left hand moving a bar over the strings while the right hand picks. My reference to ‘chordal’ playing describes (vertically-positioned) finger chording and strumming/picking.

12. This was a common association and incentive to learn Hawaiian music performing skills. The major Australian teaching organisation, Buddy Wikari’s Hawaiian Club, used to advertise that instrumental skills would enable players to become “the life of the party” (cited in Bissett, 1979: 89).

14. The Hawaiian Club was a national organisation offering tuition in lap-steel guitar, ukulele and other instruments through a network of regional centres. Some branches of which institutionalised the association between music and outdoor leisure activities by running regular picnic parties. A description of one such party, held by the Townsville branch in 1939, for example, reported how seventy patrons played various sports, dined and “gathered round to enjoy an hour’s community singing to the accompaniment of the steel guitar and accordion” (Hula Times, June 1939: 20).

15. During the early years of Euro-Australian settlement in the archipelago, goats were introduced, and proliferated on several islands, often resulting in marked deforestation.

16. Jamieson noted these lyrics without making any reference to their accompanying music.


19. Described by one patron as “a roomy boat, with twelve bunks forward, the engine amidships, and a spacious cabin at the rear with the cook’s galley in one corner” (Watson, 1935: 7).

20. Scottish ‘Hogmanay’ celebrations were widely popular in England, and, to a lesser extent some Euro-Australian communities, from the late 1800s on (possibly inspired, at least in part, by Queen Victoria’s interest in Scottish customs and culture in her later years). Auld Lange Syne is, of course, still a popular New Year’s Eve song in various anglophone cultures.

21. These were usually organised in advance by Jamieson’s business associates and customers came from various areas of eastern Australia and various walks of life. According to Jamieson, regular bookers included Queensland graziers, New England doctors, engineers from the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales and parties of staff from the Australian Museum in Sydney on their annual holidays (interview, October 1993).

22. I have been unable to ascertain the identity of the person referred to.

23. Since I have encountered no other reference to Jamieson playing (or even possessing) a violin, the writer may either be referring to Jamieson’s (unknown) “assistant” performing on this instrument, or else be mistaken in their description.


26. Born near Turin, Fiorito migrated to Australia in 1925, initially working as a cane-cutter and semi-professional accordionist around Ingham, before moving to Proserpine in 1926. The Fiorito farm at Crystalbrook became a centre for local Italian community socialisation, with Fiorito regularly performing on the accordion for his guests (Proserpine Italian Research Committee, 1998: 88-89).

27. See the Proserpine Italian Research Committee’s 1998 publication A Heart In Two Places for a detailed account of Italian migration to and residency in the Proserpine region (1908-1998).

28. She first attracted public attention by swimming down the Thames in London from Putney to Blackwall and twice nearly completed a cross-channel swim to France. She subsequently appeared on-stage at London’s Hippodrome theatre.

30. Kellerman's career was dramatised in the film *Million Dollar Mermaid* (1952), starring celebrated actress/swimmer Esther Williams and featuring spectacular aquatic set pieces directed by Busby Berkeley.

31. I have no record of this footage ever being released or publicly screened.

32. I have been unable to ascertain Kellerman's motives for fulfilling this role or what, if any, remuneration and/or advantage she received for her efforts.

33. The term “Jazzarino” first appears in Australia in 1919 as the title of Tin Pan Alley jazz tune (published by Allans of Melbourne). The term does not appear to have been in common usage after this time and its use in the article appears to have been an idiosyncratic one. (Thanks to John Whiteoak for this information.)

34. I have not been able to ascertain whether Melbourne Ward and Kellerman knew each other from the (overlapping) periods of their involvements in the US vaudeville circuit. However, this is certainly a possibility.

35. Amongst Ward's papers in the archives of the Australian Museum are notes for a speech on the qualities of Duke Ellington's work which appear to date from the early 1930s and chord charts for Ellington's *Mood Indigo* (first recorded by Ellington in 1930) – a composition which was notable for its use of Barney Bigard's clarinet playing as a lead melodic instrument at the bottom of its range.

36. See Fitzgerald and Hayward (1999).

37. Notes for a speech, probably written around the early 1930s, which offer an introduction to the complexities of contemporary “negro music” (the term by which Ward refers to jazz) included amongst Ward's private papers held in the archives of the Australian Museum.

38. As detailed in footnote 35 (above), papers packaged with Ward's lecture notes in the archives include chord charts for Ellington's *Mood Indigo*. Since this was first recorded by Ellington under the ensemble name “The Jungle Band” for Brunswick Records (1930) its proximity to the lecture notes suggests that Ward may have interpreted the “Jungle” reference, and/or the décor (and associations) of Harlem's Cotton Club, where Ellington and his contemporaries often performed, somewhat (over-) literally.
Exposure and Interaction

EARLY TOURISM AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER MUSIC IN THE WHITSUNDAYS (1920s-1950s)

. . . the Barrier Reef, the great potential sea-playground which this country is discovering . . . has yet to develop into a world-wide attraction. Its one lack, of course, is of a local population, for the great majority of travellers still go out into the world to discover not only stranger lands but the people who live in them.


Given the historical explanation of the removal of the Ngaro population from the Whitsundays (described in Chapter 1) it is a considerable affront that their absence should be so rapidly characterised as a “lack” by a representative of the society that had displaced them. The disjunction confirms both the paradoxical injustice of colonialism and the differential dynamics of frontier settlement and subsequent tourism. In a further paradox, in the absence of a local Ngaro population, another indigenous group was co-opted to fill this ‘vacancy’ during the early phase of organised Whitsunday tourism. This group comprised the Torres Strait Islander crews of luggers (small commercial sailing boats\(^1\), mainly captained by Japanese at this time\(^2\)), which came down to the Whitsundays from their base at Thursday Island to harvest trochus shells\(^3\) and bêche-de-mer\(^4\).

As represented in the 1936 film *White Death* (discussed in Chapter 4), trochus and bêche-de-mer were gathered by crewmembers who went out from luggers in small dinghies and dived for them in the shallow water on the reefs\(^5\). Trochus shells and dried bêche-de-mer were then taken back to the Torres Strait for sale to merchants. Luggers visiting the Whitsundays would usually moor off Hayman and adjacent islands in the north of the archipelago. While the crews usually stayed on-board the luggers during their visits, they also ventured ashore for supplies or occasional feasts and often met and/or interacted with Euro-Australian residents and tourists.

As Beckett (1987) and Mullins (1995) have detailed, Torres Strait Islanders experienced considerable inter-cultural contact with Euro-Australians, Pacific Islanders, Japanese, Malays, Aborigines and other outsiders from the 1860s on. Thursday Island, in particular, developed
as a multi-racial and, to some extent, multi-cultural5 port and business centre from 1877 onwards.

I. Lugger Crews

As a number of accounts of tourism in the Whitsundays during the 1930s detail, Torres Strait Islanders provided Euro-Australian tourists with an element of cultural difference by entertaining them with a repertoire of songs and/or dances drawn from both the traditional and modern repertoire of the Torres Strait. One of the most detailed accounts of Torres Strait Islander performances in the Whitsundays in the 1930s has been provided by cruise operator Bruce Jamieson (whose own musical activities were detailed in Chapter 2). As he later recalled:

We often encountered luggers with their crew collecting trochus shell and “bêche de mer” and traded tobacco for tiger cowrie and other beautiful shells . . . Two of the luggers in particular, the “Tranton” and “Placid” from Thursday Island often worked together. Their crew were all mission-educated and a magnificent looking lot. Each lagger carried about 15 Torres Strait Islanders and one skipper (usually Japanese). (Jamieson, nd: 70)

Responding to the presence of the lugger crews, Jamieson initiated a series of significant inter-cultural contacts between the visiting Islanders and tourists. These occurred on island beaches or, on occasion, on the deck of Jamieson’s boat, after he began inviting lugger crewmembers to join with him in staging impromptu musical concerts. The Islanders performed a variety of songs in circulation in the Torres Strait and, as discussed further below, were reciprocally entertained by Jamieson and his passengers. Jamieson has recalled that the lugger crews’ repertoire included Torres Straits language songs from individual islands, contemporary pidgin songs, (localised) versions of Protestant hymns, adapted versions of traditional English language songs and popular Western Pacific tunes (interview, October 1993). Four particular examples of the songs performed by crew members recalled by Jamieson were an English language song extolling the virtues of Thursday Island entitled T.I. my beautiful isle; a sailing song referred to by him as The lugger in the strong south-easter; a song he identified as “a version” of the British folk song Fare thee well my bonny lass “with additions in their language [sic]” (interview, October 1993); and Isa lei.

Jamieson has recalled that the lugger crews performed these and other songs acapella, with occasional accompaniment from shakers or clap-sticks, and has lamented that:

If only I had a good tape recorder in those days – I don’t know if any recording has ever been done of those Torres Straits “boys” – they have a knack of harmonising different to the Polynesians and Melanesians, and very beautiful. (Jamieson, nd: 70-71)

As he specified elsewhere, he found one of the most distinctive and appealing aspects of their singing was its utilisation of “half tones . . . with some of their harmonies in quartertones” (interview, October 1993).

The first two songs identified by Jamieson as being performed in the 1930s were well established in the (20th Century) repertoire of the Torres Straits. Based on the title and his memory of the four line chorus:
T.I. my beautiful Island,
T.I. my home sweet home,
I'll live there forever,
The sun is sinking, farewell

the song Jamieson refers to as *T.I. my beautiful isle* can be identified as a well-known Torres Strait song usually referred to (in current usage, at least) as *Old T.I.* Original authorship of this song has been attributed to Jaffa Ah Mat, a resident of Badu Island, of mixed Torres Strait and Malay ancestry (whose family were well known as local musicians) some time in the mid-late 1920s. The song appears to have been widely popular among Torres Strait Islander communities and was a staple in the repertoire of Torres Strait singers Dulcie, Sophie and Heather Pitt (the daughters of well known Torres Strait identity Douglas Pitt) who performed regularly on the Atherton radio station in the late 1930s/early 1940s under the name of The Harmony Sisters. Visiting Cairns in the early 1940s, Australian novelist Jean Devanny wrote a brief description of the Pitt sisters’ version of the tune and its origins:

The melody of “T.I.” (Thursday Island) is exquisitely sweet and haunting. It is the Harmony Sisters favourite number. The first and last stanzas and the melody were a product of communal effort, the second stanza was created by Douglas Pitt’s son by his first wife. (Devanny, 1944:42)

As transcribed by Devanny, the song’s lyrics comprised:

T.I., my beautiful home,
T.I., my loving home,
I'll be there forever,
Sun is sinking, farewell

Norena nar lum oor gen,
Norena Norman e,
Mar-m-ged mar-ged nukar*,
Sun is sinking farewell

Oh T.I., my beautiful home!
'Tis the land where I was born,
When moon and stars do shine,
I'm longing for home,
Oh T.I., my beautiful home!

* N.B. Devanny's rendition of this verse appears to be a loosely phonetic version that bears little resemblance to current standard spellings.

The first and third verses represent the standard lyrics of the song to which various additional passages, in English, western Torres Strait Kala Lagaw Ya or eastern Torres Strait Meriam Mir languages, were regularly added by performers. (The second verse in the version above is in Meriam Mir and refers to two luggers working along the mid-far north Queensland coast during the 1930s.)

A similar version of this song (without the specific interpellation) features in the (contemporary) repertoire of Torres Strait Islander singer Seaman Dan. A waltz version of the
song included on Seaman Dan’s debut CD *Follow the Sun* (2000), concludes with the opening chorus of the Harmony Sisters’ early 1940s version:

T.I. my beautiful home,
T.I. my home sweet home,
I’ll be there forever,
The sun is sinking, farewell

The song Jamieson refers to by the English language title *The lugger in the strong south-easter* appears to be the mixed Kala Lagaw Ya and English language song more usually known as *The Black Swan* (as featured on the Rita Mills’ CD *Blue Mountain* [1998]) or as *Black Swanna* (as featured on Seaman Dan’s *Follow the Sun*). The title given to it by Jamieson appears to be an English language summary of its subject. In her CD sleeve notes Mills identifies the song as originating from Badu Island and describes its narrative in the following terms:

This is us on the boat black swan. The southeast wind is blowing as we travel in its direction. The main sail is slapping against the mast. As we travel towards the wind it is difficult. There is now rough seas and strong tide against us. But we will keep moving forward because the boat is big and strong.

Jamieson remembers *The lugger in the strong south-easter* as one his passengers’ favourites and “the most effective” of the Torres Strait Islander crews’ repertoire, since:

. . . they performed it not only singing but making sounds . . . and you could hear the wind, you could hear the slap of the sea (the sort of “pwah” sound on the ship), the rattle of the sail (they used to rattle their little sticks like that . . . ) It was really very good. (interview, October 1993)

Jamieson has also described how vocal arrangements were often developed during the Islanders’ performances:

Sometimes they’d give you a little bit of a demonstration about how they’d change from one thing to another. One chap would stop four of them from singing . . . He’d say “Go, go like this . . .” and then he’d go off with a different harmony to one little piece of their song and they’d say “Oh Yes that better” . . . They’d be experimenting. How much singing they just did on the nod [ie improvising] I don’t know. (ibid)

This account describes a music culture – and social practice of music making – which is very much alive, developing and interactive, one where arrangements are being regularly modified and extended through improvisation. This process offers one possible reading of the conflated textuality of the song Jamieson referred to as a “version” of *Fare thee well my bonny lass*.

While *T.I. my beautiful isle* and *The lugger in the strong south-easter* are readily identifiable as popular Torres Strait songs of the period, the third song referred to by Jamieson has a more complex identity. In 1993 Jamieson identified *Fare thee well my bonny lass* as a song he had strong recollection of, and sang the following two verses:

Then fare thee well my bonny lass,
Ras-as-say-ah, ras-say-ah, love the sea,
Then fare thee well my bonny girl,
Ras-as-say-ah, ras-say-ah, love the sea
Nodi nodi puyang poo yang,
Nodi nodi puyang poo yang,
Nodi nodi puyang poo yang,
Ras-as-say-ah, ras-say-ah, love the sea

This sequence is significant for combining two separate elements. The first is an English language line “Then fare thee well my bonny lass” derived, with a modified melody, from the British folk song referred to by Jamieson. As the adjective-noun combination “bonny lass” suggests, the initial lyrical fragment in Verse 1 (above) (subsequently repeated with a minor variation in wording) has a Scottish origin. The line “Fare thee well my bonny lass” occurs in several variants of a Scottish folk song that Robert Burns drew on for his well-known poem ’My love is like a red, red rose’¹. In Burns’ version the line occurs as the first of a four-line verse, as follows:

So fare thee weel my bonny lass,
So fare thee weel a while,
and I will come again my dear,
though it be ten thousand mile

The remainder, majority and, indeed, overall form of the composition described by Jamieson is however neither related to, nor derived from the Scottish folk song which Jamieson’s gives as its title but is, rather, clearly recognisable as a song of very different origin. Despite Jamieson’s assumption that the song’s non-English lines were “in their language” – suggesting either Torres Straits creole or one of the two indigenous languages of the Torres Straits – the other lyrics are, in fact, in Malay. The song that forms the core of the composite song Jamieson recalled is Nona Manis, a popular Malay language song of the period (with the additional phrase “by the sea” in Jamieson’s version being an English language interpolation).

Whatever the origins of this conflated text, the combination is lyrically congruent. Nona Manis appears to date from the 1920s and to have originated in the eastern part of the Dutch East Indies (variously referred to as Ambon [after its administrative centre], the Moluccas or, more recently, Maluku). As might be expected of a popular vernacular song, several different versions have been recorded and notated since the 1920s (including several variants in the kroncong style”). One element common to these is the use of the two phrases, used in various orders and combinations, “Nona manis siapa jang punja” and “rasa sajang sajang”. The opening phrase, from which (most) versions of the song take their title, translates as: “Sweet[est] maiden, tell me who you belong to?”. The second phrase is less easily translated but refers to what might be termed ‘a resignedly unrequited feeling of love’. These phrases define the song’s central theme – that of the vocal protagonist’s melancholy at his inability to possess a desired woman. From this it can be seen that the English phrase “Fare thee well my bonny lass” in the song identified by Jamieson has a clear thematic link to the Malay song (and, also, a sense which is not significantly disturbed by the poetic ambiguity of the second English-language phrase, “love the sea”).
What the song appears to represent is the admixture of a traditional British song, of a kind which might well have been sung by (and/or learnt from) British mariners in the region, with a popular Malay language composition which originated from a region of the eastern (present-day) Indonesian archipelago with which Torres Strait Islanders had a long history of maritime communication. The song appears to have entered Torres Strait popular repertoire some time in the 1920s and is remembered by Rita Mills as still being popular in the region in the 1940s and 1950s, when its performance was often accompanied by a dance which included the waving of handkerchiefs (cited by Karl Neuenfeldt, p.c. September 1999).

The fourth song identified by Jamieson is *Isa Lei*. *Isa Lei* was a popular Pacific song in the 1920s-1930s that circulated in several versions. The song appears to have originated in Tonga in 1915, written by a Tongan court musician named Tu'ivakano as a love song intended to assist a Fijian noble, Prince Tungi, in the wooing of Princess Salote. The song was subsequently introduced to Fiji, where a Fijian language version was written and popularised during the 1920s. There were (at least) two English language versions in circulation in the 1930s. The first of these to appear on record was recorded for the Australian Parlophone label by the Hawaiian duo David and Queenie Kaili under the title *Fijian farewell* in 1928, credited to John Merton. The second (and most commonly known) English language version was written by Lieutenant A.W. Caten, then the British bandmaster for the Fiji Defence Forces in Suva, and published in 1932 by Boosey and Co.

The song, in its various versions, is thematically close to *Nona Manis*. Its lyrics lament a sweetheart – named Isa – who has departed. The lyrics of the opening verse of Caten’s version declare:

Isa, Isa, you are my only treasure,
Must you leave me so lonely and forsaken?
As the roses will miss the sun at dawning,
Every moment my heart for you is yearning,
Isa lei, the purple shadows fall,
Sad the morrow will dawn upon my sorrow,
Oh! Forget me not when you’re far away,
Precious moments beside dear Suva Bay

Given the multiplicity of versions referred to above it is impossible to identify precisely which was performed by the lugger crews but whichever it was, its performance exemplifies the fluid movement of songs, and their various adaptations, in the western Pacific region during the 1920s and 1930s which the lugger crews, Jamieson and his passengers contributed to.

Facilitated by a contact between the tourism and fishing industries, such songs, and the performance contexts described by Jamieson, were, notably, ‘organic’ – part of an orally transmitted culture, a socio-cultural by-product of human interaction. In this regard, and by dint of their location at the beginning of Whitsunday tourism, they offer a model of tourism as cultural exchange. Jamieson played for the lugger crews. They reciprocated by playing for him and his passengers. Jamieson later recalled that the Torres Strait Islanders were particularly impressed by the emotive qualities of the music he and his guests performed for them.
In the examples he has cited, such performances involved a diverse repertoire. Discussing one concert held on the deck of The Cheerio with the crew of the lugger Tranton, Jamieson recalled that after their performance, the lugger crew “asked what kind of songs we sang” (Jamieson, nd: 70) and that, after a hasty consultation:

... we gave them a fair rendition of some of the old Plantation songs. ‘Massas in the cold, cold ground’ really got them – they were nearly all crying (ibid).

Jamieson also recalled that his performances on bagpipe were similarly received by lugger crew members, and recollected that on one occasion several Islanders held their hands, trembled and cried as he played, with one telling him “it’s too much... it’s beautiful... it get right inside you” (interview, October 1993).

There are (at least) two notable aspects to these accounts of Jamieson’s and his guests’ performances for lugger crews. The first concerns the (degrees of) exoticism of the material. The reference to the Torres Strait Islanders’ inquiry as to “what kind of songs we sang”, followed by Jamieson and his passengers’ performance of “old Plantation songs” merits comment. On the one hand, the selection of this specific repertoire might be taken to suggest a lack of any distinctive and widely known Australian song tradition at this time18 and a curious ‘defaulting’ to a foreign style and repertoire. In this sense, we could view the performances as embodying an incongruous exoticism, premised on a complex, imported bundle of maudlin, inappropriate and racist discourses. But while the latter characterisations are certainly tenable, attention needs to be paid to both the material itself and its localisation in Australia.

The “old Plantation songs” Jamieson and his passengers performed were somewhat less foreign to their performers than their cultural origin might suggest. The genre developed in North America as form of imitative and/or parodic pseudo-African-American balladry predominantly written and/or arranged by white composers and performers. John Whiteoak has identified that such songs were innately culturally mediated in that they “frequently combined popular British melody with words reflecting white perceptions of African-American life and dialect” (1993: 52). These songs, and associated styles of music, dance and comic performances, were first introduced into Australia in the 1830s. They reached a height of popularity in the 1880s, after which they became a staple element in Australian vaudeville shows (ibid: 54) and also entered the domestic repertoire of (piano-accompanied) parlour songs, where their sentimentality allowed for (various styles of) melodramatic vocal delivery. In this sense, the adoption of these songs as Australian repertoire is essentially similar to the lugger crews’ adoption of both imitative and/or parodic material (such as that described below), or multiply modified repertoire (such as the Nona Manis variants described above), as Torres Strait Islander repertoire.

While it is impossible to identify the precise (musical/lyrical) triggers of the lugger crew members’ tearful reactions to the “old Plantation songs” described by Jamieson, their response was, even if somewhat overly intense, clearly congruent with the established emotional associations of the material during this period. However exotic the specific material may have been to its audience19, they appear to have engaged with it within the dominant conventions of its circulation. Similarly, while lugger crew members’ responses to the bagpipe music were somewhat more intense than that usually experienced by aficionados of
bagpipe playing, for whom the instrument’s music is often regarded as stirring and/or poignant, the instrument appears to have been more directly exotic (as in the sense of being alien and/or novel) to its audience than the “old Plantation songs” discussed above. In this regard, it is likely that the bagpipes’ distinctive skirling, vibrato-laden drones were interpreted by their audience as anaphonically suggestive of non-verbal vocal utterances associated, in many cultures, with the expression of melancholy, pain and/or despair. In this sense, also, the Torres Strait Islanders’ engagement was congruent with (a broad aspect of) the instrument’s usual cultural effect.

Both groups discussed above were exposed to new experiences and perceptions through the musical performances described; a situation very different to present-day models of passive, commodified cultural exploitation – stage-managed local culture packaged (and often re-styled) for tourist consumption. The practices involved in the 1930s were ones that can be identified as co-existing in equilibrium (and mutual respect). Similarly, the processes of combination of different elements of songs and/or repertoires evident in Fare thee well my bonny lass/Nona Manis also evidence a fertile cultural appropriation and re-signification of various sources by Torres Strait Islander performers. As I will now go on to discuss, this aspect of repertoire, song development and resignification also continued into the context of more formally organised tourism.

II. Tourist Presentations

When the Hallam family took over the lease on Hayman Island and its resort in 1935 the type of inter-cultural contacts described above persisted, in a modified, less-reciprocal form, with crews being invited to come ashore to perform for guests after dinner around a fire on the beach. Marion Eaton, who grew up on the Island during this period, recalls being allowed to stay up late and to join in with the lugger crews’ dances on these occasions (and remembers that one of the songs frequently performed by the crews was entitled Farewell my fatherland [p.c. July 1997]).

The Hallams built up the resort progressively, bringing in staff from the adjacent mainland and other areas. Two early employees (whose first names alone have been recorded for posterity) were Torres Strait Islanders named Nadi and Obē. While it is unclear how these Islanders arrived in the Whitsundays, or what their previous employment had been, Leslie Rees, visiting Hayman Island in 1941, remarked that Torres Strait Islander employees at the hotel, then numbering four, were actively recruited by the management:

When the [lugger] boats call at the islands, the boys [sic] receive offers of employment. As soon as free to take them up, they come south by boat to Cairns and then by train to Proserpine and so out to the Whitsunday Islands. After a year of work, they receive a month’s holiday and go north. They give a promise to return but sometimes miss their boats. (1942: 46)

Given the lack of any local population of Torres Strait Islander descent in the region at this time, it seems likely that Nadi and Obē were recruited by the Hallam family on a similar basis to that described by Rees. By the time of Rees’s visit to Hayman Island in late 1941 two other Torres Strait Islanders were working there: Salee Gibuma, a twenty four year
old employed primarily as a boatman, and Awati Maiti, a twenty two year old employed primarily as a waiter, both from Boigu Island\textsuperscript{21}. (Rees also noted that two further Torres Strait Islanders were employed by the hotel but were absent on leave at the time of her stay.) Rees’s visit resulted in two articles published in the \textit{B.P. Magazine} (a quarterly publication produced by the shipping company Burns Philp). The first, a descriptive article about Hayman Island tourism, related the manner in which Gibuma entertained guests at “night picnics” by singing “his native Torres Straits or lugger songs to the piano-accoridon\textsuperscript{22}” and concluded with a description of a final night performance by Maiti and Gibuma that described how:

\ldots the dark boys displayed rhythmic ritualistic dancing and song, dressed in white shirts, ankle ribbons and red sarongs, and armed with bean-rattle and native drum . . . By the end, the whole party was chorusing two of their songs. I can hear \textit{Whassa matter you last night?} and \textit{Farewell my fatherland} coursing through my inner ear now, already taking on the character of nostalgic symbols of a fine holiday. \textit{(Rees, 1941: 53)}

The second article provided a detailed profile of Gibuma and Maiti under the title ‘Native Boys of the Barrier Reef’ \textit{(1942)\textsuperscript{23}}. This comprised a highly positive account of their skills and personalities and opened with the notably progressive statement (for the period) that:

A fine book remains to be written about the natives found along the North Queensland coast and the islands of the Torres Strait, where co-operative living is developed to a degree that makes our warring, insane, ‘civilised’ society look silly. \textit{(ibid: 46)}

In the course of the article Rees recounts an evening when Maiti and Gibuma were joined by two Torres Strait Islander women employed as domestic staff at Lindeman Island resort “who danced hulas and ritual dances in unison with our chaps”\textsuperscript{24} with Maiti and Gibuma providing rhythmic accompaniment on “a native drum” (shown as a warup in an accompanying photograph) and “castanette-like bean rattles” \textit{(ibid: 47)}. Although Rees did not provide a detailed description of any of the dances performed by either Maiti and Gibuma or the Torres Strait Islander women in her articles, she included detailed reference to two songs learnt from Maiti and Gibuma – \textit{Whassa matter you last night?} and \textit{Farewell my fatherland}.

Rees’s initial description of \textit{Whassa matter you last night?} makes a similar error to Jamieson’s (with regard to \textit{Fare thee well my bonny lass/Nona Manis}) by assuming that it was sung in a Torres Strait “pidgin”. Evidently confused by the odd language of the song, she also refers to its “mixture of English and native words” \textit{(ibid)}. Using quaintly dated, ‘hip’ phraseology, she describes \textit{Whassa matter you last night?} as:

\ldots a native cutie’s song which one might imagine sung in any low dancing dive. It is addressed by the cutie to her boy-friend, who has let her down. \textit{(ibid)}

She goes on to speculate that, given (what she presumes to be) its mixture of languages, “it might well have been taught in some of the mission schools on Torres Strait islands”.

As transcribed by Rees (without notated melody – though with the comment that “the tune is most saucy and piquant”), the song’s lyrics comprise:
Whassa matter you last night?
You never come to see ma ma, I tink so
You no likee me no more
But other fella likee me too.
I number one good-lookin’ - too much lua * [*allure]
Ha ha, ha-ha-ha,
Ha-ha ha-ha-HA,
Ha ha, ha-ha-ha, ha-ha ha-h’away

Rees’s confusion over the language of the song is understandable. The lyrics, written in a parodic Chinese-English pidgin, are actually those of Tin Pan Alley songwriter Charles King’s novelty *hapa haole* composition *The Pidgin English Hula*, written in 1934.²⁵

The principal difference between the version transcribed by Rees and the original is that her version translates all the pidgin Hawaiianisms into English (with the exception of “aloha” [love/affection in Hawaiian] which Rees and the singers [mis]translate for the hotel guests as “allure”). Maiti and Giburna’s version of *The Pidgin English Hula* is otherwise close to the lyrical sense and theme of the original. While *hapa haole* songs such as King’s composition were popular on record and frequently played on radio in Australia in the 1930s (on stations such as 4CA in Cairns) and may have been learnt from such a source, some suggestion of the complexity of repertoire transmission in the Torres Straits is suggested by the title Rees ascribes to this version of *The Pidgin English Hula*. As John Marsden has identified (p.c. April 1999), the title *Whassa matter you last night?* appears to be a variant of *Wasa mala you?* the title by which the song was referred to in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s (where it, and many other, Hawaiian tunes were popular before the entry of Japan into World War Two).²⁶ Given that many of the lugger’s in operation in the Whitsunday Passage and Torres Straits in the 1930s had Japanese captains, Hawaiian-style songs – and other repertoire – may have been mediated through this route.

Rees (and the *B.P. Magazine’s* editor) further aided the cultural historian by including the lyrics and a (handwritten) transcription of two verses of the second song Rees notes as having been taught to her (and other guests) by Giburna and Maiti – a composition she refers to as *Farewell my fatherland* (the same song title recalled by Eaton as being performed by Torres Strait Islanders in the early-mid 1930s). Rees provides a more accurate characterisation of the origins of this song. Referring to Giburna’s perception that the song had Malay or Kanaka origin and that “someone”, seemingly another guest, suggested that the middle lines “spoke of a girl” (ibid: 46),²⁷ she described the tune as having “a lively swing with a touch of nostalgia behind” and transcribed the song lyrics as follows:

Farewell, farewell, my fatherland,
Ras-as-say-ah, ‘sas-say-ah by the sea,
Farewell, farewell, my fatherland,
Ras-as-say-ah, ‘sas-say-ah by the sea,
Noni noni sapuyang poo yang,
Noni noni sapuyang poo yang,
Noni noni sapuyang poo yang,
Ras-as-say-ah, ‘sas-say-ah by the sea,
As will be immediately evident to the reader, the song – or rather, composite song – closely resembles the version of Nona Manis/Fare thee well my bonny lass recalled by Bruce Jamieson and discussed in the opening section of this chapter. As previously outlined, the central theme of Nona Manis is that of the vocal protagonist’s melancholy at his inability to possess a desired woman. However, several versions of Nona Manis expand upon this to produce a series of different scenarios of thwarted desire, resignation and/or nostalgia. The version of Nona Manis reproduced in Zainu’ddin (1969: 40), for instance, includes additional lines of lyrics that switch gender positions – such as “Kumis hitam siapa jang punja?” (“Black moustache do tell me whose you are?”).

The Nona Manis sequences noted by Rees (and transcribed with more fidelity to the original Malay spelling than Jamieson’s version) have several minor differences to the versions of Nona Manis reproduced in Zainu’ddin (ibid) and a sheet music version published in Amsterdam in 1956. These include variations in melody, key and time signature. Both Zainu’ddin’s and the Dutch versions, for instance, are specified as being in 2/4, as opposed to Rees’s specification of 4/4. Both are also in the key of G as opposed to Rees’s specification of F. Since there is a degree of subjective interpretation to these specifications – and/or the potential for error in making transcriptions of live (or, indeed, any other) music – the similarities are such as to confirm the main sequence of Rees’s transcription as being that of Nona Manis.

Aside from the musical variations noted above, the modification to the lyrics represents a shift in theme. In its original language, Nona Manis’s title refers to a ‘Sweet (Nona) Girl (Manis)’. In combination with the phrase “Farewell My Fatherland”, the melancholy of “rasa sajjang” is retained but shifted from the original’s account of romantic loss and sorrow to a more general one. The additional English-language phrase “by the sea” (similar to the phrase “love the sea” in Jamieson’s version), in its odd conjunction with the preceding Malay lyric, appears simply to serve as a locational marker for this version of the song. The (compound) lyric serves to indicate a combined desire for a lover and ‘Homeland’ left behind – sentiments easily attributable to Torres Strait lugger crews on lengthy trips away from their island communities.

While there is no specific reference to his performing (any version) of Farewell my fatherland, the discussion of the song repertoire of the Aboriginal performer referred to as ‘Cobbo’ in Chapter 1 suggests that the song was also known by another prominent Torres Strait Islander entertainer in the Whitsundays in the 1930s, Dicky Lahou, commonly known as Dicky Poid (due to his place of origin, Poid village on Moa Island). Lahou appears to have been one of the first Torres Strait Islanders to secure residential employment in the archipelago. Together with his brother Eddie, he jumped ship whilst working on a lugger off Green Island (near Mackay) in 1930. Angus Nicolson, holder of the Lindeman Island lease, brought the brothers to Lindeman after hearing that they were able to construct grass huts of the type he wished to build for his resort development. His son Lachlan’s unpublished memoirs record that the Lahou brothers, and particularly Dick, established a good working relationship with the Nicolson family, and stayed in their employ until World War Two (when the Poid brothers relocated to Mackay).

In his memoirs, Nicolson describes Dicky Lahou as “skilled in executing many traditional songs and dances” and recorded that he performed dressed in “all the proper regalia”
(the latter phrase evidently referring to various head-dresses and lap-laps). Nicolson also recorded that in these performances Lahou would accompany himself rhythmically with “clappers” made from “split matchbox beans” (a large, divided, dry seed husk) which he either held in his hands like castanets or else tied to his wrists\textsuperscript{32}. Nicolson listed a number of the topics of Lahou’s “traditional” Torres Strait songs, which included the flight of the sea eagle, waves breaking on the shore, the sighting of a sailing ship and sailing in strong winds\textsuperscript{33}. In addition to these Torres Strait Island language songs Nicolson also noted an English language song about rowing, with the chorus “Pull, pull, pull away – my sailor/pull, pull, pull away”\textsuperscript{34} and two contemporary topical songs that referred to Poid’s former employ on luggers. One concerned living conditions on the lugger Tranton (also referred to by Jamieson above) on a voyage to gather bêche-de-mer at Bell Cay. The second was a humorous song that mimicked a Japanese lugger captain’s mispronunciation of the ‘i’ sound as ‘r’ (and the confusion caused by this)\textsuperscript{35}.

![Figure 2. Lachlan Nicolson, Dicky Lahou and Billy Moogerah](image)

As I speculated at the end of Chapter 1, given Lahou’s friendship with Billy Moogerah – the Aboriginal singer and musician also resident on Lindeman Island – it seems likely that Lahou and Moogerah may have performed together in various contexts on Lindeman (and/or other islands\textsuperscript{36}) during the 1930s and that the Farewell song which the Aboriginal individual known as Cobbo performed in the archipelago at this time was a version of the
Farewell my fatherland/Nona Manis song discussed above. But whatever the degree of musical inter-action between Lahou and Moogera during the 1930s, it is clear that Torres Strait Islanders played a prominent role in the entertainment culture of the archipelago in this period, providing a varied repertoire of song and dance entertainment to southern tourists seeking temporary escape (and experiential difference) in the region.

In terms of James Clifford’s arguments, the minimally populated, minimally administered archipelagic frontier of mid-north coast Queensland in the 1920s–30s can be seen to have allowed a (particularly relaxed) “encounter” between “the cultural figure ‘native’ and the intercultural figure ‘traveller’” (Clifford, 1997: 24). Facilitating contact between two groups visiting the Whitsundays on voyages far from their homes (and home ideologies, habits and institutions), archipelagic tourism on Hayman, Lindeman and other islands allowed for a situation which accords with Clifford’s characterisation of a “transgressive intercultural frontier” (ibid: 7) and exemplifies Pratt’s identification of a “contact zone” in terms of the:

... spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures ... whose trajectories now intersect [and demonstrate] the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination [illustrating that] copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices [can] often [exist] within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (1992: 6-7)

In this sense, the archipelago provided a privileged and unique stage for white/Euro-Australian exposure to one indigenous Australian culture at a time when racist governmental policies and institutions were restricting exposure to – and resisting (any kind of) validation of – indigenous cultures.

III. Post-War Contact

After the interruption of the War years, lugger visits to the Whitsundays and mid-north Queensland coast declined in number but Roy Nicolson, resident on Lindeman Island in the late 1940s and early 1950s, recalls that lugger boats would occasionally call at Lindeman Island in this period:

When a boat came in it would be a special occasion that everyone would enjoy. Groups of seven or eight, may be more, Torres Strait Islanders would come ashore and perform on the beach. They would have all the proper head-dresses, with feathers on, for the songs and dances. (interview, April 2000).

The repertoire that Nicolson recalls the lugger crews performing at this time appears to have been similar to that of the pre-War era. These post-War visits also produced another type of contact experience for a particular audience since, as Nicolson recollects:

The resort employed some Torres Strait Islander girls as housemaids – but no Islander men – and the girls would be really excited to see the men on the beach doing their dancing. (ibid)

One purpose of lugger crews’ visits to resort Islands at this time was the sale of shells to holidaymakers (shell-collecting being a popular hobby during this period). Helen Tiffin, a
frequent visitor to Brampton Island during the 1950s and 1960s, recalls that:

Crews from the luggers would visit to sell shells they had collected diving on the reefs, in deep water. It would be quite exciting. If you saw a lugger you would look to see if it was coming ashore. If it was, they would blow a conch shell to attract your attention and come on to the beach, usually at sunset. They would show the shells and usually perform a few songs and dances. (interview, December 2000)

Unlike the performances that Nicolson recollects, Tiffin recalls that the Torres Strait Islander crews would include a more varied repertoire:

I remember they’d sing Swing low sweet chariot and Carry me back to old Virginny and all the guests would join in. (ibid)

The two songs Tiffin recalls derive from the repertoire of southern US Afro-American balladry. Given that no previous Torres Strait Islanders visiting the Whitsundays appear to have performed material of this kind, the inclusion of these songs in a lugger crews’ repertoire merits comment. While it is possible to conject that Jamieson’s performance of “old Plantation songs” such as Massa’s in the cold, cold ground to appreciative lugger crews in early the 1930s may have stimulated an interest in the repertoire, the performance – and mutual familiarity with – the material is more readily explained with reference to broader aspects of Australian culture in the immediate post-War era. As John Whiteoak has identified (p.c. April 2001) ‘minstrel’ songs such as Carry me back to old Virginny were included in community songbooks that were still widely used in the 1940s and 1950s. Swing low sweet chariot was even more widely known, being internationally (re-)popularised by its inclusion in the repertoire of US vocalist and film actor Paul Robeson and its inclusion in Australian school songbooks. In this regard, the lugger crews’ performances of such material in the 1950s did not represent the presentation of exotic musical difference to a passive audience but rather the performance of a shared musical repertoire, adopted from elsewhere and rendered local by virtue of repeated performance and familiarisation.

Although luggers crews occasionally performed for Whitsunday resort guests until the early 1960s, the nature and administration of post-War tourism (discussed in following chapters) and the decline of trochus and bêche-de-mer fishing in the post-War period rendered the cultural experiences discussed in this chapter a discrete episode within the unfolding history of the Whitsundays. In contrast to the nature of Torres Strait Islander performers’ repertoires in the 1930s, the (Euro-Australian) culture of the Island resorts that developed from the late 1950s on produced various exoticist practices which needed no representative (or examples) of an actual cultural otherness to enact their fantasies of difference.

IV. In Time

Ali Behdad entitled his 1994 study of Orientalism in the age of colonial dissolution Belated Travellers. Central to his discussion is the notion that the various western writers he discusses were, crucially and necessarily, too late to experience the untainted exotic ‘other’ they desired (and desired to represent). There is also a profound sense of belatedness to the
experiences of Euro-Australian tourists in the Whitsundays in the 1920s and 1930s (let alone the 1940s and 1950s) in that they were too late to experience the culture of the Ngaro, the region’s traditional occupants and owners, and too late to have any encounter with Torres Strait Islanders whose culture was not already blended with several others. Yet to state this is to distort, to erroneously assume some pure cultural essence and isolation for the peoples concerned – a particularly problematic characterisation for such maritime peoples as Torres Strait Islanders. While they may have missed the Ngaro, in another sense, the Euro-Australian tourists and residents of the region were superbly ‘in time’. Their encounters with Torres Strait Islanders – and vice versa – occurred during a period when substantial elements of pre-European-contact culture survived along Australia’s north eastern coastal fringe.

In terms of the history of the Torres Straits, which has yet to experience tourism at a level similar to that institutionalised within the Whitsundays from the 1930s on, the phenomena described in this chapter are also a significant aspect of cultural history. Indeed, until the recent popularity of Torres Strait Islander vocalist Christine Anu in the Australian popular music market in the mid-late 1990s (and the smaller, niche market success of recordings and tours by The Mills Sisters, Rita Mills and Seaman Dan) the encounters discussed in this chapter represented the only continuing presentation of Torres Strait Islander culture to mainstream Euro-Australians outside the Straits region itself. In this sense, the “contact zone” of the Whitsundays during the peak period of the 1930s and early 1940s and, to a lesser extent, the immediate post-War decades, was a notably “transgressive intercultural frontier” allowing contact and traffic both ways across its watery boundaries. While Torres Strait Islander lugger crews may have represented “the cultural figure ‘native’” (Clifford, 1997: 224) to the Euro-Australian tourists who encountered them, this principally represented an exoticist misperception of a people who exemplified “the intercultural figure ‘traveller’” (ibid) at this time.

**End Notes**

1. A lugger is a sailing vessel with between one and three masts fitted with obliquely hanging, four-cornered sails.


3. A conical shell about three inches high and four inches in diameter used for making ‘pearl’ buttons for garments.

4. A marine echinoderm (also known as the trepang, sea-cucumber or sea-slug) prized as a culinary delicacy by Chinese consumers. (See Ganter, 1994: 17-20 for an account of the development of bêche-de-mer fishing in Northern Queensland; and Reid, 1954: 79-91 for a discussion of bêche-de-mer fishing on the Barrier Reef in the 1920s and 1930s.)

5. Harvested trochus shells were taken on board the luggers and boiled (with the mollusc meat removed and often eaten).

6. Torres Strait Islander residence on Thursday Island was prohibited at this time and while
different cultural groups co-existed, their social and cultural practices were discrete and infrequently over-lapping and/or inclusive.

7. Thanks to Karl Neuenfeldt for his research of this attribution.

8. Douglas Pitt, father to the sisters, was a well-known Torres Strait Islander identity in the pre-War period, noted for his swimming and sailing exploits. Devanny (1944) devotes a chapter to Pitt and his family (36-43).

9. Devanny’s travelogue book *By Tropic Sea and Jungle* (1944) is vague as to specific dates for the episodes it includes and, while its publication date is 1944, an (unpaginated) ‘Author’s Note’ states “[c]ertain aspects of this book apply to conditions prior to the war in the Pacific” – i.e. prior to 1941.

10. Bua Mabo has identified that the two boats were owned by the Farquhar family, drew their crews from the eastern Torres Straits and worked as far south as the Swain Reef area off of Mackay. Devanny comments that “Douglas Pitt’s son by his first wife” wrote the Meriam Mir verse about the *Norena*, which Devanny describes as “his boat” (ibid). Given Mabo’s identification, and patterns of boat ownership in the Torres Strait in this period, Devanny’s reference is likely to refer to a boat that Pitt worked on. Mabo has supplied the following translation of the Meriam Mir verses:

   *Norena*, sailing on your water
   *Norena* and *Norman* are sailing on your water
   To your island your bow runs straight

   (Thanks to Bua Mabo for his assistance with the identification and translation of the above and Karl Neuenfeldt for assisting with this.)

11. Thanks to Graeme Smith for pointing this out to me.

12. Thanks to Margaret Kartomi for this information.

13. In 1905 the pearling lugger fleets operated by Reg Hockings and James Clarke out of Thursday Island relocated their base to Aru Island, in Dutch New Guinea, close to the Moluccas, intensifying this contact.

14. Misspelt as *Esalele* in his biographical manuscript (Jamieson, nd: 70).


16. (A version of) the lyrics of which were published as an alternate text to A.W. Caten’s English language version of the song published by Boosey and Co. in 1932.

17. The bagpipes were played at civic occasions on Thursday Island in the 1890s and early 1900s and it is likely that Torres Strait Islanders who visited the Island to attend such occasions in this period may have heard the instrument being played. Jamieson also recollected that the bagpipes were popular with Aborigines around the area he grew up in and remembers playing them to small groups of Aborigines near South West Rocks in the mid-1920s (interview, October 1993).

18. Despite the rural tradition of bush ballads, the newer wave of popular nostalgic Australian ‘locational’ songs of the 1920s (see Scott-Maxwell, 1997: 51) and the popularity of Peter Dawson’s recording of *The road to Gundagai* (1931) in the early-mid 1930s; it is possible to contend that these did not constitute a distinctive, widely-known Australian song tradition
during the 1930s (especially amongst urban populations).

19. I have been unable to ascertain to what extent Torres Strait Islanders may have been exposed to and/or familiar with such a repertoire and its associations in this period. Styles of music and dance derived from the touring Minstrel shows of the mid-late 1800s were performed by Euro-Australian performers for Euro-Australian audiences on Thursday Island in the early 1900s (see, for instance the reports of a King’s Birthday entertainment published in the *Torres Strait Pilot* on November 14th 1903) and may also have been taught by school teachers.

20. I have been unable to ascertain which islands they originated from.

21. NB Rees simply refers to them as Sarli and Awati. Many thanks to Karl Neuenfeldt for finding out their surnames and island of origin for me.

22. It is unclear whether she is referring to Gibuma accompanying himself or another individual performing on the instrument.

23. By the time of the publication of her second article she had married and taken the surname Clarke Rees. To avoid confusion, I have retained Rees as her reference name for both articles in the text and Bibliography.

24. Rees identified one of the dancers as being the daughter of Murray Pitt, a Mer-born Torres Strait Islander of mixed Jamaican and New Caledonian parentage.

25. Thanks to John Marsden for aiding this identification.


27. This detail suggests that the song may have been more widely familiar in Australia at this time.

29. A reference to a male desired by a (presumably) female protagonist.


30. I have been unable to discover any further information about Rees, but there is no evidence that she was anything other than an amateur musicologist and there may therefore be some questions about the accuracy of her notations.

31. Now held by his son Roy Nicolson.

32. Similar to the usage identified by Rees by performers on Hayman.

33. This topic suggests that the song might have been the previously discussed *Black Swan* (referred to by Jamieson as *The luger in the strong south-easter*).

34. When interviewed by the author in April 2000, Roy Nicolson, Lachlan’s son recalled this as one of his father’s favourites and sung this chorus aloud.

35. Nicolson’s account includes no details of precise lyrics or melodies.

36. Such an association may explain an account made by a tourist, Lionel Wigmore, who visited St Bees Island in late 1932 during a holiday in the region. While visiting the Island, he observed a performance by some “Aborigines” who provided “dances” (and, presumably accompanying music/songs) “descriptive of the East Wind, casting a fishing net, a football match at Thursday Island, caulking a boat, and furling sails” (Wigmore, 1936: 11).

37. With audiences specifically attuned to indigenous musicians and/or the world music scene.
38. Although it should be noted that the Torres Strait Island Blues singer Dulcie Pitt, (who performed under the stage name of ‘Georgia Lee’), enjoyed some commercial success in Australia in the 1950s and occasionally included Torres Strait Islander material in her repertoire.
Displacement

PALM ISLAND TOURISM, WHITE DEATH AND THE WHITSUNDAYS

Mr Grey paid a tribute to the aborigines for their uncanny knowledge of the bush and water. “I have watched them spear fish, throw boomerangs and make fire” he said “Australians are not as proud of them as they should be.”

