

# ‘Aborigines are True Soldiers of the King’: Recalling the Regimental March, Gumleaf Style

*Robin Ryan with Gunai-Kurnai Elder  
Uncle Herb Patten*

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I'll sing you a song of the Gum leaf, of a leaf that is tough and true  
Emblem of those who are fighting, fighting for me and for you.<sup>1</sup>

As Mark Cann, CEO of the British Forces Foundation, remarked in 2014 on music's role in war: 'it's a shared experience that helps cohesion and team bonding. It uplifts people and takes them away from the moment they are in.'<sup>2</sup> Nostalgic songs, now and in the past, have been a means of mental escape between battles, of soothing isolation and of staving off boredom, concerns which are, of course, applicable to Aboriginal Australian servicemen. The adoption of European wartime songs by Aboriginal Australians deserves scholarly consideration, particularly in light of Roland Bannister's argument that contemporary accounts of military music offer histories inclusive of all society in the cause of promoting notions of citizenship and nation building.<sup>3</sup>

In honouring the iconic contribution of the Aboriginal gumleaf band to the auditory atmosphere of World War Two, in this article we argue that gumleaf renditions of war songs represented a new sound and a new way of being, characteristic of the harsh Koorie history of

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<sup>1</sup> Ethel Phillips Fox, first verse of 'Song of the Gum Leaf,' estimated date 1940 (NLA, Keith Watson Collection 4833633). We thank John Whiteoak for alerting us to this source.

<sup>2</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, 'Is Music Still Important for Soldiers Today?' *How Did Pack up Your Troubles Become the Viral Hit of WW1?*, presented by Gareth Malone, <[www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3ypr82#z2q86sg](http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3ypr82#z2q86sg)>.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Bannister, 'How are We to Write Our Music History? Perspectives on the Historiography of Military Music,' *Musicology Australia* 25 (2002): 18.

World War Two. War provided a diversion that, for a short period at least, permitted Aborigines to make sense of their post-colonial existence. Liz Reed explains that ‘whilst their involvement in the war did not bring about many of their desired political changes, it did provide albeit briefly, the experience of being treated as valued equals.’<sup>4</sup>

Gumleaves have played a distinctive role in the cultural construction of Australian-ness during wartime. For instance, during the Great War (1914–1918), it was common practice for family members to mail postcards with gumleaves attached to them to soldiers overseas, who would make small fires of them to remind themselves of home and family.<sup>5</sup> The gumleaf was so strong a signifier of Australia that the aroma of eucalyptus oil piqued the senses of soldiers returning home by ship from the two World Wars long before the Australian coastline appeared on the horizon.<sup>6</sup> The gumleaf also projects deep symbolism as a visual and sonic icon, illustrating the ability of innocuous soundmakers to establish unique character. R. Murray Schafer has noted that ‘when a sound object is known and loved it functions more as a sensory anchor, assuring us that we are at home even when other features of the environment are alien or intimidating.’<sup>7</sup>

The gumleaf acted as signifier of national identity by way of its function as a musical instrument during World War Two (1939–1945).<sup>8</sup> The Cinesound newsreel *Aborigines are True Soldiers of the King* depicts the Aboriginal Australian Imperial Force squad training and performing as a gumleaf band at Wangaratta Camp, Victoria, in 1941.<sup>9</sup> Over fifty years later on 23 April 1993, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) featured this footage in their television coverage of the book launch of *Forgotten Heroes: Aborigines at War from the Somme to Vietnam* by Alick Jackomos and Derek Fowell. Australia’s leading Aboriginal gumleaf player or ‘leafist,’ the Gunai-Kurnai musician Herbert Patten (born in 1943 at Orbost, Victoria),<sup>10</sup> was invited to play ‘The Last Post’ at this event filmed in Canberra.<sup>11</sup> Two years

<sup>4</sup> Liz Reed, *Bigger Than Gallipoli: War, History and Memory in Australia* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2004) 144.

<sup>5</sup> John Wrigley and Murray Fagg, *The Eucalypts: A Celebration* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2010) 116–18. The Great War Gallery at the Army Museum of Western Australia displays three dried gumleaves mounted on a plaque with the inscription: ‘A gumleaf of Australia, the land of the Kangaroo, to tell you that under the Southern Cross, someone is waiting for you.’

<sup>6</sup> Gladys Milroy and Jill Milroy, ‘Different Ways of Knowing: Trees are Our Families Too,’ *Heartsick for Country: Stories of Love, Spirit and Creation*, ed. Sally Morgan, Mia Tjalamina and Blaze Kwaymullina (North Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2008) 37–8.

<sup>7</sup> R. Murray Schafer, ‘Music and the Soundscape,’ *The Book of Music and Nature*, ed. David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001) 68.