(Unattributed, 1936: 12)

As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, Mary Pratt’s notion of the cultural contact zone is singularly appropriate to the subject of this study. The zone she envisages is one marked by “the spatial and temporal copresence” and intersecting “trajectories” of “subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctions” (1992: 6) and in which sets of “interactive, improvisational” encounters and processes occur (ibid). This chapter analyses a particular set of cultural intersections that exemplify the phenomena Pratt refers to and also extends her formulation into a study of such intersections within a specific fictional representation of the area, its history and ethnicities.

The discussion that follows develops along two strands. The first examines the interrelation of Ngaro descendants with the Palm Island community in the period 1918-36, giving an account of the complex nature of “copresences” and “intersecting trajectories” for the indigenous people of the region. A second strand analyses the manner in which the feature film White Death (1936) produced an elaboration and inscription of a set of contact/frontier zone histories and created contemporary fictions from these.

I. From The Whitsundays to Palm Island

Palm Island was given its English language name by Captain Cook, who anchored briefly offshore during his voyage along Australia’s eastern coast in 1770. The traditional owners of the Island are the Wulgurugaba people, who hosted James Morrill and his companions in the mid-1800s (as discussed in Chapter 1) and also resided along the coast down to (present-day) Townsville and, offshore, on Magnetic Island. Wulgurugaba lands were linked through a Dreamtime Snake narrative that accounted for the fragmentation of their islands from the Queensland coast with reference to the Snake’s journey down the Herbert River to the sea,
where it fragmented, parts of its backbone forming Palm Island and its head forming Magnetic Island (Watson, 1993: 18). Watson records that:

People of the offshore islands . . . were linked to each other and the mainland linguistically and socially, through trade and travel and through movements occurring for large gatherings. (ibid: 19)

Ships began to visit Palm Island intermittently from the 1820s on. After initially avoiding visitors, the Wulgurugaba – like the Ngaro – began to express a violent antipathy towards incursions on their lands. This persisted until the 1870s, when increasing Euro-Australian settlement and the actions of Aboriginal (‘native’) police detachments succeeded in crushing resistance (ibid: 24-36).

A substantial proportion of the Wulgurugaba were relocated to the Hull River station in 1914, where more than 50% died from disease during World War One (ibid: 8). At Hull River they were interned along with other Aborigines from the mid-north coast communities, whom Watson describes as having waged “an effective armed defence of their homelands” (ibid) prior to their confinement. Following the destruction of the Hull River station by Cyclone Leonta in 1918 many of the surviving Wulgurugaba returned to a (much changed) Palm Island.

From 1918 on Palm Island was developed as an internment centre for Aborigines from various areas of Queensland whom the local and/or state authorities wished to relocate (for various reasons¹). Like Yarrabah Camp, Palm Island was run by its superintendent, Robert Curry, as a harsh, penalistic establishment where Aborigines from various areas and culture and language groups were required to cohabit under a strictly regulated regime. From 1927 on a number of Torres Strait Islander males were also sent to the Island². They formed part of a constant stream of new arrivals, all of who were forced to adopt the English language (and punished with beatings or imprisonment if caught speaking their own languages in public) (ibid: 101). Ngaro families such as the Priors (whose route to Palm Island was described in Chapter 1) formed part of an involuntary aggregation of individuals from around forty different indigenous language groups.

While movement off the Island was strictly monitored, some male residents managed to gain employment that further broadened their social experience and contact with other groups. Peter Prior’s experiences are a case in point. Soon after arriving on Palm Island in 1918 Prior was again relocated, this time separately from his family, when he was sent to work at Arcadia resort on Magnetic Island along with another young Birrigubba male, Andy Kyle. Prior and Kyle remained at Arcadia for two years, working general duties, until their sense of isolation overcame them and they returned to Palm Island in 1920. Further contact with Torres Strait Islanders and other cultural groups was facilitated by employment on lugger boats. As Peter Prior has recalled, he and his brother George worked on these on several occasions:

. . . the trochus boats [were] owned by the Japanese³, who had some sort of deal with our Boss Mr Curry. Whenever the Japanese needed workers they would call into Palm Island and employ some of the boys on the boats for up to two to three months. It was a change from Palm Island and it helped us to save some money. (ibid: 17)⁴
Such contacts not only broadened the life experiences of (male) Aborigines alienated from their traditional lands but also provided them with cultural knowledges and competences whose outcomes and implications are discussed below.

II. Palm Island Tourism and Cultural Performance (1918-36)

Palm and Magnetic Islands began to be regularly visited by Euro-Australians in the 1870s when chartered boat trips started to operate from Townsville. Harry Butler, a resident of Magnetic Island, pioneered tourism on Palm Island by establishing a seaside guesthouse around 1900 at what came to be known as Butler Bay. The guesthouse appears to have operated with moderate success for at least ten years (Watson, 1993: 47). Following the outbreak of World War One and the (coincidental) gazetting of Palm Island as a reserve in 1914, local tourism went into temporary abeyance only to resume, in revised form, following the construction and establishment of the Palm Island Aboriginal Reserve.

The development of Palm Island tourism reflects the tendency Watson describes, whereby:

European perceptions of indigenous peoples as 'exotic strangers' were important to the success of many tourist ventures in North Queensland at the turn of the century.

(ibid: 47)

As a particularly dense aggregation of individuals from diverse cultural groups, the Palm Island community offered a substantial resource for Euro-Australian tourism in which cultural performance played a prominent – if somewhat paradoxical – role.

During the 1920s and 1930s (and, indeed, later) the administrators of Palm Island zealously enforced the various provisions of the Queensland Government’s 1897 ‘Aboriginal Protection’ Act. Ostensibly designed to protect Aboriginal communities from various debilitating influences, its multiple clauses gave virtually unlimited powers to state authorities to regulate, restrict and discipline Aboriginal groups falling under their “protection”. Within the focus of this study, Clause 31.15 was particularly notable for specifically referring to indigenous cultural expression and allowing for the prohibition of “any aboriginal rites or customs that, in the opinion of the Minister, are injurious to the welfare of aboriginals living on a reserve”.

Clause 31.15 represents a legal inscription of the perception that in order to control and ‘civilise’ Aborigines it was necessary to eradicate indigenous languages, belief systems and forms of cultural expression. One manner in which the superintendent of Palm Island attempted this was through the introduction and support of regular film screenings, formal European-style dances and the establishment of a brass band. A photograph taken in 1929 (reproduced in Watson, 1993: 10) shows a fourteen piece, uniformed ensemble accompanied, to the left of frame, by Curry. The band performed regularly at Island functions and attracted attention as evidence of the potential to educate and organise Aborigines through instruction in western cultural practices.

Despite the introduction of such activities, Curry’s regime was a complex and somewhat paradoxical one. While the public use of traditional languages was banned and the perform-
ance of Aboriginal cultural material was only allowed if written permission was given in advance, Curry actively encouraged expressions of traditional culture in particular contexts.

During the 1920s the performance of traditional cultural repertoire on Palm Island appears to have taken place in three principal contexts:

a. In unauthorised group performances, staged covertly on the Island, or in informal private situations;

b. At authorised social events (held on Saturday nights or special occasions); and

c. In organised performances for tourists.

Many of the Aboriginal families relocated to Palm Island managed to retain aspects of their traditional culture during the 1920s and 1930s and pass elements of it on to their children. Information about the Prior family repertoire has been provided by two of Tom Prior’s grand daughters, Renarta Prior and Carol Patterson-Prior. In an interview with the author in October 2000 they recalled that their grandfather and his brother George frequently performed for their family.

The repertoire they recalled comprised two types of song that appear to date from around 1900-1930. Renarta Prior has referred to the first type as “old language songs” (interview, October 2000). She describes the nature and origins of these as follows:

The songs my father would sing would be in a mixture of the Ngaro language and other local languages – what we called the Birrigubba or Birri language – because the songs would have been shared between the local people [i.e. members of the extended Birrigubba community] at gatherings and when people would just meet each other. So some of the words in the songs would be mixed up a bit or in different orders but you’d know what the song was about by the singers’ actions or motions to the songs. (ibid)

Two specific songs she recalls being performed by her grandfather Tom and his cousins reflect different aspects of early 20th Century Ngaro/Birrigubba language song repertoire. The first is a humorous “Boy’s Song” which relates how a young male leaves a group to go and see his girl and is followed by an old uncle who frightens him into returning to the male group. Renarta Prior has identified the song as dating back to the 1920s (at least) and, given the song’s traditional theme, it might either represent a song from a pre-contact repertoire or else a modern expression of themes and narratives from such a period in a new form (interview, October 2000).

A second song recalled by Renarta Prior has a more clearly modern (post-contact) theme. The composition is known as either Yuggarman or Johna Brown’s Song. The first designation refers to the song’s subject matter. Yuggarman is a Birrigubba term for Chinaman and, as summarised by Renarta Prior (ibid), the song relates the experiences of Aboriginal labourers working for a Chinese employer, tending a market garden. In translation, the song’s refrain states, “if you don’t pay us we will steal your vegetables”. The topic of the song suggests that it was either composed by Ngaro/Birrigubba speakers after their relocation to the Bell’s Gully area (around 1903–18) or else was learnt from Aboriginal singers on Palm Island. Its subject matter, a humorous critique of (in this case) Asian employers, sung in a language they could not understand, invites comparison to other contemporary material (such as the song mocking a Japanese lugger captain performed by Torres Strait Islander Dicky Lahou on Lindeman Island in the 1920s).
Along with this material, Renarta Prior and Carol Patterson-Prior have identified three other songs performed by their father and uncles which appear to have been acquired either through Ngaro (or other Aboriginal) men who worked in the lugger trade – visiting locations such as Thursday Island and coming in contact with a diverse range of fellow workers – or through Torres Strait Islander lugger crews visiting the region. These songs comprise versions of the Fijian (derived) Isa Lei, the Torres Strait song Black Swanna and the English language song Old T.I. While Isa Lei appears to have been performed in a relatively un-modified form of the Caten version discussed in Chapter 3\(^1\), the version of Black Swanna Renarta Prior has identified as performed by her father Peter appears to have been substantially modified:

*Black Swanna*, that was one of our old ones. My father and his brother would sing it. It had [Ngaro/Birrigubba] language words in and they would do a dance to it, a corroboree dance in our style – not the ‘shake-a-leg’ style but our one – moving forwards and back. They’d often do that one, I remember it. (ibid)

The third song recalled by Renarta Prior and Carol Patterson-Prior appears to have been a (multiple) adaptation of the modern Torres Strait song *Old T.I.* (discussed in Chapter 3) that primarily involved the substitution of ‘P.I.’ (Palm Island) for ‘T.I.’ (Thursday Island). This variant is well known as *Old P.I.* (and is detailed in Bill Scott’s *Australian Folklore* [1997: 176-177]). The version recalled by Prior and Patterson-Prior represents a further stage in which several Ngaro/Birrigubba language phrases substituted for English language ones; and Renarta Prior has speculated that the lyrics and/or general feeling of these may also have represented a nostalgia for the Whitsundays (p.c. March 2001).

Renarta Prior has identified three instruments that were used by her father and uncles to accompany their singing and dancing. Two of these are instruments common to Birrigubba communities, clapsticks and a small hand-drum with a possum-skin membrane\(^1\). The influence of Torres Strait Islander culture is suggested by the brothers’ use of what Renarta Prior refers to as yaksos (split bean pod rattles) of a type often used by Torres Strait Islanders (see Chapter 3).

The oral history account of Peter Prior’s life recorded by his daughter Renarta (1993), complements her recollection of her family culture by providing a description of performances at authorised social events on Palm Island which highlights the multicultural repertoire sources of the dances performed by Palm Islanders at this time:

I will never forget how we were taught to do the English dances, and on Saturday nights all the men had to sprinkle buckets and buckets of water on the ground to lay the dust around our dance area before night time. While this was being done the women used to get the old kerosene lamps ready so that we could hang them all up around the dance area.

We used to enjoy ourselves and we all liked to style up on the English dances and every week, we learned how to do new ones. But when that old dance floor started drying up, we would start our Corroboree and Torres Strait Island dances, men and women and children and there would be dust flying everywhere, but we didn’t care because we all used to have a good time. (Prior, 1993: 32)
Confirmation of the Priors’ ability to perform Torres Strait Islander dances is given in a later stage of Peter Prior’s memoirs. Following an incident in which Peter Prior retaliated against two Aboriginal ‘native police’ officers who had attacked a family member, he and his family were relocated to another Aboriginal settlement, Woorabinda, south west of Rockhampton, in 1944. Despite arduous conditions, song and dance also played an important role in this community and the Priors had an opportunity to display the repertoire they had acquired on Palm Island:

We also used to have our own Corroboree teams and we would try to learn new ones from other dance teams as well. But they never saw the Torres Strait Island dances before, so my sons and I showed them how to do some while we were there.

(ibid: 36)

Along with the authorised social performances described by Prior, another performance opportunity was provided by Palm Island’s implication into regional tourism during the 1930s. Despite severe restrictions upon their autonomous social expression of traditional songs or dances, members of the community were required to participate in corroborees organised by Robert Curry to entertain groups of Euro-Australian visitors. While it is not clear which of the Island’s various Aboriginal groups performed, and whether their repertoire comprised traditional material and/or adapted/’syncretised’ songs or dances, performance skills had substantial currency and status in the settlement during this period.

Watson has asserted that Palm Island tourism was encouraged so as to obscure the harshness of the Island’s regime and “to promote the notion that [it] was a model settlement” (1993: 121); as a result of which:

The ‘sight-seeing’ of these visitors became fetishised in the 1920s, tourists arriving from as far away as Freemantle on the mainland and European countries, in search of the ‘exotic’. Curry ensured that their movements on the island were thoroughly supervised, and as the owner of the only car on Palm he drove them around ‘at breakneck speed’. (ibid)

Corroboree performances formed part of the exotic experience organised for visitors. Watson has identified such performances as catering for visitors who wished to experience a (packaged) encounter with indigenous people in (what was imagined to be) their ‘native’ environment. Watson supports this contention by citing the account of Alexander Crosby Brown who attended a corroboree in 1929 and wrote that the “astonishing” aspect of the experience was that it “gave one the feeling of being face to face with utter elemental savages” (Brown, 1929: 59). Brown also described a dance in which:

A tom tom sounded a series of crescendo booms while the dancers shook the ground, rending the air with savage shrieks and grunts. It swept to a climax and they combined an ear-splitting yell, brandishing their weapons at us. (ibid)

Watson draws on the latter description (and an underlying edge of anxiety in Brown’s account of his entire Palm Island visit) to argue that, “his fears and those of other white observers could well have been deliberately nourished by the performers” (1993: 122). While such a claim is plausible, Brown’s descriptions tell us more about white anxieties than the nature of the cultural performances he witnessed.
Helena Cass, who visited Palm Island in 1933, whilst holidaying around Cairns, provides a markedly different account:

Those who had been free to dress for the corroboree in the afternoon came as a welcoming party on the beach as the lugger neared the shore. They made an imposing picture in their singular attire of white and different coloured clay, ingeniously made feather head-dresses and shorts. Some carried boomerangs, and some, spears. (Cass, 1934: 9)

After visiting Curry’s house and witnessing a boomerang throwing competition, Cass attended a corroboree where members of various “tribes” (ibid) performed separate dances. One point particularly significant for the focus of this chapter is her identification of an (un-named) individual as the “producer” of the event, suggesting – as might be expected – a standard format for such performances:

The corroboree was held near the beach in an open space entirely surrounded by very tall palms. The native women and children sat round various fires where the men also gathered during the dances of another tribe. Four different tribes were taking part. The “producer” had two music sticks [presumably clap sticks] with which he made appropriate sounds, gave the time for the dance, and eked out the music with his voice. (ibid: 9-10)

Female accompanists and the dancers themselves provided further musical accompaniment:

Some of the women beat the ground with sticks, keeping time, and others made a curious hollow noise, like a drum, by crossing the legs above the knees and pounding the legs where they cross. In certain dances, the players keep time with the beating of their hands, and in others they join in chorus, working up to a climax: ah-ah-ah-ahhh; or u-u-u-u-luh-luh-luh followed by r-r-r-r-ee-ee-ee-eeeee and then a grand climax – Ahh ! short and sharp, and the leader cries “Finish !” (ibid: 10)

Cass’s account suggests that the corroboree performances for tourists represented a welcome opportunity for the dancers to perform in public and to entertain the Palm Island residents who attended the events:

They seemed to enjoy their dances enormously, one man taking part though he had a wooden stump. Another began in white flannel trousers, apparently forgetting that the dance called for flexed knees and a convulsive leg movement quite impossible with clothing restrictions. He very cleverly removed them as he danced [and] threw them aside. (ibid)

Cass lists a series of dances that suggest that the performance repertoire drew on a variety of Queensland clan and Torres Strait Islander material. One reference in particular, to “two very pretty” dances, merits comment:

... the Sea-gulls, in which bunches of leaves are used to simulate flight, and a Dance of the Sea, showing the movement and restlessness of waves. (ibid)

Given the nature of Palm Island’s community, the topics of these dances suggest that they may have derived from the traditional repertoire of a coastal/archipelagic Aboriginal
clan, such as the Ngaro, from a Torres Strait repertoire or from some syncretic adaptation of the two. (Indeed, given the reference to a ‘Dance of the Sea’, and Renarta Prior’s recollection that her grandfather and grand uncle accompanied their Ngaro/Birrigubba adaptation of the Torres Strait song Black Swanna with a dance, it is possible that Cass’s description refers to the same song/dance).

Whatever the particular origins of the song or dance repertoire concerned, Cass’s account is also illuminating for its detail of performance pieces and their mode of delivery:

The dances illustrate some experience of the tribe or something they have seen. The first was one of fear, the Rainbow Dance. A native was afraid that the rainbow, represented by a large lawyer-cane basket, would get him, as it did. The performer, who wore a quill through the cartilage of his nose, feigned terror admirably. He apparently lit a fire and did everything else possible to ward off the danger which stealthily approached, pushed by a native crawling between two lines of men making terrifying noises. Eventually the basket is dropped over the body of the victim who makes frantic efforts to escape . . .

The Alligator dance was similar to the first: two rows of excited men, with a black crawling in terror in the foreground, and at the far end, the alligator advancing very slowly, crawling from side to side in a most realistic way and holding a white flower in the mouth, “which helps to catch man”. These two figures are linked by another, dancing from one to another in very quick tempo. The two sides, dancing and shouting wildly, gradually close in as the alligator seizes its victim. Then, without the dancers ceasing for a second, this finale was re-enacted with increased tempo and noise.

Catch-him-in-rope-Alligator was another on this theme, but with the alligator as prey. A falling-down dance was given for light relief, the two principals sparring and falling down before the blow could reach them, to the general delight. The Guy Fawkes wore a mask stuck on with native beeswax, and a ring of excited spearmen danced exultingly about their prisoner. (ibid)

Cass’s description of the dances is notable on a number of levels. While the description of the ‘Alligator Dance’ does not suggest any significant deviation from traditional practices, the inclusion of a cane basket in the ‘Rainbow Dance’ is clearly a modern innovation. Similarly, the ‘falling down’ dance suggests some degree of influence from similar silent film routines of the type featured in 1920s’ Hollywood film comedies, Cass’s (somewhat ambiguous) reference to a ‘Guy Fawkes’ dance also suggests an incorporation of European themes and/or references.

III. Uncivilised

In 1934 the Palm Islanders’ reputation as skilled and well-organised corroboree performers came to the attention of Australian film director Charles Chauvel as he was planning the production of his feature film Uncivilised. Chauvel’s film drew on a range of racist anxieties and exotic stereotypes to relate the story of a beautiful journalist who is kidnapped on her way to meet the mysterious white chief of a remote Aboriginal tribe. When she finally arrives at
his settlement she initially views the chief as an ‘uncivilised’ curiosity before eventually falling in love with him.

Released in 1935, *Uncivilised* received extensive press coverage and was screened widely across Australia. While the film’s opening credits and script specify it as set in north-west Australia, the film was actually shot on the opposite coast of the continent, around Palm Island and in Sydney. Chauvel chose Palm Island as a location due to both its scenic qualities and the presence of a stable, pliant and highly regulated (and thereby dependable) group of Aborigines. After having secured Curry’s co-operation and goodwill, Chauvel shot several sequences on Palm Island in which local Aborigines – including various members of the Prior family – appeared as extras. Subsequent to this, Chauvel arranged for a group of fifteen male Palm Islanders (including Peter Prior) to be transported to Sydney to appear in a number of studio sequences.

Along with bush scenes and the battle that provides *Uncivilised* with its climax, the Palm Island Aboriginal performers appear in several corroboree scenes. These comprise what appear to be performances of traditional dance styles. The music for these is provided principally by clapsticks, slapped thighs and vocal chants (and, in one sequence, a didjeridu) – similarly authentic sound sources for such performances – which appear to have been recorded simultaneously with the dances shown on screen. In addition to re-enacting traditional performance styles for the camera, their visit to Sydney also provided the Palm Island cast with an opportunity to further diversify their musical knowledge and skills.

On completion of the film shoot Chauvel accepted an offer from the management of Sydney’s Theatre Royal to take the Palm Island performers to see a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan’s orientalist operetta *The Mikado*. As their contribution to the project’s ‘wrap’ the Aboriginal cast invited Chauvel and the film crew to a social function. Evidently impressed by the performance they witnessed at the Theatre Royal, the Palm Islanders provided a particular exoticist surprise for their guests. As Elsa Chauvel later recalled:

... they decided a corroboree would be a fitting send-off, and we were invited to join in and watch. To our amazement, we found the star act was a native and primitive interpretation of the “Mikado”, complete with bush fronds for fans: it was brilliant. (Chauvel, 1973: 78)

Despite her condescending use of the adjectives “native” and “primitive”, Elsa Chauvel’s account clearly identifies the Palm Island group’s mimetic skills, cultural flexibility and inclusive engagement with new forms and performance contexts. Far from being alienated from and/or destabilised by *The Mikado*, they showed themselves as seasoned performers capable of embracing, imitating and rapidly re-creating and recontextualising its exotic signs of difference.

**IV. Zane Grey and White Death**

In the 1930s the Whitsundays began to attract the interest of big game fishermen. Along with those Australians who tried their luck in the archipelago’s bounteous waters, the most prominent early game fisherman was US author Zane Grey. During the 1920s–30s Grey wrote a series of internationally popular cowboy novels, many of which were made into success-
ful Hollywood films. He was also a keen fisherman and drew on his considerable income to finance regular sailing trips around the Pacific. In 1928 and 1930 Grey spent extended vacations on Tahiti that formed the basis for an account of his fishing experiences published under the title Tales of Tahitian Waters (1931) and an exotic Island romance entitled Reef Girl (which was not published until 1978). His exploration of the Pacific continued in the early 1930s and he visited the Whitsundays in 1931 and declared that the waters to the north of Hayman Island were “the best big game fishing grounds in the world” (cited in Smith, 1996: 48).

Grey returned to the Whitsundays in 1935 on an extended vacation, basing himself at Embury’s Hayman Island resort and fishing the adjacent waters. During late 1935/early 1936 the Australian press reported his exploits in detail. Indeed, so extensive was the media coverage that the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) responded by publicly condemning Grey and game fishing in general (thereby further heightening public awareness of his visit). Capitalising on this publicity, Grey hastily collaborated with Australian Cinesound writer Frank Harvey to write a scenario for a feature film based on Grey’s fishing skills and the picturesque qualities of the region.

While Grey had an ongoing contract with Paramount Studios to produce feature versions of his novels, his Whitsundays film, entitled White Death, marked his only on-screen appearance. The film was shot largely on Hayman Island and adjacent waters (with some additional scenes later filmed at Cinesound Studios in the Sydney suburb of Bondi) and was directed by Grey’s business manager Edwin Bowen. Grey took the lead role, playing himself, in a stiffly naturalistic style, as a great white hunter/hero who visits the Whitsundays in order to catch a giant shark (and thereby win a wager). Once in the area he encounters a distraught missionary whose wife has been devoured by a ferocious local shark, referred to by the local Aboriginal clan as the ‘White Death’, and is persuaded to try and catch it. As might be expected, the great white hunter eventually triumphs over the great white shark (and narrative closure ensues).

The film’s narrative tension – if it can be referred to as such – is lightened through a series of comic scenes and a romantic sub-plot. The comic scenes parody Grey’s (real-life) dispute with the RSPCA and feature the veteran stage comic Alfred Firth as a bumbling member of the (fictional) Society of Fish Protectors who meets with a series of mishaps. The romantic sub-plot involves the courtship and eventual conjunction of the film’s young love duo, played with unaffected straightforwardness by Nola Warren and John Weston. Further performative variety was provided by Harald Colonna, who played his role of distraught widower to the hilt, complete with manic stares and a haunted, melodramatic delivery reminiscent of acting styles in European Gothic Horror films of the period (such as Dreyer’s Vampyr [1932]).

The variety of acting styles contributed to the generic confusion evident in the film’s initial promotional poster, which described it as “Australia’s First Romantic Comedy Drama”. Even this inclusive description is inadequate since the film also includes several on-screen musical scenes and documentary-style sequences (including underwater shots of coral and fish and scenes of Torres Strait Islander lugger crews diving off the reefs).

White Death opened in Sydney in November 1936. Despite a largely negative press response to the film as an example of screen drama, it enjoyed box office success on its
premiere run, largely, it appears, due to Grey’s imprimatur and its appeal as a documentary travelogue of a remote, exotic area of northern Australia. While reviewers in US and British publications were as negative as their Australian colleagues about the film’s dramatic appeal, *White Death*’s representation of its locale was singled out for praise. The reviewer for US trade paper *Variety*, for example, was scathing about the plot and acting but emphasised that:

The one highlight of the production is the magnificent photography of the Great Barrier Reef. If perchance the pic hits the screens overseas [i.e. outside of Australia] these sequences will do much to induce tourists from abroad to this haven. (9.12.36: 13)

The picturesque charms of the region were underlined in the film’s romantic centerpiece, which conjoins its young leads in a romantic clinch on a beach at sunset. Heightening the passion of the scene, the sequence also features a song, studio recorded by an unknown vocalist and mimed on-screen by Weston. The song – written by Australian composer J.E. Morthardt and entitled *Moonlight on the Barrier* (Reef) – both encapsulates the romantic charms of Island holidays noted in Chapter 2 and conforms to the format of an international tropicalist/romanticist genre popular at the time. As Aline Scott Maxwell (1997: 38-39) details, during the 1920s and 1930s a series of compositions (with titles such as *Moon over Manakoori, Honolulu Moon, Arabian Moon* etc.) celebrated the charms of romantic moonlight over exotic (i.e. non-Western) locations. Markedly different in theme from the Hayman Island ‘Goat Song’ (discussed in Chapter 2), written about the same island shortly before, the song featured in *White Death* was the first of the series of romantic/touristic ballads about the charms of the region whose history is detailed in subsequent chapters of this volume.

The composition features as a love song sung by Weston to his sweetheart. Sitting on a beach at sunset, Weston’s character struggles to express his love for his intended. Stuck for words, he asks her “shall I play you a little tune I wrote just for you?” and picks up his guitar and commences playing. At the point at which Weston begins, the sound switches from the realist (‘diegetic’28) mode of the scene, featuring an on-screen performer and an accompanying instrument, and transforms to a mode typical of Hollywood musicals where the song’s accompaniment (and, indeed production sound29) emanates from an off-screen (‘extra-diegetic’) source (clearly indicated by the musical accompaniment of plucked harp and soft strings). Sung in an accomplished crooning style, the song’s lyrics produced a familiar linkage of moonlight and romance:

Moonlight on the Barrier,
Soft sound of the sea,
Moonlight on the Barrier,
Bringing you closer to me

Moonlight on the Barrier,
Starlight in my heart,
Moonlight on the Barrier,
Nothing can keep us apart

Bright as the silver moon trail,
Your eyes looked into mine,
Soft is my love song singing,
Low as the surf on the reef’s far line
Moonlight on the Barrier,
Your head on my knee,
Moonlight on the Barrier,
Bringing you closer to me

During the song sequence the film’s visual images alternate between Weston’s performance, Warren’s enraptured appreciation and shots of the sunset and moonlight on the sea. Somewhat predictably, the serenade has its intended effect and the scene fades out on a passionate embrace.

If the Moonlight on the Barrier sequence provided an accurate prediction of the re-creation of the pristine archipelagic space as a tourist centre in subsequent decades, another aspect of the film offered a more complex reference to the archipelago’s past.

V. Exotic Indigeneity

As discussed in previous chapters, the tourist industry that developed in the Whitsunday archipelago in the late 1920s took place in a region denuded of its indigenous inhabitants. As a result, Zane Grey’s decision to include an Aboriginal community (apparently) resident on Hayman Island in his film provided him with an immediate problem. In the absence of convenient local ‘extras’ Grey turned to the group of Palm Island performers discussed in Section III to fill the void. While none of the Priors were recruited for the cast (for reasons unknown), the majority of the other Aboriginal performers employed by Grey were from the group of Palm Islanders who had previously appeared in Uncivilised.

One of the Palm Island cast, Frank Bigbelt, was identified in White Death’s opening credits by name, reflecting his role as an actor in the film (rather than an indigenous ‘extra’). Bigbelt acts as a comic foil for Firth in a series of sequences that primarily rely on visual-performative (rather than verbal) humour. The most extended of these involves Bigbelt falling victim to a practical joke involving a mirror reflection (and later turning the tables on Firth, its perpetrator). The silent-film style of comedy presented in these sequences is complemented by a musical score which blends low, rumbling bass melodies with harp glissandi to create a musical ‘mismatch’ which suggests the characters’ confusion, (and also includes novelty elements, such as trombone pitch slides, as comic emphases).

The score for these and other sequences was written and orchestrated by Isadore Goodman, a well-known pianist and populariser of fine music in Sydney in the 1930s. Unlike his later music for Chauvel’s drama of Aboriginal life Jedda (1954) – for which Goodman drew on the pioneering ethnomusicological research of A.P. Elkin to write passages which utilised Aboriginal instruments and the melodies of indigenous Australian birds – White Death’s score principally drew on the conventions of film accompaniment which had been established during the silent film era and extensively codified in widely circulated manuals of cinema accompaniment.

Aside from Bigbelt’s individualised role, the Aboriginal cast of White Death appears, en
masse, in two sequences. In the first they are shown menacing Firth, dancing and ritualistically brandishing spears, after he has been caught stealing food from them. In this sequence Firth’s plight appears to have been lifted wholesale from a Hollywood Western. He is shown tied to a brightly decorated upright log, bound with rope in a classic image (and style of) restraint familiar to fans of Western films used to seeing heroes and heroines bound to ‘totem poles’ while war-dancing, whooping ‘Red Indians’ prance around them.

The second Aboriginal ensemble scene comprises a seemingly documentary-style representation of a corroboree. Filmed in a (static) medium-long shot, the sequence shows its cast, adorned with ceremonial body paint, dancing in the lee of a large rock, upon which are painted circles and outlined human figures (which suggest the locale as a sacred and/or ceremonial space). In this scene, which only has an incidental narrative function, the Palm Island performers effectively provide an on-screen substitute for the absent, dispossessed Ngāro and offer their presence, appearance and culture as the principal indigenous ‘colour’ for Grey’s shark-fishing fantasia. But aspects of the substitution, particularly with regard to the scene’s musical accompaniment, are more complex than this simple account might suggest.

Despite the extensive catalogue of musical motifs to suggest various national/racial/indigenous groups that was formulated during the 1920s, there were no commonly recognised musical signifiers of Aboriginality in the cinema during the 1930s. While the reasons – and decision maker(s) – remain unclear, Goodman’s score refrains from defaulting to (what may have been perceived to have been) acceptably proximal musical signifiers of indigeneity to accompany the corroboree sequence. This is all the more notable since a prominent example of the latter approach was present in Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack’s King Kong (1933), one of the most commercially successful (and sensational) films of the early 1930s. Max Steiner’s score for King Kong used the distinctive tom-tom rhythms usually associated with ‘Red Indians’ (ie indigenous North Americans) in Hollywood cinema, together with various other melodic exoticisms, to accompany the film’s ‘Aboriginal Sacrifice Dance’ sequence, performed by the inhabitants of Kong’s Island. But despite the use of this technique in Steiner’s acclaimed score, the producers of White Death eschewed such substitutionalism and opted for another style of music to accompany their ‘Aboriginal Dance’ sequence.

In White Death’s corroboree sequence, the screen images show its Aboriginal cast dancing and singing, accompanied by a seated percussionist. Its images are accompanied by a somewhat muffled, low fidelity musical passage. The nature of the recorded sound, the percussion instrument common to both visual and audio track, the engagement of the Aboriginal cast in dance steps and (apparent) singing (given the absence of close-ups this is an assumption); suggest to the viewer that the music is synchronous with and produced by the (apparent) on-screen performers. In this regard the music appears to ‘fit’ and has none of the incongruity and obvious artificialism of Steiner’s score in King Kong. Yet, despite its apparent congruity, the music is notable for being indexical of the complexity of Palm Island culture in the 1930s and for representing a very different style to that indigenous to the Whitsundays’ original Ngāro inhabitants.

To begin with, the corroboree sequence shows a performer beating time with (approximately) half metre long sticks on a small percussion instrument which appears to be a (slit)
wooden idiophone\textsuperscript{40} (the image is somewhat indistinct). Given that this is not an instrument that researchers have identified in use among Queensland Aborigines (during any historical period)\textsuperscript{41}, it suggests that this instrument has been incorporated into Aboriginal repertoire from Torres Strait Island culture. Aside from the presence of a wooden idiophone, the most immediately incongruous element to the researcher with even a basic familiarity with Australian indigenous musics is that the song featured on the soundtrack during the corroboree scene is not, in any sense, a composition of a kind that would have been performed at a traditional Aboriginal corroboree. Even without recourse to further identification of the song based upon the language in which it is sung, its melodic structure and vocal performance (with a high melodic variation rising over a lower dominant, melodic part) shows the clear influence of styles of Christian hymn singing. While this musical tradition influenced some Aboriginal music cultures in the early 20th Century there appear to be no records of its being used in festive (male) corroboree performances of the type shown in \textit{White Death}.

While the song may seem aberrational in the context of traditional Aboriginal cultures, its performers’ schooling in Palm Island’s polyculture provides the explanation and ‘bridge’ for its performance. Indeed, the song is a relatively typical example of a particular localised repertoire. The repertoire in question is that of the Torres Straits, where Christian hymnody, often mediated via Pacific Islander missionaries such as Solomon Islanders and Samoans, had been introduced (and localised) into both sacred and secular local language song repertoires from the 1880s on. This identification is confirmed by the language of the song featured during the corroboree sequence, which is sung in a dialect of the western Torres Straits Kala Lagaw Ya language\textsuperscript{42}. Helen Reeves Lawrence has further identified the song (which has no commonly accepted title) as a secular composition "well known throughout the Torres Strait" usually, though not exclusively, performed as an accompaniment to dancing\textsuperscript{43} (p.c. August 2000).

In the manner of other songs incorporated and adapted by Palm Island Aborigines such as the Birrigubba performers discussed above, the song, as featured in \textit{White Death}, is modified from its more common Torres Straits form. As Reeves Lawrence has observed:

This recording [in the film] has an unusual performance. For one thing, there is no skin drum (warup) accompaniment. As is characteristic of this kind of dance song, the main beat (usually provided by the warup, but absent here) is subdivided equally into four, with the accent coming on the first beat of each group of four. These subdivided beats are usually produced by beating a bamboo slit-drum (lumut) with two sticks. However, on this recording the timbre of the beating does not sound like struck bamboo and a substitute for the lumut is being used. (p.c. August 200)

While we can only speculate whether the reasons for the change in percussion accompaniment are due to a process of modification of material to align it with previously established performance styles and/or, more simply, due to the improvised nature of the performance on available instruments by available performers; the recorded performance represents a significant variant of its source material.

In both its music and its visual/performance styles, \textit{White Death}'s corroboree scene presents a composite form, derived from the cultural mixtures occurring on Palm Island that
were then exported to the Whitsundays for the duration of *White Death*’s production. The compound culture of the Palm Islanders provides the film with a fabricated ethnicity used to spice up the (depopulated) Islands and to excite a cinema audience unaware of the actualities of the archipelago’s indigenous history. In this regard, at least, the film’s corroboree sequence presaged the combinations of music, instrumentation, dance (and discourse) that took place on Hayman Island some twenty five years later as a manifestation of a post-War exoticism. But unlike this form and practice, *White Death*’s corroborees and Aboriginal presence were presented as (implicitly) authentic.

In terms of its manufacture in a particular locale, the production event and subsequent text of *White Death* can be seen as inter-related and overlapping contact zones which represent elaborations of previous intersections and improvised encounters. While *White Death*’s fictions – and, specifically, fictionalised Aboriginal presence – may not represent any direct re-staging of Ngaro history, its occurrence and subsequent circulation gives it an historical status in its own right as part of a modern, mediated and syncretic Whitsunday history in which exoticism and fantasies of difference have played a prominent role.

**End Notes**

1. Either for acts regarded as offences by the Australian legal system or simply due to the wish of various minor Queensland government officers and/or pastoralists to remove particular individuals from their areas. (See Watson, 1993: 10).

2. Peter Prior recalls, “[s]ome for punishment or many of them were just taken away from their families and sent to Palm to work” (1993: 16).

3. For discussion of Japanese involvement in the Torres Strait lugger trade and their relationships with Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal crews, see Hayward and Konishi (2001).

4. While Prior may have returned to Palm Island after working on luggers, many young men did not, using the opportunity to escape (Watson, 1993: 106).

5. Fully titled the ‘Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act’.

6. Such as the access to opium indicated in its full title (above) and the exploitation of Aboriginal women by Euro-Australian men.

7. The establishment of a brass band was originally suggested by a member of the Aboriginal community, Ellison Obah, who had performed in one during his previous confinement on a mainland reserve.

8. Watson (1993: 215) notes that in the 1930s the Anglican Church on the Island allowed a Torres Strait Islander choir to sing “traditional songs”. Her reference to “traditional” is somewhat ambiguous in that it probably refers to the adapted Christian hymnody that developed in the Torres Straits in the late 1800s rather than material from the period prior to western contact.

9. Renarta Prior has commented “I don’t know why ‘Brown’ is in there, since it’s not a Chinese name” (ibid). I have not been able to illuminate this issue.

10. Given the absence of Chinese market gardeners on Palm Island it seems likely that if the song was composed there its lyrics refer to previous, off-Island experiences.
11. Discussed in the following chapter.

12. As far as I can gather from discussions with Renarta Prior and her recollection of performances witnessed some decades ago.

13. Although Scott’s guesstimate of the song being composed in 1936 appears to be incorrect since, as discussed in Chapter 3, Bruce Jamieson recalled that the song being performed in the Whitsundays in the early 1930s.


15. During their stay in Sydney they resided at the Aboriginal mission at La Perouse in South Sydney.

16. Despite the opening titles’ credit to Richard White for ‘dance direction’.

17. Since the film’s credit sequence identifies two Cape York Aborigines, Harri Weipa and Booya, as coordinators, the use of a didjeridu to accompany one of the film’s dance sequences is not surprising, since the instrument was in use in western Cape York around this time.

18. The addition of strings, timpani and choral chanting to particular corroboree sequences obviously represent as an attempt to integrate the music recorded by the film’s featured Aboriginal performers with the orchestral score written by Lindley Evans (and thereby manifestly does not constitute any kind of authentic representation).

19. While Peter Prior and his cousins were accomplished singers and dancers, they did not appear as featured performers in these scenes. (Thanks to Renarta Prior for this information [interview, October 2000].)

20. Including Wanderer of the Wastelands (1923), Nevada (1928) and Code of The West (1934).

21. In her preface to the 1977 publication of the book, Grey’s daughter Loren Grey states that the novel was first submitted to Grey’s publishers, Harper and Brothers, shortly after his death in 1939 but was rejected for publication on the grounds that its contents were deemed “too ‘daring’” for Grey’s existing audience (1977: viii) (presumably with regard to the book’s eroticism and descriptions of inter-racial sexual relations).

22. The Australian author and adventurer Norman Caldwell and Grass Island resident – and renowned local ‘character’ – Boyd Lee shared these sentiments. Caldwell stayed with Lee on several occasions during the early-mid 1930s and published two books concerning his fishing exploits (Fangs of the Sea [1936] and Titans of the Barrier Reef [1938]). Lee was also renowned for his fishing skills and his abilities to trap other local fauna, such as crocodiles.

23. Who had no previous experience in this role.

24. The images of the boats and their crew are bound into the narrative in an extended ‘cutaway’ sequence (as it) witnessed by the young lovers from the beach. This sequence shows a lugger moored off the coast of Hayman Island and groups of Torres Strait Islanders diving on the reefs for bêche de mer and trochus shells and emerging from the water to present their harvest to the camera. Lacking any narrative function (and never subsequently referred to in the narrative), the sequence appears to principally reflect Grey’s personal appreciation of the fishing and diving skills of indigenous Australians cited in the prefatory quotation to this chapter (and the fortuitous availability of the lugger offshore during the film shoot).

26. The diegetic mode is one that accords to the coherent fictional world of the film (usually, in the West, a realist one), where sounds have on-screen sources (either visually represented and/or implied).

27. By which I mean the quality of recorded studio musical sound as opposed to standard film sound (in the genre, budgetary-range and period in which the film was produced).

28. Bigbelt’s role in *White Death* suggests an inter-textual allusion to *Uncivilised*. As is detailed by Elsa Chauvel (1973: 71-72), Bigbelt took a marked dislike to *Uncivilised*’s male star Charles Hooey. Since Bigbelt was a convicted murderer, Hooey was, unsurprisingly, somewhat intimidated and particularly wary of Bigbelt during shooting. Bigbelt’s role in *White Death* was as a member of the local Aboriginal community ‘borrowed’ by Grey to shadow Firth and intimidate him into not interfering with Grey’s shark hunting endeavours.

29. Thanks to Aline Scott-Maxwell for her discussion of Goodman’s score with me (in e-mail exchanges between us in August 2000).

30. Goodman was a South African born musician who moved to Sydney in 1929 to take up the position of Professor of Piano at the Conservatorium of Music after studying at London’s Royal College of Music. Goodman introduced a mixed bill of musical performances and film screenings at Sydney’s St James Theatre in 1933-35 and at Prince Edward’s Theatre in 1935.

31. Who made some notable early recordings of Aboriginal music.

32. In her biography of Goodman, his wife Virginia wrote, with regard to *Jedda*:

   It was a very good film score until Elsa Chauvel, the wife of Charles Chauvel, decided that parts of it were too modern. She had old silent movie style ‘hurry music’ substituted for sections where Isadore had used bird calls and authentic Aboriginal instrumentation. The score somehow later disappeared. (Goodman, 1983: 126)

33. Such as Lang and West (1921) and Rapee (1925). (See Scott-Maxwell [1997: 47-49]).

34. These resemble poles featured in Chauvel’s *Uncivilised* (1935), which, as discussed above, featured many of the same Aboriginal performers. A publicity shot for *Uncivilised* (reproduced in Chauvel Carlsson [1989: 97]) shows Aboriginal artists decorating an upright log with spiral and dot patterns under the watchful eye of the film’s art director James Coleman. Chauvel Carlsson’s caption states that Coleman “had chiefly to supervise and organise the natives in the art work required for the film, their own instinctive skills and knowledge of totemic design finding instant expression” (ibid) – suggesting that the Aboriginal artists employed elements of traditional visual culture to acquit aspects of the art director’s design.

35. Unfortunately, the only surviving copy of the film I have managed to locate has a six minute sequence of missing sound at this point, so the audio-track accompanying this sequence remains unknown to me.

36. One significant difference between the two corroboree scenes is that while the ceremonial body paint of the performers in both scenes is similar, Chauvel’s corroboree scene features the performers wearing distinctive striped cylindrical hats, made from tree bark, which are entirely absent from *White Death*. 
37. Since there are no records of such images being left and/or painted on rocks on Hayman Island at this time by Ngaro, these images were probably painted specifically for the sequence by an individual or individuals unknown. (See footnote 34 above.)

38. See Kibbey and Neuenfeldt (1998) for discussion of these in late 20th Century cinema.


40. A struck percussion instrument.


42. Thanks to Helen Reeves Lawrence (p.c. August 2000) for this identification.

43. Based on information supplied to her by Elemo Tapim and Doug Bon, Reeves Lawrence has detailed that:

   Although the song is of Western Islands origin, it is used for Ailan Dance [secular styles of Torres Strait Islander dancing] in the Eastern islands as well, especially by Meriam [the inhabitants of Mer island]. However, the Western Islanders perform dance to this song using their own choreographed movements, and the Eastern Islanders dance to it using a different set of choreographed movements, created by Meriam. While dancing using their own set of movements, the Meriam sing the song in Western Islands language (i.e. as it was originally composed), although they do not understand the meaning of the song text. Their dance movements do however have meaning. (p.c. August 2000)
Low-key and Festive

ISLAND RESORT ENTERTAINMENT IN 1950s–1960s

World War Two gave the tourist business a bad blow . . . but it’s an ill wind that blows no good. During the War, thousands of Australians and Americans saw the beaches of Queensland. They came, they saw, they were conquered by Queensland’s balmy weather, scenic beauty and, above all, by the wonders of the Barrier Reef. When we began business after the War, we had a converted public for our tours. We had ex-servicemen in every State who were ‘walking advertisements for Queensland’, telling everyone of its charms. (Ferguson, 1954⁺, quoted in Barr, 1990: 34)

Following the interruption of the War years, when resorts were closed (between 1942–45), regional tourism slowly revived in the late 1940s. Along with the reactivation of individual resorts, the establishment of the Roylens cruise boat company at Mackay in 1948 was also a significant development. Initial Roylens cruises passed through the Whitsundays en route to the outer fringes of the Great Barrier Reef but, with the number of Roylens boats expanding to eight by the early 1960s, islands such as Brampton became regular stopping-off points. As Section I of this chapter outlines, with the exception of the re-developed Hayman Island facility, discussed in detail in Chapter 6, the types of entertainment offered at Whitsunday resorts in the immediate post-War period continued the low-key style established in the 1930s. From 1958 on, individual island resorts also collaborated in an annual festival, aspects of which, as Section II describes, provided a significant engagement with the region’s history.

I. Reviving the 1930s

Without exception, all Whitsunday Island resorts offered some kind of musical entertainment in the immediate post-War period. Smaller resorts without staff willing and/or able to perform relied on phonograms and radios for entertainment. As a visitor to South Molle Island in the early 1950s recalled (in Program 1 of the ABC Radio Huts to Highrise series), some resorts also relied on earlier technologies:

On South Molle, in those days, the only musical instrument [was] the pianola and so at night they had a few good rolls of dance music . . . and the rest of us would dance and play on. But that old pianola was great fun and I always remember the farewells when we left. Everyone would gather round the pianola with a few beers and have a good old sing song.
Farewells appear to have been an important feature in the closure (and subsequent memory) of individual tourist’s experiences. Helen Tiffin, who holidayed on Brampton Island on several occasions in the 1950s and 1960s, recalls that:

When guests left after a week’s stay they’d be paddled out to the Roylens boats, wearing leis, singing The Maori Farewell Song:

Now is the hour when we must say goodbye,  
Soon you'll be sailing far across the sea,  
While you’re away, Oh then remember me,  
When you return, you’ll find me waiting here

(interview, December 2000)

The choice of this song as a standard farewell for departing visitors rendered it a signature element of the Brampton Island experience at this time. Although the Island also held regular pit-roasts in this period, referred to by the Maori name hangis, the Maoriness of its entertainments were highly tenuous. The Maori Farewell Song, in particular, was a complex, mediated text. Far from being an indigenous Maori song adopted by the resort, the composition sung at Island farewells was a modified version of a piano piece written by an Australian composer around the mid 1910s1. The melody appears to have been popular with Maori performers in the 1920s and was adapted and provided with English language verses by pakeha New Zealander R. Stewart, together with a passage of Maori lyrics by Maewa Kaiau4. This version of the song was published by Beggs of Auckland in 1928 under the title Now is the Hour (Haere ra). The song subsequently established itself as a sentimental favourite for communal singing in both New Zealand and Australia (and has been characterised by John Whiteoak as “a standard device for winding up a show by really slowing and cooling down proceedings – indicating ‘that’s all folks’” [p.c. April 2001]).

The Maori theme on Brampton was also accompanied by more familiar Polynesian/Hawaiianesque entertainments. As on several other islands, members of the staff provided live entertainment in addition to their standard duties. Tiffin recalls that in the early 1960s Isla and Valda, daughters of the Islands’ owner Arthur Bussutin, and other female employees, entertained guests by donning grass skirts and leis and performing hula-style dance routines. Non-residents employed in the tourist trade were also co-opted into resort entertainment. As Valda Busuttin-Winsor recalls, for instance, in the late 1950s Viv, a local boat owner:

... used to help us organise the dances and games, like Coconut Relay Race and Duster Hockey, both simple but hilarious. There were gypsy taps, barn dances and slow jazz waltzes to “Are You Lonesome Tonight?” and “Sleepy Lagoon”... Elvis was on the Hit Parade with “Heartbreak Hotel” and “Love Me Tender”. (1982: 152)

In 1962 the Roylens Company, whose cruises had been calling at Brampton Island regularly over the previous decade, acquired the Island’s lease. Roylens’ owner-manager Tom McLean described the entertainment on offer in the period immediately prior to his purchase in the following terms:

Reels, square dances, waltzes, polkas, Boston two-steps were danced to music from records or a pianola. Whatever the activity, everyone took part. (1986: 81)
McLean’s company invested in the upgrading of the resort’s facilities and one particular building became known as the ‘Sugar Shack’, after the eponymous 1963 hit single by the US rock and roll band The Fireballs. The song and its accompanying dance became a regular feature of island entertainment at this time. A photograph reproduced in McLean (1986), accompanying a textual reference to the early 1960s on Brampton, shows about twenty individuals on a dance-floor spaced in a grid formation. The caption states, “everyone joined in the evening entertainment, which invariably included dancing the ‘Sugar Shack’” (ibid: 1983).

As with Brampton, other small island resorts relied on a combination of staff and visiting guests’ skills. Sybil Harrison, who worked at Happy Bay resort on Long Island in the 1960s, later recalled that:

> I could play the piano, sing and dance so it was natural for me to become an entertainer . . . We just had a tiny room with a bar and a piano but the things we got going were wonderful. We had singalongs, people danced and we even performed plays. (quoted in unattributed, 1995: 28)

Similarly, at Happy Bay Resort on Long Island, the resort’s owner, Henry Mountney, entertained guests. Mountney purchased the resort in 1949, in partnership with Frederick Thompson, after working as a mechanic in Mackay and visiting the Whitsundays on regular maintenance trips\(^5\). As an accomplished piano-accordion player, his skills were well suited for both accompanying sing-a-longs and providing dance music.

Aside from Hayman, which was in another league in terms of investment and facilitation during the 1950s (see the detailed account in Chapter 6), some of the most regular and enthusiastic entertainment in the archipelago was provided at Daydream Island between 1948, when it was purchased by Reg Ansett’s Barrier Reef Islands company, and 1953, when the company closed it down. Marion Eaton, who worked at the resort in this period, has provided a vivid account of the Island’s evening programs. While perhaps more elaborate and ambitious than the pre-War entertainment on the islands described in Chapter 2, her description accords with the spirit of 1930s’ participationalism:

> Guests and staff on Daydream supplied the evening’s entertainment, which took the form of sing songs, dances, costume parties, games etc. On Daydream guests used their own resources [for theme party nights] wearing magnolia and palm leaves, sheets, blankets and chamber pots on their heads.

> On Daydream almost every night’s entertainment began with a sing song round the piano – almost everyone joined in. The sheet music for the piano was varied and included some that had been on the island since the 1930s. However some [of the guests who were] pianists would bring their own which often was the latest.

> The hokey pokey was a popular dance but most people knew how to dance quite well. Occasionally there would be a demonstration of a tango (to [the tune] “Jealousy”) or a jitterbug. Some dances ended up with a conga with dozens of guests weaving snakelike out onto the beach around the cabins and back into the hall. (p.c. July 1997)

> The dancing referred to spans a range from early 20th Century convivial novelties, such
as the hokey pokey and conga, through to more overtly ‘exotic’ pair dances such as the tango. The costumery referred to indicates a distinct lack of self-consciousness and a lack of attention to glamour and grooming which befitted the low-key surrounds and facilities of the resorts. These elements continued through into the Whitsunday Festivals, introduced into the region in the late 1950s.

II. The Whitsunday Festivals

The inter-island Whitsunday Festivals were initiated in 1958 and continued through to the early 1970s. Held over a week in Spring (usually October or November), the festivals were initiated in an attempt to promote tourism outside the peak Christmas period. One of the main attractions was a series of beauty contests held on individual islands which female guests and staff would contest (in order to be awarded the title of ‘Miss Brampton’, ‘Miss Hayman’ etc.) followed by a grand final, usually held on Hayman, at which one winner was awarded the title of ‘Coral Queen’. The opening events and finale, held on weekend days, attracted day-trippers from the coast, conveyed from Proserpine (and Airlie Beach) to ferry embarkation points by specially charted buses. In addition to the extra visitors who attended events, the festivals succeeded in attracting national attention by virtue of their suitability for representation in the Cinesound, Movietone and Australian Movie Magazine cinema newsreels that continued to be produced and screened until the early 1970s.

The inaugural festival took place in 1958 and identified itself as a commemoration of Cook’s ‘discovery’ of the archipelago. Although this association appears to have been somewhat stretched, individual events provided more specific attempts to celebrate and inscribe a (particular kind of) history of the region. On South Molle Island, for instance, a mock corroboree was staged for tourists. Some 110 years after James Morrill and his shipwrecked companions’ participation in Birrigubba corroborees on the nearby coast, visitors to the island (many of whom had flown in on Trans-Australian Airline planes), ‘blacked up’, squatted on the ground and ate fruit while a giant reef cod was barbecued over a fire.

The following year provided even more complex historical burlesques. Valda Busuttil-Winsor has given an account of a festival day at Brampton Island in 1959 which merits detailed discussion here:

Around ten a.m. there came the noise of an unusually staccato-like motor overhead . . . The first helicopter to land on the isle now touched down . . . The pilot when he stepped out, shook hands with the robed “Mayor” and “Mayoress” of Brampton. When you looked closely at the Lady Mayoress, it was apparent that she wore a blonde wig made of rope, extra heavy makeup and had very masculine-looking shoulders, arms and legs. People recognized Ted, one of the staff, in the floral sun-frock, as the couple and their party returned along the beach to a decorated “Mayoral Dais”. (1982: 180)

This description refers to a gentle parody of civic duties, roles and appearances that the holidaymakers had safely left behind and accords with the kinds of masquerades and costumery also referred to by Marion Eaton (above). The next stage of the festivities, delayed until the arrival of three Roylens boats from the coast and boats from Lindeman, Happy Bay
and South Molle Islands, comprised the dramatic apex of the day, performed in front of a large crowd:

When all the visitors had landed, a canoe appeared from around the side beach, paddled by an ebony-skinned Cannibal King. The "chopper" hovered low above him, ruffling the water, and the wild-looking chief shook his paddle at it. (ibid: 181)

While it seems unlikely that either the designers of the event or its audience would have conceived it as anything other than an entertaining spectacle, the performance described above is notable for utilising a helicopter and a canoe as dramatic elements and for creating striking symbolic references to the history of the region. What better symbol of the clash between Ngaro past and Euro-Australian modernity could there be than a canoe paddler shaking his paddle at a helicopter hovering overhead and blasting him with its down-draft? The scene exemplifies the disparity of technologies, the power of the West's technological society and the intrusion of the latter into the tranquil space of the region. The performance vignette can also be interpreted more specifically. By an eerie coincidence it took place 100 years – almost to the day – after the incident that marked the beginning of a series of clashes between Ngaro and Euro-Australian mariners in the region. The opening skirmish of this campaign occurred when Captain Daniel Sinclair, captain of the Santa Barbara called in at Thomas Island after 'discovering' the site of the present day town of Bowen (at a time when James Morrill was living in the area with a local Aboriginal clan). A group of Ngaro attacked Sinclair's party and drove them away. As the subsequent development of the region attests, this victory was a brief and deceptive one.

Upon reaching the shore, the dramatic spectacle continued in a different symbolic vein:

His "wife", her similar grass-skirted garb enhanced by shells and bead necklaces, ran down the sand to meet him and present him with a small goat. After walking back up the beach, the "Queen" asked for a coconut off a tree above them. Her husband accordingly climbed up the long trunk, picked a nut, carried it down and opened it. There was something shining inside – a can of beer, soon consumed by the King and the Queen sitting at the base of the tree trunk. (1982: 181-182)\(^{10}\)

Viewed in the light of the centenary of the Thomas Island clash described above, this sequence represents a curious burlesque. The representation apparently on offer is not so much of the Ngaro, of whom the pageant designers and tourists presumably knew next to nothing, but more of a clichéd Pacific Islander indigeneity (as suggested by Bussutin-Winsor's description of the canoeist as a "Cannibal King"). The beer image returns the spectacle to a tourist experience, expressed via masquerade. While the Ngaro did not know of alcohol until introduced to it by Euro-Australian settlers, it had become a staple ingredient of the tourist experience by the 1950s. The familiar linkage of Aborigines/blackness with alcohol here serves to elide its more fundamental association with tourism.

Following the conclusion of the formal entertainment:

Waterbike races, coconut race, Inter-Island Tug O' War, an underwater Treasure Hunt, were part of the programme. A set of guys and dolls danced the reel out under the trees. The men wore white shorts and shirts, the girls were in sarongs, and all had flower leis. (ibid: 182)
While the ‘Cannibal King’ sequence described above represented a singular – and unusually resonant – performative cameo, other years offered other curious inscriptions and validations. At 1961’s Festival, for instance, the Anglican Dean of Brisbane, Reverend William Baddeley, leant his weight to the proceedings. After opening the Festival at Long Island’s Happy Bay resort, dressed in shorts and garlanded with a lei, he cruised through the flotilla of visiting boats holding a crucifix aloft to bless those present. Subsequent years saw a procession of Queensland ministers of tourism opening proceedings (and performing such onerous tasks as crowning island beauty queens).

Despite the energy and invention of resort staff on islands such as Brampton (above), the finales, usually held at Hayman Island, and featuring a Mardi Gras program or similar entertainment, represented the climax of the Festivals. As the following chapter details, these, and associated events, represented the most intense expression of 20th Century exoticism in the archipelago.

End Notes

1. E.A. Ferguson, personal communication to the Queensland Under Secretary, Department of Mines and Immigration.

2. Tom McLean founded Roylens Cruises after moving to Proserpine in 1938 to become licensee of the Proserpine Hotel. He first perceived the demand for such a service when tourists expressed a desire to visit the reef.

3. Allen Styles has identified it as a composition by Clement Scott entitled the *Swiss Cradle Song*, first published by Palings around 1913 (p.c. April 2001). John Whiteoak has provided me with an alternative identification (p.c. April 2001), citing a reference in *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News* 1/1/39 that identifies it as adapted from an Australian composition by Clarence Elkin by the Maori “prophet Ratana” who “made into a rallying song for his followers" (ibid). I have been unable to ascertain which account is the most accurate.

4. Po Atarau,
   E moea iho nei,
   E haere ana,
   Koe ki pamamao,
   Haere ra,
   Ka hoki mai ano,
   Ki i te tau tangi atu nei

5. A photograph reproduced in Blackwood (1997: 38) shows Mountney relaxing while visiting Brampton Island on a maintenance visit in the late 1940s, leaning against a tree and playing his accordion.

6. After which they were succeeded by individual annual events such as the ‘Fun Races’ referred to in Chapter 8.

7. Staff members participated at several resorts in order to assure a viable number of contestants in the contests.

8. The Australian National Screen and Sound Archive holds a variety of items from the period 1958-71 which provide an insight into the nature of the proceedings.
9. NB: In the opening part of this extract I have condensed the paragraphs of the original in order to assist sentence continuity.

10. As footnote 9. above, I have condensed the paragraphs of the original in order to assist continuity. The coconut’s role in this performance merits comment. Coconut palms were initially propagated in the Whitsundays by Euro-Australians in order to provide a food source for any mariners who might be shipwrecked in the archipelago. One individual employed by the Queensland Government to plant such trees was Daniel (‘Bob’) Dewar. Dewar was a notable amongst early Euro-Australian residents of the archipelago for marrying a Ngaro woman, known as Ginny. He resided with a group of Whitsunday Aborigines, who followed a traditional lifestyle, until the late 1920s, fishing for dugong and turtle, and lived, at different times, around the Stewart Peninsula and on Newry Island. One of his sons was Frank, the Lindeman Island storyteller discussed in Chapter 1. Bob Dewar’s history, one of Euro-Australian engagement with Ngaro culture and lifestyles, is one notably absent from spectacles such as that described by Bussutin-Winsor.
“Geography Has Gone”: HAYMAN ISLAND AND RESORT EXOTICA FROM THE 1950s–1980s

Hayman Island was something that captured the imagination of a nation when it first started. The word went right through the industry about this fabulous resort that was opening on the Great Barrier Reef. It was the first true 5 star resort which ever opened in Australia... Hayman became a catalyst in the entire development not only of the Whitsundays but of Queensland and because of Queensland, Australia. This was the first breakthrough of the [Australian] hotel industry into... catering for people on a world basis.

(Andre Maestracci, program 5, ABC Radio series Huts to Highrise [1990])

In 1947 Reg Ansett, founder and owner of the major Australian airline that bears his surname, visited the Whitsundays. Impressed by the tourist potential of the area he set up a company named Barrier Reef Islands (BRI) and acquired the leases of Daydream and Hayman Islands. As Chapter 5 detailed, the company ran Daydream Island until 1953, when its resort facilities were closed down indefinitely. From the onset however, BRI targeted Hayman Island as its principal priority and undertook a major upgrade of facilities in order to develop a luxury resort on the Island. Their aims were realised when construction was completed on what came to be known as the Royal Hayman Hotel\(^1\). The resort officially opened in July 1950 with a ceremony attended by the Australian Deputy Prime Minister Sir Arthur Fadden.

Despite its apparent exaggeration, the statement by Andre Maestracci which prefaces this chapter provides a largely accurate characterisation of both the hotel’s facilities and the impact of its opening on the Australian hotel and resort industries (and, in turn, the perception of these in the international marketplace). Indeed, the contrast between Ansett’s Royal Hayman Hotel and the rough-and-ready facilities of the first tourist ventures in the archipelago suggest a far greater chronological gap than the mere twenty five years that separates them.

Some of the models for Ansett’s resort were Honolulu hotels such as The Hawaiian and The Royal Hawaiian. These resorts enjoyed a major vogue in the 1930s and many affluent Australian customers visited Hawai’i on cruise packages during the decade. In addition to their location, the Honolulu hotels were noted for the quality of their accommodation, dining, bars and, particularly, live entertainment. The latter principally comprised the
(westernised, commercialised) *hapa haole* style of Hawaiian music and hula-style dance performance. Several Hawaiian hotels further exploited this aspect by commissioning songs that celebrated their facilities. These were published in sheet music form as holiday souvenirs. In 1935, for instance, The Royal Hawaiian Hotel commissioned Al Jacobs and Johnny Noble to write the composition *In the Royal Hawaiian Hotel*, which was recorded by Dick Mcintyre and his Harmony Hawaiians in the same year. A souvenir edition of the sheet music, featuring a prominent cover photo of the hotel's Waikiki Beach frontage, was sold at the hotel for a number of years. The sheet music was also retailed in Australia and New Zealand and the song was recorded by leading Australian Hawaiian-style balladeer Johnny Wade in 1937. The song's lyrics concerned memories of an idyllic, short-lived romance facilitated by the hotel in question and the song's final lyrical couplet pronounced:

In my memory I'll always dwell,
In the Royal Hawaiian Hotel

In order to make the parallels between their own resort and Waikiki's finest explicit, the management of the Royal Hayman Hotel ran a national competition for a theme song for the new resort and financed the recording and release of a souvenir record in 1950. This comprised two compositions – John Ashe's *I lost my heart on Hayman Island* (which won the contest) and Reg Hudson's composition *Pack up a dream and head for Hayman Island*. These two tracks were combined as the a- and b-sides of a privately pressed 78rpm 12-inch record that was sold at the resort. The record appeared with a central record label design showing a beach, palm trees and a young woman, dressed in a bikini, engaged in intimate conversation with a young man wearing floral-pattern shorts.

Ashe was a Townsville-based popular composer who began his songwriting career in the late 1930s. He became interested in Hawaiian music after listening to radio shows such as 'Under the Banyan Tree' and 'Hawaii Calls' which were broadcast live from Honolulu (Myers, 1986: 51). These shows combined a variety of songs and instrumental numbers with an audio-scape that signified Hawaiian beachside locality (through devices such as the sound of waves breaking on a beach and/or their minimally reverberated acoustically 'open' sound) and was presented by soft voiced announcers (emphasising peace, tranquility, sensuality and relaxation).

Prompted by these radio shows, and Bing Crosby's popular recordings of *hapa haole* songs, Ashe was inspired to write similar style compositions about his own 'exotic Pacific' location, the islands and waters off the coast of Townsville and around the Great Barrier Reef. Three of these compositions – *I lost my heart on Hayman Island*, *Magnetic Island* and *Sunset on Orpheus Island* – later appeared in an elegantly presented booklet of nine compositions entitled *Blue Mist: Musical Settings of Colourful Australian and New Zealand Place Names* (1952).

Rather than extolling the virtues of the Island's tourist amenities, the lyrics of *I lost my heart on Hayman Island* depicted a holiday romance blossoming on an island paradise. They comprised, in full:

I lost my heart on Hayman Island,
That lovely light on sand so white beneath the moon,
The stars look down on Hayman Island,
Where winds that woo sing soft,
As two hearts beat in tune
When I whispered “Darling, I love you”,
Came a sigh, with a sweet “I love you too”,
I lost my heart on Hayman Island,
That night I found my dreams were bound to all come true

Despite its clear derivation from *hapa haole* standards such as *Blue Hawaii*, recorded by Crosby in 1937 (with its chorus “Dreams come true/ In blue Hawaii”), Ashe’s composition is carefully crafted (within the accepted thematic clichés of the genre). One notable element is the song’s highly auditory-orientated lyrics (recalling the soundscapes of ‘Hawaii Calls’ and ‘Under the Banyan Tree’). Along with the standard reference to visual pleasures (of the “lovely light”, “stars” that “look down” and “moon”), there is the anaphonically-suggestive alliterative sibilance of the phrase “where winds that woo sing soft”; the “whisper” and “sigh” in the second verse; and the (mixed) musical metaphor of “two hearts beat in tune”. As befitting such lyrical and melodic cues – and Ashe’s original inspiration – the arrangement recorded by Melbourne’s Radio 3DB Orchestra, led by William Flynn, is markedly different from that provided by George Watson’s Hawaiians on the flip side of the souvenir single. Max Blake’s vocals, featuring heavy use of the vibrato, and its orchestral backing invite comparison to the (pseudo-Hawaiian) big band orchestrations provided for many of Crosby’s better-known recordings of *hapa haole* Hawaiian songs². The 3DB Orchestra accompanies Blake with lush strings, a harp part and brass section and also includes a variation on the vocal melody (loosely inspired by conventions of lap-steel guitar solos), provided (principally) by the string section, as an instrumental break.

As the management hoped, buoyed by the publicity around the opening of the resort, the compositions, and particularly *I lost my heart on Hayman Island*, proved popular with the Australian public. Australian vocalist Johnny Wade recorded a second version of Ashe’s composition in 1956, for Columbia Records, and re-popularised the song. A number of other Australian performers and groups also featured it in their live sets, in either vocal or instrumental versions. One significant reinterpretation was recorded (as late as 1975) by Melbourne group Jim Jensen and his Hawaiians as an evocative, exotic, late-1950s style ‘cocktail-jazz’ instrumental, featuring Hawaiian-style steel guitar and vibraphone³.

The lyrics to Hudson’s composition on the b-Side are (essentially) undiluted advertising copy for the resort. Its final verse and chorus, for instance, describes how:

You revel in the beauty of a coral pool,
Go cruising under clear blue skies,
Romance among magnolias when the night is cool,
What a wonderful Pacific paradise
So pack up your dreams and head for Hayman Island,
There you will find your dream has all come true,
For there’s holiday happiness at Hayman for you

The somewhat overstated functionality of the lyrics is emphasised on the recorded version, which foregrounds John O’Connor’s (tenor) vocals and clear enunciation. Somewhat
surprisingly, given the up-market image the resort was aspiring to, the track’s limited instrumental line-up, and the modesty of its execution, makes it closer in style to the kind of Hawaiian music that was performed by Jamieson and colleagues in the 1930s than the sweet, luxurious sounds associated with the Waikiki culture of the 1950s. The contrast in styles suggests the juxtaposition between informal beach/pool-side busking and a studio-manufactured evocation of highly commercialised leisure – a discrepancy and, indeed, tension that was to re-emerge in the materiality of resort practices at a later date.

While the Royal Hayman may have adopted a *hapa haole* song as its signature tune, the musical entertainment provided for guests in the early 1950s was orientated to a more conventional (and somewhat dated) perception of what a particularly ‘refined’ clientele would expect at a luxury hotel (whatever the location). A pianist provided unobtrusive music for pre-dinner drinks, a violinist performed for diners, wandering between tables, and after-dinner dancing was accompanied by either a pianist or a piano accordionist, providing music for waltzes, quicksteps and other ballroom standards. This entertainment has been described by (then) head chef Andre Maestacci as “tasteful, ‘quality’ music of the sort that guests of the time would expect at a luxury hotel anywhere” (interview, October 1999). Despite these attractions, the resort did not succeed in securing the volume of (highly affluent) clients it required to return a profit and began re-targeting itself at a slightly lower socio-economic bracket in 1952 (Barr, 1990: 40).

By the mid-1950s the disjuncture between the musical practices described (approvingly) by Maestacci and that of the Hotel’s official theme song was resolved as the hotel re-aligned itself to what might be termed a ‘location-sensitive’ aesthetic. Marion Eaton, who worked at the resort in the mid-1950s, has identified that during this period the resort was tentatively “feeling its way”, trying to develop an identity which would both suit its locality and ambience and also cater for fashions in leisure and resort entertainment that were in vogue with the socio-economic set it was targeting for custom (p.c. July 1997). One vogue which the hotel was ideally placed to exploit was that for Hawaiian/Polynesian theme dining, drinking and entertainment of the kind becoming popular in both (metropolitan) Australia and North America in the mid-1950s.

Exploiting the warm climate, outdoor dining and exotic (or perhaps, more accurately, ‘exotic looking’) cocktails soon became a feature of the resort. As Eaton has recalled, the resort re-orientated to a “Polynesian theme” in the mid-1950s:

... which flowed on from the daily outdoor smorgasbords, which were highly decorated with tropical flowers and fruit. A weekly spit-roast was tended by sarong clad female attendants and the waiters wore Hawaiian shirts. (p.c. July 1997)

Maestacci confirms this account:

The South Sea Island theme, with the Hawaiian association, and the Hawaiian music, came to be an Island resort theme in a lot of places at the time, not just in Queensland, and visitors were attracted to it ... The music was part of the whole experience of dining and relaxation. (interview, October 1999)

The style of music in this period, somewhat paradoxically, was essentially similar to that performed on the beaches of Hayman Island in its previous (impromptu, more down-market) incarnations – comprising *hapa haole* Hawaiian songs and similar material. While
this complemented the Polynesian-style leisure orientation of the 1940s and 1950s, it became somewhat outmoded and out-of-step with the international vogue closely association with Polynesian-theme leisure culture of the late 1950s and early 1960s – that of musical exotica. As analysed in detail in Hayward (ed) (1999), this form was developed by Les Baxter in the early 1950s, utilising large instrumental ensembles, and then modified for a small group format in Honolulu in the late 1950s by performers such as Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman. Shuhei Hosokawa has characterised the style which Denny and Lyman developed, utilising piano, vibraphone, bass, percussion (and various other ‘exotic’ instruments), as:

... a complex form premised on a play of subtle sound textures which condense various (aural) stereotypes within an unobtrusive style designed to be easily consumed and appreciated. (1999: 72)

Hosokawa further describes the form in terms of its typical performance “at a low volume, with gentle sonorities ... to an audience who were often diverted in their listening and/or engaged in parallel listening while chatting and drinking” (ibid: 86). The latter characteristics were those which account for one of its alternative names, lounge music. Despite the congruity of this form with both the Polynesian theme dining and drinking activities developing at the Hayman resort and the management’s previous orientation to what might be described as ‘discreet’ musical accompaniment for diners, this style of musical performance was not one that was employed at the Royal Hayman Hotel.

I. Hot Hayman

In 1959 Andre Maestracci became resort manager and set out to refresh and repackage the hotel. One of the means through which this was accomplished was via a radio advert produced by the Bracey’s agency. The ad’s sonic montage drew on and updated the Hawaiian resort audio-scapes presented on radio shows such as ‘Hawaii Calls’ by combining, in succession, the sounds of an airplane landing, surf sounds and a Hawaiian guitar followed by a jingle based on the refrain “Hayman Island Holiday” sung by a female vocalist to the tune of the chorus of Jean Schwartz and William Jerome’s 1910 novelty Orientalist pop song Chinatown, My Chinatown. The exoticist transposition of the latter to a Hayman Island theme came to symbolise the music culture of the Island over the next decade.

To herald what was to become the ‘Swinging Sixties’, Maestracci employed the Italian performers Duo Moreno for a three year residency (1959-62). The duo comprised two brothers, Alessandro and Cesare (Moreno), multi-instrumentalists who performed on guitars, piano, piano accordion, drums and vocals. The duo initially worked in Rome in the mid-1950s, performing on the club circuit, and appearing on radio and television, before relocating to the USA and working in New York and San Francisco. The brothers arrived in Australia in 1958 to play a series of concerts for Italian communities on Australia’s East Coast. Attracted by their energy and musical proficiency, Maestracci offered the musicians a residency at The Royal Hayman. He has identified this move as a deliberate attempt to keep ahead of the field in live entertainment by providing a band that could perform “the latest international dances” for guests (interview, October 1999). Capitalising on their success with
Hotel visitors during the period of their residency, the duo released a number of recordings in Australia (on the Astor label) that were available for purchase in the hotel (and appear to have been popular resort souvenirs). The albums featured a range of Italian, Spanish, Mexican and Latin American songs from the period. Popular songs in their (live and recorded) repertoire included a version of the international cha-cha-cha hit _Never On A Sunday_\(^1\) (sung in Italian under the title Uno a me uno a Te), a version of the Mexican composer Tomas Mendez’s rhumba song _Cu-cu-ru-cu-cu Paloma_ (popularised by Harry Belafonte) and the twist number _Tintarella di Luna_\(^2\).

![Figure 3.
Duo Moreno with Enrico Sabbatini, Hayman Island 1962 (from ‘Unforgettable Hayman’ brochure)](image)

In addition to their employment to provide music for outdoor smorgasbords, the hotel utilised the Duo Moreno’s background and air of European sophistication to enliven a weekly ‘Continental Night’\(^3\). This collapsed and condensed a series of recognisable European themes. A young Queensland woman who visited the resort in 1962\(^4\) described one such night in her diary in the following terms:

Wednesday 6th August: At night they had Continental night. Dinner by candlelight (candles stuck in wine bottles). The waitresses wore brief white satin blouses, slit
black skirts and black mesh stockings . . . The musicians wandered around the tables playing continental music during dinner. Afterwards there was cabaret in the coffee lounge. The Moreno Boys played a lot of Italian tunes, amongst them, O Sole Mio. Kay Petersen did a ballet and acrobatic dance (cart-wheels and bend-backs etc.) This was the French section. Victoria (a night club singer from Melbourne, who also appears on T.V.) also sang a couple of songs. Kay Petersen did a Spanish dance and the Moreno Boys sang a couple of Spanish songs. Mr Maestracci (the manager) also sang a couple of songs in French.

![Image of hula dancers](image)

*Figure 4. Hula Competition, Hayman Island 1962 (identity of participants unknown)*

Although the juxtaposition of Polynesian-theme outside dining and drinking and “Continental” music was, in itself, an exotic combination, these elements only represented two aspects of the multi-referential exoticism which flourished at the resort at this period. Some sense of the scope of its imagination is conveyed in the following paragraph from the hotel’s brochure ‘Unforgettable Hayman’ (1962):

If a soft voice should whisper “Viens donc, mon ami”, or a lei-garlanded maiden murmurs in liquid Hawaiian as you dance in the uninhibited gladness of a Hayman
Mardi Gras, you wouldn’t be surprised at all. For geography has gone . . . New Orleans, the Mystic Orient, Latin America, France . . . they are all there in spirit. True some liberty is taken with the calendar. On Hayman Island, Mardi Gras and New Year’s revels happen often, not just once a year; and everything is new, exciting . . . a mad whirligig of fun, frolic and fiesta to the heart quickening tempo of seductive music.

There is a striking resemblance between this promotional copy and the sleeve notes of albums by artists such as Baxter, Denny and Lyman in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The notes for these albums frequently proclaim their ability to transport the listener to exotic and often – via the sleeve image – explicitly erotic realms. As the anonymous author of the sleeve notes for Denny’s Afro-desia album (1962) relates:

We become armchair travellers with our magic carpet, our hi-fi (stereo) equipment and this album . . . [Here] has been recreated that marvellous lost universe of fantasy – completely appealing . . .

In this sense, it is possible to see the exotic gimmickries at Hayman Island in this period as attempts to materially enact the kinds of pleasure – and, specifically, transport into exotic realms – that musical exotica was being promoted as producing for its armchair hi-fi audience. Using the talents of the Duo Moreno (and regular collaborator Euro Sabatini) as a musical platform, the resort organised various fantasies of cultural difference for their clientele. While employees, costumes and props played a significant part in staging these fantasies, the participation of guests was also a crucial element. Unlike many of the Honolulu hotels, where elaborate stage shows dazzled patrons, Hayman required a greater integration of customer and staff energies for its entertainments to be effective. This aspect was noted in the holiday diary of one visitor in the following terms:

Friday 3rd August: Calypso night was on. The waitresses at dinner were dressed Calypso style too. There was a South American and also a cha-cha-cha dancing competition. There were a couple of Cabaret items. One, a voodoo dance by Hazel (a waitress also) and an Egyptian belly-dancer (Kay Petersen). Bill, a guest who was a professional entertainer, also sang. The Duo Moreno band is terrific too.

Monday 6th August: At night, the Luau Feast, where we sat on the floor in the Tapa room and had a roast pig, cooked in banana leaves in the Barbecue. A lot of girls did the Hula . . . I went in the Hula competition with Jim. Everyone in grass skirts or lap-laps. A Hungarian girl, Victoria and a middle-aged New Zealand chap won it.

As if to emphasise the cultural collisions (and general melangerie) involved in such theme nights, photos taken in 1962, show music for the hula competition being provided by Duo Moreno and Sabatini (nattily attired in Hawaiian shirts to suit the occasion) performing on acoustic ('Spanish') guitar and piano accordion. While the accordion has never established itself as a standard instrument within the Hawaiian genre, its capacity to produce what John Whiteoak has described as “dreamy Hawaiian effects such as legato, glissandi and tremolo” (p.c. August 2000) allowed it to substitute for (and approximate) the more commonly used lap steel guitar on such occasions.
The organisation of the various theme nights re-connected the resort to the highly participatory nature of pre-War Whitsunday entertainments and caused some degree of confusion amongst visitors familiar with the resort’s early 1950s’ product image. Reflecting this, one journalist visiting the island in 1962 opened a feature on the resort in the following terms:

A bearded St. Trinian’s “monster”\(^{18}\) was dancing with a hula girl, a Bedouin sheik with a Japanese geisha. Fair enough. It was Mardi Gras night. But goings-on so gay, light-hearted and crazy, were not exactly what we had expected of Hayman Island. (Mercer, 1962: 36)

Mercer’s disconcerted reaction to being pitched into a party night in which he was confronted by a bearded adult male dressed in a schoolgirl’s uniform dancing with a female in a hula outfit (presumably comprising a grass skirt and bikini top), represents his perception of there being a significant difference between the original, ‘refined’ (socio-culturally elitist) pitch of the resort referred to by Maestracci above and its (then) present. It clearly was not what he (and his lady wife) “had expected of Hayman Island”.

Mercer’s article continued with a description of the first night’s festivities that suggested
that the resort was successful in securing a high degree of participation from its guests (at least at the time of his visit):

... by the time we arrived, the bar was already a-tinkle with ice cubes and laughter ... never before had we seen an impromptu festival achieve so quickly and maintain for so long such spontaneous gaiety. Intervention by the management was limited to an invitation to guests to seek the co-operation of the orchestra if they felt like performing.

The response was frankly astonishing. Any trace of shyness was collectively given the go-by. Impromptu songs and dances ... some of them amusing, kept the orchestra busy for two hours. All night the cabaret remained alive with friendly conviviality. And it was the same every other night we visited the bars or lounges. (ibid)

The resort cultivated conviviality through various means. In Spring 1962, for example, the weekly hotel news-sheet (entitled The Beachcomber’s Bulletin) promoted a Monday night event with the headline ‘Tonight Is Meet Your Neighbours’ and described the purpose of the evening in the following terms:

We believe that during your holiday you should meet as many persons as possible, and to do so we have arranged a night during which the music and dances are planned to mix you as much as possible ... Any Gentleman dancing with the same girl twice will be requested to present her with an engagement ring.

While it would be erroneous to assume a universal inebriation amongst patrons at evening events, some degree of lubrication is both suggested in Mercer’s account and featured in resort publicity during the period. The 1962 brochure ‘Unforgettable Hayman’, for instance, includes a double-page photo, illustration and text spread on the Hotel’s cocktail bar facilities, summarised in the text in the following terms:

It’s cocktail hour ... and the wizardry of a master, at a shake of his enchanted cup, transforms mere liquids into elixir! In this friendliest of atmospheres you enjoy the potion of your choice.

With the assistance of the “master”, his “wizardry”, “his enchanted cup” and the (potent) “elixir”, the guests’ “impromptu songs and dances”, performed with the assistance of the versatile resort band, can be seen as part of the holiday makers’ collective Bacchanalian release. In this modern version of a traditional pursuit, enacted in a “wonderful Pacific paradise”, various musical and performance traditions (Hawaiian, Latin etc.) were incorporated in a casual and impromptu party context where communication and expression were unconcerned with cultural difference as anything other than a flavour to enhance proceedings. Unlike the pre-War musical interaction with Torres Strait Islanders at Hayman Island, or the earlier performances of local Aborigines, the festivities described here eliminated any sense of musical contact with, or even tangential reference to, the indigenous musics of the region which had entertained pre-War guests, opting instead for a cocktail of exoticist references.

In the 1970s the management attempted to update the hotel’s musical image by employing a series of resident musicians to perform pop/rock material. One of the longest serving of these employees was Sergio Paradiso, an Italian vocalist and electronic organist
(who specialised in performing Neil Diamond songs) who worked on the Island in the mid-
late 1970s. But despite a regular turnover of musicians and resort staff in the 1960s and
1970s, the variety of exoticist approaches discussed above continued as key elements of the
Hayman experience. As in previous periods, the dancers performing at these were largely
drawn from staff employed in other capacities at the resort.

II. Decline and Closure

With the redevelopment of Daydream, South Molle and, later, the re-establishment of
Hamilton Island as high-quality resorts (as discussed below), Hayman experienced strong
competition for custom in the 1970s and early 1980s. While it retained its weekly schedule
of six different theme nights per week into the 1980s (South Sea Island Show, Chinese New
Year, Mardi Gras, Latin American fiesta, Country and Western Night and Continental
Evening), these were increasingly formulaic and distant from the contemporary entertain-
ment culture developing in the region. The following description of the cabaret offered in
1984 by the resort’s entertainment manager Johnny Borg illustrates the Island’s increasingly
clichéd and dated style, dependent on passively consumed (and satirised) stereotypes rather
than participatory enlivenment:

On Wednesday nights it’s a Continental cabaret-type show. Johnny, who’s fluent in
five languages, invites you to travel the world with him as you sip your coffee and
cocktail. On this pleasant after-dinner journey, Johnny takes you first to ‘Gay Paris’.
He dons the cap of a Frenchman, cracking jokes and well-loved songs. For this act,
Johnny and his backing musicians, the Kalendar Band, are joined by six colourfully
attired – and extremely athletic – can-can girls.

The next culture to be seized upon – and given the comic touch – is Latin America.
Johnny’s repertoire of Mexican jokes gets the audience jovial – in a fit state of mind
for the Mafia-mocking act that follows. Johnny then shows off his character im-
personating ability – with some hilarious renditions of stage stars such as Elvis Presley,
Dean Martin and Charlie Chocker.

The versatile three-piece Kalendar Band takes the floor for the next few segments,
which are Bavarian-style, beer-drinking knee-slapping numbers . . . The show ends
with a classic continental touch – Zorba The Greek. (Unattributed, 1984b: 9)

In a final attempt to refresh the entertainment schedule, the Hotel appointed an ent-
tertainment manager with a very different performing background, Filipino trumpeter Vester
Roxas. Roxas was a well-travelled cabaret performer with an established musical pedigree,
having played with jazz greats such as Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald and Buddy Rich.
Despite his undoubted musical skills, Roxas was faced with an increasingly rudderless resort
strategy and attempted to complement his (considerable) abilities with those of the general
staff of the resort. In a move which spun one facet of Hayman Island’s entertainment culture
back to the earliest days of regional tourism (discussed in Chapter 2), Roxas co-opted the
resort’s maintenance man, Max Host, into performing on-stage on Saturday nights – at what
was billed as a ‘Bush dance’ – accompanying the dancers by performing on the bagpipes.
Under the headline ‘Shy bagpipe player leads island dance’, The Whitsunday Times (20.2.85) published a photograph of Host performing on the same terrain as that of Bruce Jamieson in the early 1930s, blowing the pipes against a background of Hayman Island palm trees.

In response to its increasing lack of direction and decline, the Hayman resort was closed-down in 1985, razed and then rebuilt as an elite, up-market operation (at a cost of $300 million), re-opening in 1987. Instead of package tour revellers, the resort reorientated itself to cater for individual guests. Since its relaunch it has been patronised by celebrities such as press magnate Rupert Murdoch (who held a famous ‘summit’ meeting with the [then] British Opposition leader Tony Blair there in 1994). The principal musical entertainer at the resort since its re-launch has been Cook Islander vocalist and guitarist John Lindsay, a skilled, melodious ballad performer who toured with various Maori pop bands in the 1970s and 1980s before entering the resort’s employment as resident musician in the Island’s Planter’s restaurant22.

Along with Lindsay, the style of visiting musical entertainers at Hayman Island in the 1990s has represented a return to the discrete ‘quality’ that Andre Maestracci aspired to in the early 1950s. Occasional higher profile events have also been more lavish than those previously staged. One private party hosted by Murdoch in 1997 for outgoing News Limited chief executive Ken Cowley, for instance, featured the following entertainment:

Jazz legend Don Burrows played during dinner, harpist Mary Doumany performed a work composed specially for Mrs Cowley, and guests danced to a surprise guest vocalist, John Farnham23. (Symons, 1997: 13)

Today, few traces of Hayman Island’s immediate post-War musical and entertainment history remain and the Island’s entertainment culture is internally discrete and largely separate from the regional circuit discussed in subsequent chapters.

III. Rivalling Hayman

Daydream Island resort was officially (re-)opened in 1968 by the Speaker of the Queensland state parliament, David Nicholson. In a ceremony that reinscribed the history of Captain Cook’s ‘discovery’ of Terra Australis and the colonial government’s adoption of the doctrine of terra nullius24, a hotel employee dressed as Cook landed on the resort’s shore and presented its owner-developer, Bernard Elsey, with a ‘charter’ which affirmed his ownership of the Island. The resort initially adopted a similar exoticist angle to that developed at Hayman Island in the 1960s and quickly established a reputation for ‘anything goes’ (‘Swinging Sixties’) hedonism and unlicensed gambling which led to sensationalist reporting in the Sydney press (coverage that probably increased its attractiveness as a holiday destination with a particular demographic).

Elsey had prior experience in the Queensland tourist industry, having establishing the Beachcomber Hotel and Tiki Village in Surfers Paradise in the 1960s. The name and style of the latter resort reflected Elsey’s interest in the 1960s’ vogue for (pseudo-Polynesian) tiki-style decor and the entertainment, drinks and food that became associated with them25. One of the notable aspects of the Tiki Village was a large central pool in the middle of which was
moored a floating platform stage sizeable enough for musicians and dancers to perform on. While not as impressive in scale, Elsey’s Daydream resort also featured a tiki theme bar area, which included artefacts (such as shields, baskets and shell ornaments) that Elsey had personally collected on visits to various Pacific Islands and a large and vivid island-scene mural. Completing the ambience was a resident ensemble, suitably named the Tiki Trio. The trio comprised Frank Smith (guitar and vocals), Johnny Visser (accordion) and Reg Braun (drums). Similarly to Hayman Island’s early 1960s resident combo, the Duo Moreno, the band did not play the style of musical exotica usually associated with tiki culture, typified by performers such as Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman, but rather blended Hawaiian/South Sea Islands-style balladry with pop standards. As Braun has described: “we tried to give a Polynesian feel to the songs we did even if they weren’t Island or Hawaiian songs” (interview, April 2000). The Tiki Trio’s residency at Daydream was abruptly curtailed in January 1970 when Cyclone Ada hit the Whitsundays, almost completely demolishing Daydream Island’s facilities and severely damaging all other Island and Airlie Beach resorts. Deprived of their residency, the Tiki Trio relocated to Elsey’s Tiki Village in Surfers Paradise, where they performed until 1972.

Daydream Island’s facilities were rapidly rebuilt and the resort was operating again by late 1970, with music being provided by Alan Madden (guitar and vocals), Richard Ahmat (drums and vocals) and various bass players. Ahmat has described their repertoire as comprising:

... a bit of everything: Latin music early on, for dancing or easy listening – stuff like Never on a Sunday, Amore and Spanish Eyes – and rock and roll at the end of the night when people were in the mood for it. If guests were tired, after being out on the boats or something, we’d wind up about 10pm but if they were in the mood for raging we’d play on until around 2 a.m. (interview, April 2001)

In addition to their regular nightly gigs, the resident bands on Daydream also had to perform Hawaiian/Polynesian brackets for luau parties held on the Island. These were large-scale events, catering for up to 350 people, including parties of tourists brought over by boat from Airlie Beach. Similarly to Hayman Island, notable attractions of these were the Polynesian-style dance routines performed by young female staff at the resort. During the early 1970s the line-up of dancers on Daydream included Samoan and New Guinea employees who also helped train their Australian colleagues in appropriate movements.

Ahmat left Daydream in 1971 and Braun and Visser returned from Surfers Paradise and joined up with Madden. In the early-mid 1970s the trio played more contemporary pop material, such as Elton John songs and a number increasingly appropriate for Whitsunday tourists as the 1970s progressed. Peter, Paul and Mary’s Leavin’ on a Jet Plane, whose chorus proclaimed:

I’m leaving on a jet plane,
Don’t know when I’ll be back again,
Oh babe, I hate to go

The increased pop orientation of the band’s set typified a general shift towards contemporary pop and rock music (conceived as a style suitable for both younger and middle-aged resort clients) from the late 1970s on. Bands performing cover versions of recent hits and
discotheques playing similar material became increasingly prominent in the Islands and these entertainment styles and practices were factored into the design of new resorts such as Hamilton Island, which initially opened in 1984 and re-opened (after a major fire) in 1986²⁹.

Since the mid-1980s, live music at Island resorts has been provided by a combination of acts (usually from outside the region) imported for short-term residencies, together with locally based artists employed for individual and/or regular weekly gigs. As the following chapters detail, the latter group expanded considerably in the 1980s and provided a musical centre and identity for the region that was increasingly coastally-based and pan-archipelagic. But while many of the locally based (and highly idiosyncratic) practices discussed in this and previous chapters dwindled during the 1980s, as a narrow pop-rock repertoire gained ascendancy (and performers became increasingly professionalised and competitive), the homogenisation of regional entertainment culture also resulted in a series of reactive developments. One outcome was the formation of specialist (niche) acts as such as Gunnadood and the Flames of Polynesia (discussed in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively) and another, the rise in local songwriting (discussed in Chapter 8). While the 1980s marked the end of the musical variety culture – and florid exoticism – discussed in this chapter, a series of new performers went on to establish distinctive new styles and practices alongside the increasingly standardised pop-rock hegemony of the archipelago.

End Notes

1. The ‘Royal’ prefix was bestowed when King George booked into the resort in anticipation of a royal visit to Australia in 1949. While the royal party did not eventually visit the Island, due to the King’s bad health, the imprimatur was adopted as part of the resort’s name.

2. Together with a prominent dedication to hotel manager Arthur Benaglia.

3. During the mid-late 1930s Townsville also had an active branch of the (national) Hawaiian Club, an organisation teaching lap-steel guitar and ukulele playing and organising picnic parties and dances at which live Hawaiian music was played. Radio 4CA, from the nearby town of Cairns, also broadcast a regular live Hawaiian music show featuring a band drawn from members of the Cairns branch of the Hawaiian Club and led by guitarist Jack Sandi.

4. Ashe was not the first composer to attempt this. In the 1920s Australian locations were celebrated in songs such as Wodonga (1923), Bundaberg (1927), Cootamundra (1923) and The Murray Moon (1922). See Scott-Maxwell (1997) for further discussion.

5. Recorded by Johnny Wade and his Hawaiians in 1950.

6. The other songs comprised Coolangatta Moon (Edward Leadbeater) and the New Zealand songs Blue Mist (Dick Carr), My Little Wahini of Rota Rua (Brian Kelly), My Star Wanganui (Doug King) and Paekakariki (Ken Avery).

7. A subject which closely resembles the love song (and screen scenario) featured in White Death and the references to holiday romances in the Whitsundays discussed in Chapter 4.

8. Such as Sweet Leilani and Blue Hawaii, both recorded for the soundtrack of the 1937 film Waikiki Wedding.

10. The vogue for (quasi-Polynesian) tiki theme bars and entertainment areas began to take off in the mid-late 1950s and was popularised in North America by entrepreneur Stephen Crane. For discussion of ‘Hawaiian/Polynesian’ style entertainment in Australia during this period see Bambrick and Miller (1994: 70-76).