<sup>8</sup> Robin Ryan, ‘“Not Really a Musical Instrument?” Locating the Gumleaf as Acoustic Actant and Environmental Icon,’ *Societies* 3.2 (2013): 224–42.

<sup>9</sup> Cinesound Review 488 (1941). The Second World War provided steady news fodder for pre-television era Cinesound newsreels. 20th Century Fox and the Greater Union Organisation donated the Cinesound Movietone Australian Newsreel Collection to the National Film and Sound Archive in 1988 and it is listed on UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register (‘Cinesound Movietone Australian Newsreels,’ <[aso.gov.au/titles/collections/cinesound-movietone-newsreels/](http://aso.gov.au/titles/collections/cinesound-movietone-newsreels/)>).

<sup>10</sup> In 2003, when Patten turned sixty, he acquired the status of an Elder and the respectful title of ‘Uncle Herb.’ Patten can be heard performing gumleaf on ABC Radio National’s programme ‘Earshot,’ <[www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot/herb-patten/6569732](http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot/herb-patten/6569732)>; the Music Education unit of Louisville Public Radio, Kentucky, USA, <[soundcloud.com/wuol/music-with-leaves-audio-for-kids](http://soundcloud.com/wuol/music-with-leaves-audio-for-kids)>; and in numerous YouTube videos.

<sup>11</sup> ‘7.30 Report,’ ABC, 23 Apr. 1993, featuring Cinesound Review 488 (1941). ‘The Last Post’ signifies the end of the day and is played at commemorative ceremonies to honour the fallen.

later, Patten performed a 'war song medley' for the broadcast of *Australia Remembers the Black Diggers, 1939–1945*.<sup>12</sup>

The role of war song repertoire in Patten's 'lifetime soundtrack' will be a unifying feature of this article. Lauren Istvandity coined the term 'lifetime soundtrack' to describe a canon of music that is personally meaningful to an individual, based on its attachment to memories spanning the length of the lifetime. As Istvandity has shown, when music is a cultural object mediated by family members for a significant part of childhood, it evokes broad senses of experience, representing feelings, attitudes, and interactions as a collective.<sup>13</sup>

Our discussion of the entry of three specific war songs into Patten's sonic memory opens with a summary of their generation and distribution, followed by a reading of what the songs stood for within a fringe settlement isolated from power and influence. Vignettes of music-making within this rural setting and within urban Koorie Melbourne will provide an understanding of musical identity and cultural proximity in Victorian Aboriginal society. Additionally, it will be shown that the creative phenomenon of the gumleaf band aptly reflects Margaret Kartomi's description of musical transculturation as 'a cover term for the complete cycle of musical processes set in motion by culture contact (including the influx of new culture elements, and the loss or alteration of existing ones).'<sup>14</sup>

Patten's performance practice on the gumleaf was influenced by the musicians of Lake Tyers, and as will be shown, this can be traced back to his parents' acquaintance with the Lake Tyers soldier-leafists, who attended their wedding in 1940. Patten's inclusion of the war song medley between and across cultures—firstly as an antidote to late-twentieth-century segregation, and more recently in creating spaces of belonging within different ethnic groups—underscores a two-part recorded leaf arrangement intended to portray the World War Two gumleaf band.

As Stephen Blum reminds us, every culture is a site of encounters, for which we need to acknowledge multiple (and potentially incompatible) ways of experiencing and understanding music.<sup>15</sup> This case study revolves around a broad context of interaction between European and Indigenous Australian musical practices. Our focus will be on Koorie (Koori) Victoria,<sup>16</sup> where wartime and post-war music-making provided a form of social compensation for people who, up until 1967, were legally no better off than wards of the state.

### The Provenance of the Three War Songs Adopted by Patten

At the outbreak of the Great War, recruitment songs proved popular in music halls, and marching bands were sent to accompany troops on the Western Front. Songs like 'It's a Long

<sup>12</sup> Ian Braybrook and the Dja Dja Wrung Media Association, *Australia Remembers the Black Diggers 1939–1945*, Bendigo KLFM broadcast, 15 Aug. 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Lauren Istvandity, 'Fostering the Lifetime Soundtrack: Memory, Family and the Home,' paper delivered at Popular Music: Communities, Places, Ecologies Conference, IASPM-ANZ, Griffith University, Brisbane, 24–26 Nov. 2013; Istvandity, abstract, 'Music and Autobiographical Memory: The Soundtracks of Space and Place,' Sound, Memory and the Senses Conference, University of Melbourne, 24–25 July 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret J. Kartomi, 'The Processes and Results of Musical Culture Contact: A Discussion of Terminology and Concepts,' *Ethnomusicology* 25 (1981): 233–4. 'Syncretism' is a similar term that is applied to culture contact.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Blum, 'Conclusion: Music in an Age of Cultural Confrontation,' *Music-cultures in Contact: Convergences and Collisions*, ed. Margaret J. Kartomi and Stephen Blum (Sydney: Currency Press, 1994) 255.