11. A song that was so popular in 1960 that it charted in the UK in five different versions and was also widely played on Australian radio.

12. These songs are featured on Duo Moreno’s 1961 Astor Records album Italian Favourites that includes a range of Italian, Spanish and Latin America songs. Its full track list comprises: Tintarella di Luna, Que Sera Michina, Resta Cu’imme, Eso El Amor, Come Sinfonia, Soldato de Levita, Giorgio (del Lago Maggiore), Besame Mucho, Il Cielo in una stanza, Cu-cu-ru-cu-cu Paloma, Tu vuo’ta L’Americano, Uno a me uno a Te (Never on a Sunday), Quien Sera, and Buonsera Signorina.

13. Theme evenings of this kind were held in Australian nightclubs and restaurants from the late 1940s on and were particularly popular in Sydney. (Thanks to John Whiteoak, p.c. August 2000, for this information).

14. The writer of this diary has requested anonymous attribution of the entries reproduced in this volume.

15. See the relevant chapters in Hayward (ed) (1999) for further discussion.

16. See endnote 14 above.

17. For an informed speculation as to the Duo Moreno’s model for their Hawaiian/Pacific repertoire and performance styles see Chapter 11 Section I.

18. A reference to the series of British post-War ‘St Trinian’s’ comedy films based in a (fictional) girls’ secondary school.

19. The “orchestra” in question being the Duo Moreno and Sabatini.

20. As Kelcey Braun, who worked on Hayman Island in the mid-late 1970s, recalls:

   None of us were professionals, they would take the girls off the reception desk or somewhere [for luaus] and you would go on with your fake suntan and raffia skirt. We were given some basic instruction in moves from a woman called Bonny who worked at the resort. She was an ex-stripper from London and a very good dancer. We danced to Lovely Hula Hands, Pearly Shells and songs like that. But I wouldn’t say we were in any way “authentic” to any Island styles. (interview, April 2000)

21. Possibly a misspelling of Chubby Checker?

22. Lindsay has also performed with visiting musicians. One particular concert, performed with Jim Hackett (guitar and vocals), was recorded and released on cassette by Hackett as Blue Nose (1992?) under the band name The Tradewinds (see Chapter 7 Section III for further discussion).

23. A well known, enduring and singularly non-controversial Australian pop singer.

24. As discussed in Chapter 1, this was a doctrine that presumed that there was no ownership
of land prior to colonial settlement and that land could therefore be allocated to settlers without consideration of the rights of indigenous inhabitants.

25. This trend began in continental North America in the late 1950s and was popularised by Stephen Crane’s lucrative chain of Tiki bars, the first of which opened in Montreal in 1959.

26. The Tiki Trio also played for guests during dinner, moving around the restaurant. They performed in this manner on one particularly notable night, that of Saturday 17th January 1970, as squalls blew around the Island. As Braun recalls:

We did our usual dinnertime gig around the tables in the dining room, this time wearing bright orange life jackets and playing *Abide With Me* in deference to a cyclone warning in the Coral Sea we had heard on the radio. The guests found this highly amusing but I was administering first aid to these people a few hours later after the cyclone passed through the Whitsundays leaving a death toll of fourteen. (interview, April 2000)

27. Despite the surname, and a shared ancestry in the Torres Strait, Richard Ahmat is not related to Jaffa Ah Mat, the composer of *Old T.I.* discussed in Chapter 3.

28. Air travel to the region increased steadily throughout the 1970s, further opening up the region to southern travellers.

29. See Chapter 10, Section I for further discussion of Hamilton Island’s early entertainment culture. Since its inception the (whole-island) resort has grown to the extent that it is now a town in its own right and has been identified as the largest resort in the South Pacific (Smith, 1996: 93). The feature film *Sabrina Down Under* (2000) provides an extended representation of its facilities.
Live Every Night

THE ARLIE BEACH MUSIC SCENE (1968-2000)

Chapters 2–6 detailed cultural practices enacted on various islands in the Whitsunday archipelago. Together with the islands, one further location completes the space of the contemporary Whitsundays – the narrow coastal strip, comprising Shute Harbour, Airlie Beach and Cannonvale, which faces and facilitates the archipelago. The area’s close association with the islands is inscribed in the design of local cruise operator Fantasea’s Airlie Beach booking office. The side wall is decorated with a mural that provides the shore with a distinct identity. Twisting the north-south axis and plane of the islands to a west-east panorama, the mural adds another feature, a southernmost ‘island’ comprising a long thin strip upon which nestle Shute Harbour, Airlie Beach and Cannonvale. This map reflects the manner in which these three centres effectively constitute a coastal enclave of the archipelago, bound in to its culture and economy. While the enclave is linked by road to the country town of Proserpine, to the northwest, some thirty minutes drive away; the cultural distance between the two areas is considerably further. In contrast to its newer, brasher neighbours, the historic sugar town of Proserpine, with its mills, surrounding canefields and narrow-gauge cane rail tracks, represents an older rural Queensland with a distinct culture and ambience. Older Proserpinians refer to the area around Airlie as ‘The Beach’ – a term which embodies a sense of its difference from its hinterland.

I. Developing The Scene

The present-day area of Cannonvale was first settled around 1900–1910 and expanded as a result of the use of its beach as an embarkation point for ferries servicing the fledgling Whitsunday Island resort industry during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1938 a jetty was constructed to assist this activity but rapidly deteriorated and was replaced by another at nearby Abel Point in 1948. This lasted ten years until a series of cyclones in the mid-late 1950s rendered it inoperable. A decision was then made to establish a jetty at a sheltered location on Shute Bay now known as Shute Harbour. This began operating in December 1961. The first settlements at Airlie Beach were established in the mid-1930s and residents were mostly engaged in farming until the 1960s when the development of a caravan park and motel at Airlie Beach began the expansion of tourist facilities that continued over the next four decades.
One of the first musicians to reside in the area was singer, banjo player and percussionist Jack Gilbert Crane. Crane, commonly known (and henceforth referred to) as 'Banjo Jack', was born in Tasmania in 1905. His parents moved to the outskirts of Sydney in 1914 and his father became a singer in the Sydney Philadelphian Choir. Growing up in a musical family, Banjo Jack learnt to sing, play banjo and drums and tap dance while in his teens. While information on his early life is sketchy, he appears to have travelled extensively around the Pacific during the late 1920s and 1930s, spending considerable time in China. One of his earliest musical interests was jazz, an enthusiasm that he pursued around 1930 in Shanghai by performing with a dancehall jazz band. As E. Taylor Atkins has related:

By the late 1920s and 1930s Shanghai had a firm reputation as the “Asian jazz mecca”. Hundreds of lavish dance halls, casinos, cabarets and nightclubs catered to a “large and affluent population of Western bachelors”. (1997: 95)

During the 1920s and 1930s many Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and US musicians performed in the city alongside individuals from other diverse locations. The jazz styles performed appear to have varied from New Orleans style jazz through to a variety of popular dance styles (such as the tango) (ibid).

Returning to Australia, Banjo Jack settled in rural New South Wales before enlisting in the Australian Army. After the War he lived in various locations in Queensland before arriving on the outskirts of Proserpine in 1961. Continuing to work as a labourer, musician and music teacher, he saved enough money to purchase a block of land on the hill to the immediate north of present day Airlie Beach (then an undeveloped and inexpensive area). Rather than constructing a house, he excavated a cave-like hole in the hillside and lived there from the mid-1960s on. During the 1960s he performed at country towns, often appearing with other musicians under the moniker of Jack Gilbert’s Band, and participated in the social music culture of the region. As Rex Robinson, who moved to Proserpine in the early 1960s, later

Figure 6. Banjo Jack, Airlie Beach mid-1980s
referred, at this time the area was both rural and open to outside influences:

. . . we had many impromptu music sessions at Windy Ridge Farm in those years. ‘Captain Seaweed’ was skippering boats then and he would bring musicians over who were travelling though, and our local musos like Banjo, Merv Jones, Keith Hickox would join them. I remember great sessions with Banjo, Merv and Ken Locke playing banjos together. (quoted in Pole, 1992: 3)

As the area around Airlie Beach began to develop in the late 1960s, Banjo Jack found himself in close proximity to the fledgling tourist trade that was to transform the vicinity in the 1970s and 1980s. As the earliest resident entertainer in Airlie Beach, Banjo Jack acquired a reputation as a talented (and charismatic) singer and banjoist, performing an eclectic repertoire which included popular songs from the early 1960s (such as Burl Ives’ compositions A little bitty tear and Funny way of laughin’ and Harry Belafonte’s Banana boat song) together with older jazz compositions (such as Sweet Georgia Brown and All of me). He also taught many young performers to play banjo and guitar. One of his pupils in the early 1970s was a young primary school student named Sharon Waddington who went on to become a popular Australian country music performer known professionally as Shaza Leigh. Leigh cites Banjo Jack’s tuition as an importance influence on her career:

Banjo Jack started teaching me guitar at the age of six in the back of Fuller’s music shop in Proserpine. Later, at the age of ten, I was a regular performer with Banjo and the crew at the Whitsunday Village. I was paid $20 – with free food and drinks – every Sunday evening. I thought that was pretty special at that age.

‘The Beach’, as the locals called it, didn’t appear to be a judgmental place. The people there then were all at the end of their careers, had many years of experience between them and a wealth of knowledge to pass on. They all advised me to leave and make the world mine . . . If I hadn’t met Banjo and so many other wonderful musos I may not have known the life I live now. (p.c. April 2001)

II. Establishing Airlie

In 1968 local businessman Harry Muller took a significant step in developing local tourism by opening the Airlie Beach Hotel. As Neville Smith has related:

Many claim the opening of the hotel heralded Airlie Beach as a come-and-enjoy yourself tourist destination . . . Live entertainment, for which Airlie Beach is now noted, has its roots in the early days of the Airlie Beach pub. Harry felt that the hotel lacked something – a lively atmosphere – so he hired a local band to play and sing to create this . . . The idea was an instant success and live entertainment was to become a trademark of Airlie Beach. (1996: 132)

The first established musician employed at Muller’s pub was Peter Zeighnahn, a German born pianist who migrated to Australia in the 1950s and worked on construction projects such as the Snowy Mountain scheme before relocating to Airlie Beach. In addition to playing solo, Zeighnahn worked with other local musicians, such as Keith Hickox and Banjo Jack, in the early 1970s. Hickox recalls Zeighnahn as a highly talented pianist:
I came up to the area in 1970 from Melbourne. It was just after Cyclone Ada and the Airlie Beach pub was rebuilding. Peter was employed by the pub to play at the dinner dances they ran on Sunday nights. All the locals would turn out. The place would be packed. Peter was the anchor man playing anything from classical pieces to Glen Miller tunes, jazz, some of the latest pop tunes and numbers like *Tijuana Taxi*. (interview, April 2001)

While Zeigenhahn faded out of the live performing scene by the mid-1970s (and eventually left the area in 1979), Hickox has continued to reside on the Whitsunday coast and perform with various jazz bands through to the present (as detailed below).

Another musician who relocated to Airlie Beach and gained work in the area’s new tourist environment was Tex Simmons. Originally from Tea Gardens, on the mid-north New South Wales coast, Simmons moved to the Whitsunday shore in 1972 after his wife was offered a job at a new restaurant (supposedly) opening at Airlie Beach. Upon their arrival they found that the project had collapsed and that they had no employment. Looking around for opportunities, Simmons decided to try and exploit his musical skills. He had learnt to play guitar while serving with the Australian Army in Malaya in the 1960s:

There was a bloke called Des Connors from England, who’d been the original rhythm guitarist in The Shadows, who taught me a few things. Then I joined a band called Jeff Donut and the Electrons. I used to jump around on stage playing the electric guitar (and I’d turn it off if there was a bit I didn’t know!) After that I started to work at it and learnt to play in the style of Chet Atkins – and got quite good at it. (interview, November 2000)

After returning to Australia, Simmons learnt a repertoire of Glen Campbell, Johnny Cash, Roger Miller and Charlie Pride songs, which he used to play at social occasions. Drawing on this repertoire, he approached the manager of the Village resort, Bob Porter, auditioned and was offered a residency. As he recalls, “it was a start, I got $20 a night – but no microphone or amplifier, just me and my twelve string” (ibid). Soon after, Simmons also started performing in a duo with Banjo Jack at the Village, the Airlie Beach pub and at a third venue, The Wildlife Restaurant, which opened in 1972. Located to the north of Airlie Beach, in a nature reserve, the Wildlife Restaurant initially employed musicians to perform for diners before expanding this aspect of its business in 1976 with the construction of an outdoor auditorium.

Along with holiday makers attracted by the area’s growing tourist facilities, the Whitsunday shore also received another group of visitors in the 1970s, members of the hippy/’drop-out’ culture who emerged in Australia some 5-7 years after the heyday of the North American youth movement which served as their inspiration. Following a series of rock festivals such as, most notably, the 1973 Aquarius Arts Festival at Nimbin, in northern New South Wales (often regarded as ‘Australia’s Woodstock’), groups of young, disaffected people began to visit and/or temporarily reside in rural areas, particularly in the warmer climates of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. By the mid-1970s members of this loose cultural movement were also making their presence felt around the Whitsunday shore, an area (then) safely distant from the nearest police station in Proserpine and largely tolerant of various unconventional behaviour patterns. As Simmons recalls:
There was a pretty mad hippy scene around Airlie Beach then. A lot of people would come through and there was a lot of dope smoking and some people would just live in the national parks, under a sheet of canvas, or they’d sleep out on the beaches or in the bush. (ibid)

One effect of this influx was musical, with many visitors bringing along guitars and other instruments for their own entertainment. A number of these visitors frequented and/or stayed over on Banjo Jack’s plot\(^\text{11}\), which was the site of many impromptu social events during the mid-late 1970s\(^\text{12}\). As Simmons has detailed:

People would play outdoors a lot, just play on the beach or wherever – it was all very free and easy – and if you didn’t have a regular instrument you could just join in and jam with whatever you could. (ibid)

One form of “playing along” that Simmons recalls as particularly notable during this period involved percussion performances on a variety of objects. One instrument that enjoyed a particular vogue at this time was the dried poinciana seedpod, which was rattled by performers. The instruments were known locally as ‘Airlie Beach maracas’ and were used in various contexts, including by audience members at venues such as the Airlie Beach Hotel. Other objects were also employed for percussive purposes during performances there. As Simmons recalls:

There was this one guy, who was a mechanic, who could play pretty good bongo rhythms, but he didn’t have any bongos. So he would come along to the Airlie Beach Hotel when we played and bang along with us on a saucepan. It sounded all right too! (ibid)

These impromptu ensembles were also called upon to perform civic duties. Simmons remembers that in the mid-1970s groups of musicians would be delegated to welcome tourist planes touching down at the local airstrip, on the road out to Shute Harbour:

We’d be in the bar and someone would call “Plane coming in” and we’d pile in the cars and race down there. There’d be me, with my guitar, a bloke called ‘Superhorn’ on saxophone, Banjo Jack sometimes, and a few others who were around, rattling ‘Airlie Beach maracas’ or whatever . . . and we’d meet the passengers – who would only be half a dozen or so, because only small planes could land there – and we’d be playing When the Saints go marching In and handing out leis. People got a pretty lively welcome then. (ibid)

The kind of social interactions and musical performances described above typified the area in the mid-1970s. Pete Allsop, a vocalist, guitarist and banjo-player, arrived in Airlie Beach in 1974 and performed at various venues (as well as supporting himself through a variety of other jobs)\(^\text{13}\). As he has recalled:

It was a unique place, with a unique bunch of people. The area was still really a village then. You had a small community of people who had all come there because they shared a feeling about the place. You would do planned gigs but you’d also do impromptu performances. It was like one ongoing party that kept happening in different places. Sometimes we’d all be on-stage at the pub or the Wanderers playing to an audience, sometimes we’d go over in a boat with friends to Long Island or somewhere and just have a party on the beach. (interview, April 2001)
Responding to opportunities for employment on the shore, Reg Braun, formerly of Daydream Island’s Tiki Trio, relocated to Airlie Beach in 1974. Braun began performing five nights a week at the Airlie Beach Hotel with John Maloney (guitar and vocals) – later replaced by Farmer John – and Garry Doyle (bass and flute) in a trio called The Beachcombers. Their repertoire principally comprised recent hits such as The Rolling Stones’ *Honky tonk women* and America’s *Horse with no name* and Antipodean standards such as Max Merrit’s *Slipping away from me*. The band also accompanied Ian Fraser, who managed the venue from 1974-77 and provided a floorshow, dancing in a variety of extravagant costumes, singing Frank Sinatra songs and performing a fire-eating routine.

Other musicians also began to gravitate to the Whitsunday shore in the late 1970s, including singer and guitarist Gerry Gerrard, the first Maori performer to establish himself in the area. Gerrard arrived in Australia in the mid-1970s as a member of The Maori Troubadours and settled in Airlie Beach in 1978. During his twelve year residence in the region Gerrard performed solo and worked with various ensembles. In the early 1980s he performed regularly on South Molle Island, at their weekly Island Feast nights, and played ballad and country music sets at various venues. One of his early groups was the house band assembled for the Wanderers Paradise resort in 1979. This comprised Gerrard, Tex Simmons (guitar and vocals), Tommy Smith (lead guitar), Reg Braun (bass) and Frank Hickey (drums). As accomplished musicians, the performers liked to mix the hits they were expected to perform with numbers which gave them the opportunity for more sophisticated instrumental interplay. Unfortunately, the rowdily hedonistic culture of Airlie Beach during this period often thwarted this aspiration:

> Playing with a renowned jazz guitarist like Tommy Smith generated some great music. But this wasn’t usually what our unsophisticated audiences wanted. I remember one night Tommy did this brilliant solo in *Georgia* that sent shivers up my spine. His virtuoso performance was brought to a sudden halt by a low flying drunk crash-landing on the drum kit demanding that we play the current chart hit [Joe Dolce’s] *Shaddap Your Face*. This kind of thing happened with alarming frequency. (Reg Braun, interview, April 2000)

Tommy Smith relocated to Airlie Beach in 1979. Born in Adelaide in 1920, Smith was taught to play upright bass by his father, a cellist. He joined the Australian Navy at the age of 19 and travelled extensively, visiting the USA on several occasions and attending concerts by leading jazz musicians such as Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and Artie Shaw. After leaving the Navy in 1950 he resided in the New Hebrides (present-day Vanuatu) for seven years. As he has detailed:

> I went there originally to salvage wartime equipment but the fellow I was working with shot through with the money. I stayed on and got a job as foreman of public works on Espiritu Santo Island. While I was living there I got started on the guitar again. I began performing with a Frenchman from New Caledonia, named Paul Cassin, whose father was from Guadeloupe in the Caribbean. He taught me calypso and mento and Latin music and we used to play in a trio with another musician, Michel Lavine, who used to be violinist with the Paris Symphony Orchestra. We used
to play at the only places there were on south Santo, a couple of restaurants. I got pretty good on a variety of styles, the whole thing was quite an experience. (interview, April 2001)

Smith relocated to Sydney in 1958 and established himself as a bassist, and later a jazz guitarist. One of his higher-profile engagements in this period was performing in the mid-program interlude of Graeme Bell’s early 1960s trad jazz TV program16. In 1970 Smith moved up to Queensland, performed extensively and bought himself a yacht, which he sailed up to the Whitsundays in 1977:

I needed a change and came up here. I was living on a yacht then. It sounds impressive, doesn’t it? But I was pretty broke at the time and couldn’t afford anywhere else16. (interview, October 2000)

Smith’s entry into the local music culture was swift and accidental. Simmons relates that:

I’d met Tommy Smith years before in Manly and seen him play and I remembered how good a guitar player he was. One night I was standing in the Airlie Beach Hotel, a bit stuck because I had a gig that night at the Wildlife Restaurant and needed another muso, and Tommy Smith walks in. I went up to him and said “I know you, you’re Tommy Smith, do you still play guitar?” He was a bit surprised and said, “Yes” and I said “Well you’ve got a gig tonight!” And we’ve been playing with each other, off and on, since then. (interview, November 2000)
Smith recalls that:

We began to get work at the Airlie Beach Hotel and at the local restaurants. It was all getting started then and soon after you got acts coming up on visits from Melbourne, and even Perth, but we kept working. Jazz was pretty popular in the early days – rock and roll took a while to take hold around the town. (interview, October 2000)

The local jazz scene developed by performers such as Smith (who was also well regarded as a mentor of other musicians), grew steadily during the early 1980s and by the mid-decade was even perceived to be rivalling the pop/rock covers orientation of Airlie Beach’s venue circuit. An article published in The Whitsunday Times in 1985 (entitled ‘Airlie Beach – all that jazz’) described the variety of jazz performers working in the area and quoted a local aficionado, Jan Walrave, as stating that “there are more musical sophisticates in Airlie than anyone realises” (unattributed 1985d: 15). The establishment of the Whitsunday Jazz Club in 1982 and attendance at regular jazz nights at K.C.’s and the Terraces in 1984-85 confirmed the popularity of the form at this time.

A key player in the resurgence of local jazz during the early-mid 1980s was trombonist Ron Patrick, who retired from full-time work in the music industry in Melbourne in 1981 to move to the Whitsundays. Patrick’s professional career included work with symphony orchestras, the ABC showband (led by Brian May), jazz bands and popular entertainers such as Sammy Davis Junior, Diana Ross and Debbie Reynolds. In 1981 he established a trad jazz band named The New Airliens with former ABC showband bassist Derek Capewell (bass) and locally-based musicians Keith Hickox (trumpet), Frank Hickey (drums) and Alan Dowden (piano) that played locally for several years. Patrick also performed at venues such as K.C.’s with talented local jazz players, such as guitarist Alvin ‘Tut’ Tutin and multi-instrumentalist Geoff Hales17, and provided a continuing presence for a local jazz scene that was frequently augmented by visiting musicians18.

While jazz’s popularity in Airlie’s central strip declined in the late 1980s, as bars and clubs increasingly focused on contemporary pop/rock music, the form managed to maintain a presence on the fringes of the town. In 1990 an ensemble named the Jazz and Blues Connection (J&BC) began a weekly residency at The Whitsunday Sailing Club that continued for four years. The trio initially comprised Phil Campbell (bass and vocals), Alex Riqueline (guitar and vocals) and Nigel Poole (piano). In 1993 Yvonne Anthony, a pianist and composer who introduced a series of original compositions to the ensemble’s repertoire, replaced Poole19. In 1997 members of the band began playing in various capacities with the resident quartet established by drummer Alan Dorman at a new jazz club based at the Volunteer Marine Rescue building at Shingly Bay. A modified version of the J&BC, comprising Anthony (keyboards), Patrick (musical director and brass and woodwind player), Campbell (bass) and Ray Agius (drums), adopted the moniker SpinOff and recorded a CD in 200020. Entitled Winds of Change, the album featured twelve original melodic, jazz-blues style compositions by Anthony, four instrumentals and eight songs (including two songs inspired by the Whitsundays which are discussed in Chapter 8).

Patrick’s contribution to the local jazz scene has also included work with school students, his co-ordination of a local youth jazz big band (sponsored by Fantasea Cruises in the 1990s) and his organisation of various jazz events. Despite the ascendency of pop/rock music in the
1990s, Patrick’s various projects, Chrissie Courtenay’s work with Smith and Simmons in the band The Ancient Hims (and the guitarists’ ongoing personal collaborations) have maintained jazz as part of Airlie’s public music culture.

III. Cruise Music

With the growth of Airlie Beach and the Whitsundays’ increasing reputation as a centre for yachting, a number of operators began to run regular cruises from the 1970s on. Some of the larger boats attempted to recreate the style of Airlie’s nightlife on board. During the period 1974-76, for instance, the Airlie Beach Hotel house trio (John Maloney, Reg Braun and Slim Muller) also entertained dinner cruise passengers on the Whitsunday Wanderer. These appear to have been lively events, with proceedings climaxing when the ship’s chef, Con Shears, donned a pink tutu and fishnet stockings to perform Millie’s (1964) reggae hit My Boy Lollipop while stalking around the dining area and sitting on patrons’ laps. Shears recalls that the cruise music modified as the night progressed:

We would set off gently to the folk tune I’d like to go a wandering and then by the time we got back, at the end of the night, things would have really livened up and we’d come in to land to a Gary Glitter number – the party sound of Airlie Beach at the time. (interview, April 2001)

Sunset ‘booze cruises’ on other large vessels were also popular in the 1970s–1980s, with various local musicians providing pop-rock music for passengers who were often highly inebriated by the time they returned to Shute Harbour.

Other, smaller boats crewed by owner-operators offered more low-key musical entertainments (of a kind similar to that provided by Bruce Jamieson in the 1930s). One musician who played a prominent role in both cruise music culture and Airlie’s nightlife in the early to mid-1980s was Frank Hickey. Hickey arrived in Queensland in 1977 from Melbourne, where he been drummer for Australian singer Johnny Chester (who had moved into performing country music after an early career in rock and roll[22]). Following a six month residency on Great Keppel Island (near Rockhampton), where he led the resort band and also performed as a solo guitarist, Hickey was employed on Hayman Island. His duties at the Hayman Island resort included playing in the resident band in the evenings and skippering the resort boat, The Minx, during the day. In 1980 Hickey moved to Airlie Beach, began performing with local musicians and became owner-operator of the Trinity. As part of the tourist cruises he ran Hickey would sing and play guitar, occasionally accompanied by other musicians such as Tommy Smith. His wife Alison recalls that:

Frank adored the sea. It was his main motivator and Trinity was his stage. He would sail for a couple of hours in the afternoon, drop anchor and then sing mainly sea shanties and folk and country music. His music meant a lot to the tourists and they would remember him for it. (p.c. April 2001)

His brother John, also a performer and a visitor to the Whitsundays in the 1980s, has similar recollections:

I remember seeing Frank playing outdoors in Airlie Beach, under the flames of the
kerosene lamps, with really attentive audiences who liked the ballad songs he did – like his *Warm Whitsunday isle*. He was in his element there. (interview, April 2001)

In 1984 Hickey recorded a cassette album with his brother John, under the band name ‘Shipmates’, which was sold on-board the *Trinity*. The cassette comprised eight tracks, recorded in a light, melodic, semi-acoustic, soft-rock style. It included two traditional British songs, *The rounding of Cape Horn* and *Fiddlers Green*, together with six original compositions (discussed individually in Chapter 8). Reinforcing the maritime theme of the album, the cassette cover featured a dramatic image of the *Golden Plover* under full sail.

The *Golden Plover* was a 100-foot long, two-masted sailing ship that was brought to the Whitsundays in 1975 by the Jacoby brothers – Gert, Helmut and his twin brother Gunther. The ship became an icon of Whitsunday marine leisure during the 1970s and 1980s (and subsequently featured in Phillip Noyce’s 1989 thriller film *Dead Calm*). The brothers were born and raised in Köln (Germany) and shared two main interests, sailing and singing. During their teens they developed an interest in the songs of different cultures:

> . . . a group of six of us got together with an amazing teacher who taught us songs in fifteen different languages . . . We stayed together as a group for about ten years [and] in our holidays we travelled all over Europe, especially in the countries of southern Europe like Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece. We sang the songs we had learnt everywhere – in taverns, in town squares, in people’s homes. (quoted in Pole, 1991c: 3)

The brothers arrived in Australia in 1969 to work on the reconstruction of the *Golden Plover* in Melbourne. During the lengthy reconstruction process, which was completed in 1974, they learnt a number of sea shanties from George Herbert, a Welsh rigger working on the boat. In 1974 the brothers began taking passengers on weekend sailing trips and performed songs on-board to entertain them. In mid-1975 the brothers sailed the *Golden Plover* to Airlie Beach and ran tourist cruises for four months and returned for two further months in 1976.

During their first two extended visits to the region, the Jacobys socialised and jammed with other local musicians, prompting Bob Pomeroy (who work is discussed in Chapters 8 and 9) to compose a slide guitar instrumental, entitled *The Golden Plover Theme*, that was often performed on board. In May 1976 the brothers took *The Golden Plover* on an open-ended round-the-world cruise, returning to Airlie Beach in August 1978. Upon their return, Gert and Helmut Jacoby settled in the area and resumed performing for passengers on cruises through the archipelago. During the early 1980s they frequently performed with other musicians. As Helmut Jacoby recalls:

> We would often sing with Frank Hickey or other singers on the boats, if someone was away or we were around. We would have parties and perform whenever we could. Singing on the boats was always enjoyable. It was a social thing we had then. (interview April 2001)

Helmut and Gert Jacoby also established themselves as key participants in Airlie Beach’s nightlife at this time, performing at sea shanty or ‘Buccaneer’ nights (with musicians such as Jim Fasso and Dick Otene) and performing German drinking songs at rowdy beer nights (accompanied by musicians such as Steve Rudz and Ron Hicks).
COME FOR AN EXCITING TRIP UNDER FULL SAIL BACK TO WINDJAMMER DAYS – on the 100 ft brigantine “Golden Plover”.

Enjoy the singing of sea shanties and folk songs from around the world, choose to swim, snorkel or explore. Snorkeling gear available.

Figure 8. Detail for promotional poster for Golden Plover cruises (c.1979)
Along with the Jacoby brothers, two of the area’s best-known cruise operator-performers of the 1980s were Jim Fasso and Jim Hackett (known locally as ‘Jim and Jim’). Fasso and Hackett chanced across the Whitsundays in 1980 and immediately changed their careers and lifestyles:

Jim and I were living and working in Melbourne. I was a plumber and Jim was a bricklayer. I also used to perform in a group (with three other plumbers) and I enjoyed doing that. One day I was working on a job with Jim and we decided to have a holiday. We headed off up north in a car for about six weeks and got up into Queensland and drove over the hill into Airlie. Well, we looked at the beach, with the Golden Plover at anchor in the bay, and that was it! We fell in love. (Hackett, interview, April 2001)

Shortly after arriving, Fasso and Hackett purchased the yacht La-ma-tai and began taking passengers on cruises around the inner islands. Hackett describes the musical side of these as something that grew out of the overall package they offered guests. Aiming to provide a relaxing, tranquil experience, they principally performed what Hackett has described as “gentle material – MOR songs and old-style stuff” (ibid) a repertoire that included songs by John Denver and John Williamson and Irish ballads from the Fureys’ repertoire.

Similarly to many other musicians working around Airlie in the 1980s, Hackett describes his and Fasso’s music-making as part of a lifestyle rather than an intensely professional – and professionalised – activity:

We used to take the boat out for the day and if we had no commitments that evening we’d ask if any of the passengers were in a hurry to get back. If they weren’t, we’d drop anchor and sit out there, have a few drinks and play songs until dusk. We’d often play later too. After we’d knocked off for the night we’d go down to the foreshore at Airlie Beach, under the palm trees, and we’d sit down with some of the other musos who’d come down – Bob Pomeroy, Banjo Jack, Darren from Gunnadoo … and we’d play and sing, often until three in the morning! No one would complain and people would sit by and listen if they wanted to. (ibid)

During the 1980s Hackett also performed on the La-ma-tai and at local venues as part of a three piece ensemble, entitled Tradewinds, that featured Theo Van Oosterhout on bass and vocals and Gay Bowden on vocals. The trio had a strong (and distinctly rehearsed) melodic front line, reminiscent of the Kingston Trio or Peter, Paul and Mary. Bowden recalls that the band’s repertoire was highly diverse:

… a feature of the cruises was singing, we sang everything from shanties to Maori songs, and often had other musicians cruising with us … We sang regularly on cruises and in restaurants, everything from Rock and Roll to romantic ballads (quoted in Pole, 1991b: 3)

The eclecticism Bowden refers to was represented on the band’s eponymous cassette album, released in 1984. This included standards such as Johnny Cash’s Folsom Prison blues, Elvis Presley’s Love me tender and Harry Belafonte’s Island in the sun alongside the Irish ballad Isle of Innisfree and an abbreviated, up-tempo version of Norm Clayton’s Airlie Beach song (discussed in the following chapter).
Fasso and Hackett sold the *La-ma-tai* in 1991. While Fasso moved out of the area, Hackett has continued to perform, mostly as a solo artist, and recorded a second cassette, accompanied by long-term Hayman Island resident performer John Lindsay, in 1991. Also credited to Tradewinds, the album, entitled *Blue Nose*, comprised cover versions of bush band favourites (such as *Home among the gum trees* and *Waltzing Matilda*) pop songs (such as *Sweet sixteen* and *For you*) and the title track, written by Canadian songwriter Stan Rogers (also included on Hackett’s 1984 album)\textsuperscript{22}.

**IV. Hukilaua on the shore**

While performers such as Smith, Simmons and Banjo Jack continued to perform their established (and personally preferred) repertoires at various venues in the 1970s, they also had to provide music for styles of live entertainment that hotel owners perceived tourists expected from the Whitsundays. One of these was the Polynesian-derived style that flourished on the resort islands in the 1950s-1970s (discussed in detail in Chapters 5-6). Given the low budget nature of Airlie Beach’s tourist facilities (in comparison to the major island resorts), the ‘Polynesian’ aspects of such shows were often highly tenuous.

Hukilaua were first performed onshore at the Airlie Beach Hotel in 1974, following Reg Braun’s relocation from Daydream Island. Con Shears, who worked at the hotel at the time, has recalled that early shows were both variable in content and often more dramatic than their island resort counterparts:

> We didn’t really know what we were doing at the start. The musicians would play and we would have some girls dressed up and dancing but aside from that we’d try and invent extra things. One of my strongest memories from the early hukilau shows was when I’d come on stage and sit on a chair during a song called *The only man on the island*, which was popular then. The girls would come out and wiggle suggestively around me and I’d be enjoying it. Then one night this sugarcane farmer, Alf Casey, was there and he thought he’d had a good idea.

> Alf was a bit of a character and had this ‘pet’ crocodile, about a metre and half long, which he would drive around with him on his back seat. He thought it would be good if it sat on-stage next to me during the number . . . We’ll I’d always have a few drinks before I went on and I’d manage to sit there all right but members of the audience would come up and try and take a photograph, thinking that the crocodile was stuffed, and it would turn and snap at them, scaring the life out of them . . .

> We were always a bit worried about it – and Alf – and rightly so, it turned out, since the croc bit his arm off a few years later. (interview, April 2001)

While crocodiles did not become a regular feature of the local nightlife, hukilau shows established themselves in Airlie Beach from the mid-1970s on. Musicians such as Steve Tebbett, who moved to the area in this period and secured an extended residency at the newly opened Village Resort, found themselves required to play pop/rock covers on weeknights and Polynesian(ese) shows at weekends\textsuperscript{23}. As he recalls:
On Saturday night you used to have to do a Polynesian floorshow – what they called a hukilau. The waitresses would do the dancing backed by a house band that consisted of me, Banjo Jack on congas and drums and jazz guitarist Tommy Smith. I had no previous idea about what Island music was, so I quickly learnt the chords to songs like *Pearly shells* and *Tiny bubbles* and tried to get some kind of feel but what it ended up sounding like – well, it was a bit of this and a bit of that all thrown in together.

I’ll never forget it, one night the Village’s owner, Bob Porter, came up from Brisbane to see us . . . We are playing and I’ve got cowboy boots, white jeans and a hippy-style cheesecloth loose shirt on, with my hair teased up in a Bob Dylan style. Banjo Jack was in his usual whites and Tommy was dressed like a yachtie. Bob comes in and watches our first set and then says “Christ Almighty! This is supposed to be a Hawaiian hukilau show; you look like a bunch of Mexican desperados! We’ve got to get you looking the part”. So they got some Hawaiian shirts made up for us and we really tried to make the show work. Banjo used to make flower leis and shell necklaces and give them to the kids and I even wrote a song for us called *Hawaiian Islands*, the first verse of which went:

I can feel the trade winds,
Blowing softly from the sea,
I can see the palm trees,
Swaying gently in the breeze

And it had a chorus:

Hawaiian Islands,
The beauty’s there to find,
Hawaiian islands,
I go there in my mind

When we’d play it the girls would come out and give it a shake. It was the closest I could get to Hawaiian music but I think it probably sounded more like Merle Haggard than the authentic Polynesian stuff . . . The audiences didn’t seem to mind anyway. (interview, October 2000)

Tex Simmons has similar recollections of the tenuous nature of the show’s relation to any (notional) Hawaiian referent:

Trying to sing the words to some of those Polynesian songs when you didn’t know them was awkward but the audiences loved it because we hammed it up. The word “hukilau” [in *The hukilau song*] became “nookie now!” The girls wiggled their bums and flashed as much skin as they could. They should be congratulated for their performances… as none of us had any real idea what we were doing. (p.c. April 2001)

By the 1980s the evenings appear to have passed their peak. Another locally based rock/blues singer, Chrissie Courtenay, adds that:

In the early Eighties the ‘hukilaus’, as they called them had got *very* tacky. It was a
real ‘plastic Polynesia’ thing, still pretending that we were some kind of cut-price Hawai‘i. My band would play at the hukilau with the waitresses dancing. We’d have to get up and do the standard songs but we didn’t care. I’d sing *Pearly shells* and change the words:

Shirley smells,  
Like the ocean,  
Rotting in the sun,  
Covered in sores . . .

And occasionally someone would look over at you a little puzzled, like “Did I hear that right?” It was shocking! Truly tacky. (interview October 2000)

But despite the persistence of these entertainments, the majority of bands, solo performers (and/or discos) at the new Airlie Beach resorts and venues performed a repertoire of contemporary pop/rock material.

**V. The Strip Takes Off**

During the mid-late 1970s pop-rock music began to be performed at Airlie Beach venues by bands working their way along the Queensland coast from bases in Brisbane or the Gold Coast (or further south, in New South Wales or Victoria) and through the establishment of a local ensemble, Tyte ’n’ Live, in 1978. Tyte ’n’ Live were the region’s first professional rock band and were formed by drummer Bruce Murray, originally from Brisbane, specifically to exploit the booming youth-orientated tourist scene in the area:

We were very careful from the start to think professionally. We knew we would be playing a small circuit a lot of the time so we made a real effort to keep learning new material and to have a wide repertoire. At some stages we’d be learning 3 or 4 new songs each week. We’d do Top 40 stuff, blues and few originals. (interview, April 2001)

This flexibility allowed the band to play straight rock-pop pub nights, switch to acoustic mode at other venues (playing songs by artists such as Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young or The Doobie Brothers) and be more experimental when circumstances (and mood) permitted:

Often, when we felt like it, we’d get into a bit of jamming. We’re talking about the time when Genesis, King Crimson and that type of music was big. We were all pretty good musos so sometimes we’d be doing a Top 40 number and we’d go off! We’d change the tempo and feel and really get into it! It wasn’t exactly danceable but it often worked – people kept coming. (ibid)

Tyte ’n’ Live’s live performance skills and highly varied repertoire enabled them to perform around Airlie Beach and the mid-north Queensland coast until 1985, when the group disbanded to pursue separate interests. As Murray has recalled:

Although we were a professional rock band we were very much part of the social scene that existed in those early days. We’d finish up about 11.30 and often go across
to the beach and sing and play with whoever was around. When we broke up it was
the end of an era in many ways, the scene was very different afterwards, new
people and a new feel . . . It all moves on. (ibid)

In 1980 the Airlie Beach Hotel, Wildlife Restaurant and Village were joined by a new
music venue, K.C.’s. The bar quickly established itself as a magnet for local performers. K.C.’s
was established by former Sydney-based drummer Kevin Collins (who had previously
performed for twenty years at Sydney’s famous Bourbon and Beefsteak nightclub). Collins’
presence and connections resulted in a stream of Sydney-based musicians visiting the area.
The venue opened with a two-week season by (then) Sydney-based jazz/bossa nova
guitarist and vocalist Johnny Nicol25 and went on to feature visiting artists such as Afro-
American Blues singer Wylie Read (then based in Brisbane) and Chris Qua and Harry Rivers
(from Sydney’s enduring jazz ensemble, Galapagos Duck). Local performer Richard Kaal
emphasises that:

K.C.’s was a real ‘hub’. They would have all the locals playing there and musicians
from out of town and all the musos would meet at the end of the evening. There’d
be some great nights there. (interview, August 2000)

Increasing visits from musicians from out of the area were however something of a
mixed blessing for local performers. As Kaal has also expressed:

The problem is that lots of travelling musos come through, stay for six months or so,
have a semi-holiday and upset the local musos who rely on live work for their
income. (That’s how I first came!) We always have the problem of these people
taking our gigs for far less money, so it’s difficult to make a fair living here unless
you’re well connected and established. (interview, August 2000)

Along with the “travelling musos” identified by Kaal above, a number of musicians who
were subsequently to form the core of the Airlie Beach live music scene over the next two
decades relocated to area in the early 1980s. One such performer was blues/rock vocalist
Chrissie Courtenay.

Courtenay began her career in Sydney in the early 1970s before moving up to Byron
Bay and then the Gold Coast, where she sang with a band led by guitarist Alvin Tutin.
Following her parents’ purchase of the lease of Titan Island in 1978 she began visiting the
Whitsundays regularly. After working at Daydream Island on a six month contract in 1980,
which involved waitressing as well as singing for resort guests, she relocated to Airlie Beach
in 1981 and resumed performing with Tutin in a band called Reefer, playing rock-funk
material at venues such as K.C.’s and The Village and frequently jamming with local and vis-
iting musicians. As she remembers:

K.C.’s was always my favourite venue. Sometimes, in the early days, there would be
up to a thirteen piece band on the tiny stage – musicians standing on tables to play,
 jammed up there together. There wasn’t much room for customers! (interview,
October 2000)

In 1982 Courtenay worked a year’s contract on Lindeman Island, followed by a year
working on Hamilton in 1983 with Geoff Hales. After a seven year period away in Perth,
where she performed and recorded two albums as half of a duo named Mollyduke, she
returned to Airlie Beach in 1991. One of her first projects on her return was a duo with (ex-Gunnadoo) vocalist/violinist Clare O’Meara, who performed under the name Some Girls Doo and released a (self-produced) cassette album of standards in 1993. Aside from a one year residency at the Bootleggers Club in Mackay in 1998, Courtenay has remained a staple of the local live music scene since her return from Perth. Reflecting the cost-conscious nature of venue management during the decade, much of her work in the 1990s was in small group formats, performing with guitarist Alan Pearson in a duo named Courtenay Act in the early 1990s and, more recently, with guitarist Vimmi Kaptein in a duo named Beats Working. While Courtenay has not recorded any of her own compositions, her central place in the town’s live music scene resulted in her performing a song entitled Busted Flat in Airlie Beach in the early 1990s. Loosely based on Kris Kristoffersen’s Me and Bobby McGhee, the song opened with the lines: “Busted flat in Airlie Beach/ Waiting for the rain” and had lyrics that were modified at each performance, reflecting local events and personal interactions.

As the nature and performance of Courtenay’s song suggests, the group of musicians who regularly performed around Airlie Beach in the 1980s and 1990s both perceived themselves to be (and interacted as) a community whose personalities and activities extended into Airlie Beach’s public culture. One musician whose career and persona exemplifies this is Alan Pearson. Born in Stockport, in the north of England, Pearson began performing in his teens before emigrating to Australia in 1970. Pearson initially settled in Adelaide, where he performed semi-professionally with two bands, Brandee and Affection. He chanced across Airlie Beach while travelling along the East Coast on an extended holiday:

It took four weeks to drive to Airlie. I came over the hill, and, as many others have done before and since, I thought “Wow! How long has this been here? I’m staying!” and I did. I’d never worked solo before but I started looking for work. First gig I ever

Figure 9. Alan Pearson performing on South Molle Island, 2000
got was on Daydream Island. Sybil Harrison was entertainment coordinator there and sent a 60 foot yacht to pick me up! And I got on board with my guitar and thought I’d made it! You know I’m from England – it sure beats driving over the Pennines in winter to some shitbox club in Sheffield or somewhere. That’s why you try and stay here, it’s such a good lifestyle. (interview, October 2000)

Usually working solo, Pearson provided sets of cover material, described by him as “pub grub music” (ibid), which appealed to the audiences at Airlie Beach bars. But rather than providing unobtrusive musical ‘wallpaper’, his act attempted to engage and provoke audience reaction:

I’d do a mixture of songs, like My old man’s a dustman and Speedy Gonzales – anything to annoy the audience! There was always a great deal of banter going on and I’d like to milk it. I did the Airlie Beach pub for eight years, a LOT OF heckling went on there. Everyone got stuck into me as a result. I even got this nickname ‘The Dirge’ after someone wrote a letter to the Proserpine Guardian after having seen me at The Terraces (above the pub) on a Sunday afternoon. He wrote and complained about my music and it stuck. The pub used to advertise me like that for years. They used to bill me “Almost Live – The Dirge”!

I used to have an ongoing public fight with the manager of the Airlie Beach Hotel, I’d put things in the paper about him and he’d answer back. It was like one big, continuing performance across the stage and out in public. That tells you a lot about the scene up here then, it was the whole fun thing. (ibid)

While a more skilled musician and performer than such comic descriptions imply, Pearson’s role as a solo artist (and occasional collaborator with other musicians) can be seen as one aspect of a public persona also enacted via his music journalism for various local papers in the 1980s and 1990s and frequent references to him and his practical jokes in the same publications. Just as the resort cultures discussed in Chapters 2, 5 and 6 required their animateurs, Pearson’s role in Airlie Beach’s music scene over the last two decades has been a notable one.

Along with the careers of those individual musicians discussed above, the development of regional music circuit in the 1980s also provided opportunities for a series of locally-based bands that included Centrefold (early 1980s), Black Coral and Dirty Work (mid-late 1980s), Streetwise (early 1990s), Paul Terry’s Chapa (early 1990s) and Willie Hona and Santos’s duo Manta Ray (late 1990s). Similarly, a number of major Australian bands began to add gigs in Airlie Beach to their Queensland tour itineraries from the early 1980s on (Bullamakanika, John Paul Young and The Divinyls being amongst the first major acts to perform in the area). The Airlie and archipelago circuit has also facilitated the establishment and continued viability of two ensembles that have been closely associated with the region over the last two decades – The Flames of Polynesia and Gunnadoo. Their styles, histories and artistic motivations are detailed individually in Chapters 9 and 10, reflecting their distinct contributions to the cultural environment of the region.
During the 1990s the pool of musicians profiled above was enhanced by the relocation of three experienced guitarists and vocalists to the Whitsunday shore: Richard Kaal, Vimmi Kaptein and Kieran McCarthy. Performing in various solo, duo and ensemble formats, they can, in some respects, be seen as the successors to previous local performers such as Fasso, Hackett and Hickey. But despite their abilities, their professional orientation differentiates them from the culture of the cruise-music performers discussed in Section III (above) and that of those local enthusiasts who established the Whitsunday Folk Club in 1989. The club flourished in the early 1990s and combined lively participatory sessions with appearances by visiting luminaries such as British folk stars Martin Carthy and Dave Swarbrick (in 1990). Co-founder and coordinator Pam Pole has recounted that:

The club grew in response to the wishes of many of the local, non-professional musicians to recreate the musical atmosphere of the early days of Airlie Beach/Whitsundays – when all kinds of spontaneous music happened. With the rapid growth of the Whitsundays in the 1980s, the same great spontaneous party/session scene didn’t happen so much. There were a lot of great musicians who didn’t play commercially but who were too good not to be heard. (p.c. April 2001)

Kaptein, Kaal and McCarthy’s careers are discussed in Chapter 8, with particular reference to their abilities as songwriters and their creation of a contemporary corpus of Whitsunday songs. Along with their work, another recent contribution to the music culture of the Whitsunday shore has been provided by a group whose performances, ideals and aesthetics operate outside the commercial contexts detailed above and are closer to those embraced by members of the Whitsunday Folk Club.

VI. Lifestyle Jamming

Together with the steady stream of professional musicians seeking softer climes, a quieter lifestyle and a greater connection to the natural environment, another group has also frequented the Whitsunday shore in the 1990s; a new generation of ‘counter-cultural’ travellers attracted to the region for similar reasons to their hippy predecessors of the 1970s. Patricia Sherwood has referred to this group as “alternative lifestyles” and has characterised them as sharing a common goal of “reconstructing society so as to create a cultural and social milieu that is based on co-operative, sustainable ‘quality’ personal, social and ecological relationships” (1997: 139). For this group, inspired by a mixture of ‘back-to-nature’ feral and/or New Age sensibilities, the beaches and woodlands of the Whitsunday coast and the islands of the archipelago comprise an idyllic space.

The alternative lifestyles visiting the region are most visible on the fringe of the town, in locations such as the waterfront park that runs parallel to Shute Harbour Road. During the 1990s the park hosted a series of impromptu performances, the nature and dynamics of which were in marked contrast to those that took place a hundred metres away in the nearby bars and cafes of the main tourist strip. Some aspects of this alfresco music making have been casual, quiet and personal – guitars have been gently strummed, flutes blown, songs softly voiced. Others have been more assertive.

As Sherwood has emphasised, a central aspect of alternative lifestyles’ attempts to
develop forms of cultural expression appropriate to their philosophies has been their "appropriation [of] cultural artifacts and beliefs from third or fourth world cultures" (1997: 139). In this regard, for both Australian alternative lifestylers and communities elsewhere, the didjeridu has become a favoured instrument due to (assumptions of) its deep, symbolic connections to Aboriginal culture and the Australian continent as a whole. Sherwood has argued that for alternative lifestylers the instrument has come to represent:

... a metaphor of holism which [is] seen as uniting them with the earth, with each other, with sustainable lifestyles and with all living things (1997: 141).

One performance I witnessed in the park exemplified this characterisation.

**July 24th 1998.** Under the shelter of a spreading tree, in the midday heat, a group of eight young men and women sit solemnly, heads bowed and/or swaying, listening intently to a bare-chested, dreadlocked Caucasian male playing the didjeridu. This is clearly an event the group are highly attuned to and absorbed in. While the sound of the didjeridu extends around the park and out across the bay, the space they are locked into, in the immediate area facing the open end of the didjeridu, is a closed one. What is most notable, to my exterior, dispassionate and disengaged perspective, is the musical element. Despite the suggestion implicit in the group’s focused attention that they are – in some way, at least – didjeridu cognoscenti, it is evident that the performer, whose face is strained and red, is devoting all his energy to maintaining the single note drone which is the most basic – and (literally) monotonous – element in an (accomplished) didjeridu player’s musical repertoire. This doesn’t seem to bother the listeners, for whom the event itself seems most significant: the creation of a sound-space on the Airlie Beach foreshore that the didjeridu player’s performance temporarily marks as theirs.

As Graeme Smith has emphasised, a didjeridu performance “carries a large symbolic freight” that provides “a range of meanings for various groups of users and listeners” (2001: 13). The “symbolic freight” apparent here was one premised on a respect for, and respectful attention to, a performer enacting a ritual – the performance of feral didjeridu, a self-referential and introverted practice less to do with conventional notions of musicality (and/or musical appreciation) than the claiming and demarcation of territory. Similar sonic sensibilities and strategies were also present in another performance I witnessed on the foreshore.

**January 18th 2000.** Walking along Airlie Beach’s waterfront at twilight I hear a drum booming across the still waters of the bay. Following the sound, I head south. As I approach the sound source I hear other, faint percussion noises and I locate and walk towards and past the performers. A dozen or so young people in their late teens/twenties sit or stand in a loose cluster. One group arranges food while another partakes in a small, impromptu jam session. Leading the ensemble is a male performer slapping an African djembe drum with his open hand (producing the booms I had first heard). Following his short rhythmic phrases – and somewhat disconcertingly sudden shifts (and even halts) in rhythm – are two female players performing on small hand drums. Unsurprisingly, they often lose the beat. Almost inaudibly, and clearly musically lost, a male scrutinises the neck of an acoustic guitar and tries to match soft, major-chord strums to the rhythms. Just as I began to make sense of this line-up I am startled to hear an almost dub-like intrusion into the groove as an (unseen) harmonica player attempts to insert short blues(esque) melodic ‘stabs’ over the top.
As a passing outsider, the music principally sounded a mess but, then again, like several of the previous discussed participatory practices, it was not produced for external consumption or observation. Indeed, whilst listening to the jam I was reminded of earlier musical occurrences in the region, such as the “up to date jazz band” that coalesced on Hayman Island in 1928/29. While evidence suggests that Melbourne Ward was a more competent ensemble leader than the djambe player I observed, wouldn’t there have been similar ragged edges and lost instrumental voices in those performances? And wouldn’t a similar relaxed, participatory groove have typified the local jam sessions of the 1970s in Airlie Beach, where participants accompanied guitarists and horn players with saucepans and seedpod maracas?

The use of Airlie’s waterfront park as an alternative performance space in the 1990s throws into relief the intense commercialisation of the area’s entertainment culture since the early 1980s. Bifurcated into a commodified, commercialised zone and a counter-space in which different rules and aesthetics apply, the two poles of regional music history described in previous chapters continue to be perpetuated in the social space of the region. However, in contrast to this deviation of musical practices and sensibilities, there is a substantial degree of convergence between what Sherwood identifies as the appropriation of “cultural artifacts and beliefs from third or fourth world cultures” (1997: 139) and previous exoticist practices in the area. While the ideologies, demeanour, gravity (and drugs of choice) of alternative lifestylers are markedly different from the performers and audiences who participated in the hukilau described in Section IV, it is possible to identify the operation of a common aesthetic.

In a study of non-indigenous uses of the didjeridu in contemporary music, Karl Neuenfeldt has argued that non-Aboriginal performers have used the instrument in four principal ways. He identifies these as “the essentialistic, the exotic, the equivocal and the absurd” (1994: 88). While there is a degree of subjective attribution to these (non-mutually exclusive) categories, Neuenfeldt’s characterisations illuminate the manner in which alternative lifestylers’ performances (and/or appreciation of) didjeridu music can be perceive to exist in a more complex and compromised space than that of the ideal “co-operative, sustainable ‘quality’ personal, social and ecological relationships” (Sherwood, 1997: 39) they aspire to. Expanding Neuenfeldt’s four-part characterisation to apply to a variety of musical practices that appropriate the forms and styles of cultural ‘others’, it becomes apparent that while the “essentialistic” and the (muted) middle ground of the “equivocal” do not appear to have been present in Airlie Beach’s hukilau traditions, these were, manifestly, premised on the enactment of the “exotic” and “absurd”. Similarly, applying Neuenfeldt’s schema to a variety of alternative lifestyler musical practices (such as the djambe-led jam referred to above), a distinct historical convergence is evident.

Despite the (seemingly) oppositional aesthetics of Airlie Beach’s commercial resort culture and the alternative lifestylers who have entered its space in the 1990s, both groups have been involved in the appropriation and re-creation of cultural othernesses in a specifically conceived and demarcated recreational space. In this regard, the ‘reconstructive’ aspect of alternative lifestyler culture in the 1990s is just as alien, exotic and exterior to the regional spaces it occupies as any of the other practices discussed in this (and previous) chapters. Its ‘alternatives’ are no more locally appropriate or holistic to the Whitsundays, its history or
contemporary cultures, than any other; they are, more accurately, another component in the complex, serial re-creations of culture in a markedly fluid zone.

End Notes

1. The specific focus of this study does not allow for more than passing reference to Proserpine’s cultural history. Much of this is represented in the collection, archives and various publications of the Proserpine Historical Museum – the publication A heart in two places (Un Cuore Diviso) – Italian settlement in Proserpine 1908-1998 (1998) offering a particularly rich and detailed account of its specific topic.

2. In 1989, in response to the growth in yachting in the region, a marina was built on Abel Point. This has remained free from cyclone damage and was expanded considerably in the 1990s.


4. Banjo Jack died shortly before my first research visit to the Whitsundays in 1997. My account of his life is collated from information provided by musicians he performed with and cross-checked with information provided by Pam Pole and his great-niece Robyn Cross.

5. One account, published in 1936 in the US musician’s paper Metronome, proclaimed that “Shanghai represents a Seventh Heaven for the jazz musician” (Lapham, 1936: 39) and emphasised the lack of restriction on foreign performers securing employment there (ibid). See Atkins (1997) for a qualification of this.


7. An aspect represented by land prices at this time. The plot cost him one thousand and sixty pounds.

8. His friend and sometime musical collaborator Steve Tebbett has recalled that when he first met Banjo Jack in the early 1970s:

   He lived in a cave, with a view overlooking Shingly Beach, a beautiful unspoilt sandy beach. When I went up there there was this man in his late 60s/70s and what he’d got was, well, when you looked up at Banjo’s place it looked like a resort, he’d got umbrellas and tables out – but when you got there you realised that there wasn’t anything there. He’d dug into the cliff face and put corrugated iron sheets, which you’d lift up like a hatch, and he had a cave about 3 x 4 metres in size with a bed, books and drums, guitar and banjo and that was it. He’d no running water, no electricity, nothing! (interview, October 2000)

9. During his life Banjo Jack was known variously as Jack or John and used the surnames Gilbert Crane and Gilbert.

10. The venue enjoyed a high profile in the mid-late 1970s, hosting concerts by the US soul band The Drifters in 1976 and Australian acts such as Ross Ryan, Doug Ashdown and popular Sydney-based drag act Les Girls.

11. Which became known locally as ‘the ground’.

12. Steve Tebbett remembers that:
The police used to come down from Proserpine from time to time and look around Banjo’s place for drugs, or anything else ‘suspicious’ but it didn’t used to worry Banjo. He’d have people staying with him all the time and he’d get postcards from all over the world from people who’d stayed with him. (interview, October 2000).

13. Allsop resided in Airlie Beach in 1974, lived there again in 1977 and returned on various occasions in the early 1980s.


15. The program ran from 1962-64 under several titles.

16. Smith’s boat, named Life, was the venue for many musicians’ parties at this time.

17. Hales was a former Channel Nine musical director who moved to the Whitsundays in 1981 and worked as musical director at Hamilton Island until his death in 1986.

18. During the mid-1980s Dowden and Patrick also encouraged the growth of jazz in Mackay by performing regularly at the town’s Austral Hotel with local jazz musicians, including trumpeter Ron Milliner, saxophonist Ian Aitken and drummer Ray Agius.

19. Anthony relocated to the Whitsundays from Melbourne and had also performed in London during the 1980s.

20. With guest vocalists Viv Kealley and Barbara Agius.

21. Chester was one of Melbourne’s earliest rock and roll performers. His career reached its peak in 1964 when he supported the Beatles on their Australian tour and became compere of the TV pop show Teen Scene.

22. Born in Ontario in 1949, Stan Rogers was based in Nova Scotia for most of his performing career. Blue Nose was written in 1977 as the theme song for a documentary film on the exploits of the famous Nova Scotian ship Blue Nose. It first appeared on Rogers’ 1978 album Turnaround. Rogers died in a plane crash in 1983.

23. Tebbett is an accomplished blues and country performer who also worked in the area in the mid 1990s and continues to perform short-term residencies with country singer Keri McInerney at island resorts such as South Molle.

24. ‘Nookie’ is an Australian colloquial term for sexual activity.

25. Nicol was born in Ayr, northern Queensland, of mixed raced parentage. He initially established himself as a professional musician by performing with the Maori Troubadours in the early 1960s and went on to become a cruise boat performer in the Caribbean. He relocated to Sydney in the early 1970s and recorded albums such as Touch of Blue (1975).

26. The sense of community suggested above was made manifest in the early-mid 1980s in the form of RAGs (Rough as Guts Entertainment) concerts organised for causes such as the construction of the local ambulance station and the maintenance of Proserpine Old People’s Home. As Courtenay has recalled:

   All the local musos would play at them in front of thousands of people. There were so many musicians taking part that you’d have to book in. You’d get two songs, and then you’d be off. (interview, October 2000)
27. Other terms that are often used to describe this group are ‘ferals’ and ‘New Age travellers’.

28. These associations are inscribed in the project (and track titles) of flautist/multi-instrumentalist Ian Richardson’s 1995 CD album *Dugong Dreams*. Released by Sony Music Australia (attributed to the project name Howlin’ Wind), the album opens with a track entitled *A Night In Cairns* and includes a set of gentle, ambient, instrumental compositions with titles such as *Whitsunday Raga*, *Nautilus Kabuki* and *Coral Requiem*.


30. For discussion of the specific areas in which the didjeridu was traditionally performed in Australia see Moyle (1981).
“Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes”

WHITSUNDAY SONGS AND SONGWRITERS

*With these changes in latitudes,*
*Changes in attitudes,*
*Nothing remains quite the same*

(Jimmy Buffett, *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes*, 1977)

Each Saturday morning Airlie Beach hosts a market at the eastern end of the bay where local people sell handicrafts, fruit and vegetables or second-hand goods. It’s a small, low-key affair patronised by both locals and tourists. Visiting the market on January 20th 2000, my youngest daughter and I strolled along the harbourside path looking at the stalls. The relaxed ambience was aided by an acoustic guitarist performing for customers on a small covered dais at the Sailing Club end. As he took a short break we approached the dais and perched on the edge of the platform, taking in the scene of sunny, relaxed, commerce and yachts gently rocking on their moorings in the bay. Then – perfectly on cue – Dave, the guitarist¹, started to perform Jimmy Buffett’s *Margaritaville* – a song celebrating prolonged beachside escapism (“Don’t know the reason/Stayed here all season”) and the virtues of margarita cocktails as a balm for the injured heart:

> Wasting away again in Margaritaville,
> Searching for my last jigger of salt,
> Some people claim that there’s a woman to blame,
> But I know, it’s my own damn fault

After the singer ended the song we exchanged a few words. He told me that Buffett was “one of the best” and, gesturing towards the boat-strewn bay and surrounding hills, claimed that (the song) *Margaritaville* was “just perfect for here”.

This connection is well established in the area. In April 1989 Airlie Beach’s Hogs Breath Cafe held the first in a series of annual events entitled ‘Jimmy Buffett Parrot Head Parties’ that celebrated the music, lifestyle and favoured drink (margaritas, of course) of the US performer. A local (ad hoc) ensemble billed as The Wreckcreators, provided music for the
first party and in subsequent years a variety of local musicians have performed at the event. The management of Hamilton Island resort has also recently compounded the association. As local performer Richard Kaal has reported:

This year [2000] they have been getting me to perform on the dock at Hamilton Island for cruise ships coming in. As they are bringing the people off ashore, I’m there providing the atmosphere, playing Jimmy Buffett songs. (interview, August 2000)

It is not only singers who have made the connection. Local resident John Bates’s book of Whitsunday tales and histories, *The Last Islands* (1993), opens with the following dedication:

Written for those comfortable in the cockpit of their yacht, sun awning up and cold drink close by, anchored quietly in the Whitsundays. So too, for those who wished they were in that same position.

And follows this with a quote from another Jimmy Buffett song, *Lovely Cruise*:

There’s wind in our hair and water in our shoes,
Honey it’s been a lovely cruise

Both *Lovely Cruise* and *Margaritaville* are from Buffett’s 1977 album *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes*, whose title sums up the anticipation and experience of Whitsunday cruising for the denizens of Australia’s major urban centres. This was the first of series of Buffett albums that used ‘exotic’ instrumental flourishes and timbres to spice up their country/rock base and celebrate the attraction of navigating the tropical waters, ports and sensory menu of the Caribbean. The lyrical and thematic appeal of Buffett’s Caribbean/tropicalist inflected country songs is neatly summarised by Bates’ book dedication – addressing both those privileged few able to sail the seas concerned and those for whom such a prospect is an enticingly escapist one. Buffett’s only live performance in the region was an (unannounced) acoustic concert held on Hamilton Island in 1992 during his vacation there, attended by an audience of resort guests and locals. As Bates recalls:

The place was packed. There had been all these rumours and he actually played. It was at the resort disco. He was really enjoying himself and it was perfect for the place, his songs fitted with the Whitsundays so well. (interview, October 2000)

Buffett’s tropicalist songs reflect on the experience of (anglophone) North Americans visiting and interacting with the Caribbean. The appeal of Buffett’s songs for various Whitsunday musicians, writers and resort owners is that their own experience of the Whitsundays has substantial affinities to Buffett’s tropicalist worldview. But the region has also produced its own songwriters who have written material that ranges from relatively straightforward paens to holiday hedonism through to more complex representations of place and local character. Unlike Buffett, who has never pursued a career which depended on employment at the (Caribbean) resort locations that a substantial number of his songs represent, the majority of Whitsunday songs discussed in this chapter have been written by performers dependent on – and immersed and implicated in – the local tourist environment.
I. A Taste of the Tropics – Norm Clayton

The first songwriter to emerge in the post-War resort environment of the archipelago was Norm Clayton. While his songs have a clear affinity with those previously written about the region by non-resident songwriters, the context in which they were written and performed has clear affinities to the ‘impromptu and al fresco’ style of early Whitsunday tourist music discussed in Chapter 2.

Norm Clayton moved to the Whitsundays in 1979 after a successful career as a businessman in New South Wales and South Australia. Clayton was born in Sydney in 1916, grew up in a musical family and began playing ukulele in the 1940s, choosing the instrument since it was “small and light and easy to carry around” and “good for parties” (interview, October 2000). During his business career his performances were limited to social gatherings, where he would accompany himself singing standards (such as Blue moon, The second time around and The Sheik of Araby) but his relocation to the Whitsundays, at the age of 63, allowed him to develop his musical talents further.

Twelve months after the death of his wife in 1978, Clayton met, and subsequently formed a relationship with, Sybil Harrison, a prominent figure in the development of Island resorts (and winner of several local and national prizes for services to tourism). Harrison came to the Whitsundays in 1965 and worked on Dent and Long Island resorts as an entertainment coordinator (and in various associated roles). Following Cyclone Ada, and the temporary shutdown of regional tourism, Harrison moved south to work at Tangalooma Island resort, near Brisbane, before returning to take up a position as entertainment coordinator at South Molle in 1972. In 1979 she moved to a similar position at Daydream Island, where she remained until retiring in 1989.

Clayton’s relationship with Harrison brought him into close proximity with the guests and resort environment of Daydream Island. Unlike its opening period (discussed in Chapter 6, Section III) musical entertainment on Daydream at this time was limited to that provided by staff, such as Harrison (who was an able pianist) or other employees who combined service duties with occasional performances. Clayton’s relaxed demeanour, musical skills and enthusiasm were well suited to such an environment. As he recalls:

I’d just play socially for whoever was there, nothing too formal. It was all for fun. People always want to be happy on holiday and music gets them into the mood. I used to have a great time – wonderful times. (ibid)

This environment, and substantial relaxation time, allowed Clayton to complement his repertoire of popular songs with a number of original compositions that reflected and referred to the tourist experience of the region. As he has emphasised:

I just wrote the songs about what we were doing – about the places. You’ve got to be a bit different and people liked to hear and sing about where they’ve been and what they’ll remember – the happy memories. (ibid)

The majority of Clayton’s songs comprised major key melodies, set to three or four chord ukulele accompaniments, were performed (with some variation) at medium tempos and featured catchy (singalong) choruses and lyrical/melodic hooks. The broad theme of his Whitsunday songs is summarised in the title and opening verse of A taste of the tropics:
A taste of the tropics,
Dreamy days in the Sun,
A taste of the tropics,
Good times for everyone

Clayton’s subsequent compositions tie such sentiments to specific locations. His long-term association with Daydream Island resort is commemorated in a song that recalls The Royal Hayman Hotel’s two souvenir songs (referred to in Chapter 6). Entitled The Daydream Island Song, the first verse states:

Daydream Island in the Sun,
It’s the place for everyone,
Holiday magic all day long,
Palm trees waving, music and song

Followed by a chorus with an extra hook line:

So come and join us,
For lots of fun,
Stretch out in the glorious sun,
Beautiful food for everyone
– [brief pause] –
Cocktails when the day is done

Clayton also wrote a song that extolled the virtues of Airlie Beach (both as a location in itself and a gateway to the archipelago) that appears to be the first composition to specifically refer to the town (as opposed to the islands). The Airlie Beach song is Clayton’s most lyrically detailed composition and features five verses itemising different local pleasures (the climate, boating, food, sexual opportunities and alcohol). The verses feature a distinctive AABCCB end-of-line rhyming scheme – as in verse two:

We’ve got boats with sails,
And enormous whales,
And dolphins swimming by,
There’s Islands galore,
Coral reefs off shore,
All under a bright blue sky

And the song concludes with the invitation:

Where is this paradise,
Where everything is nice,
With so much within reach?
Come Hell or bust,
You’ve got to make it a must,
To come to Airlie Beach

The unambiguously promotional aspect of such songs, together with Clayton’s spirited delivery and joie de vivre, established him as a key figure in publicising the charms of the region. A report in The Whitsunday Times later described how:
. . . his penchant for entertaining made him a must-have at every barbecue and official opening in Airlie, to the point where the Whitsunday Tourist Bureau asked him to start promoting the area throughout Queensland and around Australia. (unattributed, 1996: 11)

The subjects of the three songs detailed above made them particularly suited for their use by Clayton and Harrison in their marketing of Whitsunday tourism, an enterprise that included a lengthy national tour in 1982-83. As Harrison has recalled:

We decided to do something new, an Australia-wide tour, down south, then across the centre to Darwin and all over. We did a tourist promotion show, which worked very well. (interview, October 2000)

As Clayton has elaborated:

You’ve got to be different. People are after happiness and you’ve got to be able to project it. That’s what we did. That’s where the songs helped. We projected all right! (interview, October 2000)

During their promotional tours Clayton and Harrison met up with various people whom they had previously encountered as holidaymakers in the Whitsundays. Several of these individuals worked in the media. As a result, Clayton and Harrison were invited to appear on TV shows such as Brisbane’s Today Tonight (on which Clayton performed A taste of the tropics live).

Along with the compositions discussed above, Clayton also wrote other songs reflecting on his experiences in the Whitsundays. One of these was entitled The Torres Herald. The subject of the song provides a succinct cameo of historical change in the region. As Ray Blackwood has detailed (1997: 268), The Torres Herald was a schooner built in Brisbane in 1938 that was used by the Church of England as a missionary support vessel in the Torres Strait until the early 1970s, when it was acquired by Alan and Barbara Southwood and refurbished as a tourist charter vessel. Blackwood notes:

In 1976 a not-too-serious race between the The Torres Herald and local developer, Bob Porter’s Dahlia for a bottle of rum was the genesis of the ever-expanding Whitsunday Fun Race sailed each year off Airlie Beach. (ibid)

Clayton was at the helm of The Torres Herald for the initial race, which went on to attract dozens of entrants by the mid-1980s (and considerable notoriety for the custom of having topless female ‘figureheads’ for each boat, a concluding ‘Miss Figurehead’ contest and for bringing a large and frequently rowdy crowd to Airlie Beach for the day’s event).

While Clayton never appeared as an advertised and/or featured performer on the islands or at Airlie Beach, he became well known for singing at social gatherings and by performing on-stage during invitation slots at various venues. Through such exposure, his compositions, and particularly The Airlie Beach song, became known to locals and tourists. But despite strong local interest in his material, he did not attempt to record and release any of his songs during his performing ‘career’.
II. Shipmates

The first album to feature a number of original songs about the Whitsundays was released on cassette in 1984 under the title *From A Warm Whitsunday Isle*. The album was subtitled ‘Contemporary songs of sailing and the sea’ and was credited to an ensemble named Shipmates that comprised Frank Hickey (vocals), John Hickey (guitar, mandolin and cittern), Andrew Ingles (guitar, bass and percussion) and Andrew Hickman (vocals). As detailed in Chapter 7, Frank Hickey was a singer/guitarist/drummer and cruise boat operator based at Airlie Beach in the 1980s. His brother John, also a part-time folk musician, explains the background to the album in the following terms:

Frank had always had the idea of doing an album about the Whitsundays and one year when he came down to Tasmania on holiday we recorded the album, pretty quickly, on a four track with some other musicians we knew. (interview, April 2001)

The album comprises five original tracks (*Never for me, Fine lady, Island passage, Shadow on the sand* and *Whitehaven Bay*), a modified version of Canadian folk singer Gordon Lightfoot’s song *Christian Island* (retitled *Warm Whitsunday Island*), a traditional ballad entitled *Rounding of Cape Horn* that Frank Hickey set to music and a version of the traditional song *Fiddlers Green*. The songs on the album are performed in a semi-acoustic folk/soft-rock style, with melodic, medium-high pitched vocals and acoustic guitar lead lines and chordal fills.
The modified version of Lightfoot’s song, originally recorded for his 1972 album *Don Quixote*, crystallises the principal themes of the compositions featured on the album. Frank Hickey’s principal modifications are lyrical, switching the place of reference from Christian Island (in southern Georgian Bay, Ontario) to the Whitsundays and inserting references to Hickey’s ship *Trinity*. Recorded over a mid-tempo, semi-acoustic groove, accentuated by a lightly funky bass guitar riff, Hickey’s lyrics and tender vocal performance deliver the ballad as a quasi-love song to Hickey’s ship:

She’s built of the pine from the Tasmanian isle,
Trim in the bow and the lady’s got style,
When anchor is raised, we’ll head for home,
But how we love to roam,
On the brine and swelling foam

When the swell comes up I will fill my cup,
With the whisky of the Highlands,
And we’ll drink a toast to the Coral Coast,
And a warm Whitsunday Island

Frank Hickey’s version of the traditional song *Fiddler’s Green* provides an apposite companion to *Warm Whitsunday Island* through its lyrical theme, which contemplates a sailor’s afterlife:

And now Fiddler’s Green is a place I hear tell,
Where the old sailors go if they don’t go to Hell,
Where the skies are not grey and the dolphins all play,
And the cold coast of Greenland is far, far away

Hickey regarded the song as something of a personal anthem and regularly featured it in his performances on the *Trinity*, a factor that was given even greater poignancy in 1990 when the inscription ‘To Fiddler’s Green’ was carved as an epitaph on his tombstone following his early death.

John Hickey’s compositions *Fine lady* and *Shadow on the sand* were inspired by his visits to the Whitsundays in 1980 and 1985. Like Clayton’s *The Torres Herald*, Pomeroy’s instrumental *Golden Plover theme* and Frank Hickey’s *Warm Whitsunday Island*, *Fine lady* celebrates and commemorates a particular ship:

This old ship came into Shute Harbour when I was up there. It looked terrible, old and dirty, but I found out that it was the Klaraborg, one of the oldest surviving sailing ships in Australia at that time. It fascinated me but later I heard that it had burnt out and sunk off the coast of West Australia. It seemed a very poignant story and I wanted to record it. (interview, April 2001)

The song’s lyrics reflect this inspiration by combining a historical account of the ship with a personalised address in the chorus:

You were a fine lady,
Before your mast I felt so free,
You were a fine lady,
The oldest sailing ship on the sea
The melancholy nature and historical theme of the song’s lyrics are enhanced on the recorded version of the song by a flute introduction and accompaniment to the verses and a solo instrumental passage performed on a shawm, a medieval predecessor of the oboe with a distinct buzzing tone.

John Hickey’s second song on the album, *Shadow on The Sand*, narrates a specific journey through the archipelago:

Sailing from Brampton Island,
Heading north on the sea wind,
Shadows on the sand

Through Cumberland Channel,
Sheltered by the reef,
Through the Solway Passage,
We anchored off the beach

He describes the lyrics as a reflection of his experience in the archipelago:

When I was writing the song I was very conscious that the unspoilt nature of the islands needed to be protected and I pored over maps of the area to put in the names of the places I had been to in order to identify where those wonderful places were. (ibid)

The specific Whitsunday references and focus of the tracks described above are complemented by the more general Island topics of Ingles’ *Whitehaven Bay* and *Island Passage* and Ingles and Hickman’s *Never for me*. These songs primarily express an imagination of Island life and experience. *Whitehaven Bay* relates its protagonist’s aspiration to escape north to the Whitsundays. Recorded with an urgent rock-style arrangement, and a central instrumental break with electric and acoustic guitar interplay, the song identifies Whitehaven Bay as an ideal location (a “piece of paradise”) and considers this against the vocal protagonist’s current plight:

To get to Shute Harbour,
I need a battery for the car,
Just one more week,
One more pay,
I’ll be in Whitehaven Bay

*Never for me* shifts perspective, being written from the point of view of an individual who has succeeded in relocating to the mid-north Queensland coast. Its title refers to the city and its lyrics detail the pleasures and experiences of island life and sailing which the vocal protagonist finds preferable to his previous life:

All these islands are my home,
I will be here tomorrow,
And I will not want to go,
Back to the city – it was never meant for me

*Island passage* offers an even more generalised scenario, that of a vague dated tropicalism that evokes the Pacific fantasies of Hollywood’s *South Pacific* (1958) or the ersatz
Polynesianna of Airlie Beach’s 1980s hukilaus. Set to a light acoustic funk groove, the opening verses proclaim:

I have always wanted to go,
Where they tie the boats together,
With pieces of coconut string,
And the people tend to sing,
Every time they’re being happy

I have always seemed to dream,
Of the skin of girls in water,
And the sand dries their toes,
And the people have few clothes,
So the huts don’t need a laundry

My dream, an Island Passage,
No phones, no telex message,
Boats with sails from the reef,
Eat some fish then I can go on the beach

The songs on From A Warm Whitsunday Isle represent a variety of idealised perceptions of Whitsunday leisure, expressed by male songwriters with various degrees of experience of the region. With the exception of the references to the female form in the lyrics of Island passage (above), the album is notable for eschewing sexual themes in favour of (often ultra-romantic) celebrations of sailing and of ships often referred to as explicitly female – “my lady”, “a fine lady”, “she” etc. This lyrical orientation reflects the particular development of a male-orientated cruise music culture around Airlie Beach in the 1980s (discussed in Chapter 6, Section III) and is one that is largely absent from the songs written about the area in the 1990s.

III. The Romantic Whitsundays

The first song about the Whitsundays written by female songwriters (that my research has uncovered) was Mavis Blackwood and Karina Shim’s Whitsunday Blue (1992). The composition was written as a theme song for the local tourist industry. Gunnadoo member Darren Hicks recorded a demo version, as a soft, mid-tempo, keyboard-accompanied ballad. But while the song attracted some interest from local tourism entrepreneurs it was not released commercially and, despite occasional performances, did not enter the repertoire of any local ensemble.

Whitsunday Blue’s lyrics identify the archipelago’s natural beauty:

Whitehaven sands so pure and white,
The sea around is crystal clear,
The casuarinas gently sway,
As soft sou’easters greet the dawn
and the chorus complements such descriptions by extolling the virtues (and inevitability) of return visits:

Whitsunday Blue, I’m coming back,
Whitsunday Blue, to stay with you,
The memory of your sun-drenched days,
The memory of bright, starry nights,
The Islands wait for me and you,
The shade of poincianas wide,
The scent of flowers clouds my mind,
The sea is blue, Whitsunday Blue

The lyrical preoccupations of Whitsunday Blue are all also evident in two songs recorded by the Whitsunday jazz band SpinOff on their debut CD Winds Of Change (2001). Winds Of Change features twelve tracks written by keyboard player Yvonne Anthony, who relocated to the area in the early 1990s. Two of her songs, Out of the Blue and Hideaway Bay, are described on the CD sleeve as being “inspired by the area’s spectacular beauty”. Hideaway Bay offers a description of the archipelago similar to that detailed in the lyrics of Whitsunday Blue. This is particularly pronounced in the third verse of Anthony’s song:

An ocean blue as blue can be,
White sand as far as you can see,
A kestrel circling up above,
While dolphins dance,
We dream of making love

Like Blackwood’s lyrics, Anthony’s composition transcribes the dominant visual images of Whitsundays’ tourist culture into song. But despite lyrical similarities, Hideaway Bay principally differs from the songs discussed above by identifying the location referred to in its lyrics as a place suitable for a pair of lovers to “hide away”, an emphasis made explicit in its final verse:

A time for us,
A time to share,
A tiny sailing boat to take us there

This personal, emotional emphasis represents a return to the linkage of the region and romance represented in Moonlight on the Barrier (1935) and I lost my heart on Hayman Island (1950). However, in contrast to their masculine emphasis, as songs designed to woo their female addresses, Anthony’s Hideaway Bay represents a quieter, more private consolidation of passion and emotional affinity. This aspect is reinforced by the warm, restrained delivery of its lyrics by Phil Campbell, on the version of the song featured on Winds of Change. The track has a bossa nova rhythm performed at a brisk, medium-fast tempo with flugelhorn and, later, electric piano and flute lines interweaving with the vocal part, suggesting the emotional intertwining and intimacy described in the song’s lyrics.

The themes of Hideaway Bay are complemented, and rendered (simultaneously) more abstractly and revealingly, in the lyrics of Out Of The Blue. The song’s title suggests both the location of the Whitsundays and an individual (and relationship) there as affecting a trans-
formation in the life of the song’s lyrical protagonist. The song’s theme revolves around the double allusion identified in the song title – that of surprise and the pervasive colour of the sea. These associations are interwoven in lines such as:

Out of the blue came my fantasy,
Suddenly you seemed to be calling me,
Beautiful you wandering all alone,
Waiting for me,
Waiting to draw me near

In this verse it is ambiguous as to whether the “you” refers to the area and/or a particular individual. These ambiguous associations are deepened and intensified in the subsequent verse:

Out of the blue,
Out of my comfort zone,
Into the new,
Into the great unknown

which appears to allude to both (actual) oceanic depths and deep emotional commitment.

Similarly to Hideaway Bay, the recorded version of Out of the Blue is sung by Phil Campbell. The track begins with an eight bar instrumental sequence featuring trombone lines over a brisk samba rhythm. With the entry of the vocals the instrumental backing shifts into a colourfully sympathetic arrangement that, in combination with the song’s smooth melodic contours and Campbell’s precise, slightly huskily-timbred vocal delivery, gives the song a retro feel that evokes mid-20th Century Hollywood renditions of Latin and/or Caribbean romance and exoticism. In this regard, the song marks a significant deviation from the Hawaiianesque exoticism of many of the previous musical representations of the region and suggests an alternative feel – and rhythm – for the representation of the romantic Whitsundays.

IV. From The Shore

Along with the group of songs discussed above, which refer to the beauty of the Whitsunday Islands and sailing, a new style of song-writing addressed to local themes and characters emerged along with the development of a nucleus of musicians around Airlie Beach from the mid-1970s on. One of the earliest songwriters to relocate to the Whitsunday shore was bush band and Australiana enthusiast Bob Pomeroy, who settled in Airlie Beach in 1975. Along with his contributions to the local bush band Maple Syrup (discussed in Chapter 9), Pomeroy frequently appeared solo around Airlie Beach performing a mixture of bush ballads, sea shanties and original compositions. Many of his songs were humorous and highly irreverent. In contrast to Clayton’s smoothly celebratory material, one of Pomeroy’s songs was entitled Another shitty day in paradise. Despite its title, the song (which was never recorded) affectionately described and satirised the locale and staff of Earlando resort (north of Proserpine but part of Airlie Beach’s extended circuit), a popular venue with local performers due to the support of its licensee Don Moore for various musical projects⁶.
A similar irreverent playfulness is evident in a track by bush band musician Dave Isom, who visited the Whitsundays in 1984 and performed with Pomeroy (see the discussion in Chapter 9, Section II). *Sailing*, recorded on Isom’s 1994 album *Down to the Sea – Songs for sailors and armchair adventurers*, is identified in its CD booklet as having been “written when holed up in Cid Harbour during a 48 hour torrential downpour”. Its final verse humorously describes Isom’s perceptions of his 1984 visit:

We’ve been sailing round these islands now,
Having lots of fun,
Staying up late playing cards,
And lying around in the sun,
But I think I’ll pull up my anchor,
And move away from here,
For all I ever seem to get
Is cold women and warm beer
and provides a more down-to-earth characterisation of Whitsunday pleasures than the songs discussed in the previous section.

In 1984 singer-guitarist Greg Hastings visited Airlie Beach and stayed for a period of five months, during which time he played extensively as a solo artist and performed alongside Pomeroy in the local bush band Maple Syrup (see Chapter 9 for further discussion). Hastings was an accomplished songwriter who had previously recorded an album of original compositions entitled *Rose Without Thorns* in Canada in 1983, which he sold at his gigs. His stay on the Whitsunday shore also prompted him to write several songs about the area. Two of these were written and performed live during his residence and commemorated aspects of Airlie Beach culture. *The loopy blues* described the experience of holidaymakers and short-term visitors to the area (the ‘loopies’ referred to in the title) and, in particular, their engagements with the town’s live music culture. Recorded on Hastings’ 1995 album *Live At The Old Mill*, the song’s chorus celebrated his audience (and the opportunities available to musicians at the time):

Another night in Airlie Beach and the usual crowd was there,
Screaming off the rooftops and tearing out their hair,
There were loopies to the left and loopies to the right,
Think I’m going to pick one up and take them out tonight
and concluded with a description of his experience of live music in Airlie during the mid-1980s:

Because there’s magic in the rafters and there’s magic in the eaves,
Let’s all have another round before the evening leaves,
Join me in the chorus, cos this song’s for one and all,
But if you’re going to sing it, just sing it with some guts
Also included on *Live At The Old Mill* is Hastings’ (self-explanatory) *Whitsunday farewell*, a song that described his feelings upon leaving the area:

This place where the green hills rise out from the sea,
Where the sun shines down on the islands,
Many’s the good time has happened to me,
And I’ll be sad when its time for me to go

Hastings’ third Whitsunday song, entitled Banjo Jack, was written in 1994. In the song, as yet unrecorded, Hastings recalls his friendship with the musician (discussed in the previous chapter) and their impromptu jams in Airlie Beach. Richly nostalgic, the song describes how Hastings felt Banjo Jack’s ‘spirit’ come to him one night in Western Australia:

I was sitting by the campfire out near the Southern Cross,
When I could have sworn I heard it on the wind,
It was the tinkle of a banjo and a tune he loved well,
Sweet music, like when the saints go marching in

Thought of that veranda when we sang out to the stars,
Felt a tear run slowly from my eye,
When music was our laughter and laughter filled the air,
I’ll miss his face when next I wander by

The distinctly Australian nature of the Whitsundays, of the travellers and travel routes that bring them to the region, and of the experience of live music is also represented in the work of singer-songwriter Kieran McCarthy. McCarthy’s musical style occupies a crossover point between country, folk and rock and his songs address a range of Australian locations and themes. McCarthy began his career as a performer and songwriter around Melbourne in the mid-late 1980s before embarking on a series of extended national tours. As the cover note on his 1994 CD One For The Road summarises:

For the past six years Kieran has travelled the length and breadth of Australia as a full-time minstrel. His experience and rural upbringing have resulted in a unique collection of songs in a hard country style.

The album includes a variety of semi-autobiographical ‘On The Road’ songs that celebrate the charms of locations such Darwin, Cairns, Alice Springs, Perth and The Whitsundays visited via Australia’s long inland highways. While the majority of the album’s songs feature assertive country-rock style arrangements, Whitsunday shore, the only sailing song on the album, is significantly softer in style. Accompanied by McCarthy’s acoustic guitar, an unobtrusive, medium-pace rock rhythm section and a melodic fiddle break, the song’s lyrics locate it at a midpoint between the 1950s Hayman Island songs and Buffett’s tropicalist compositions. The opening verse paints an archetypally romanticised picture of the Islands:

Sunlit sand, aqua sea,
Rainbow reef, rainforest breeze,
Music floating across the bay,
Laughter drifting, there’s angels at ease

before switching to a Buffettesque chorus:

Sail me to Whitsunday shore,
Shoot the breeze, it’s not too far,
Sail me to Whitsunday shore,
And join me in some R & R
and two more verses which develop this escapist scenario further:

    Work for years ruled my life,
    Chasing dollars by day and by night,
    Stepping back, I looked around,
    Saw the vacuum then I saw the light

    I like to move, I get around,
    Feeling better on tropical ground,
    Set the mainsail, catch the wind
    Catch the sunset, we’re paradise bound

While the song might appear purely escapist, it was also autobiographical, since in the interim between releasing One For The Road (1994) and its successor Precious Ground (1996) McCarthy relocated to Airlie Beach and established himself in the tropical location celebrated in the song.

Several of the compositions on Precious Ground concern beaches, boating and/or coastal life. These include romantic songs such as the nostalgic recollections of With you in Byron Bay (which are also represented in the CD’s fold-out panorama image of the beach at Byron Bay), and the joyous invocation of Broome’s waterfront in Head to Broome. Other songs offer grittier scenarios. Runaway ride, for instance, a ballad sung to a simple chordal guitar accompaniment, invokes a darker, dangerous side of Pacific yachting – akin to that portrayed in Philip Noyce’s 1989 thriller film Dead Calm (shot in the Whitsunday Passage) – with its verse:

    A Yachtie said “Baby I can please ya,
    I need a deckie for a trip to Micronesia”,
    She gathered up her things and said goodbye,
    Then held the rudder while a drug runner died

The only track specifically addressed to the Whitsundays provides a less sanitised version of the scenarios presented in either Whitsunday Shore or Buffet’s gentle ballads; one more in accord with Airlie Beach’s uninhibited contemporary nightlife. Entitled Wrecked again (a double entendre of ship-wrecked and the Australian use of the term ‘wrecked’ to refer to extreme inebriation), the song refers to the bar culture that has thrived in Airlie Beach since the establishment of Muller’s hotel in 1968 and substitutes the smooth margarita intoxications celebrated by Buffet with the harder edged consumption of “Jack” (Daniels). Set to an up-tempo, acoustic rock groove that gradually builds to a fuller rock accompaniment, Wrecked Again establishes its lyrical theme in its opening verse:

    Kicking back with a bottle of Jack in Paradise,
    Mister Monsoon’s coming round again,
    Sticky heat, sticky feet and bug eyes,
    Another year and I’m still here again

The song relates how the protagonist quit his city life and partner and “took off round the world” but “didn’t get too far”, and concludes with an (unrepentant) chorus:
Oh Lord I'm getting wrecked again,
Wrecked in Airlie Beach again,
Hey Lord I don't care less again,
Wash me up and wash me down

McCarthy's third album, *Mr Monsoon* (2000), developed the local themes in more detail. As a professional musician primarily working a circuit of venues along Shute Harbour Road, a substantial proportion of McCarthy's audience comprises backpackers travelling through the area. The album includes two songs specifically addressed to their experiences. The first is a humorous, up-tempo (and mildly satirical) anthem with a catchy singalong chorus well suited for performance in Airlie's clubs and bars. Entitled *Backpacker*, the album version of the song is set to a familiar 1970s' Faces/Rolling Stones-style rock rhythm and opens with the declaration:

I've got a backpack,
A credit card from my Dad,
I've got a sore seat,
I rode a bus to Airlie Beach

and features a chorus that recalls Norm Clayton's *The Airlie Beach song* by itemising local pleasures:

Ten dollars for a bed,
Five dollars and I'm fed,
Eighty dollars just on beer,
But the company is free up here

The second song, *Missing you*, despite also being catchy and radio-friendly, has a strong melancholic undertow in relating the emotions of a female traveller reflecting on a short-term relationship and her general experience of Australia. McCarthy describes it as:

... a song with a strong sad edge. People passing through connect with each other but then one moves on while the other stays put and they have to come to terms with being apart, which is confusing. It's about those kind of emotions – and travelling in general. (interview, September 2000)

The song's opening verse and chorus proclaim:

She says, "I'm Canadian, you know I'm proud of that,
My mountain lakes, my winter snow,
But as an alien, lost in your great outback,
I just wanted you to know:

You were right about the sky, it's so blue,
You were right about the Rock, it rings so true,
And I'm standing in a phone booth in Alice Springs,
And I love this land of your and all it brings"

Before concluding:

"I was right about my heart, I'm missing you,
I was right about your love, it rings so true,
And I’m standing in the freshly fallen snow,
And I’m wishing you were here in Toronto.

*Mandalay moon* also offers a subtle manipulation of theme through its locally-specific inflection of traditions of exoticist song writing. As detailed in Chapter 4, during the 1920s and 1930s there was a mini-vogue for compositions that celebrated the charms of romantic moonlight over exotic locations. For the listener unfamiliar with the geography of the Whitsunday coast, McCarthy’s composition initially appears to be a contemporary (and nostalgic/referential) example of the early 20th Century exoticist genre. (Mandalay is a destination more often referred to in western songs as an improbably remote [and near-mythic] location – as in *On the road to Mandalay* – rather than a specific city in central Myanmar/Burma). But while the song’s lyrics might appear to support such an interpretation, the romantic place which the song celebrates is, in fact, Mandalay Hill, to the north of Airlie Beach, where McCarthy resides. The song reflects upon its writer’s realisation of youthful dreams by moving from Melbourne to the Whitsunday shore:

When I was young my imagination gave me a set of wings,
When reality kicked in, I smiled at all those dreams,
The spirit is a friend of mine; I hope it stays that way,
I can see the image now in that moon over Mandalay.

Along with McCarthy, the Whitsunday shore’s other most prominent contemporary singer-songwriter is Richard Kaal, who relocated to the region after being captivated by the charms of sailing in the Whitsundays. Kaal’s website explains the origins of his 1997 album *Dawning Of The Day* in terms of an experience and sensibility shared with many of Jimmy Buffett’s songs (and his 1998 autobiography), the freedom and tranquility of sailing:

Richard wrote a lot of music while he was sailing on his yacht ‘Cadenza’ over the past few years. Inspiration from the water the people the lifestyle and the solitude made it a very easy and satisfying experience. (<http://members.xoom.com/musikaal/page1.html>)

Kaal’s sojourns on the Cadenza followed a long career in the Australian music industry. He began working as a professional musician in Sydney in the early 1970s, appearing in the cast of the stage musicals *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Kaal subsequently performed with various bands and duos (as a singer, guitarist and violinist). He first came to the Whitsundays in the late-1970s, working a short-term residency at South Molle and performing at K.C.’s in Airlie Beach as part of a duo named Fusion with his (then) wife Wendy. Increasingly attracted by the locale and its lifestyle, he spent much of the early-mid 1980s alternating residencies at venues such as Charlie’s in Airlie Beach and taking extended yacht cruises before settling on the Whitsunday coast in 1995.

*Dawning of The Day*, recorded at the studio facility he established at Cannonvale in 1996, features Kaal, keyboard player Dale Stephans, Tame Eria (bass) and Vimmi Kaptein (electric guitar). The album comprises a series of relaxed but intricate, jazzy light-rock/funk grooves overlaid with Kaal’s husky, melodic vocals and recorded and mixed with a considerable clarity of instrumental separation and delicate timbral and textural variations. While three of the songs (*A sea of raging cobras, Upstart again* and *Save me*) are referred to on the
CD notes as being inspired by the Queensland coast (the latter being identified as “written in the Whitsundays 1996”) – the album’s songs, have little direct lyrical address to the region.

Kaal’s interest in the local music scene and access to his own studio facilities led him to produce a CD entitled *Whitsunday Songwriters – Volume 1* in 1999. The album was designed to showcase established, rising and debuting local songwriters and was financially assisted by Whitsunday Shire Council, the Queensland Arts Council and local businesses (including Fantasea Cruises and several Airlie Beach cafes). The CD features two songs each by McCarthy (*Mandalay moon* and *Missing you*) and Kaal (*Don’t look back* and *Hello – out there*) together with single songs by Vimmi Kaptein, Tame Eria, Roneee Brown, Drew Finlay, Jason Gardel, Trevor Green, John Grey, Willi Hona and Paul McDonnell and a composition by the only featured female songwriter, Gina Jones*.

Kaptein’s contribution to the album, entitled *Turquoise and emerald*, provides a similar celebration of place (and colour theme) to Blackwood and Shim’s *Whitsunday blue* and resembles McCarthy’s *Whitsunday shore* in combining an account of escape to the region from the city:

> I left the big smoke,  
> I came to this place,  
> To try to be human,  
> To leave the rat race
with a description of the area’s natural beauty and recuperative appeal in the chorus:

Mother Ocean, Father Time,
This Island dreaming, healing my mind,
Turquoise and Emerald –
In golden sunshine

The song, whose most prominent aspects are Kaptein’s multi-tracked (rhythm and lead) electric guitar and relaxed (paralinguistic) vocal delivery, is performed in slow-mid-tempo soft-rock style – its sonic brightness and bias to the mid-high frequency range suggesting the sun-drenched scenario represented in its lyrics.

Born and raised in South Africa, Kaptein performed semi-professionally in Cape Town, mainly in pop/rock bands, before relocating to Australia in 1987. He first settled in Perth and then lived in Darwin before moving to Airlie Beach in 1995. Although he describes his musical career in Australia as mostly spent playing rock (since “that’s what gets you the gigs”), he identifies blues, jazz and African music (“something which is always there”) as forms that continue to interest him. Since moving to Airlie Beach he has performed with Gunnadoo, in a pop/rock standards duo with Richard Kaal and, since 1999, in Beats Working, a duo with singer Chrissie Courtenay, mainly playing for corporate functions on Hamilton Island, at venues in Mackay and, occasionally, in Perth.

Kaptein’s first solo album, entitled One Step Higher, was released in 2000 and comprises material recorded at his home. Along with Turquoise and Blue – which he describes as a song “written to order”, since “Richard [Kaal] wanted local songs” (interview, October 2000), Kaptein’s other locally addressed song is Trouble in Paradise. The song is a slow tempo rock/blues number that Kaptein describes as making parallels between “what’s being done to the environment, the problems there, and the kind of personal problems you get, the ones you can get anywhere” (ibid). This theme is made explicit in lines such as:

Someone dropped some more trash on the reef,
Someone’s talking, lying like a thief

After the track climaxes musically in a passage marked by high lead guitar lines, Kaptein ends the song with the statement:

Someone told me not to waste this time,
To save what’s yours and what is mine,
This beauty should be here,
For our children’s children’s eyes,
They want to play in paradise,
Want to stay in paradise

The Whitsunday Songwriters CD includes material recorded in a variety of styles. Along with those tracks described above, it includes tracks as diverse as Gina Jones’ acoustic country ballad Crazy, Willi Hona’s leisurely (Pacific) Island reggae song Runaway Johnny and Tame Eria’s Free Spirit, a song with cryptic, New-Ageish lyrics performed to acoustic guitar accompaniment with melodic synthesiser flourishes and slow guitar breaks. While Kaptein’s Turquoise and emerald and McCarthy’s Mandalay moon are the only compositions on the CD whose lyrics refer specifically to the region, the album possesses an overall
laid-back feel (suggested by its spacious musical mixes and lack of urgent tempos, harsh timbres and/or aggressive/depressive lyrics) which is complementary to the life style of the area and the (associated) image promoted by its tourist agencies. In this sense, at least, the 1990s have seen a reassertion of local musical identity, albeit one largely produced and promoted by migratory musicians enabled and acculturated within the tourist economy and ethos of the region in its latest stage of re-creation. The exoticsisms involved are those that have now become internalised as an identity discourse within the fabric, design and lifestyle of the Whitsunday shore, where tourism is not so much an intrusion as a central socio-economic base and set of values.

End Notes

1. Due to the informal nature of my conversation with him (and the presence of a lively two year old), I didn’t manage to get Dave’s surname. As far as I have been able to ascertain, he was an amateur performer who has not played a discernible role in the local music scene outside such contexts.

2. J. E. Morthardt’s Moonlight on the Barrier, John Ashe’s I lost my heart on Hayman Island and Reg Hudson’s Pack up a dream and head for Hayman Island.

3. Harrison formed an occasional band following her retirement and relocation to Cannonvale in the 1990s. Entitled The Golden Girls, it comprised Harrison (piano), Netta Smith (washboard), Betty Rogan (lagerphone) and Dawn Wade (tea chest bass).

4. Clayton also performed an alternative version of this composition, entitled A taste of the Whitsundays, with the lyrics adapted to replace “the tropics” with “Whitsundays”.

5. The show’s presenter, John Barton, was so impressed with Clayton and the song that he had a version of it orchestrated and recorded and presented to Clayton as a souvenir of his appearance. (The recording was never released in any form).

6. I have been unable to find any transcription of the song’s lyrics or music. (Thanks to Ron Hicks for alerting me to it.)


8. The album’s full track listing comprises:
   1. Richard Kaal Hello – out there
   2. Kieran McCarthy Missing you
   3. Paul McDonell What is this life?
   4. Gina Jones Crazy
   5. Willi Hona Runaway Johnny
   6. Vimmi Kaptein Turquoise and emerald
   7. Trevor Green House on the hill
   8. John Gray Stay with me
   9. Kieran McCarthy Mandalay moon
   10. Tame Eria Free spirit
   11. Drew Finlay Time
   12. Ronee Brown Lucky
13. Jason Gardel *Words*
14. Richard Kaal *Don’t look back*
15. Darren Hicks *Farewell*

9. A term denoting singing in a range and mode of delivery close to that of everyday speech.

10. An influence that is specifically acknowledged and celebrated on the track *Mama Africa* on his *One Step Higher* CD.

11. Island reggae (also referred to as ‘Ailan reggae’ in Melanesia) is a musical style popular throughout the Pacific that softens reggae’s distinctive stresses on the second and fourth beats in the bar (the elements that give it its trademark ‘choppy’ rhythmic accents) in favour of a smoother, more standard soft-rock style.
Resorting to ‘Tradition’

GUNNADOO, DIDGERIDUS AND EXOTIC AUSTRALIANA

In the early 1980s the music culture of the Whitsundays was further diversified by the introduction of bush band music. Bush band music, and the various dances it accompanied and was closely associated with, comprised a contemporary version of a group of predominantly Irish-Australian derived performance forms that dated back to the early-mid 1800s. As such, bush band music presented itself as a distinctly national phenomenon. In the context of the Whitsundays, where various entrepreneurs had attempted to project a Polynesian/Hawaiianesque identity for the region, the introduction of an assertively Australian form was a significant development. Given the relative isolation of the Whitsunday archipelago and shore from its rural hinterland (as discussed in the Introduction to Chapter 7), the rise of this musical style might be seen to represent a local adjustment that re-connected to rural Queensland culture. Yet, as detailed below, such a perception is complicated by the background to the national bush band phenomenon, the nature of its principal proponents in the Whitsundays and the manner in which the style developed and diversified in the area.

I. Australiana and Exoticism

Australian bush band music represents an aggregation, modification and re-inflection of a number of forms of Euro-Australian culture that established themselves in the early years of colonial settlement. The re-packaging of these elements into the now-recognisable bush band format occurred in the mid-late 1970s and followed an earlier revival of interest in forms of traditional Australian poetry and song (i.e. ‘bush ballads’) which took place in the 1950s and 1960s\(^1\). While the roots of the form may have been in 19th Century rural culture, modern bush bands initially established themselves around metropolitan centres such as Melbourne and Sydney. Graeme Smith has defined the bush band’s musical oeuvre as comprising:

\[ \ldots \text{a core song repertoire consisting of about thirty Australian vernacular ballads popularised in the Australian folk revival [of the 1950s-60s], with Irish style dance music, mostly Irish jigs and reels, with occasional tunes of similar style collected in Australia. (2000: 2)} \]

The form emerged in venues and performance contexts associated with pub rock music\(^2\) but, as Smith has emphasised:
... acquired more general popularity through the staging of bush dances, where a caller would lead participants through various folk-style dances, drawn from the English folk dance movement, Irish ceili dances, Scottish country dances and social dances from rural Australia. The format allowed a wide range of social uses, from riotous rock dances to cross-generational social occasions such as wedding receptions or fund raising events. Whether as accompaniment for dancing or as music for listening in sociable surroundings, bush bands promoted an image of lively Australianness. (2001: 5)

The first of the contemporary bush bands was the Wild Colonial Boys. Formed in Sydney in 1969, the band’s connection to Irish-Australian mythology was rapidly enhanced by their appearance in Tony Richardson’s 1970 film *Ned Kelly*, where they appeared as the Glenrowan Hotel’s house band. The Wild Colonial Boys inspired a wave of bush bands in the early 1970s, the most prominent of which was The Bushwackers. Formed in 1970 in Melbourne, the band released their debut album, *A Shearer’s Dream*, in 1974, toured overseas and achieved considerable success in the UK before returning to play extensively around Australia (regularly filling large metropolitan and rural venues in the late 1970s and early 1980s). Their success, in turn, encouraged the establishment of hundreds of other bush bands to cater for urban and rural audiences interested in the style.

The bush band vogue promoted a patriotic identification with Australian ‘heritage’ on the part of its audiences and thereby formed part of a broader phenomenon that promoted Australiana (the celebration of distinct aspects of Australian culture, flora and fauna) as a key plank of Australian cultural identity (as distinct from that of white Australia’s British cultural heritage). Toru Mitsui has characterised the identification and promotion of particular folk music traditions as national cultural markers in the mid-late 20th Century as a form of “domestic exoticism” (1998). With particular regard to Japan, the specific object of his analysis, Mitsui argues that this tendency is linked to a dualistic international phenomenon. The first aspect of this involves western pop/rock’s increasing global spread and the threat this offers to distinct national identities. The second aspect, which, to a large degree, constitutes a reaction against the first, is the international phenomenon of local cultural revivalism (which involves the valorisation and re-promotion of distinctive traditional forms). In his study of the background and projects of particular performers, Mitsui also identifies the manner in which prominent ensembles, such as Shang-Shang Typhoon, have created an audience for “domestically exotic” product by deliberately adopting styles and material from outside their cultural backgrounds into their repertoires (1998: 9).

Mitsui’s analysis provides a useful example of the manner in which music which appears – simply and unproblematically – as national and/or traditional can also be considered to be inherently exotic for the audiences who embrace and consume it. Such a perception highlights a curious paradox for the Whitsundays. While other performance forms, such as Polynesian shows, have established themselves as traditions within the resort history of the region, bush band music and dancing do not appear to have existed in any form in the region prior to the 1980s. In this context, such Australiana performances represent an introduced ‘species’ just as exotic as any other. As the following sections of this chapter detail, even within this frame of reference the precise version of bush band music introduced to the
region was a particularly hybridised one that substantially derived from a variety of foreign models.

II. Maple Syrup

In 1982 Canadian entrepreneur and amateur musician Ron Hicks moved to Proserpine with his Australian wife and children and purchased the town’s two bakeries. Hicks grew up in Moncton, New Brunswick, on Canada’s Atlantic coast, and learnt piano at school before going on to play harmonica and piano accordion in a local amateur band. After leaving school in 1955 he began taking accordion lessons from a local musician, Ercole Catelli. Catelli worked as a barber and performed semi-professionally at Moncton’s Italian club and at local parties, performing traditional Italian dances (such as the tarantella) and popular songs of the day. Hicks recalls that:

He was the best – he could play like a scalded cat! He really emphasised the importance of good technique, which many accordion players don’t have. I bought a Pistelli accordion from Italy – a beauty – and took lessons with Catelli once a week. I practiced and practiced from 6 p.m.–2 a.m. on weeknights, doing my scales to get my fingers going. I worked on getting the scales fast, in any key, to get the dexterity that he had. (interview, October 2000)

Figure 12. Ron Hicks, Airlie Beach 1985 (playing a Pistelli accordion)
After a year’s lessons, Hicks left Moncton to study at the Indiana Institute of Technology at Fort Wayne, Indiana, taking a degree in Electronics and Mathematics. After graduating he travelled to Japan, Hong Kong and Australia, meeting and marrying an Australian, Aline Kemble, before returning to North America and teaching in New Jersey. He moved back to Australia in 1964, settling in Canberra and remaining there until 1971. During his residency in the Australian Capital Territory Hicks became aware of the city’s Irish music scene and the repertoire and skills of accordionist Jacko Kevans. Kevans attracted national attention through his work with the Wild Colonial Boys (discussed above) and was known as an energetic and versatile performer. Impressed by Kevans’ abilities, Hicks taught himself to play Irish accordion music by learning material recorded by the Irish Gallowglass Ceili Band, one of the best-known Irish bands of the 1950s–60s:

I recorded one of their albums on my tape recorder and played it back at quarter speed and picked the notes out and then gradually sped it up until I could play along at full speed, note for note, perfectly. I learnt all the tunes on both sides of the album.

It was a lot of work. (ibid)

Hicks and his family returned to Moncton in 1974 and resided there for the next eight years. He began performing again, playing accordion at curling clubs and parties, accompanied by a drummer. During this period he also became acquainted with The Bluegrass Four, a local ensemble based around the talents of fiddle player Eddie Poirier and mandolin player Louis Arsenault6. Hicks subsequently worked with another local fiddle player, Eddie Arsenault in a duo, as his piano accompanist (performing material such as Redwing, Turkey in the straw, Cock o’ the north and Mackenzie’s jig) at various local functions.

In 1982 Hicks and his family moved back to Australia, initially basing themselves in Sydney before moving to the Whitsunday coast, where he found an opportunity to enter the emergent Airlie Beach music scene. As the following account details, he achieved this in a somewhat unusual manner:

I got into playing again through baking! The Whitsunday Village was the big resort in Airlie Beach at the time and the Whitsunday Terraces were under construction. In addition to my bakeries in Proserpine there was another hot bread shop in Airlie Beach that was trying to get the business from the resorts. When the Terraces were being built we were both competing for the contract – and it looked like I wasn’t going to get it.

In 1983 Christopher Skase’s company was looking to buy the Whitsunday Village and there was going to be a meeting to negotiate the sale. Alvin ‘Tut’ Tutin’s band was playing at the Village on Fridays. Tut was trying to get more than $50 per band member per night but they wouldn’t pay more. So he just took his band and quit – a week before the meeting was being held on Friday. The buyers had been told “the place is packed out on Friday nights, with the band playing, come along and see”. And then all of a sudden they haven’t got a band . . . They were in big trouble.

Then I got a surprise. The manager of the Village, Mel Barasic, rang me up in Proserpine and said, “I’ve heard that you play music”. (I don’t know where he heard that from since I’d only played privately for a few friends from time to time since moving up to Proserpine). So I said “Well I play a little bit, accordion and some piano”
and he said "Well I’ve got a problem, can you get a band together for Friday night?" I thought, “Jesus, it’s Monday morning!” I had no idea – I’d never put a band together in my life. (But I didn’t tell him that.) I was a bit scared and I thought “How am I going to get a band together in a few days for the love of God!” But I thought a bit and said “All right Mel, if I put a band together for you on Friday night can I have the bread order for the Terraces when it opens?” He said “You’ve got a deal!” and that’s how we got started. (And I got the bread order too!)

Co-opting his twenty two year old son Darren to play mandolin and guitar, Hicks phoned around to identify other local musicians and hastily assembled a line-up including Frank Hickey (drums), Tao Van Oosterhaut (bass) and Noel Peck (guitar). After four nights’ rehearsals, they managed to get a set together and turned up for their debut performance on the Friday:

Mel Barasic was there with his guests. They were there full of anticipation and we were thinking, “How’s this going to go?” So we just went “1,2,3,4” and hit it. I played *Fly me to the moon* on piano, with Darren on maracas, the drums going and the other guys stumbling through the chords. To our surprise it sounded great as an opening number and people started dancing immediately. The whole night was a big success.

Adopting the name of Zodiac, the band performed for several months, with Hickey, Van Oosterhaut and Peck sharing lead vocals, until first Peck, and then Hickey and Van Oosterhaut departed. The band continued with the addition of jazz singer Patsy Lee and drummer George Fraser’, playing a jazzier set (which featured numbers such as *Ain’t misbehaving*) and also featured guitarist Tommy Smith, Jim Hackett and Jim Fasso at various times.

During this period Ron Hicks’s interest in Irish music was revived and re-inflected through his contact with Bob Pomeroy, a devotee of bush band music who had also performed with Kevans. Pomeroy was born in Sydney in 1942 and developed an interest in literature, music and visual art at an early age. In his teens and early twenties he was associated with the colourful Sydney circle of young ‘thinkers and drinkers’ known as ‘The Push’. In the 1960s he travelled widely, throughout Australia, and developed a strong interest in bush poetry and bush band music. In the late 1960s and early 1970s he worked in New Zealand, touring South Island with The Great Pumpkin theatre troupe and performing at folk clubs in various parts of the country. During his stay he also formed a relationship with New Zealander Pam Pole (who went on to become a key figure in the organisation of Airlie Beach’s folk music scene in the 1980s and 1990s). Pole accompanied Pomeroy back to Sydney in 1974 and recalls that on his return he:

... dropped straight back in to the remnants of the glorious ‘Sydney Push’ days. We lived in East Balmain, in a house with Bill Morgan (one of the members of the Wild Colonial Boys) and partied and played music with Declan Affley, Dave de Hugard Jacko Kevans, Gordon McInytre and many, many more great folk musicians. On one memorable occasion we sang rebel songs in the Communist Party HQ at Surry Hills with Seamus Gill and Declan Affley – this was mind-blowing for a quiet Kiwi lass! (p.c. April 2001)
Pole recalls Pomeroy having a strong interest in cultural history sites:

I explored the Rocks area of Sydney with Bob in 1974. It was a living history lesson. He took me to places such as ‘The Hero of Waterloo’, the pub where Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson were said to have debated with each other. When we were in rural New South Wales Bob went to the town of Ironbark – which had been renamed Stuartown in honour of a politician – and ended up reciting ‘The Man From Ironbark’ in the old Ironbark pub! (ibid)

Pomeroy moved to the Whitsunday shore in late 1975 and became a well-known character around Airlie Beach’s bars and music venues, singing, playing guitar and reciting bush ballads. His interest in bush poetry went beyond a mere hobby and, by all accounts, represented a strong personal identification and enchantment with the colourful characters and narratives its ballads described. He played solo at venues such as the Wanderers and Airlie Beach Hotel and at Island resorts such as Happy Bay, singing and reciting bush poems. In addition to his musical activities, Pomeroy was also occasionally employed as a character actor – effectively in-role as himself – in productions ranging from the title role in a locally-staged play, written by guitarist Tommy Smith, entitled ‘The Swaggie’ (based on the lyrics of *Waltzing Matilda*) to a small part in Peter Weir’s 1977 film *The Last Wave*.

*Figure 13. Programme for “The Swaggie”, (1987)*
Pole recalls that Pomeroy was attracted to the Whitsundays by the history that the area’s development in the 1980s was rapidly effacing:

Bob was always interested in exploring the past and singling out the ‘larrikin’ and interesting aspects of the history of wherever he was. He loved the rich history of the Whitsunday area and was interested in local characters such as Boyd Lee, who used to live on Grassy Island. (ibid)

During his residency in the area Pomeroy’s enthusiasm and willingness to perform in a variety of contexts attracted other local musicians to bush band music. Pomeroy regularly performed in Bowen and encouraged local musician Rob Lowcock to form his own bushband, the Bootooloo Duffers, in the mid 1970s.

Inspired by bush band music, and its affinity to the Irish and Atlantic-Canadian music he was familiar with, Ron Hicks formed a trio with Darren Hicks (mandolin) and Pomeroy (vocals and guitar) entitled Maple Syrup. Despite the band’s distinctly Canadian name (taken from a Canadian-Irish dance tune they used to feature in their act), they played sets of Australian bush band music. As performers of a style of music relatively new to the area, the band soon secured regular employment. Their performances spanned the spectrum specified by Smith above, from “riotous rock dances” at established Airlie Beach venues such as The Village, where they soon gained a residency, to “cross-generational social occasions”

![Figure 14. Maple Syrup (l-r Ron Hicks, Bob Pomeroy, Darren Hicks), Airlie Beach 1985 (performing at a toga party)](image-url)
such as parties, weddings and community events, both locally, around Bowen and inland. At these occasions Pomeroy provided the “energetic – and larrikinish – Australianness” while Ron and Darren Hicks provided an inventive musical accompaniment which drew on various Irish and Irish-derived musical styles.

Along with Pomeroy, another influential figure on Maple Syrup and the subsequent development of Gunnadoo was Greg Hastings. Prior to embarking on a solo career in 1979, Hastings had been a member of the Perth-based Mucky Duck Bush Band, which he co-founded in 1973, featuring as a vocalist, guitarist and bush dance caller. As discussed in Chapter 7, Hastings arrived in Airlie Beach in 1984 for a five-month stay and, in addition to performing solo, joined Maple Syrup and taught Darren Hicks to call bush dances before leaving the area.

Shortly after their formation, Maple Syrup also forged a connection with the ‘wellspring’ of Australian bush band music through their association with Dave Isom, a founder member of the Bushwackers. Isom visited the Whitsundays on extended sailing holidays in 1984 and 1988. His 1994 album *Down to the Sea – Songs for sailors and armchair adventurers* identified his version of Country Joe MacDonald’s *Save The Whales* as being inspired by attending a concert by Australian folk-rock band Goanna at Long Island, during which they performed the track – along with other material that was to feature on their second album *Oceania* (1985). Isom’s encounter with Goanna also proved fruitful in that it marked the start of his association with Goanna members Rose Bygrave and Marcia Howard (who feature on *Down to the Sea* as backing vocalists). During his 1984 visit Isom also became acquainted with the members of Maple Syrup and performed a number of concerts with them. Isom’s material was highly familiar to the band and Isom remembers his experience of playing with them as a positive one:

> We really enjoyed what we did and audiences responded well – the scene up there was really lively then. One memorable gig we did was during the rebuilding of Hayman Island resort. We played one Sunday morning for the building workers. They loved the Aussie bush songs, especially Chad Morgan’s *Fatal wedding* and *I’m my own grandpa*. We also did some maritime material, including *Down to the sea*, that I had written whilst holed up in Cid Harbour, waiting out inclement weather. (p.c. May 2001)

Isom renewed his acquaintance with Ron and Darren Hicks in the late 1980s and recalls that “their Gunnadoo band, which used to play at the resorts, was impressive – they had a professional presentation, different in feel from the earlier line-up, but playing a similar sort of music” (interview, April 2001).

### III. Gunnadoo

In 1986 Ron and Darren Hicks began performing with singer Mark Nicol, originally from Sydney, whom they first encountered as a barman at Earlando (a resort property north of Proserpine). After sitting in with them on a regular basis at The Village, Nicol formally joined the band. Nicol’s addition strengthened the band’s vocal line-up and introduced another strand in their repertoire, contemporary Australian material by artists such as John Williams...
and Bullamakanka. Another musician joined in 1987, Clare O’Meara, who originally visited Airlie Beach on holiday from Sydney in 1986 and returned to reside in the area in the following year. O’Meara had a background in classical music, having studied violin as a child, and had to rapidly adapt her performing style to what she has characterised as the “loose folksy style Gunnadoo excelled in” (p.c. November 2000). She accomplished this primarily by listening to and imitating the repertoire of the bands Gunnadoo were inspired by:

Ron Hicks and Mark Nicol had many recordings of bluegrass, Texas swing and country music (both American and Australian) that featured prominent fiddle playing that I spent many hours listening to. I learned several tunes and licks by ear, then combined with some improvisation, gradually altered my violin playing to this melodic, lilting style. The violin took on a new meaning, becoming a fiddle. (p.c. November 2000)

While the band established a stable line-up and series of bookings for itself during 1986–87, they did not have an established name13. As Ron Hicks has recalled:

The group went to Mount Isa to do a gig without me and on the way back they saw a sign that said ‘Gunnadoo’ Road. We weren’t so professional in the early days and we always used to get up on stage and look at each other and say “What are we gunna do then?” So when Mark saw that sign he came back and said “That’s our name”. (interview, October 2000)

The Gunnadoo band made their first recording in 1988 in a recording studio installed in an old tin-shed, located in a sugar cane field on the outskirts of Mackay, which used straw bales as sound buffers and hessian bags as wall cladding. The band recorded twelve numbers from their live set for inclusion on a cassette album self-released by the band and entitled Flavour of the Month. The album features three traditional Australian songs (Waltzing Matilda, The drover’s dream and The Rybuck shearer); the traditional Irish fiddle tune Blackberry blossoms14; five contemporary Australian songs (John Williamson’s True blue and Good to be me, Bullamakanka’s Home amongst the gum trees, Dave Ovenden’s Copaki Creek and Trevor Lucas’s Poor Ned); Australian country singer Slim Dusty’s Country revival; and two US Country rock/boogie compositions – The Charlie Daniels Band’s The Devil went to Georgia and the Ozark Mountain Daredevils’ Fly away.

The variety of the material on the album reflected the individual interests of band members and their operation in an environment that Ron Hicks describes in the following terms:

To a large extent we simply played songs we enjoyed and if anybody came up with anything we’d do it and colour it as we saw fit. But there were some drawbacks. I could play all the complicated Irish material on the accordion where the chord changes are very frequent – sometimes almost every strum – drawing on the technique I had learnt back with Ercole Catelli. But in the Whitsundays people weren’t especially interested in Irish music, they just wanted to have a good night out and rage a bit, so what was the point in working the band hard to do the intricate stuff? In the end the tunes we tended to play were fairly simple. (interview, October 2000).

Hicks’ experiences here support Graeme Smith’s assessment that the musical format of bush band music “is fairly standardised, and to an ear used to Irish playing, some of the instrumental performance had more exuberance than finesse” (2001: 5).
Despite Ron Hicks’s modest description of the band’s skills, their debut cassette is a credible example of 1980s bush band music, distinguished by Nicol’s characterized vocal delivery, a solid rhythm section, which is frequently used to underpin medium-fast tempo arrangements, and an effective interplay between Ron Hicks’s accordion and O’Meara’s violin. Hicks and O’Meara’s interplay can be heard to good effect on the instrumental *Blackberry blossoms*. The tune was introduced to the band by O’Meara, who learnt it from The Barron River Drifters, fellow competitors in the 1989 Charters Towers Country Music Festival (at which Gunnadoo won Festival Grand Prize). While the tune originally derives from Ireland, the number is a well-known bluegrass tune, best known in the version credited to fiddler Arthur Smith (who was a prominent figure in the Nashville music scene in the 1930s and 1940s), which was revived in the 1960s by influential US bluegrass banjo players Bill Keith and Alan Munde.

The version recorded by Gunnadoo draws on Ron Hicks’s knowledge of Atlantic Canadian traditional music:

Clare used to play the tune and I had an idea for recording it. On the album the instrumental part is played three times. The first has one fiddle part, the second is double-tracked fiddle and the third has a further overdub. That sound of a number of fiddles playing jigs and reels with exact same notes, with no one embellishing or varying it, is a sound from Nova Scotia I knew from a great group called the Cape Breton Symphony – four fiddles (and bass guitar and drums). Their music is incredible. That’s where the idea came from. (interview, October 2000)

![Figure 15. Gunnadoo (l-r Tui Timoti, Mark Nicol, Neil Boland, Clare O’Meara and Darren Hicks) on stage in Sydney, 1991](image-url)
While Ron Hicks’s departure from the band in 1989 deprived them of the accordion sound that distinguished their early shows, Gunnadoo added Maori lead guitarist Tui Timoti and continued to establish a local reputation as a tight, proficient band that put on an effective live show. As Nicol recollects:

After Ron left we had to change the sound around. We hadn’t had lead guitar before, just the accordion and fiddle, so when Tui joined and Clare played more keyboards we had more of a rock line-up. Tui and Clare acted as MDs [musical directors] and we got a tighter sound for playing the newer rock numbers we did. (interview, November 2000)

From 1989 on the band performed in two principal contexts – staging an Australiana show at various resorts and also playing more rock/pop based sets at Airlie Beach and Whitsunday Island resorts. Reflecting this dichotomy, the band’s second album, recorded in 1991 in Alberts Studios in Sydney with drummer Neil Boland, was entitled Divided Attention.

_Divided Attention_ featured material from both their pop/rock and Australian/Country repertoires. The former comprised a selection of versions of popular songs performed and recorded in a style close to their original recorded forms (The Box Top’s _The letter_, Joe Cocker’s _You can leave your hat on_, Neil Diamond’s _Cherry, Cherry_, The Eagles’ _Lying eyes_, Huey Lewis’s _It’s hip to be square_ and John Stewart’s _Gold_). The latter spans a range of
material which could form part of either format (such as the two Charlie Daniels’ songs, *The South’s gonna do it again* and [a re-recording of] *The Devil went down to Georgia*, and Claire O’Meara’s vocal feature ballad, Bonnie Raitt’s *Nick of time*); vintage country and bluegrass standards *Ghost riders in the sky* and *Orange blossom special*; and two original compositions.

The two originals on *Divided Attention* derive from and extend the Australiana-ist origins of the band and Ron Hicks’s Atlantic Canadian-influenced repertoire. *Brown death of the north* sets (selected) verses from Lex McLennan’s Queensland bush ballad ‘The Taipan’ to original music by the band. As befitting its origins, and the poisonous subject of its lyrics, the song’s verses are sung by Nicol in a dramatic, declaratory fashion, with a more celebratory chorus, sung by Nicol and O’Meara, and extended mellow, melodic country-style fiddle and lead guitar breaks – an assemblage which blends bush band narrative style and country music accompaniment.

The second original track, the medley *Didgeridoo/Running Through The Canefield*, opens with an introduction provided by Darren Hicks’s double tracked didgeridu, playing staccato ‘growls’, a drum rhythm, played mostly on the toms, and occasional clapper stick beats and (single-string) guitar glissandi. One and a half minutes into the track the didgeridu drops out, the drum rhythm uses the fuller range of the kit and the full band enter to perform a two minute, up-tempo fiddle-led instrumental passage (in the key of D) whose rhythm and urgency suggest the “Running” designation of its title. The melody of *Running Through The Canefields* is derived from a North American tune known in (at least) two variants: a traditional Atlantic Canadian tune entitled *McNabb’s Hornpipe* (usually performed in D) and a well-known bluegrass number entitled *Bile Them Cabbage Down* (usually performed in A). O’Meara describes the inspiration for the (second part of) the composition in the following terms:

The track is an adaptation of a tune I found on an old tape from Ron Hicks (which didn’t give any title or composer credits). I first heard it while we were driving back from Mackay, and there are miles and miles of canefields along that section of the Bruce Highway. The tune stayed in my head, and I just had to do something with it, so I varied the melody, tempo and form and it became a popular instrumental in our live set. (p.c. November, 2000)

Blending the elements of didgeridu and a fiddle instrumental, adapted by O’Meara from a North American traditional tune, in a track whose name refers to the Queensland sugar canefields; the composition evinces an inclusive ethnicity (and regionality) and suggests a complementarity to the conjunction of Aboriginal didgeridu and Irish-Australian/North American fiddle. While such instrumental combinations are relatively commonplace in the early 21st Century – after a decade of cross-cultural musical collaborations and ‘fusions’ – Darren Hicks’s use of the didgeridu in Gunnadoo and the period when he introduced it merit comment. Unlike many metropolitan-based Australian rock bands and musicians, Hicks did not adopt the didgeridu as (or in response to) any political initiative or agenda. As he describes:

A girlfriend gave me one as a present in 1988, I am not sure why, so I had a go and started to learn it and began playing it with the band. That year Mark, Clare and I went
to Charters Towers for the country and western contest to see how we would go. While I was there I met an Aboriginal guy by the name of David who was in a group and we sat down and he was only too pleased to show me how to make ‘traditional’ animal sounds on the instrument. (interview, August 2000)

While Hicks claims little knowledge of the didjeridu’s use in bush band, Irish (or country) music prior to learning the instrument, Graeme Smith has identified that:

The idea of placing the didjeridu under Irish tunes emerged in the late 1970s, first in Australia and, soon after, in Eire. In most cases the instrument provides a continuous drone on the low D (circa 73 hz), which can be articulated with rhythmic patterns. Such an accompaniment was relatively simple musically, and, notwithstanding the striking exoticism of the instrument, it has gained a degree of acceptance among many traditional musicians . . . enhanced by its musical properties [which] mimic the drone of the pipes which many regard as the only fully legitimate accompaniment to the monophonic solo melody of Irish traditional dance musics. (2000: 6)

What is most notable about Hicks’s use of the instrument is that it has not been used in the manner described above. Rather it has been used as lead instrumental ‘voice’ – in on-stage solos (from 1988 on), in the initial section of the recorded medley Didgeridoo/Running Through the Canefields and as an accompaniment to Aboriginal derived/imitative dances in Gunnadoo’s mid-late 1990s sets. As discussed further in Section IV below, as a result of Hicks’s use of the instrument, the didjeridu began to assume the status of an instrumental signature sound for the region prior to the adoption of the instrument by local Ngaro/Birigubba descendants and their performance on it around the Whitsundays (as described in Chapter 10).

**IV. Show Time**

In 1986 Gunnadoo secured a weekly residency at Hamilton Island that they continued until 1998 (despite the departure of O’Meara in 1993 and Nicol and Timoti in 1995) and their efforts were officially recognised by their winning a Whitsunday Tourism Award in 1989. During the 1990s the band also performed outside the Whitsundays, at venues in Mackay, Bowen and inland mining towns, over at Normanton (on the Gulf of Carpentaria) and, for four successive years, at Sydney’s Royal Easter Show (1989-92). The continuing success of the Australian aspect of their work led this style to be their main focus in the mid-late 1990s.

Reflecting the highly lively nature of Airlie Beach’s resort culture and the entertainment orientation of the Island resorts, Gunnadoo’s approach to performing bush band/Australiana sets has been in marked contrast to the development of restrained, purist performances at many of the bush dance clubs that have operated in and around urban areas in the 1990s. The group has continued to perform classic bush band songs (such as Waltzing Matilda and The Rybuck shearer) and to teach and call bush dances and has also introduced a cabaret variant of traditional Aboriginal performance practices into their act. Inspired by Aboriginal dances imitative of individual Australian fauna that he had seen performed by Aboriginal
acts, Hicks developed what he has described as one of the show’s “never-fail” routines:

I get members of the audience to imitate the walk of an Australian animal, like an emu. I get three girls and three guys up from the audience. Then I say, “The thing is it’s the emu’s mating season – so we would like to see the male and the female’s mating dance”. They think that they’ll have to do it individually but I make them do it in couples – you can imagine! They have to dance it to the didgeridu and drums. It’s hilarious. It never fails. The most reserved people come out of their shells and do some wicked stuff. It’s amazing to see, you have to drag these people up and then off they go! (interview, August 2000)

Given the nature of the animal imitations involved and their accompaniment by didgeridu music, such routines clearly derive from (and thereby invoke) Aboriginal cultural practices. As such, this aspect of the band’s set can be seen as an adoption of a well-known aspect of indigenous culture that has been widely performed in social and educational contexts over the last two decades. These routines thereby inhabit a contentious zone, rendering themselves open to criticism on grounds of appropriation and/or parody but can equally well be regarded as so distanced from any notional Aboriginal referent as to be an inoffensive, contemporary pan-Australian practice.

Complex issues of cultural knowledges, competences and readings are also relevant to another aspect of Gunnadoo’s live shows. While many of the audiences at Whitsunday resorts have been Australian, with some degree of cultural familiarity with the kind of show Gunnadoo provide, or else have comprised British or North American tourists able to understand Hicks’s on-stage patter and instructions; changing patterns of tourist marketing (and favourable currency exchange rates) in the early-mid 1990s led to a high proportion of Japanese visitors attending the band’s shows on Hamilton Island in this period. This required Gunnadoo to consider aspects of cross-cultural communication in presenting their act to a predominantly Japanese audience. One of the first issues concerned the format of Gunnadoo’s evening shows. At Japanese resorts offering dinner entertainment, or music venues (known as ‘live houses’), patrons usually depart shortly after the completion of the (usually singular) program of entertainment. Unaware of this, members of Gunnadoo frequently found themselves in the situation whereby:

We used to do a dinner show, in formal dress, and then after they’d finished eating we’d have a quick rest, change clothes and then come back and do the show. I’d say “Thank you very much ladies and gentleman, we will take a short break and then be back with the Australian show”. But when we’d come back, all the Japanese, who’d be 80% of the audience then, would have gone and the room would be almost deserted!

It wasn’t until I went out one night to get a drink after our dinner set and saw a Japanese family there and went up to them and said “The show’s not over, come back for ‘Australian showa’” that I realised they all thought that was it for the night. The family came back in and had a ball and I then learnt to say in Japanese “Stick around for a while the show starts at 9 p.m.”. (Darren Hicks, interview, October 2000)

Other aspects of the entertainment also required some attention to Japanese language
and customs, such as the organisation of dancers in the conventions of bush dances and the provision of various comprehensible cues and instructions. As Hicks recalls:

Later on I would be making announcements in Japanese during the set – and getting rounds of applause for them! When they’d come up to dance, I’d be calling “Okusan wa migi saido” (“Husband on the left hand side”). They’d really get into it, dancing and shouting words they didn’t know like “Oi”. (ibid)

In addition to being ‘domestically exotic’ for Australian audiences, the material presented for Japanese audiences in this context bears distinct comparison to the exotic nights presented at Hayman Island in the 1950s–1960s for Australian audiences. For Japanese audiences however, the presentation of the shows as Australiana would appear to suggest a sense of a local origin (and/or assumed authenticity) to the form that, as this chapter has argued, is highly complex.

Since the early 1990s Gunnadoo has performed intermittently as a project run by Darren Hicks with the participation of various available collaborators, most recently Richard Kaal (acoustic guitar), Vimmie Kaptein (electric guitar and bass) and Tony O’Farrell (drums). As the following section discusses, Hicks has also contributed to another aspect of the development of a local musical style.

V. Didjeridu Songs

As chapters 8 and 11 detail, following Darren Hick’s introduction of the didjeridu into Gunnadoo in the late 1980s the instrument began to be adopted – independently – by both Ngaro/Birrigubba-descended musicians, such as Wayne Butterworth and Leo Gabey Junior, and by alternative lifestylers visiting the area. These adoptions were local instances of a more general pattern. As Karl Neuenfeldt (1997) has detailed, the didjeridu rose in prominence as an Australian icon during the 1990s and the instrument, and recordings of didjeridu music, became established as standard tourist commodities. Responding to this vogue, Darren Hicks recorded two solo didjeridu pieces in 1999 that now form part of a new development in the musical culture of the Whitsundays.

In 1999 local performer and recording studio owner-operator Richard Kaal oversaw the production of a CD compilation of local songs that was released in early 2000 under the title *Whitsunday Songwriters – Volume One* (see Chapter 9 for further discussion). Tracks 1-14 comprise original songs by local performers. The final cut – Track 15 – is a didjeridu instrumental performed by Hicks entitled *Farewell*. The explanation for the track’s inclusion on an album of songs reflects both Hicks’s central role in local music culture and the increasing prominence of the didjeridu in Australian music culture. As Hicks has related, he recorded the track at Kaal’s request:

Kaal: I wanted Darren to contribute something since he played a big part in getting the album together.

Hicks: I’m not a songwriter but we thought that a didj track would fit since the didj is now more commonly used than it was when I first started playing it. We called it ‘Farewell’ because we were going to put it last on the CD.
The composition was improvised in the studios around what Hicks describes as “a couple of ideas” (ibid). In contrast to the musical aspect of the Airlie Beach waterfront park performance discussed in Chapter 8, Hicks’s track is one where the variety of sonic modulations (and their post-produced reverberation) create a text constructed within the produced space of the stereo CD playback environment. The track comprises a subtle soundscape where the didjeridu’s drones and barks provide the track’s frontal sound, with occasional, sparsely used percussion beats completing the mix.

If the production motivation and sonic text of Farewell offer themselves for consideration in primarily musical terms, the origins of Hicks’s second solo didjeridu recording (to date), entitled Sunrise, are markedly different in nature and refer back to the tourist interest in the didjeridu discussed above. Sunrise, like Farewell, provides an instrumental closer to a CD of songs. The track appears on Kieran McCarthy’s third solo CD Mr Monsoon (discussed in Chapter 9). Like Farewell, the composition was recorded especially for the album and post-produced by Kaal. As an intrusion into an album of material otherwise performed by a singer-songwriter, the track’s presence is even more surprising than Farewell’s inclusion on the Whitsunday Songwriters compilation.

McCarthy has provided a candid explanation for the composition’s presence on his CD:

While I was getting the album together I went into Rainbow Music [the Airlie Beach music shop] and asked them what kind of Australian music tourists bought. The owner said that they always asked for didjeridu music, not the Yothu Yindi type fusion kind, but the straight didj stuff. So I thought, “Well those people are my main audience too – I might as well have a didj track on to round things off”. I just asked Darren and we got it done. (interview, October 2000)

McCarthy’s approach reflects the duality of the tourist culture of the area. While tourists patronise live music venues that provide internationally familiar forms of pop/rock music, they often purchase recordings of didjeridu music – and/or actual didjeridus – as sonic souvenirs of Australia.

The rear cover of McCarthy’s CD provides a visual complement to Hicks’s solo track, showing the image of a sunrise over the Whitsundays, inviting the listener to recall and/or imagine this vista as invoked and accompanied by the track itself. Soon after Mr Monsoon’s release McCarthy made copies of the CD available to Fantasea Cruises and they played the CD regularly in Spring-Summer 1999 on their trips between Hamilton Island and Airlie Beach. In this context, a journey through the archipelago, the passengers could gaze out at the landscape represented on the CD’s rear cover and hear it overlaid by the recorded didjeridu sound, echoing out from the ship’s speakers into the real-space of the archipelago. As Chapter 11 elaborates, this modern, technologically mediated association of sound and space provides one set of impressions and associations for those tourists who experience it. The Ngaro’s contemporary experiences of the didjeridu in the archipelago are strikingly different and intersect with a deeper history, providing a different set of associations for the didjeridu and archipelagic space.
End Notes

1. This, in turn, related to and was partially inspired by a similar revival of interest in folk musics in North America and Western Europe. Significant early Australian publications that reflect this interest include Palmer and Sutherland (1951), Anderson (1955) and Stewart and Keeting (1955).

2. An energetic, raucous and impassioned style performed for an audience who would often reach a stage of considerable intoxication and exuberance by the end of the evening.

3. Dave de Hugard and Declan Affley also recorded songs and instrumental pieces for the film’s soundtrack but their recordings were discarded in preference to material by Waylon Jennings and Shel Silverstein.

4. Initially named The Original Bushwickers and Bullockies Bush Band, shortening their name in 1971.

5. The (unattributed) CD booklet for the Bushwackers’ 1994 ABC Music compilation So Far . . . 1974-1994 states:

   The Bushwackers’ astounding popularity in concert peaked in the 1980s when their dances regularly attracted crowds of 4,000 in capital cities. One memorable night more than 1,000 were turned away from a sell-out show at the Birkenhead Barn in Sydney. (unpaginated)

6. Ronald Labelle, from the Centre d’études acadiennes in Moncton, has described the instrumental prowess of The Bluegrass Four in the following terms:

   The band was led by Eddie Poirier, who is mostly known as a fiddler, although he is also an excellent guitarist and bluegrass banjo player. Louis Arsenault mostly played mandolin with the Bluegrass Four, although he is also a multi-talented musician. In fact, one thing the group did on occasion was to start a tune, then trade instruments in turn as they played, until all musicians had played each instrument in turn (banjo, guitar, mandolin, bass). (p.c. October 2000)

7. Fraser worked for Hicks as a pastry cook. Ron Hicks has recalled that “Darren and I and George used to play in Proserpine in the bakery on main street on Friday afternoons [in 1983-84] – it used to attract attention and bring people in”. (interview, October 2000).

8. ‘The Swaggie’ was staged at the Cannonvale Reef Gateway Motel, to musical accompaniment by Ron Hicks and Helen Moore, and included an audience-participation bush dance item in its second act.

9. Goanna were founded in 1977 and rose to prominence in 1982 with their highly polemical single Solid Rock (which promoted Aboriginal Land Rights) and an album produced by ex-Fairport Convention member Trevor Lucas entitled Spirit of Place. They broke up in 1985 shortly after the release of their second album Oceania.

10. Chad Morgan is an Australian country singer, known for his humorous songs and on-stage persona, who began recording in the 1950s. His best-known composition is his 1952 signature song The Sheik from Scrubby Creek.

11. At various times in the band’s career their name has been rendered as “Gunna-Doo”, “Gunnadoo”, “Gunna Doo” and, graphically, as a logo where the two words have been linked by a
gum tree. The version I have used here, and throughout, is the version regularly used by the band in the 1990s.


13. During this period members of the group appeared, in various permutations, under names such as the Whitsunday Village Bush Band and The Drought Breakers.

14. See below for discussion of its origins.

15. Neil Rosenberg has identified that “the title ‘Blackberry Blossoms’ has been around in fiddle traditions for some time, attached to several different tunes of Irish origins”. (p.c. September 2000)

16. Thanks to Neil Rosenberg for this information (ibid).

17. Ron Hicks left the band for personal reasons and relocated to Sydney, where he has resided since. He has not subsequently performed at anything other than social occasions.

18. Thanks to Ron Hicks and Neil Rosenberg for this identification (p.c.s November-December 2000).

19. Which have been ably documented in the pages of the magazine fRoots (formerly Folk Roots) if not by academic analysts.

20. After leaving the band O’Meara performed with Chrissie Courtney in Some Girls Doo for a year, before leaving the area.

21. The band’s publicity material, featured on their web site in 2000, describes their act in the following terms:

The Australiana show is a cabaret style show that is ideal for any conference or holiday resort. It is a full two hour show, which gets the audience involved right from the very start. Using a blend of traditional Australiana music and contemporary styles of Bullamakanka, Redgum, Slim Dusty and Rolf Harris, the band delights audiences with its up tempo beat and some of the most hilarious ‘onstage’ competitions you will ever see. <http://members.xoom.com/gunnad0o>

22. These have often been organised as self-consciously purist ventures intent on maintaining a very precise notion of what an ‘ideal’ bush dance should entail. This approach links more directly to the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s than the bush dance movement popularised by bands such as The Bushwackers in the 1970s and 1980s. One example of the approach I am referring to here was a club that I contacted in 1998 in order to find details about a forthcoming bush dance. Phoning up the co-ordinator I was summarily informed (without my asking) that no alcohol would be on sale or allowed in the venue (unless it was “a small amount of wine to be consumed with food”). When asked the reasons for this prohibition I was told that there had been problems in the past with people drinking and being “loud” and “out of hand” – behaviour that apparently “spoil” the precise execution of dances. (For the record, I chose not to attend the event in question.)

23. Such dances have often been performed by Aboriginal troupes in schools, museums and other public places, often with invited audience participation segments which have involved non-Aborigines attempting the imitative gestures and movements involved.
24. As part of research for this book I canvassed opinions on this matter from several Aboriginal residents and performers. Opinions varied. Some individuals viewed the performances as so obviously non-Aboriginal as to be of no concern to them. Others expressed indifference to the whole issue I was raising while others felt that the dances, and use of the didjeridu, were inappropriate and offensive.

25. Actually, “Ladies (should be) on the right hand side” – effectively the same thing. (Thanks to Toru Seyama for Japanese language assistance.)

26. From 1987-95 Hicks and Nicol also performed as a duo under the name The Droughtbreakers, playing rock/pop sets with novelties such as multiple versions of the same song. A published review of one of their 1993 shows noted that:

The Airlie Beach Hotel roared last Sunday afternoon when Gunnadoo’s Hicks and Nichols [sic] played no less than four versions of Knocking on Heavens Door: the Bob Dylan version (which brought a standing ovation), the Guns and Roses style, the reggae and the Joe Cocker version. It brought the house down and packed out the pub. (unattributed, 1993: 18)

27. See Neuenfeldt (1997) for a discussion of the tourist market for didjeridus and didjeridu music. Fittingly perhaps, the book in which his essay appeared, his edited anthology The Didjeridu: from Arnhem Land to Internet (1997) was also extensively stocked at tourist shops around Australia in the late 1990s, entering into the same circuit of souvenir purchase.
Polynesian Performance


Before each performance I get them all backstage to say a prayer. They have to respect what they are doing and have to have a sense of its importance. We are performing Polynesian culture and the traditions of Pacific islands. We are entertainers but there is an important and serious aspect to what we do – and that is why we keep going, it’s not just about earning money from performing on stage.

(Dick Otene, musical director and manager of The Flames of Polynesia, interview, January 2000)

January 29th, 2001. The Flames of Polynesia are performing their weekly show at South Molle Island. Their audience comprises resort guests, visitors from other islands and a group from Airlie Beach ferried in by Fantasea Cruises for the evening. For anyone aware of the history of the western/central Pacific region, the show and its locale provide a set of striking associations. While the resort’s main entertainment space is conventional enough, containing a dance floor, stage, bar, seating areas, poker machines and pool tables, its design and decor are singular. Entering the venue, the right wall displays a massive mural of Captain Cook’s ship Endeavour. The facing wall presents a pentych of images. Central to these is an image of Cook, poring over a map. This is flanked by two smaller images attesting to Cook’s ‘discovery’ of the archipelago. One image is of a handwritten parchment note, the other, a hand-drawn map of the region. Flanking these in the triangular bottom corners of the wall are small images of navigational aids. Continuing and amplifying the references to Cook, the bar area features a series of illuminated sepia panels – like latter-day stained glass windows – showing scenes of the Endeavour at sea. Complementing these, and clearly visible to the band, the sound/lighting control area opposite the stage is situated in a booth constructed to resemble a ship’s (masthead) crow’s nest.

The overall impression is of a secular historical shrine. The venue commemorates the early European exploration and imperialism that secured the islands of the western Pacific for the ancestors of the Euro-Australian audience who now patronise the resort. Within the design and fabric of the venue there is no sense of another history, no alternative monuments to the dispossessed Ngaro or other Pacific peoples. The alternative is, instead, embodied in the performance and cultural project of The Flames of Polynesia, the troupe
whose banner has been pinned up at the rear of the stage and whose music and dancing captivate the crowd gathered to see them.

![Image of The Flames Of Polynesia trio on stage at South Molle Island 2000](image)

**Figure 17. The Flames Of Polynesia trio onstage at South Molle Island 2000 (l-r Waha Gray [bass], Matta Brown [drums], Dick Otene [guitar])**

The musical performance begins in a low-key fashion. The core trio of the band (comprising bass, drums and rhythm guitar) comes quietly on stage and plays two short sets (interrupted by a break as the hotel’s generator crashes). The sets include western pop standards (*Brown Eyed Girl* and *Quando, Quando, Quando*), a Bob Marley bracket and a Polynesian medley (*Pearly Shells, Tiny Bubbles, Seven Canoes* and *Hoki Mai*), performed in a reggae-tinged, Pacific soft-rock style. The dance floor stays empty as guests order drinks from the Hawaiian shirted bar staff or play in the games areas. After a short break the lights dim and the sound system plays a new track, commencing with a conch shell fanfare – Siva Pacifica’s single *Mana (Part II)*. Fittingly for the complex, mediated nature of the performance, the track is a contemporary mediation (and exploitation) of Pacific culture¹. The soft, clear, melodic sound and underlying house/funk rhythm is best described as ‘Pacific world beat’ – a cocktail in which Pacific elements flavour a standard western recipe of dance beats and pop
song structures. The track serves to ease the audience into the show that follows.

The band files on again, the core trio augmented by an MC (master of ceremonies) and four dancers, and perform a series of dances, interspersed with audience participation numbers. The dancers represent a cross-section of the contemporary population of the region. Along with long serving Cook Islander and Maori dancers are Euro-Australian performers from Proserpine and Airlie Beach. While the well-practiced Polynesian dancers retain a notable edge over their more recently inducted colleagues, the Polynesian cultural identity of the act is an inclusive one in which individual’s skin tone and evident ancestry are less significant than conformity to a group aesthetic and respect for Polynesian culture. As The Flames’ founder and musical director Dick Otene emphasises:

We are open to anyone who wants to come and learn to dance. If they have the right attitude and respect and are prepared to work they can join and learn the culture. We are not trying to keep it to ourselves; we want to spread it and to let people know about it. As long as they learn it right and respect it, it doesn’t matter whether they are Maori people or white Australians, or other people. (interview, January 2000)

Despite the prominence of images of Captain Cook in the room’s decor, an inclusive post-colonial cultural performance signals that, on this night and this stage at least, a Polynesian cultural presence (temporarily) occupies a site of Euro-Australian erasure of Ngaro identity. In its inclusive festivity the event recalls the celebratory dances that once welcomed Cook and his crew to Tahiti and Hawai‘i before the full impact of European colonialism dawned on the indigenous peoples of the Pacific.

I. Island Showbands

As Chapters 5 and 6 detailed, Polynesian-theme nights and entertainments were a staple of Whitsunday Island resorts from the 1950s on. Almost without exception, the musicians, directors and managers who provided these resort shows were Euro-Australians or Europeans, most of whom had little knowledge of the cultural origins of the material they performed. In the 1980s this situation changed as resort managers actively recruited Maori and Cook Islander musicians and ensembles from New Zealand to work at Whitsunday resorts. Two associated factors provided the impetus for this recruitment. The first was the perception that Polynesian musicians would appear to be more authentic performers of the music and dance forms concerned. The second was that New Zealand offered an established talent pool of musicians and dancers to draw on.

Maori performers began to enter the New Zealand entertainment industry in the late 1800s. Their most regular employment was in the form of ‘concert parties’, ensembles that performed accessible and entertaining packages of traditional Maori songs and dances for mainly pakeha (Euro-New Zealander) audiences. By the 1950s, with the rise of various forms of western popular music, Maori ‘showbands’ developed, performing a variety of song and dance material. During the 1960s, when younger audiences began to demonstrated a preference for less apparently diluted (and primarily pakeha) exponents of British and US rock/pop styles, these showbands proved a mainstay of the more conservative (and middle-aged) cabaret and resort circuit.
The first Maori-led showband to establish themselves in the Whitsundays was formed on South Molle Island in early 1983. The act, entitled Tropical Hi, was formed by Maori bandleader Gugi Walker at the invitation of the management of South Molle resort. Walker was a music industry veteran who had previously led the popular Maori showband The Quin Tikis (an act that performed in New Zealand and internationally, in locations such as Manila, Singapore and Noumea, during the 1950s). Walker relocated to Sydney in 1961, where he performed solo and also worked as musical director for Johnny O’Keefe (who had undertaken a high-profile New Zealand tour in 1959). During the late 1960s and 1970s Walker ran several cabaret acts on The Gold Coast before moving up to the Whitsundays.

Walker’s initial ensemble comprised three Australian musicians, Tom See-Poy (piano) and John See-Poy (drums), from the town of Innisfail on the north Queensland coast, Greg Walker (guitar and vocals) and Englishman Mike Matthews (bass). The band conformed to the established pattern of Island entertainment (discussed in Chapters 5 and 6), providing music for a weekly schedule of theme nights. As an article introducing the band to the region described (evoking Hayman Island’s 1962 claim that ‘Geography has gone’):

It is a wonder South Molle’s new show band, Tropical-Hi doesn’t suffer from jet lag. Every night of the week the band travels around the world to bring guests a different style of music.

In Tuesday nights, Tropical-Hi turns on rock and roll that would be right at home in the steamy clubs of London, Wednesday night the band changes pace with the Jamaican rhythms of calypso and reggae, and on Thursday night the band visits the prairies of America, playing popular country and western tunes

On Friday night Tropical-Hi joins in the spectacle of the Island Feast playing Hawaiian music and later launches into an ad lib jam session aboard the booze-cruising Whitsunday Wanderer.

On Saturday night, the band shares the spotlight with Zoe the stripper for a highly entertaining evening of cabaret. (Unattributed, 1983: 8)

In the months that followed the band’s establishment Walker added a number of other musicians and dancers as featured performers for the Island Feast night and enhanced the reputation of the Polynesian show thorough more rehearsed routines. Walker also highlighted his Maori heritage – and the Maori presence on the north-central Queensland coast – by organising a Maori music festival on South Molle Island in June 1984. This combined the musicians and dancers from Tropical Hi, Proserpine’s Maori Culture group and Mackay’s Silver Fern Maori Concert Band in a spectacular show attended by South Molle guests and tourists ferried over from Airlie Beach and other resorts for the occasion.

In 1985 Walker left his residency on South Molle and moved to Long Island as the resort’s new entertainment director. Despite retiring from live performance, he continued to manage Tropical-Hi, with a major change of personnel, providing various theme night entertainments and performing at the weekly Polynesian feast. The new Polynesian floorshow became a major attraction for the resort and, at the peak of their popularity around 1987-88, Tropical Hi featured up to fourteen dancers in their shows and attracted large, enthusiastic audiences.
The management of South Molle replaced Tropical Hi with a showband previously based in Wollongong, New South Wales, called Waiata Express. The band’s musical director was Maori multi-instrumentalist Bob Te Hira, a graduate of Melba’s Conservatorium of Music in Melbourne. Other musicians included Maori guitar and bass player Fraser Kenna and Australians Gerry Day (vocals), Steve Merta (drums) and Mark Buckafield (DJ, lights and sound mixing). Their variety schedule resembled that established by Tropical Hi:

The fun started yesterday with Beach Bum Talent Quest, featuring music that made surfing famous – from the Beach Boys to the Four Seasons. Calypso Night (tonight) will brim with bananas and the music of Harry Belafonte and Reggae Greats, Waiata Express style. Gerry Day says he has packed a pair of six shooters for Thursday’s foot stompin’ hip slappin’ Country Night.

It’s business as usual for Friday’s famous Island Feast night – a weekly tradition for locals – and South Molle’s infamous booze cruise. Friday’s floorshow, steeped in Maori legend and the folklore of the Polynesian people, overflows with magnificent Maori showmanship.

Saturday’s Cabaret Night is when Waiata Express comes into its own with a show that includes appearances by characters that look and sound awfully like Elvis, Stevie Wonder, Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton, Ray Charles and more. (unattributed, 1985b: 19)

In addition to the musicians listed above, Te Hira, his wife Jan and their children featured as dancers in the Polynesian floorshow at South Molle, maintaining the Island Feast as a major drawcard for the Island resort despite the competition offered by Tropical Hi’s similar event on Long Island. But while the proximity of the two showbands made them rivals, the cultural affinities between the Maori performers promoted a camaraderie which Bob Te Hira has emphasised in racial terms, stating “we have what you call ‘blood’ respect” (quoted in unattributed, 1995c: 9).

Hamilton Island manager Keith Williams followed South Molle and Long Islands’ strategy of employing Polynesian performers and organised the recruitment of six performers from New Zealand to provide a Polynesian cabaret show entitled ‘Viva Tahiti’. Members of the troupe were Maori and Cook Islander performers who had worked in various Maori/Polynesian showbands around New Zealand and internationally.

‘Viva Tahiti’ was launched in 1983 at a high-profile event that was headlined by Australian variety artist Peter Allen (best known for his Latin-tropicalist hit Rio and his anthemic I Still Call Australia Home). Following the launch, the ensemble performed twice a week at the resort until their residence was interrupted by a major fire that burnt out the ballroom and destroyed the venue’s p.a. system and sound desk. With performances suspended, the ensemble broke up with most members departing to New Zealand or Sydney. Taken with the region, Cook Islander percussionist and dancer Matta Brown stayed on, relocated to Airlie Beach and became one of the central figures in the archipelago’s Polynesian music scene over the next fifteen years.
II. Matta Brown and Cook Island Music

The Cook Islands were given their English language name by the Russian explorer Krusenstein in the 1790s in acknowledgment of Cook’s ‘discovery’ of the group in 1773. The Islands were administered as a protectorate of New Zealand from 1901–1965, after which they became an affiliated territory of New Zealand. Despite their administration by pakeha authorities, and a high degree of socio-economic exchange and affiliation between the two locations, the Cook Islands have retained much of their indigenous and immediately post-European contact syncretic culture. As Takiora Ingram has characterised, traditional forms of music have remained a key element in this:

Music has a highly public role in Cook Islanders’ lives. It enhances ceremonial, ritual and festive occasions, including the investiture of leaders, religious ceremonies, children’s christenings, marriages and funerals. (1998: 896)

Brown was born on Mauke, a small island in the southern part of the Cook Islands. While the island is more westernised than northerly parts of the Cook Islands (such as Manihiki – discussed in the Introduction and in Reeves Lawrence [1996]), Brown grew up in a traditional cultural environment in which music played a central role:

My first influence was probably going to church and doing Sunday school choir and then from there us kids would go home and we used to muck around on all the log drums we used to make, called the tokere, playing with different percussion rhythms and I grew up with it all my life. (interview with Stuart Rogers, July 1998)

The choral music he refers to comprises Rarotongan (dialect) Maori language versions of Christian hymns (known as ‘imene api‘i-Sapati), usually sung acapella in local churches (Ingram, 1998: 898-899). While these hymns were only introduced in the mid-late 1800s, they are now popularly regarded by Cook Islanders as an indigenised (if not indigenous) form of culture. The log drumming style referred to above utilised the tokere, a small wooden log drum with two slits cut into the top part which is struck with wooden sticks.

Ingram has identified that the period in which Brown learnt drumming – immediately after the Cook Islands’ accession to autonomy in 1965 – was one during which “music became an important medium for developing a national identity” (1998: 896). Jon Tikivanotau Jonassen has identified that Cook Island drumming, in particular, became “an important part of Cook Islanders’ national identity” at this time (1998: 901), with touring troupes such as the Betela Dance Troupe and Cook Islands National Arts Theatre establishing percussion skills – and general musicality – as an important international identity marker for Cook Island culture in the Pacific (ibid).

At the age of ten, Brown’s family relocated to nearby Aitutaki and later to Tuapapa in Rarotonga, where Brown performed with a local percussion ensemble at village festivals. At this time Brown began to conceive of the possibility of a musical career that might enable him to travel. At the age of seventeen he pursued this goal by moving to Wellington, New Zealand, to stay with an uncle. Shortly after arriving he began performing with a mixed Cook Islander/Maori ensemble that performed at various venues around North and South Islands and formed the core of a concert troupe that toured Japan in the early 1980s. The ensemble’s experience attracted the attention of Tina Wilson, who had been employed by Hamilton
Island resort to assemble a Polynesian act. Brown and five colleagues were offered a one-year contract to perform at the resort and were flown over to commence their residency in early 1983.

After the dissolution of Hamilton Island’s Viva Tahiti ensemble, Brown’s reputation as a skilled tokere player attracted the attention of Dick Otene, a Maori performer based at Airlie Beach, who was interested in establishing an independent, locally based Polynesian ensemble. In contrast to Brown’s direct recruitment into the Whitsunday resort industry, Otene arrived in the area by a more circuitous route.

III. Dick Otene

Otene was born in The Bay of Islands, in the far north of New Zealand. During the 1800s, when the Whitsundays were still inhabited by members of the Ngāro people (and when Euro-Australian presence in the archipelago was minimal), The Bay of Islands prospered as a port. Located at the southern end of the Pacific whaling circle, the area was visited by boats from the United States and Australia harvesting the seas of the mid-Pacific and visiting Norfolk Island, Lord Howe Island and the Bay of Islands at the furthest western extremities of their travels. As a result, US, Hawaiian, Australian and Norfolk Islander mariners mingled with Maoris and pakeha New Zealanders in the bustling port, spending money on various recreations after long months at sea. Otene’s ancestry reflects The Bay of Island’s historical connections to the broader Pacific through his having a Hawaiian grandmother, whom his grandfather met while working in Hawai‘i around the turn of the 19th Century. Otene grew up speaking Maori language and also learnt various Maori songs and dances from his parents. His father was a keen amateur musician and his mother was an accomplished performer of traditional Maori songs and dances and also served as a judge in Pacific arts festivals during the 1960s.

After completing college in Hamilton, Otene left traditional Maori culture behind as, like many other young Maori at the time, he became caught up in the excitement of the boom in pop music and associated youth culture which had developed in the mid-1950s in the USA and spread to Australia and New Zealand soon after. After learning piano at school Otene switched to guitar and vocals and began performing semi-professionally. During the 1960s he performed in Maori pop bands supporting touring artists such as The Ink Spots and Brothers Four, played in backing bands for local performers such as Ricky May and John Rowles and appeared in the house band of the TV show Teen 63.

While Otene continued to work in various pop/rock outfits and in Maori showbands playing the New Zealand cabaret circuit in the 1970s, the demise of his parents led him to renew his interest in Maori and Pacific culture:

As I was growing up, in my teenage years, I didn’t bother much with my parents’ culture and what they were interested in. It was all the new music and young fella’s things, leaving all that old stuff behind . . . My parents used to tell me all the time, “Come with us to [the Maori] weekend schools, where you learn about your culture”. But that wasn’t for me at the time. I wanted to be the big rock hero! But after my mother and father passed away I realised what they had been on about and how
important it was and I started to look into it all. They showed me my heritage but I
didn’t take it on until they were gone. I had to learn the hard way. So after that I learnt
from the old people, became a good student, just stuck with them, grabbed
the knowledge that they had and realised that it was important to me. (interview, January 2000)

This new orientation also prompted Otene to explore his broader Pacific heritage:

I went back to Hawai‘i in the Seventies to see where my grandmother came from, get
bit of knowledge about my family background as well as where I grew up. Where I
am from, us Maoris know we have that background, a culture that stretches over to
Rarotonga and to Tahiti, to Samoa, back to Hawai‘i. We are all connected along those
lines, so my grandmother’s background, and my going to Hawai‘i, is my part of that
big roots history. And going to Hawai‘i helped make it clear for me. When I went to
Hawai‘i, at the Polynesian Cultural Centre they had a big floor show, top class. I was
inspired by that, all Polynesians – Hawaiians, our own culture. They had 200 or 300
people to draw on, and I thought that was something I would really like to do if I ever
could. (ibid)

IV. Lighting The Flames

Otene moved to Australia in 1976, settling in Victoria and performing with a four piece
pop-rock band entitled Straight Snakes before going on to work in the mining industry. He
relocated to the Whitsunday shore in 1981 and began working as a semi-professional
musician in various Airlie Beach bands before fulfilling his ambitions by forming The Flames
of Polynesia in 1984. Otene recalls the inspiration for the ensemble in the following terms:

In the early 1980s they had a regular luau night at the Village Resort. The show was
put on by some white Australian musicians and some girls doing the dancing. They
wanted me and [fellow Maori musician] Rex Pieta to join and help out, so we did.
What they were doing was good in a way, it was ok, it was entertainment . . . But we
thought to ourselves "Hey, we could do better than that". The band broke up and the
management of the Village and The Terraces got interested in us forming a Polynesian
group to see what we could do.

We were sitting up on the top of The Terraces restaurant, dining, and we looked out
at the view, out to sea, and there were these flames from torches lighting up the area.
They looked very impressive and I looked at the two things together – the sea and
the flames – and I said that it would be good if we had a group to call it 'The Flames
of Polynesia', so we got the name from that.

Then we looked around a bit and then got Matta Brown in to play the Polynesian log
drum and then we got Bob Te Hira, another old Maori friend, a singer and guitar
player, to join and we had the full band. (ibid)

Te Hira, his wife Jan and their children were recruited from their residency at South Molle
Island (described in Section I above). Drawing on this experience, Pareana Te Hira went on
to become the principal choreographer and trainer of new dancers for The Flames of Polynesia. Bob and his seven year old son Scott ‘Tahi’ Te Hira also proved an instant success with their fire dancing routines (producing headlines such as ‘Flame twirling Tahi lights Airlie nightlife’ – Whitsunday Times, 10/7/84: 10).

Figure 18. The Flames Of Polynesia (publicity photo), c1995 (Matta Brown back centre-left, Dick Otene back centre-right)

The Te Hiras remained with The Flames until 1988 and their departure was a significant event for the ensemble. In a newspaper article devoted to the line-up change that appeared in The Whitsunday Times in June 1988, the remaining performers published the following acknowledgment:

The Flames of Polynesia extend their sincere gratitude to the Te Hira family and thank them for the time and effort spent cultivating the Flames of Polynesia spirit. (unattributed, 1988: 1)

Otene and Brown attempted to maintain the “spirit” established in 1984-88 (whose philosophy is summarised in this chapter’s prefatory quotation) by adding five new Maori
performers to their line-up: singer and drummer Rewi (Tom) Greening (an old school friend of Otene’s), dancers Maewa and Steve Whananere (who had previously performed with a Polynesian cultural troupe based in Japan) and ex-Tropical Hi members, singer and dancer Moana Waaka and Cook Island dancer Tumai Thompson. The late 1980s line-up was one of the most active and popular, performing up to five nights a week at Hayman, Lindeman, Hamilton and South Molle resorts and at the Whitsunday Village at Airlie Beach (with a varying number of dancers, as budgets and personnel availability permitted). As Otene has emphasised, the maintenance of a reliable pool of dancers over an extended duration has been a major logistical issue for the ensemble:

It is a lot of work keeping The Flames of Polynesia going, it isn’t just a job where everyone just turns up and they know what to do, like playing in a regular pop band. There’s a lot of people that come and go and most of the new members don’t have the skills or knowledge needed, so we have to teach them to dance or play various things. We must have had over fifty or sixty different dancers through the Flames since we started. Some of them stop after a while but lots of them go on and perform in other places with other people if they move away. We also get phone calls from people down south in Sydney who know about us and how good our dancers are. If they have a Polynesian act which is playing down south or touring overseas they will call me and if I can find some dancers who want to go away and do some work with them, they get together. We are like a talent school for them. (interview, January 2000)

While a series of dancers have passed through the troupe since the early 1980s, the format of their shows has remained relatively stable12 and the set list for The Flames’ mid-2000 performances – reproduced below – is typical of the shows they have performed over the last fifteen years:

1. *Otea* (Tahiti) – mixed male and female dance
2. (Unnamed) drum dance (Tahiti) – male dancers only
3. Coconut fire dance (Tahiti) – mixed dance
4. *Tinikling* (The Philippines) – audience participation item
5. *Mokora* – duck dance (Cook Islands) – male dance
6. *Uli Uli* (Hawai‘i) – mixed dance
7. *Ta fau a pati* – slap dance (Samoa) – male dance
8. *Aparima* (Tahiti) – mixed dance
9. Invitation hula (Hawai‘i) – audience participation
10. *Pokare Kare Ana* (New Zealand) – dance choreographed to a Maori love song
11. New Zealand Maori medley (comprising an action song and poi – women’s dances; and a haka – male dance)
12. Paddle dance (Hawai‘i) – mixed dance
13. Solo hula (Hawai‘i) – performed by female dancer to an invited couple, seated on-stage
14. Fire dance (Samoa) – mixed dance
15. Fire torch dance (Hawai‘i) – mixed dance
16. Finale and Introduction to individual dancers

(NB Information in brackets refers to dances’ places of origin13.)
This selection comprises five Hawaiian (/Hawaiianesque\textsuperscript{14}) dances, four New Zealand Maori ones, four Tahitian, two Samoan and one Cook Island item. The only non-Polynesian dance is the Filipino Tinkling, a dance where a pair of dancers move between bamboo poles rhythmically clapped on the floor (performed as an audience participation number\textsuperscript{9}). The dances listed above all belong to what might termed social and/or festive genres which have been regularly performed to cultural outsiders over the last century and now form part of an international – inter-Polynesian – entertainment repertoire that has become a style in its own right (rather than simply a commercialised/touristic ‘distortion’ of traditional practices).

In The Flames’ – and other accomplished Pacific ensembles’ – dance shows, costume, choreography and (individual and collective) performances combine to produce a theatrical spectacle. The variety of dances featured in the set requires performers to embody and project (various combinations of) grace, sensuality, energy, zest and, in the case of the haka, posturally aggressive physicality. The switching of modes (and combinations) between individual dances is both a sign of the performers’ physical versatility and a device that helps sustain audience interest over the duration of the set. As Brown identifies:

The thing about us is that we are entertainers. We do Island dances but we do them as part of a show . . . If we did a full-on traditional cultural show at a resort people wouldn’t expect it and wouldn’t get it. We vary our material, and present it in a certain, lively way, and it seems to work. (interview, July 2000)

As Otene emphasises, various aspects of traditional sources have to be modified and presentation designed to suit the ensemble’s performance schedules and context:

We have to use raffia in the costumes, because the proper traditional, authentic materials wouldn’t last too long if they were used three times a week. If we used old tapa cloth and real flowers we would always be replacing them. The artificial ones look fine on stage. It’s not traditional but you have to be practical about it. It’s got to look good on stage, that’s the thing. (interview, January 2000)

In addition to the spectacle of the dancers, The Flames’ shows also feature an element that binds them into the various traditions of Whitsunday entertainment (detailed in Chapters 2-7 and 9) – audience participation. Otene identifies this element as providing a greater degree of engagement than the passive consumption of their performance:

The invitation hulas always work! They’re fun but we also want to get people involved with the show since when people are part of something they think it’s something special. They take photos to remember it and it makes what they had in the Whitsundays a special experience . . . like they have been somewhere, not just another hotel place like any other holiday resort anywhere. Getting the kids involved is important to us too. At places like Daydream they are usually shunted off all day to daycare and that\textsuperscript{16}. We want to give them a cultural experience too, because then they’ll grow up and remember, “I’ve seen that”. When they see some pictures of Polynesian dancing they’ll know what it’s about and have positive memories. (interview, January 2000)
V. A Modern Tradition

The Flames’ regular finale, featuring dancers twirling flaming sticks, has become a signature element and spectacular climax to their act. In South Molle’s hall the switching off of the electric lights to provide maximum effect for the whirling fire sticks has another (no doubt unintentional) effect. Deprived of artificial light, the commemorative images of Captain Cook which adorn the walls fade into the shadows and the (literal) Flames of Polynesia illuminate the visual space of the auditorium for a flickering moment, immediately before the ensemble are introduced one-by-one to receive their applause from the crowd.

Despite audience’s enthusiastic response, there are no encores. The set finishes and the performers return backstage to change and pack and travel back to their homes on the shore. The resort ambience returns as the house lights adjust to entice the audience on to the dance floor. The disco starts up, its songs accompanied by their music videos, shown on a large screen above the floor. On the night I attended the show (29.1.00), the first sounds and images which followed the Flames’ performance exemplified the delocalised product of the contemporary international music industry – Britney Spears took centre screen and sound space with a song, rhythm and dance which provided a familiar groove for its audience to slip into.

Mediated and com/modified as it might be, the temporary Polynesianisation of the resort’s auditorium during the Flames’ set provides a sharp rejoinder to the celebratory discourses embodied on the walls. But as a statement, it is (literally) dis-placed. The contacts and clashes between Polynesian and Cook’s crew took place far to the east of the Whitsundays. The rejoinders to Cook’s intrusions performed by Aboriginal mimic Percy on nearby Lindeman Island in the 1930s (discussed in Chapter 1) were of a different order (and were performed to a Ngāro audience who were suffering the impact – rather than relaxing in the rewards – of European invasion). In this sense, despite the celebratory vitality of the Flames’ dancers and musicians, and the evident enjoyment of their Euro-Australian audience, the show’s out-of-placeness hides, rather than reveals, the history of the Island and the archipelago that the resort effaces. But, then again, the Flames cannot be held to account for their performance within an environment (or place and opportunity) created by (first) European settlement and imperialism and (latterly) the internationally orientated resort industry. Any attempt to problematise the presence (and popularity) of Polynesian performers in the archipelago in the late 20th Century is to doubly victimise them, to overload them with contradictory expectations.

Despite the recent arrival of Maori and Cook Islander performers in the Whitsundays, their musical repertoire is essentially a contemporary variant of the western Pacific vernacular songs performed by Aboriginal musicians such as Billy Moogarah and Arthur and Robert Peterson; Torres Strait Islanders such as Dicky Poid, Salee Gibuma and Awati Maiti; and Euro-Australian musicians from Bruce Jamieson in the 1930s, through to resort bands in the 1950s-1970s. In this manner, the sounds and spectacle presented by The Flames represents a contemporary version of a more general regional inter-cultural repertoire and practice, a phenomenon that has established itself as a modern tradition within the archipelago.
End Notes

1. The song is from the Siva Pacifica project album co-ordinated by Australian producer Jeremy Copping with the assistance of Australian-based Samoan singer Robyn Luaatu and various musicians from the Solomon Islands.

2. Also spelt ‘Googy’ in various press and promotional materials.


4. See the discussion of the ‘Unforgettable Hayman’ brochure in Chapter 6.

5. Walker left the Whitsundays in the late 1980s and established a slimmed-down version of Tropical Hi, comprising a sequencer and three dancers, with himself as MC and instrumentalist. This ensemble played around Queensland, visiting Airlie Beach, in the early-mid 1990s.

6. Also referred to in early press reports as Bob Wynd.

7. While the Cook Islands are also known as Rarotonga, after the group’s main island, the colonial name has – somewhat surprisingly – been widely retained in the Islands and internationally.

8. The current population of the Cook Islands is around 20,000, with over 40,000 Cook Islanders residing in North Island, New Zealand, mostly in and around Auckland. The Islands have self-government in all areas except defence and foreign relations.


10. The instrument forms part of a family of log drums, including the larger pate and Ka’ara, and the three feature, together with pa’u (membraphone) drums, in the line-up of Cook Island percussion ensembles.

11. As discussed in Chapter 7, one of the musicians referred to was jazz guitarist Tommy Smith who recalls that:

   They had me playing Hawaiian guitar there – which wasn’t really my thing – backing some girls doing a hula show. It was work but it wasn’t what I was interested in playing. (interview, October 2000)

12. Given that the tourists, who constitute their principal audience, largely see the show on a one-off basis (or on successive annual visits), it has not been necessary for the band to frequently vary their material.

13. As named and identified by Otene in a copy of the set list supplied to the author.

14. I use the term ‘Hawaiianesque’ here to refer to variants of traditional Hawaiian hula dances devised, circulated and/or popularised in various non-Hawaiian contexts (such as Hollywood).

15. Jonas Baes has identified that the tinikling “is a traditional Philippine dance, developed perhaps from Southeast Asian dance traditions” which has been “commonly associated with Hispanic Philippine dances”. He also notes that a similar style is present in the traditional singkil dances of the Maranaw in the Southern Philippines. (p.c. October 2000)

16. Here Otene is referring to a feature of resorts such as Daydream Island that run supervised leisure activities for children, allowing parents child-free relaxation time.
CHAPTER
ELEVEN

Returning to the Islands

THE REASSERTION OF NGARO/BIRRIGUBBA CULTURE

This stuff isn’t in any of the local histories . . . They have very little on us. When we have said who we are, people have said, “Oh, we thought you were South Sea Islanders”.

(Irene Butterworth, interview, August 2000)

As Chapters 1 and 4 outlined, Aboriginal occupancy of the Whitsunday Islands ceased in the 1920s/30s. The Ngaro’s dispossession occurred as a result of the development of the archipelago and adjacent coast by Euro-Australian settlers. The dispersal of individuals and families to areas outside traditional Ngaro lands, such as Palm Island, Proserpine and other mainland locations (together with the subsequent removal of individual Ngaro children by government authorities and their adoption by Euro-Australian families’) had a devastating effect on Ngaro culture. Traditional Ngaro customs and language declined as scattered Ngaro families and individuals began to integrate and interact with the other regional and/or ethnic groups they were now required to live alongside. By the 1940s, increasingly few Ngaro descendants spoke their original language and the performance of traditional songs and dances dwindled to minimal levels. As a result, the processes of cultural reassertion discussed in this chapter have required an active re-creation of Ngaro identity by contemporary Ngaro/Birrigubba activists.

After a brief history of the establishment of Proserpine and its Ngaro-descendant community, this chapter describes various attempts by the local indigenous community to (re-)engage with their archipelagic homeland. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the (inaugural) ‘Paddling Through History’ Festival, held in October 2000, which returned Ngaro descendants from Proserpine, Palm Island and Townsville to the archipelago and celebrated their history in a series of ceremonies and performances.

I. Establishing the Proserpine Community

The Scottish aristocrat George Dalrymple named the region occupied by the present day town of Proserpine after the Greek goddess of Spring in 1859. Between the 1860s and early 1880s there were a number of violent clashes between members of the resident Gia clan and settlers attempting to establish cattle stations in the area. As a result of punitive actions
against local clans, and a continuing increase in settlers, these clashes abated during the 1880s. Sugar cane plantations were first established at this time, mainly staffed by indentured Melanesian workers (referred to as kanakas by their employers), who had been recruited and/or abducted from the islands of the New Hebrides (present day Vanuatu) and the Solomon Islands by Australian privateers. While the local sugar industry slumped between the mid-1880s and 1890s, its revival in 1897, with the establishment of Proserpine mill, led to the development of the present-day town and brought a fresh influx of labour into the region. In 1910 a rail link between Proserpine and the port of Bowen was established, enhancing the profitability of local sugar production. During the 1920s and 1930s Proserpine also established itself as a regional entertainment centre with its own theatre, dance hall and pubs.

In the 1920s and 1930s a small number of Ngaro and Gia families resided on the outskirts of town. This situation persisted until the 1940s when some local Aborigines began to move into the main town following a temporary downturn in the local economy caused by World War Two. As might be expected, given the discriminatory nature of Australian law, culture and society in the early-mid 20th Century, relations between Aborigines and the (socio-economically dominant) Euro-Australian population of the region were often fraught and mutually suspicious. As Ngaro elder and activist Irene Butterworth has emphasised:

In the 1940s and 1950s, when I was growing up, we always had a bit of anxiety that if our families got big they would be split up. If anyone in authority came round to our place we’d all head off. (interview, August 2000)

Contact and engagement with other communities in the region proved more attractive and productive. Another marginalised population living in the vicinity of Proserpine in the 1940s and 1950s were the descendants of the indentured South Sea Islander sugar plantation labourers referred to above. Islanders and Ngaro populations not only interacted but also, in some instances, consolidated their interactions through intermarriage. Mabel Eppi for instance, who was born on Whitsunday Island in 1930, married Dan Peterson, a South Sea Islander, and had several children. Another group with which Ngaro and kanaka-descended families associated were the Torres Strait Islanders who continued to visit the Proserpine estuary up until the 1950s (in the declining stages of the trochus and bêche-de-mer fishing industries). Irene Butterworth has recalled that:

My parents were one of the first Aboriginal families to move into the town itself . . . Lots of the crews off the lugger boats used to come to our place, lots of people. Our house was always full all the time. (ibid)

As her sister Ailsa Murray has also identified, association with these groups (whose children were not subject to officially sanctioned kidnapping) allowed a useful anonymity for local Aborigines, since “in those days white people couldn’t tell the difference between Islanders and other black people” (interview, August 2000).

Music played an important part in the frequent social gatherings between members of these communities. Dan and Mabel Peterson’s children Arthur and Robert were popular multi-instrumentalists, playing lap-steel guitar, acoustic guitar, mandolin, flute, violin and gum leaf. The brothers’ repertoire included hapa haole Hawaiian songs (such as Beyond the reef and Harbour lights), Western Pacific songs (such as the Fijian-derived compositions
Fijian skies and Isa Lei), popular US material (such as After the ball and Daisy, Daisy) and Country songs (including several popularised by US performer Slim Whitman). They performed at public functions (such as dances) and socially, at their family home and also, on occasion, in an old cafe in Proserpine’s main street where they were joined by other local musicians for informal jam sessions. Torres Strait Islander musician Ernest Ahwang performed regularly with the brothers between 1959 and 1961, when he lived in Proserpine, and recalls that:

We would play together. Arthur and Robert were talented musicians. Arthur would play [lap] steel and Robert played a violin with a horn on it [a stroh'], doing the instrumental fills in numbers, and we would have other people coming in too sometimes. There was an Italian accordion player – Frank Deambrogio – who used to play with us. He was pretty good too. It was mostly social, us having a get together. We enjoyed playing. (interview, September 2000)

Deambrogio was one of a number of amateur Italian-Australian accordion players who performed around Proserpine in the 1950s. He recalls that the sessions were “just for fun, seeing what we could play together at the time” (interview, October 2000). The Peterson brothers also performed regularly with another Italian-Australian musician, guitarist Primo Ferraris, in a variety of small ensembles at dances and community functions. The interaction of the Petersons, Ahwang, Deambrogio and Ferraris in the 1950s-1960s reflects both the musicality of the Ngāro/Islander and Italian communities in the area and their historical association in the development of sugar cane farming, when kanak labourers were employed by and/or worked with Italian farmers.

The local Italian-Australian music scene around Proserpine was further enlivened during the late 1950s and early 1960s by visits from multi-instrumentalists Alessandro and Cesare Moreno, who, as discussed in Chapter 5, were employed on an extended residency at the Royal Hayman Hotel during this period. The Morenos performed at community functions (such as weddings and 21st birthday parties) and socialised with members of Proserpine’s Italian community. Since this was the period when Deambrogio and Ferraris were performing with the Peterson brothers and Ahwang, it is likely that the Morenos had some degree of awareness (if not direct experience) of the repertoire and instrumental styles of Pacific music played around Proserpine at this time. It is also possible that there was a more direct musical connection between the two. One of the Duo Moreno’s duties on Hayman was the performance of brackets of Hawaiian/Pacific music to accompany weekly luau feasts. Given that there is no evidence that they had performed such music prior to their residency at Hayman it is possible that the Petersons’ and Ahwang’s repertoire and performance styles (and/or the convervance of Deambrogio and Ferraris with their music) offered the Morenos a model for their adaptations of the genre for performance on accordion and guitar at the resort.

While the Peterson brothers’ competence as performers allowed them a considerable degree of interaction with the town’s Euro-Australian population, there were, as Ngāro activist Irene Butterworth emphasises, clear social demarcations and they were consequently “very wary about what they could and couldn’t do” (ibid). Despite the Peterson brothers’ popularity as entertainers and their family validation of musciality, their children did not go on to play a role in the social music culture of the Proserpine region. However, the
intercultural community in which the Petersons were active provided an element of continuity through its incorporation of Torres Strait Islander Leo Gabey. Gabey was born on Thursday Island, to a Murray Islander family, in 1940. He moved to the Australian mainland in his late teens and worked on the railroads, travelling south down the Queensland coast. While working in Proserpine, Gabey met and married Arthur Peterson’s daughter Esther. After settling in the area he went on to play guitar at various social functions and was also bass guitarist in local Country music ensembles during the 1960s.

II. Reasserting Ngaro Identity

During the years between the final departure of the Ngaro population of the archipelago and the cultural and political reassertions of presence and identity discussed below, Ngaro contact with the Whitsunday Islands continued on a limited and intermittent basis. One continuance was in the form of fishing, with Ngaro descendants such as Arthur Peterson sailing in the Whitsundays at weekends in the 1940s and 1950s, fishing and hunting dugong and turtle. Another, more occasional reason for/means of visiting the islands occurred in the early 1960s-1970s, when the Island resorts ran their annual festival (discussed in Chapter 5). Special excursions were organised from Proserpine that gave Ngaro families the opportunity to visit islands such as South Molle.

Irene Butterworth also had occasional opportunities to visit the islands in the 1970s and 1980s as a passenger travelling with her husband Charlie, a truck driver who frequently worked for construction companies. The construction industry enjoyed a boom period in Queensland during the 1970s and 1980s during the tenure of the state National Party government led by Joh Bjelke-Petersen. During this period developers were given a virtual carte blanche for their projects, with negligible attention paid to environmental and national or local heritage issues. One outcome was the establishment and/or major upgrading of the majority of today’s Whitsunday resort facilities. Bjelke-Petersen publicly embraced and promoted such projects. One particular venture he supported was the establishment of Keith Williams’ controversial Hamilton Island resort complex, complete with its prominent, highly visible tower blocks. Bjelke-Petersen visited the Island to officially launch the resort’s first phase in 1982 and returned in 1984 to officially open the second.

As Butterworth recalls, one particular visit to a resort construction site in the archipelago in the 1980s proved a pivotal moment in the development of her political consciousness:

One day [in 1986] I went over with Charlie in his truck on the boat to Hayman Island, carting the last lot of rocks for their new rock [swimming] pool. You weren’t supposed to walk around the place when you were delivering materials but we asked someone and they said “Fine”. But it wasn’t . . . We were marched off by security and had to get back in the truck. I realised later that they were only doing their job . . . But it played havoc with me. I thought “No, you are not going to do that to me” . . . It really registered and started me thinking. (interview, August 2000)

In the years immediately following the incident described above, Aboriginal Land Rights issues, and associated social and cultural awareness campaigns, began to attract support and publicity from both indigenous groups and their supporters in the run-up to (and
aftermath of) the 1988 Bicentennial of establishment of British settlement in Australia. Along with a general disillusionment with the Queensland Government’s corruption and cronyism, this broad shift in political climate was one factor behind the defeat of Bjelke-Petersen’s government in the 1989 state elections.

In the early 1990s, the lightening of the repressive, racist regime that Bjelke-Petersen had cultivated combined with a number of (interconnected) local and national factors to encourage various indigenous groups to assert themselves with greater confidence and support. For the Ngaro (at least\textsuperscript{10}), academic researchers have also assisted in the rediscovery of their cultural heritage. Irene Butterworth has commented that:

> It’s amazing what’s coming to the fore now. Bryce Barker arrived one day in 1992 and phoned me up and said “I want to take you to see something” and it hasn’t stopped since! (ibid)

Barker, now a senior lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Southern Queensland at Darling Downs, began work in the Whitsundays in the early 1990s, researching a doctoral thesis on the area’s history\textsuperscript{11}. As he has explained:

> I had archaeological evidence of prehistoric use of the islands dating back 9000 years but also of historical use (ie there was bottle glass in the top of nearly all the sites excavated). I also had historical records of Ngaro people living in the area up until the 1920s and 1930s... The archaeological record provides an enormous amount of detail in regard to how and where people lived on the Island system and in a general sense demonstrates cultural links to the contemporary community. (p.c. August 2000)

Encouraged by such archaeological insights into the Ngaro past, its cultural links to the present and the broader shifts in socio-political climate discussed above, Irene Butterworth, and other Aborigines around the areas of Proserpine and Bowen, became actively involved in campaigns for the recognition of traditional ownership of the region. In association with other indigenous communities of the Birrigubba people, Ngaro descendants lodged a land claim with the Australian High Court in 1993 that covered various areas from Rockhampton, in the north, down to the Whitsundays. (At time of writing the claim appears to be finally approaching resolution.)

In parallel with the submission of the land claim, local Aborigines made a move towards cultural re-assertion by establishing a performance group named the Mashma Dancers. The troupe (who took their name from the Gia word for gum leaf) was established in 1993 to provide an Aboriginal cultural presence in a form that could be employed by the Whitsunday tourist industry. The venture was actively supported by local tourist entrepreneurs who saw the appeal of such an ensemble in the post-Bicentennial period, when interest in Aboriginal culture was high amongst Australian and international visitors.

Given that the majority of traditional Ngaro and Gia songs and dances had largely disappeared by the late 20th Century, the troupe had to develop and learn a new repertoire that drew on aspects of shared Birrigubba traditions (as discussed in Chapter 4) and new contemporary styles of pan-Aboriginal cultural performance (such as imitative indigenous animal dances\textsuperscript{12}). The ensemble were choreographed and accompanied on didjeridu by a Palm Islander named Boisie Pymble\textsuperscript{13} who resided around Proserpine in the early-mid
1990s and who brought with him a repertoire learnt on Palm Island and honed in various previous performance contexts in Queensland.

Along with Pymble, the Mashma Dancers included Irene Butterworth’s son Wayne and several other male and female performers from around Proserpine and Bowen. Mashma performed on Hamilton, Long and South Mollie Islands in 1993-94. During this period a parallel enterprise was also established, in collaboration with (Euro-Australian) cruise operators John Fowler and Mick Sullivan, entitled Bungeroo Cruises (after the Birrigubba word for turtle). The cruises took tourists to parts of the archipelago off the usual cruise routes, such as Cid Island, and provided commentaries on the indigenous history and resources of the region. The venture also gave their indigenous organisers the opportunity to reacquaint themselves with their ancestral homelands.

One particular cruise through the outer islands had a dramatic impact on the Ngaro descendants on board. (NB the following dialogue is extracted from a discussion between the participants that I recorded in Proserpine in August 2000.)

*Irene Butterworth:* The first time I ever went to Nara, on Hook Island, where all the caves are, with Bryce [Barker], I had the eeriest feeling. I don’t know whether you can explain it. It was probably a wake-up call – “It’s about time you’ve come back” – since no one had been there since the likes of Uncle Bill [Moogarah] or my Aunty Daisy in the 1930s, no one else – or no one else who belonged out there. The first time I went to the outer reef it was mind-boggling.

I decided that I really wanted to hear a didj played at Nara. I wanted to sit in the inlet on the boat and listen from there. Well, we arranged it and the didj player played and from where I was sitting it just sounded wonderful, it echoed down the inlet. But evidently it turned out to be the wrong thing to do. My son, who’d gone ashore, had a weird experience.

*Wayne Butterworth:* Boisie started playing and then it was like someone grabbed me by the spine and ran their hand up it. All the hairs on the back of my neck just stood up.

*Irene Butterworth:* By the time he got back down to the boat he was a lather of sweat, his eyeballs stood out... He never spoke on the way back.

*Esther Gabey:* I felt something different, strong... a really good sense of belonging. Wayne was sick all the way back, I thought “Ay it’s probably just a place for women” – who knows?

*Irene Butterworth:* Or look, maybe it was that something like that just hadn’t been done for such a long time.

*Esther Gabey:* To me it was a kind of awakening, like finally we had gone home and things had come out.

*Irene Butterworth:* We had a film crew on-board that day but we said to them, no you don’t film any of this, no cameras. We didn’t know what we were feeling at the time. We have spoken about it a lot since. It was really something.
There are a whole set of complexities to the event described above – and the different perceptions of those present – which illustrate the issues involved in revisiting, reinterpreting and re-identifying with cultural heritage sites. While sustained discussion of these is beyond the scope of this book, the musical aspect of the experience merits comment. As discussed in Chapter 9 Section V, prior to the mid-late 20th Century the didjeridu appears to have been limited to a relatively small area of northern Australia and there are no historical accounts of Ngaro or other regional clans utilising the instrument. Pymble’s didjeridu performance at Nara, described above, was therefore, in all probability, the first instance of the instrument being performed there and represents the extension of a contemporary pan-Aboriginal cultural practice into the area. When I broached this topic with the individuals participating in the discussion reproduced above, the response was significant. After some discussion as to whether the didjeridu may have been played by members of northern clans participating in large regional gatherings such as those described by Morrill (in Chapter 1), the ambiguity of the instrument’s relevance for the Ngaro and the Whitsundays was readily resolved with the simple assertion that since Wayne Butterworth had learnt didjeridu playing from Pymble the instrument now was part of Ngaro culture – a clear demonstration that, for my informants at least, culture is perceived as a living, adaptive and reactive form rather than a museumified referent.

A very different kind of cultural unease to that experienced at Nara Inlet during the occasion described above was also precipitated by the presence of Ngaro performers in the Islands in the 1990s. This concerned an anxiety about Aboriginal people returning to the archipelago on the part of the region’s new occupants. A (Euro-Australian) musician performing in the archipelago in the mid-1990s commented to me that while audience responses to the Mashma Dancers were usually positive, some island resort managers were uneasy about the ensemble’s presence on ‘their’ islands. More specifically, he recalled that the management of one resort seized on a minor incident to cancel the Mashma Dancers’ weekly appearance:

They were really looking for an opportunity to drop the group. Like a lot of resort managers they were very conservative and used to get worried when the [Aboriginal] musicians and people with them would be sitting around the resorts before shows – worried that they would frighten the guests or something! It’s an old attitude; keep the performers out of sight, especially if they look ‘different’.

While Mashma and Bungaroo established a niche and reputation for themselves (despite the prejudiced attitudes of some resort managers) both ventures began to decline in 1994 due to pressures described by participants in the following terms:

_Irene Butterworth:_ The backer behind the cruises put up the money, which was fine, but he went too fast for all of us, wanting a five day a week [commitment]. The guys would have been happier with two or three days a week. And in the tourist industry there’s no such thing as weekends! Not only that but a lot of them had other jobs – so it became “Sorry, day job first” and it started to break up.

_Wayne Butterworth:_ One problem is that there are only a handful of us in the local community and there’s not a big number of people interested in dancing. Everyone’s
got to work too, it makes organising things difficult.
(Discussion with the author, August 2000).

Another Ngaro descendent who participated in local music culture for a short period was Leo Gabey Junior. After learning basic aspects of guitar from his father (as discussed above) Gabey learnt didjeridu “by playing around with a bit of PVC pipe” (interview, October 2000) and performed at a pub in Proserpine in 1998. As he recalls:

A local pub wanted to have an Aboriginal show in order to attract some of those tourists who all went to Airlie Beach, so I worked there doing a short talk about us local Aborigines and then showing them how to play a bit of didj. It didn’t last that long – because the tourists didn’t come along much to Proserpine – but it gave me a chance to show my culture. (ibid)

While the cultural projects of Mashma and Bungeroo lapsed in the mid-late 1990s (and the Proserpine initiative failed to take off), the views of Ngaro descendants have continued to be taken into account on various regional representative and consultative bodies. The historical continuity of use of the Whitsunday archipelago’s marine resources by Ngaro descendants has, for instance, resulted in government bodies such as the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority recognising the Ngaro as the traditional owners of the Islands. Since 1994 Irene Butterworth has served as a member of various management committees and the recognition of Ngaro custodianship of the archipelago was further enhanced by the appointment of Wayne Butterworth as a Parks ranger. As his mother has emphasised:

Getting Wayne as a ranger was great since we had always said that we need our people out there. They are our eyes and ears. (ibid)

The “eyes and ears” of the Ngaro were also returned to the Islands, in grand and spectacular style, in an event held in 2000 which celebrated the prior Aboriginal occupancy of the archipelago, the various peoples who have passed through the region since the early 1900s and the musical traditions detailed in previous chapters of this book.

III. Paddling Through History

The organisers, participants and project of the (inaugural) ‘Paddling Through History’ Festival, held between October 26th–29th 2000, exemplified the profound changes to the region over the preceding 150 years and the possibilities for inclusive forms of public cultural performance, symbolism and reconciliation. The Festival developed from a series of annual events organised by the Outrigger Whitsunday Canoe Club that involved canoeists gathering for communal paddles (and subsequent socialisation) in the Whitsunday Passage. As Alex Bortoli, a local journalist and hotelier, has explained:

The idea came to me really vividly in a dream one night [in late 1999]. It was like a ‘vision’. I had the idea of celebrating the Aborigines who used to travel on outrigger canoes through the Islands by having kayakers and outriggers paddling with them. It was so clear and exciting that I got out of bed and started planning it, wondering whether it could work. I had the feeling that it could be important. (interview, October 2000)
Bortoli’s idea was to combine a canoeists’ event with a festival that would facilitate a public return of Ngaro descendants to the archipelago, travelling from the coast to the islands alongside the canoeists and participating in ceremonies and cultural events on individual islands. Fittingly, for an area whose recent history has been increasingly inter-cultural and international in orientation, Bortoli’s inspiration for the event derived from a cultural context geographically distant from the western Pacific. Bortoli’s ancestry is Bermudan-Italian and he grew up on Bermuda, an isolated British colony located approximately 1000 kilometres north of the Caribbean. As he relates:

I had some idea about how tourism and culture (and how tourists and different types of local people) could interact from growing up in Bermuda. It probably gives me a particular perspective about living in the Whitsundays and what might develop here. (ibid)

From Bortoli’s initial, relatively modest idea, the scale and ambition of the event snowballed and turned into a major commitment for its trio of organisers, Bortoli, Kathy Szeputi and Sue Shanks17, as other interested parties offered to participate in the Festival. Szeputi has recalled that “it just started getting bigger, and didn’t seem to stop, we kept adding things all the time” (interview, March 2001).
After negotiating with a number of Whitsunday resorts, Long Island and South Molle Island agreed to stage day/night events and to assist in accommodating the large party of canoeists, cultural performers and support personnel who formed the Festival’s touring party\textsuperscript{18}. As these negotiations proceeded, the conference organisers began to attract sponsorship from the Queensland state government\textsuperscript{19}, Whitsunday Shire Council, Tourism Whitsunday, Channel Seven Television, Flight West airlines and a number of local businesses. The Festival’s final itinerary comprised:

October 26th – Formal launch and musical performances at the Airlie Beach Sailing Club.
October 27th – Gathering of participants at Shute Harbour for a blessing of the flotilla by traditional owners; crossing by canoes and festival barge to Long Island; and talks, guided walk, ceremonies, music and dance performances and overnight stay on the Island.
October 28th – Crossing by canoes and festival barge to South Molle Island followed by talks, guided walk, ceremonies, music and dance performances and overnight stay on the Island.
October 29th – Crossing by canoes and festival barge to Airlie Beach followed by closing ceremony and music and dance performances.

\textit{Figure 20. Ceremonial smoking of the kayaks, Shute Harbour, October 2000.}
The unusual (and highly photo-/telegenic) nature of the event attracted substantial attention from the media. Channel Seven TV included scenes from the Festival launch on its evening state news program and local papers also covered the Festival with photos and feature articles. But, within the terms of reference of this book, at least, the most notable impacts were upon the participants themselves and the most significant impact upon regional history was a symbolic one.

The scope of the Festival widened considerably during its planning stages. In addition to indigenous community groups from around Proserpine and Bowen, the final Festival party included the descendants of the Ngaro/Birrigubba Prior family who had been relocated to Palm Island in the 1920s (as discussed in Chapter 4), performers of other Australian/Western Pacific backgrounds from northern Queensland and a number of Euro-Australian participants.

For the Ngaro descendent families from Proserpine, the Festival marked a further stage in their re-engagement with ancestral lands (as outlined in Section II above). As the Festival barge departed Shute Harbour and made its way towards open water I talked with Irene Butterworth about her expectations of the festival. Just as she identified it as “another stage in reclaiming what’s ours” a small group of dolphins surfaced and sped alongside the barge, leaping through its bow waves. “That’s a sign”, she said, “an omen for us, I think things will go well now”.

For members of the Prior family, most of whom had not visited the archipelago since their ancestors had been exiled from the Islands in the early 20th Century, their return was a powerful experience that they also perceived as marked by signs. Speaking to the author on the second day of the festival, at South Mollé Island, Renarta Prior related that:

Gubulla Munda – the snake spirit – went with us Ngaro people to Palm Island. It’s been sleeping there. We’ve come back here now and it’s waking up again. You know that storm last night on Long Island when we were there? That was the Gubulla Munda crying tears of joy at our return here, at things being put right again.

Her sister Carole Patterson-Prior responded with the statement that:

Even if you haven’t been to this particular place before, you take the spirit of your grandparents and their people with you – they come with you and you feel like you’ve got a deep connection right away, like something waking up in you. It feels very powerful – very good. (ibid)

As a participant-observer in the Festival (giving daily talks on Whitsunday musical history as well as researching this chapter) I was able to observe the experiences of Ngaro descendants on their voyage through the space of the contemporary Whitsundays. When the barge that carried the performers and their equipment first approached the shore of Long Island, a young Ngaro descendant remarked on the quizzical stares of guests sunning themselves on the beach and quipped “Maybe they think we’re coming to invade them, ay?!” The remark was only half in jest. As the barge beached on the sand, lowered the ramp at its prow and the horde of performers and participants of various races and skin-tones disembarked, carrying didjeridus, banners, crates and packages, a temporary reterritorialisation of the resort space was enacted. For a few, fleeting hours, areas of the Island were transformed into what Hakim Bey – romantically invoking the spirit of autonomous “sea rovers and
corsairs” (1991: 97) – has termed a ‘Temporary Autonomous Zone’ [‘TAZ’], a place and time where established order is destabilised by the exuberant expression of cultural and social non-conformity and difference.

As the day on Long Island progressed, the impact of our arrival (and the contestation of our ‘TAZ’) became apparent. While initial confusions about accommodation, performance spaces and food queues gradually resolved themselves and the anxiety of reception staff dissipated, various tensions remained evident. Many resort guests looked considerably uncomfortable as festival participants settled and socialised at various points around the grounds, occupying the differently constituted spaces of the tourists’ own ‘TAZs’. One particular exchange I participated in proved illuminating. After dinner I was sitting, waiting for the music to recommence, when an elderly male resort guest came and stood next to me. After gazing at me quizzically for some time, as if trying to ascertain my status, he gestured towards a group of indigenous performers standing nearby and asked, “Do you know what they’re doing here?” I replied by explaining about the Festival. Evidently unimpressed, he turned towards the performers and scrutinised them again before asking, “So you’ll all be leaving tomorrow?” I replied in the affirmative and, evidently relieved by my response, he turned and walked off towards the accommodation area.

Figure 21. Didjeriduists (l-r) Unidentified, Ken Dodd and Wayne Butterworth performing at South Molle Island, October 2000
The subsequent day at South Molle Island was smoother. The resort’s management and staff were more welcoming and better organised. Perhaps more adequately primed as to the reasons for our presence, resort guests appeared to be less threatened by such sonic deterritorialisations as a lunchtime didjeridu concert by the main pool (where Birrigubba performers Wayne Butterworth and Ken Dodd played a set that resounded impressively around the hard, reflective surfaces of the pool courtyard). Following an afternoon of al fresco music and dance performances, the Festival reached a climax, in terms of audience size and participation, in a show held in the resort’s freshly refurbished entertainment hall.

One of the most striking elements of the concert was the manner in which the performers re-connected with – and thereby re-affirmed – various aspects of the history of cultural performance and interaction discussed in previous chapters. The evening’s participants included:

1) The Palm Island Dancers, a troupe including fifth generation descendants of members of the Ngaro Prior family who were exiled from Whitsunday Island in the early 1900s, which was joined by Renarta Prior for a performance of the Birrigubba ‘Boy’s Song’ (discussed in Chapter 4).

2) Troupes of young local performers of Birrigubba-descent – the Didjada Mogarah Mith Bama Dancers from Bowen and the Proserpine HWC Dancers.

3) South Molle Island resort staff.

4) The Bucasia Sea Shell Dancers, a troupe from Mackay of mixed Torres Strait Islander and Melanesian descent.

5) The Dawul Dancers, the locally based duo of Sally Johnson and Samantha Martin, originally from the Kimberley region of northwest Australia.

Figure 22. Renarta Prior and members of the Palm Island Dancers onstage at South Molle Island, October 2000
The cultural diversity of the performers, which extended to an audience that included their friends and families along with other festival participants, resort guests and day visitors, constituted a significant gathering of representatives of the different cultures that had participated in the modern history of the region.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Figure 23. The Bucasia Sea Shell Dancers onstage at South Molle Island, October 2000*

In terms of deep history and traditional ownership, the most striking aspect of the evening, and Festival as a whole, was the return of Ngaro/Birrigubba culture to the Islands in the form of Renarta Prior and the Palm Island Dancers' performance of traditional repertoire. Together with the supportive complementarity of the Birrigubba troupes from Proserpine and Bowen, the presence of Ngaro descendant performers on stage renewed the initiative established by Mashma in the mid 1990s and reinserted indigenous forms into the resort space. Other performers also provided further returns and reaffirmations. The songs and dances performed by members of the South Molle resort staff returned to the spirit of the earliest phase of Whitsunday tourism (as exemplified by Bruce Jamieson and his parties), by offering entertainment to the indigenous Australians who formed a sizeable part of the concert audience. Similarly, the presence of the Bucasia Sea Shell Dancers also echoed the Torres Strait Islanders who entertained tourists with their songs and dances from the 1930s through to the early 1960s.
The mood of the Festival party on the final day was subdued as equipment and luggage was packed aboard the barge to be taken over to Airlie Beach. The route back to the coast took us away from the festival’s ‘TAZ’ and its brief, euphoric reterritorialisation of the archipelago. Over the four-day period the Festival had employed the talents of over seventy performers, many of whom, in the immediate ‘afterglow’ at least, felt that the experience had changed their perceptions of the archipelago. Charles Bobongie, a singer-guitarist of mixed Aboriginal, Scottish and Solomon Islander descent from Mackay, commented to me that his participation in the Festival had given him “a different idea about the place, being with all these people is special, it should be like this all the time!” Similarly, Richard Kaal (whose work is discussed in Chapter 8) remarked that “I’ve played here often but it’s never been anything like this, it makes you look at the place differently”.

Kathy Szeputi, organiser of the Festival’s cultural program has identified the significance of the event in the following terms:

The Whitsundays are a fascinating place, the history is there but it’s ‘latent’, below the surface. If you don’t know about it, it’s not really apparent. Perhaps what we did with the Festival is to bring it to the surface and make it visible by bringing different people together there. (p.c. March 2001)

Along with this emphasis on making the latent visible, the experiences of the participants referred to above emphasise that for them, the event wasn’t simply an engagement with Whitsunday history but a notable event within that history.

At time of writing – early 2001 – the significance of the (first) ‘Paddling Through History’ Festival is open to dispute. If the Birrigubba peoples’ long-running Land Rights claim eventually succeeds in gaining Ngaro descendants significant access to areas of the archipelago, the Festival may be subsequently associated with the revival of indigenous rights in the region. But whatever such retrospective readings may assert, one important aspect of the event was that it identified that the cultural zone of the Whitsundays offers spaces for the assertion of claims, representations and affective allegiances that can both draw on its history and posit new presents and futures. The success of the inaugural ‘Paddling Through History’ Festival suggests that – in this specific time and place at least – the performance cultures associated with tourism are not fixed and irretrievably conceded to a homogenising cultural mainstream but are open to modifications that can reaffirm local cultures and identities and lead to new, syncretic regional forms.

End Notes
1. As a result of the various practices that produced the national phenomenon known as ‘the Stolen Generation’.

2. This aspect of the cultural history of Proserpine has been minimally researched. One of the few published sources is Smith (1996: 23-27), which includes some information and a photograph of labourers’ dwellings and gardens.

3. Peterson’s island of origin is unknown. Given that the majority of South Sea Islanders in the region were the offspring of workers from the (present day) nations of Vanuatu and the
Solomon Islands, Peterson’s ancestry is likely to have been from one (or both) of these communities.

4. The origins of which are discussed in Chapter 4.

5. Ahwang was born in Thursday Island and grew up around Cherbourg (where his family were relocated upon the outbreak of the Pacific phase of World War Two). He began performing with bands playing South Sea/Hawaiian repertoires in locations such as Bundaberg in the mid 1950s, alongside musicians such as Keith Clay and Russell Head. He moved to Bowen in the mid 1950s and relocate to Proserpine around 1959.

6. In 1962 Ahwang left Proserpine and eventually relocated to Mackay where he continues to perform Hawaiian-style and country songs with various bands.

7. The stroh (invented in 1904) was a violin with a horn attachment that functioned as an amplifier, enabling the instrument to be heard in ensemble contexts (alongside louder instruments such as brass).

8. Others being Luigi Fiorito, Fred Patti, Ras de Roma and Nerino Ruggeri.

9. Such as a series of policy initiatives by Paul Keating’s national Labor government; the impact of the Australian High Court’s ‘Mabo Decision’ in 1992, which enshrined native title in common law; and the findings of The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, released in 1992, which identified the need for greater address to indigenous culture and sensibilities in the education system.

10. My caveat here acknowledges that much academic practice in fields such as History, Archaeology, Anthropology and Ethnomusicology has been exploitative of its indigenous subjects/informants. I have tried to avoid this tendency in the research and production of this book and to follow the admirable example of Dr Bryce Barker’s research.


12. By which I mean the adoption of a series of dances, such as animal impressions, which have entered into a national Aboriginal repertoire.

13. I encountered various spellings of his name during research and have used the one most commonly cited here.

14. Pymble believed that his parents’ families’ ancestral origins were on the Whitsunday coast.

15. Who has requested anonymity here.

16. Identity of resort omitted at request of informant.

17. And also for the kayakers and canoeists who eventually participated, since their final (3 day) route was 36 kilometres long.

18. Daydream Island resort also expressed initial interest but later withdrew due to their facilities being shut down for a major refurbishment.

19. From the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Office of Multicultural Affairs and Regional Arts Development Fund.


21. Prior has commented that:
I shouldn’t really be singing it, since it is a Boy’s song, but I learnt it from my father and since it is one of our old songs I can sing it with the children. (interview, October 2000)

22. The dancers were coached and accompanied by Ken Dodd on didgeridu for their performance.

23. A troupe coached, co-ordinated and accompanied by Ken Dodd.

24. Young indigenous performers from Proserpine, members of the secondary school Homework Class (HWC), rehearsed and coached by Ken Dodd and Samantha Martin and Sally Johnson (the Dawul Dancers) for their festival performance.

25. The performers appearing at the inaugural ‘Paddling Through History’ festival, October 2000, comprised:


Speakers – Boori Pryor (Birrigubba author), Bryce Barker (University of Southern Queensland), John Bates (Whitsunday author) and Philip Hayward (Macquarie University).
Ruins, Refrains and Repetition
(REFLECTIONS ON EXOTICISM AND ARCHIPELAGIC ECOLOGY)

October 30th, 2000. I am on board a Fantasea jet catamaran, gazing out at the islands while travelling at high speed over to Hamilton Island airport after having attended the inaugural 'Paddling Through History' festival. While my mind's eye recalls images of kayaks in the Passage, the jetcat I am travelling on exemplifies the privileged ease of contemporary Whitsunday tourism (for those able to indulge in it). My emotions at this moment are quintessentially touristic. I feel a mounting sense of nostalgia for the places I have just visited and a disinclination to return to the metropolis I work in.

Staring astern I am struck by the number of islands that appear pristine and betray no trace of human habitation. In the heady ion clouds forced up from the water by the jetcat's engines, I am mesmerised by the reflection of sunlight off the water and slip into a reverie. I am seduced by a sense of deep history, of the 'time before' white settlement, when the islands were much as now (but without the presence of a flotilla of boats offshore) and when the Ngaro moved between the archipelago and coast in patterns of seasonal migration. This deep time renders the presence of yachts, cruise boats and jetcats a temporal flicker, a blur of modernity across the archipelagic space. Immersed in this timescape it is also possible to fantasise various 'after times', various alternative futures for the Whitsundays.

Given the minimal development of almost all islands save Hamilton, it is easily possible to imagine a scenario whereby some kind of catastrophe (socio-economic, cyclonic or otherwise) precipitates the decline of tourism in the region. Abandoned in the subtropical heat, the material decay of resort facilities would soon follow and the islands' ecology would reclaim their temporarily re-zoned spaces. In terms of this book's address to the history of intercultural exoticism in the archipelago, this scenario accords with David Toop's definition of exoticism as witnessed at the end of the 20th Century:

Exotica is the art of the ruins, the ruined world of enchantment laid waste in fervid imagination, the paradox of an imperial paradise liberated from colonial intervention, a golden age created through the lurid colours of a cocktail glass, illusory and remote zones of pleasure and peace dreamed after the bomb. Nothing is left, except for beaches, palm trees, tourist sites with their moss covered monuments, shops stocked with native art made for the invaders, beachcomber bars and an absurd perception of what might have been. (2000: ii)

But my reverie cannot sustain itself. A Toopesque scenario of ruins and natural recreation is too appealing and too escapist to hold form for long. Looking out over the waters
of an archipelago protected by the long arm of the Great Barrier Reef, and speckled with its own internal reefscapes, I am all too aware that the most likely major change to local ecology in the immediate future will not come from the decline of tourism but rather from the global rise in population that has facilitated 20th Century tourism.

As has been increasingly apparent over the last decade, global warming has raised the world’s temperature by several degrees. One consequence has been that the polar ice caps are shrinking as their stored water melts and enters the global oceanic pool. Rising sea levels threaten the very existence of the many low-lying coral atolls that dot the Pacific. Mike Cooper’s 1999 CD *Kiribati* addresses just such issues, attempting to alert its audience to this ecological crisis by including details of the phenomenon, and the plight of Kiribati in particular, on its sleeve. Its music, described by Cooper’s sleeve notes as “ambient exotica soundscapes” comprises delicate, drifting, bubbling textures, mixed guitar glissandi, electronics and ambient sounds. The ‘ruins’ represented in Cooper’s CD are hidden, sunken, Atlantis-like, evocative of the Cornish legend of Lost Lyonesse, an area flooded by sea whose church bells can still be heard ringing deep in the waters during storms.

Cooper describes his CD’s relationship to the archetypal musical exoticism of Denny, Lyman and co. in the following terms:

I see *Kiribati* as representing a new kind of exotica. Classic exotica is about East/West or North/South and peoples relating (or not) with one another. I see *Kiribati* as being an exotica involving us (i.e. humans) and nature, in particular our relationship with the Oceans (so it is about Up/Down or Above/Below maybe?) (in Hayward, 2000: 95)

This is an intriguing and attractive account of a new form of musical exotica, a fitting one to imagine being enacted in the archipelagic space of the Whitsundays: one in accord with the new Green/Feral sensibilities of the Whitsunday shore and the sophisticated production textures of the material produced at Richard Kaal’s studios; one which, in its holistic approach to culture returns us to the Ngaro’s less intrusive custodianship of the archipelago in the years prior to Cook’s arrival and the transformations to culture, territory and power which followed.

But again, I can’t sustain this vision.

Unlike Kiribati or similar atolls, the Whitsunday Islands rise high enough from the surrounding seas to be safe from the encroachment of rising waters. The threat is not so much to the land but to the ecology of the waters themselves. The rise in global temperatures had another significant impact on the oceans in the late 20th Century, raising the temperatures of particular areas to levels that disturbed the ecological balance and maintenance of particular species. One casualty in this has been coral, the (individually) tiny creature that has collectively built massive structures such as the 1000 kilometre long Great Barrier Reef. As a result of the rise in ocean temperatures the world’s coral reefs have been subject to increasing instances of the phenomenon known as ‘bleaching’, where, when the water temperature rises over its summer maximum by several degrees, usually to around 30 Celsius, the coral is rendered lifeless, as new polyps cannot survive in the heated waters. As the dominant part of an ecological seascape, the reef’s decline affects the fauna in its waters too, damaging the extent and diversity of its species.

The first alarm bells were sounded in 1997–98 when a global ‘Mass Bleaching Event’
was noticed and reported on by marine biologists. One location that suffered particularly badly at this time was the Ryukyu archipelago discussed in this book's Introduction and described by Shuhei Hosokawa as an “alchemical place of cultural plurality” (1999: 121). In Ryukyu in 1997–98 global warming produced a sour alchemy as the reefscape struggled to maintain its dwindling polyps and bio-diversity. By Summer 1998 the amount of coral bleached on reefs around Ishigaki, the main island of the Yaeyama group, was estimated at around 70% (AIMS, 1998: np). One outcome of this devastation was – unintentionally – inscribed in Ishigaki-based performer Shuji Atukusoko’s CD Hateruma (1997). The album opens with an appealing sound, light, melodic and (paradoxically) ‘dry’ – the noise of waves breaking on a beach of coral fragments that cascade over each other, pulled by the wash of the tide. The sound is so complete, so self-sufficient that it composes the entirety of the CD’s opening track, with Atukusoko’s songs starting at track two (and the beach sound recurring between tracks). Easy as it is on the ear, it is a dead sound – the rattle of coral rubble, of reef debris, a fitting audio reflection of the plight of the reefs during 1997–98.

While the Whitsundays were spared the excesses of oceanic warming in the climactic incident discussed above, fresh concerns about ocean temperatures and, in particular, the effects on the Great Barrier Reef, rose again in 1999 and, at time of writing, are being monitored and assessed. In this manner, anxiety pervades the reefscales whose riches are now a major tourist attraction in their own right.

Gazing astern, looking out on the passage Cook sailed through some 210 years previously, another sound catches my inner-ear. On the shore at Emu Park, opposite Great Keppel Island, some 300 kilometres to the south of the Whitsundays, stands a major monument. Set on a hill facing the sea, like many other memorials (large and small) along Australia’s eastern seaboard, it commemorates Cook’s sailing by in the late 1700s. Unlike other memorials, this structure is both visually and sonically monumental. Entitled ‘The Singing Ship’, the fifteen metre high sculpture was erected in May 1970 to commemorate Cook as the “explorer-navigator-cartographer who discovered and named Keppel Bay” some two hundred years previously. Note the wording. In 1970, in Queensland especially, Europeans were still considered as the unproblematic discoverers of a continent whose inhabitants were of little account.

The fifteen metre high white concrete structure mimics the prow, foresail and mainmast of a sailing boat such as Cook’s Endeavour. In the centre of the arc between the (apparently wind-filled) foresail and mast, three high-tension cables stretch down. Designed by artist Peggy Westmoreland and acoustic designer G. Cain, the structure is impressively monumental; it looks like it could survive two hundred years of history itself. Built on a headland, the sculpture catches the wind and the cables hum, evoking the sounds of a sailing ship at sea. Powered by wind, the sculpture continually ‘sings’, only quieting when it becomes becalmed, like the ships it imitates. Its sound is therefore unrelenting, monumental, unchanging as the social sounds of culture unfold, explode and decay around it. Whatever its creators’ intentions, it stands as a chillingly permanent, immobile icon of a kind even more efficient than the massive public iconography of the despotic post-War regimes of North Korea, Iraq or Romania. It rises from the cliff like a dazzling white thorn in the skin of the Australian coast, humming maniacally to itself.

Perhaps the two – very different – sonic signs offer clues for creating an exotica of the
over-warmed, a blues for the bleached – an anaphony of the reefscape (then and now and hereafter). If exotica is the public celebration/fetishisation of difference, then maybe – as an inscription of history – the cascade of coral debris, the rattle of seed husks, the skirl of the bagpipes, the glissandi of the lap-steel guitar, the rhythm of the tokere, the drone of the didjeridu, the words and studio sounds of contemporary performers and the slap of rope against a ship’s mast need to blend to evoke a deep core sample of Whitsunday experience. A sound installation of this kind, located on one of the islands, would be a fitting focus for Whitsunday history, a referential core around which Gunnadoo’s performances, The Flames of Polynesia’s shows, the latest wave of CDs and re-introduced Birrigubba performers can circulate. But as an ending to this book this is a design for an imaginary monument. Lacking the potency and weight-of-state behind Cook, the sonic culture and acoustic micro-memorials chronicled in these pages remain dispersed in history, their echoes long since dying away over the waters of the Passage. They are unlikely to be installed in foyers or discretely located as bushland shrines for 21st Century visitors. In an archipelago such as the Whitsundays, subject to multiple cultural re/creations, only the sounds of waves and wind are guaranteed continuance.


Barker, B (2001) The Sea People – Maritime Hunter-Gatherers on the Tropical Coast (‘Terra Australis’ number 16), Canberra: Centre of Archaeology, Australian National University

Barr, T (1990) No Swank Here? The Development of the Whitsundays as a Tourist Destination to the early 1970s, Townsville: James Cook University Department of History and Politics


Caldwell, N (1938) Titans of the Barrier Reef, Sydney: Angus and Robertson
Caldwell, N with Ellison, N (1936) *Fangs of the Sea*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson


Clarke, R (1961) ‘Man with a Mission’, *TV Times*, October 21st


Crosby Brown, A (1935) *Horizon’s Rim*, Boston: Dodd Mead

Davidson, F D and Nicholls, B (1935) *Blue Coast Caravan*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson


Devanny, J (1944) *By Tropic Sea and Jungle: Adventures in North Queensland*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson

——— (1994) The Pearl Shellers of Torres Strait – Resource Use, Development and 
Decline, 1860s-1960s, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press


Gregory, E (ed) (1896) Narrative of James Murrell’s (“Jemmy Morrill”) Seventeen Years’ Exile 
among the Wild Blacks of North Queensland, Brisbane: self published


——— (1928) Nevada, New York: Harper and Brothers

——— (1933) Tales of Tahitian Waters, New York: Harper and Brothers


Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

Love, J (eds)

and Schuster

Sydney: John Libbey and Co./Perfect Beat Publications

Beat volume 5 number 1, July

Community in The Torres Straits (1890-1941)’, Perfect Beat volume 5 number 3, July

1940s’, Perfect Beat volume 2 number 1, July

Hayward, P (ed) (1999)
Hosono, H (1975) Sleeve notes to *Tropical Dandy*, Crown Records


——— (1992) ‘Endless Talking’ (Interview with Masakazu Kitanaka), *Chikuma Shobo*


J.C.F. (1929) ‘The Islands of the Whitsunday Passage*, *The Sydney Mail*, February 20th


Lamond, H (1953) ‘Early Islanders’, *Walkabout*, October


Lang, E and West, G (1920) *Musical Accompaniment of Moving Pictures*, New York: The Boston Music Company


McLean, G (1986) *Captain Tom*, Brisbane: Boolarong

Morgan, J (1997) ‘Reconstruction Notes’, in Morgan, J (ed) (untitled) booklet accompanying *King Kong CD* (USA, Marco Polo label)


Palmer, V and Sutherland, M (1951) *Old Australian Bush Ballads*, Sydney: Allan


Parliament of Queensland (1897) ‘The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act’

Pike, A and Cooper, R (1980) *Australian Film 1900–1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press in association with the Australian Film Institute


——— (1991c) ‘Profile – Gay Bowden’, *Whitsunday Folk* number 18, July/August


Prior, R (1993) “Straight From the Yudaman’s Mouth”: *The Life Story of Peter Prior*, Townsville: James Cook University – Department of History and Politics


Stewart, D and Keesing, N (1955) Australian Bush Ballads, Sydney: Angus and Robertson


Unattributed (1933) ‘Christmas at Lindeman – Festivities for Joymakers’, The Mackay Daily Mercury, December 13th

Unattributed (1936) ‘Will Seek Larger Fish in 1938’, The Argus (Melbourne), July 31st

Unattributed (1938) ‘They Mix Their Science with Romance’ [unsourced press clipping (with accompanying photographs) from Melbourne Ward’s scrapbook, held in the archives of the Australian Museum Sydney]


Unattributed (1984a) ‘Maple Syrup’, *Whitsunday Times*, February 8th

Unattributed (1984b) ‘Around the world with Hayman’s Borg’, *Whitsunday Times*, June 20th


Unattributed (1985c) ‘Waiata Express – four piece band, twelve piece family’, *Whitsunday Times*, February 27th

Unattributed (1985d) ‘Airlie Beach – all that jazz’ *Whitsunday Times*, August 7th


Whiteoak, J (1993) ‘From Jim Crow to Jazz’, *Perfect Beat* volume 1 number 3, July

Wigmore, L (1933) ‘Among the Birds and Fishes of the Barrier Reef’, *The Daily Mail*, January 21st

——— (1934) ‘Island Craze’, *The Telegraph*, June 30th

Huts to Highrise (1990), six episode ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) Radio National documentary series (produced by Siobhan McHugh)

Uncivilised (1935) directed by Charles Chauvel

White Death (1936) directed by Edward Bowen

Max Blake and the 3DB Orchestra, *I lost my heart on Hayman Island* (c/w John O’Connor and George Watson’s Hawaiians, *Pack up a dream and head for Hayman Island*) (1950) Royal Hayman Hotel Souvenir (vinyl 12”)


Mike Cooper, *Kiribati* (1999) self-released (CD)

Duo Moreno with Euro Sabatini, *Italian Favourites* (1960) Astor (vinyl 12”)

Gunnadoo, *Flavour of the Month* (1988) self-released (cassette)

——— *Divided Attention* (1991) self-released (CD and cassette)

The Hawaiian Club (with Johnny Wade), *In The Royal Hawaiian Hotel, (c/w Hawaii how do you do)* (1937) The Hawaiian Club (Process Record) (vinyl 10”)


Dave Isom, *Down to the Sea – Songs for sailors and armchair adventurers* (1994) Newmarket (CD and cassette)

Jim Jensen and his Hawaiians, *Hawaiian Holiday – 20 Great All Time Hawaiian Hits* (1975) Polydor (Australia) (vinyl 12”)


Kieran McCarthy, *One For The Road* (1994) Newmarket (CD and cassette)

——— *Precious Ground* (1996) BMM (CD)

——— *Mr Monsoon* (2000) BMM (CD)


——— *Blue Nose* (1991) self-released (cassette)


Johnny Wade and His Hawaiians, *I lost my heart on Hayman Island (c/w Malihini Mele)*
(1950) Columbia Records (vinyl 10”)

———
INDEX OF SONGS

A taste of the tropics 115-116
Backpacker 127
Banjo Jack 124
Black Swan 30, 51
Blackberry blossoms (instrumental) 142
Blue Hawaii 75
Brown death of the North 144
Busted flat in Airlie Beach 105

Carry me back to old Virginny 42
Christian Island 118-119

Fare thee well, my bonny lass 30, 32-33
Farewell (instrumental) 148
Farewell my fatherland 37, 38-40
Farewell Song 10, 40
Fiddlers Green 119
Fine Lady 118, 119-120

Hawaiian Islands 102
Hideaway Bay 122-123

I lost my heart on Hayman Island 74-75
In the Royal Hawaiian Hotel 74
Isa lei 30, 34, 51
Island Passage 118, 120-121

Johna Bown’s song (see Yuggarman)

Mandalay Moon 128
Maori Farewell Song 66, 70 (fns 3 and 4)
Margaritaville 113
Missing You 127
Moonlight on the Barrier 57-58

Never for me 118, 120
Nona Manis 33-34, 38-40

Old P.I. 51
Old T.I. 30-31, 51
Out of the blue 122-123
Pack up a dream and head for Hayman Island 74
Pearly Shells 101-13
Pidgin English hula 38
Runaway Ride 126
Running through the canefields (instrumental) 144

Sailing 124
Shadows on the sand 118, 119, 120
Sugar Shack 67
Sunrise (instrumental) 148
Swing low sweet chariot 42

The Airlie Beach song 116
The hukilau song 102
The loopy blues 124
The lugger in the strong south-easter (see Black Swan)
The Torres Herald 117
Trouble in Paradise 130
Turquoise and emerald 129

Warm Whitsunday Island 118, 119
Whassa matter you last night? 37-38
Whitehaven Bay 118, 120
Whitsunday blue 121
Whitsunday farewell 124
Whitsunday shore 125-126
Wrecked again 126

Yuggarman 50-51
Aboriginal dancing and music 3-5, 52-55, 59-61145-146, 150 (fn 23)
‘Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act’ (1897) 49
Ahmat, Richard 85
Ahwang, Ernest 169
Airlie Beach 89-112, 113-114, 116-117
Airlie Beach Hotel 91-92, 94, 101
Airlie Beach maracas 93
Allsop, Peter 94
alternative lifestyles 107-109
Ansett, Reg 73
Anthony, Yvonne 96, 122-123
Ashe, John 74-75
Atukusoko, Shuji 187

bagpipes 19-21, 84
Banjo Jack 90-91, 94, 99, 101-102, 110 (fns 8, 9 and 12)
Barker, Bryce 171
Barrier Reef Islands company 73
Bates, John 114
Bay of Islands (New Zealand) 159
Behdad, Ali 42
Bel’s Gully 8
Bey, Hakim 177-178
Bhaba, Horni 6
Bigbelt, Frank 58
Biria 1
Birigubba 1, 8-9, 48-55, 167-183
Bjelke-Petersen, Joh 170-171
Blackwood, Ray ix
Bobongie, Charles 181
Borg, Johnny 83
Bortoli, Alex 174-175
Bowden, Gay 99
Brampton Island 22, 41, 66-67, 68-70
Braun, Reg 85, 94-95, 97
Brown, Matta 157-159, 160-165
Bucasia Sea Shell Dancers 179, 180
Buffett, Jimmy 113-114, 125
Burns, Robert 33
bush bands 133-151
bush dances 133-134, 150 (fn 22)
Bushwackers 134, 149 (fns 4 and 5)
Busuttin-Winsor, Valda 22, 66, 68-70
Butterworth, Charlie 170
Butterworth, Irene 168-174
Butterworth, Wayne 172-173, 179
Campbell, Phil 122-123
Casey, Alf 101
Cass, Helena 53-55
Chauvel, Charles 54-55, 58
Cid Island 172
Clayton, Norm 115-118
Clifford, James ix, 40
Cobbo 10-11, 39
Collins, Kevin 104
Cook Islands music 158-159
Cook, Captain James 9, 47, 153, 187
Cooper, Mike 186
coral bleaching 186-187
corroboree 3-5, 52-55, 59-61
Courtenay, Chrissie 102, 104-105
Coyle, Rebecca ix
crocodiles 101
Crosby Brown, Alexander 52-53
Crosby, Bing 74, 75
Curry, Robert 48-52, 55

Dawul Dancers 179
Daydream Island 67, 84-86, 115-116
Dead Calm (film, 1989) 97, 126
Deambrogio, Frank 169
Deleuze, Gilles xi
Dening, Greg ix
Denny, Martin 77, 80
Dewar, Bob 71 (fn10)
didjeridu 108, 144-148, 171-172, 178-179
Djajda Mogarah Mith Bama Dancers 179
Dodd, Ken 179
Duo Moreno 77-82
Eaton, Marion ix, 36, 67, 76
Elsey, Bernard 84-85
Embry, Monty 15-19
exoticism 77-84, 133-135

Fantasea 89, 96, 148, 185
Fasso, Jim 98-99, 137
Ferraris, Primo 169
Fiorito, Luigi 22
Flames of Polynesia 153-166
Frank 9
Fraser, Ian 94

Gabey, Esther 170, 172
Gabey, Leo Jnr 174
Gabey, Leo Snr 170
Gerrard, Gerry 94
Gia 1, 168
Gibuma, Salee 36-38
Goanna 150
Goodman, Isadore 58
Goolgatta 7-8
Great Barrier Reef 186, 187
Grey, Zane 55-61
Guattari, Felix xi
Gunnadoo 140-151

Hackett, Jim 98-99, 137
Hales, Geoff 96, 104
Hamilton Island 86, 114, 157, 159, 185
Happy Bay resort (Long Island) 67, 70
Harris, Dicky 19
Harrison, Sybil 105, 115-117
Hastings, Greg 124-125, 140
Hawai‘i 73-74, 159-160
‘Hawaii Calls’ (radio show) 74
Hawaiian-style music 19, 74-75, 79-80, 101-103
Hawkes, Joseph 7
Hayman Island 17, 36-39, 56, 58, 73-84, 170
Hickey, Frank 94, 96, 97, 98, 137
Hickey, John 97
Hickman, Andrew 118, 120
Hickox, Keith 91-92, 96
Hicks, Darren 99, 121, 136-137, 139-151
Hicks, Ron 99, 135-143
hippies 92-93
HMS Endeavour 153, 187
Hook Island 172
Hosakawa, Shuhei xiii, 6, 77
Hosomo, Haruomi xiii
Host, Max 83-84
Hudson, Reg 75
huklaus 101-103
hula(-style) dancing 66, 79-80, 101-103, 162

Ingles, Andrew 118, 120-121
Isom, Dave 124, 140

Jacoby brothers 97-98
Jacoby, Gert 97
Jacoby, Helmut 97-98
Jamieson, Bruce ix, 18-21, 30-36
Japanese tourists 146-147
jazz 16, 23-25, 90, 94-96
Jazz and Blues Connection (J&BC) 96
Jim and Jim 98-99
Jim Jensen and his Hawaiians 75
Juru 1

K.C.s 104
kanakas (Melanesian labourers) 168
Kaptein, Vimmy 106, 107-108
Kellerman, Annette 23-24
Keppel Bay 187
Kevans, Jacko 136, 137
King Kong (film, 1933) 59

Lahou, Dicky 10, 39-40
Lamond, Henry 15
Leigh, Shazza 91
Lightfoot, Gordon 118-119
Lindeman Island 9-10, 15-16, 23-25, 39-40, 41
Lindsay, John 84, 99
Long Island 67, 70, 156, 177-178
Lugers 30-36, 41-43

Maclean, Tom 66
Maestracci, Andre 73, 76, 77
Magnetic Island 47-48
Maiti, Awati 36-38
Manihiki xi
Maori music 155-156
Maple Syrup 124, 139-140
Mashma Dancers 171-172, 173
McCarthy, Kieran 106, 125-128, 148
Mills, Rita 32
Mitsui, Toru 134
Moncton (New Brunswick) 135-136
Moogerah, Billy 9-11, 40
Morrill, James 2-7
Murphie, Andrew xi
Murray, Bruce 103

Nadi 36
Nara 172
Neuenfeldt, Karl 109
Ngaro 1-2, 7-9, 47-55, 69, 167-183, 185
Nicol, Mark 140-147
Nicolson, Lachlan 9, 39-40
Nicolson, Roy 41

O’Meara, Clare 104, 141-147
Obe 36
Otene, Dick 155, 159-165

Paddling Through History festival xiii, 174-183
Palm Island 9, 47-64, 177, 179
Palm Island Dancers 179
Patrick, Ron 96
Patterson-Prior, Carole 50-51, 177
Pearson, Alan 105-106
Percy 9
Peterson, Arthur 168-169, 170
Peterson, Dan 168
Peterson, Mabel 168

Peterson, Robert 168-169
Pitt Sisters 31
Plantation songs 35
Poid, Dicky (see Lahou, Dicky)
Pole, Pam 107, 137-138
Polynesian music and dance 153-166
Pomeroy, Bob 98, 99, 123, 137-140
Pratt, Mary ix, 41, 47
Prior family 8-9, 48-55
Prior, Peter 48, 50-52, 55
Prior, Renarta 50-51, 177, 179
Prior, Tom 50
Proserpine 167-170, 174
Pymble, Boisie 172

Rees, Leslie 36-39
Reeves Lawrence, Helen xi, 60
Roxas, Vestre 83
Roylens cruises 65-67
Ryukyu (Okinawa) xiii, 186-187

Seaman Dan 31, 32
Shanghai 90
Shears, Con 97, 101
Sherwood, Patricia 107-108, 109
Shipmates 97-98
Simmons, Tex 92-93, 95, 102
Smith, Graeme 133-134, 141, 145
Smith, Tommy 94-95, 101-102, 137, 138
Some Girls Doo 104
South Molle Island 7, 15, 23, 65, 153-157, 177, 179
SpinOff 96, 122-123
Steiner, Max 59
Sydney 55, 137-138
Sydney Push 137-138
Szeputi, Kathy 175, 181

Te Hira, Bob 157, 160-166
Tebbett, Steve 101-102
The Golden Plover 98
‘The Mikado’ (operetta) 55
‘The Singing Ship’ (sculpture) 187
‘The Swaggie’ (musical play) 138, 149 (fn 8)
Tiffin, Helen 41-42, 66
Tiki Trio 85-86
Toop, David 185
Torres Strait Islander music and dance
   29-46, 51-52, 60-61
Torres Strait Islanders in the Whitsundays
   10, 29-46
Tradewinds 99
Tropical Hi 156
Tui, Timoti 143-47
Tyte ‘n’ Live 103

Uncivilised (film, 1935) 54-55
‘Under The Banyan Tree’ (radio show) 74

Van Oosterhaut, Theo 99, 137

Wade, Johnny 75
Walker, Gugi 156
Ward, Harriet 25
Ward, Melbourne 16, 24-25, 26 (fn3)
White Death (film, 1936) 30, 55-61
Whiteoak, John 66, 80
Whitsunday Festivals 68-70, 170
Whitsunday Folk Club 107
Whitsunday Village resort 92, 101-13,
   136-137
Wild Colonial Boys 134, 136
Wildlife Restaurant 92
Wilgert, Freddy 19
World War Two 65
Wuigurugaba 1, 2, 47-48

Zeighahn, Peter 91-92
Zodiac 137
Australian Cultural History/Indigenous Studies
Ethnomusicology/Tourism Studies

TIDE LINES provides a multi-faceted study of the music culture of Queensland’s Whitsunday Islands (and adjacent coast) from the period of initial European contact through to the present.

The book details the manner in which a series of performers from different cultural contexts (the original Ngaro inhabitants, Torres Strait Islanders, Euro-Australians and Maori and Cook Islanders) have contributed to the development and diversity of the region’s music culture. Individual chapters also address such intersecting phenomena as tourism on Palm Island in the 1920s and the production of the 1930s’ feature films Uncivilised and White Death.

Drawing on a range of contemporary critical theories and a detailed historical excavation, the author expands a regional study of the impact of tourism into a meditation on cultural identity and exoticism in 20th Century Australia.

Philip Hayward’s Tide Lines is a careful, meticulous history of music and tourism in the Whitsunday Islands and is the best consideration of music and tourism generally that I know.

Timothy D. Taylor, Department of Music
Columbia University, New York

Tide Lines provides illuminating insights into issues of exoticism, displacement, tourism, and identity and establishes that any geographical location can be central if one adopts a translocal viewpoint.

Shuhei Hosokawa, Tokyo Institute of Technology

Philip Hayward is Professor of Contemporary Music Studies at Macquarie University, Sydney and an adjunct professor at Southern Cross University, Lismore. He is executive editor of the Pacific music research journal Perfect Beat and has written and edited several previous books including Music At The Borders (1998), Sound Alliances (1998) and Widening The Horizon (1999).