<sup>16</sup> In this article we use the spelling preferred by Herb Patten. The word 'Koorie' literally refers to Aborigines born in NSW and Victoria.

Way to Tipperary' (henceforth 'Tipperary') were rooted in the music-hall tradition. This first hit of the war did not incite soldiers to glorious deeds but rather evoked thoughts of home. It is generally accepted that the song's composer Jack Judge (1878–1938) wrote it for a five-shilling bet on 30 January 1912, and performed it that evening at the Grand Theatre, Stalybridge, Cheshire.<sup>17</sup> Publisher Bert Feldman & Company of London popularised the number on the British music-hall circuit as Songsheet Number 549 (1912). One of several reprinted covers bore the inscription: 'The Marching Anthem on the Battlefields of Europe ... Sung by The Soldiers of the King' (a source for the title of Cinesound Review 488 [1941], and thus for the title of this article).<sup>18</sup>

The seventh Battalion of the Irish Connaught Rangers Regiment took the song to France and Belgium with the British Expeditionary Force. Paradoxically, German troops adopted the nonchalant 'Tipperary,' and troops from Australia and other nations took it home. Paul Watt recently pointed out that although many songs were composed in Australia during the Great War, few were adopted by Australians. Although, as Chas Ridgeway penned in the first verse of his notable exception 'Sing us a Song of Australia' (1916), 'they sang *Tipperary*, *O'Reilly* as well.'<sup>19</sup>

The Welsh Harlequinaders George Asaf (George Henry Powell, 1880–1951) and Felix Lloyd Powell (1878–1942) composed 'Pack up Your Troubles' at the London Hippodrome Theatre in 1915. When it won a competition held for a marching song for the troops, the press correctly predicted that this 'philosophy song' would become overwhelmingly popular.<sup>20</sup> Often sung as a round with 'Tipperary' as the first part, 'Pack up Your Troubles' boosted British morale in the face of casualties.<sup>21</sup>

In 1927, Eduard Ingris arranged a melody by Czech musician Jaromír Vejvoda (1902–1988), 'Polka of Modrany.' This work was played without lyrics until Václav Zeman wrote a text entitled 'Škoda lásky' ('Unrequited Love,' 1934). Will Glahé recorded the German 'Rosamunde Polka' that year, and five years later his English recording of 'Beer Barrel Polka,' distributed by Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., reached number one on the Tin Pan Alley Hit Parade. Many other versions were created as the song—now commonly known as 'Roll Out the Barrel'—was adopted by World War Two recruits.<sup>22</sup>

The soldiers easily grasped the generic traits of these three songs. Like other popular choruses of the day, their musical structure was simple, their tonality firm, their tempo stable, and their rhythm steady. They formed part of a larger body of music being disseminated worldwide, even infiltrating—as this article will describe—the specific local repertoire of

<sup>17</sup> The song's controversial origin is explained in Richard Anthony Baker, *British Music Hall: An Illustrated History* (London: Pen & Sword Social, 2014). See also British Broadcasting Corporation, 'World War One: Bet on It's a Long Long Way to Tipperary,' <[www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-25238656](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-25238656)>.

<sup>18</sup> 'The Fame of Tipperary Group Present ... It's a Long Way to Tipperary! Part II,' <[homepage.tinet.ie/~tipperaryfame/longway2.htm](http://homepage.tinet.ie/~tipperaryfame/longway2.htm)>.

<sup>19</sup> Paraphrase from Paul Watt, 'Music, Lyrics and Cultural Tropes in Australian Popular Songs of the First World War: Two Case Studies,' *Musicality Australia* 36.1 (2014): 97.

<sup>20</sup> 'Pack up Your Troubles' was also published by Chappell & Co. Ltd in New York and Toronto in 1915.

<sup>21</sup> It was only natural that this iconic anthem would follow the performance of 'Tipperary' at the Centenary Celebration of the ANZAC's departure from Albany, WA on 1 November 2014 (direct broadcast, ABC 774). Participants whistled the first verse of 'Tipperary' in the traditional manner.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Conrad Seidl, 'Beer Barrel Polka,' *Mechanical Music Digest Archives*, <[www.mmdigest.com/Archives/Digests/199707/1997.07.08.08.html](http://www.mmdigest.com/Archives/Digests/199707/1997.07.08.08.html)>.

Australian Aboriginal musicians in East Gippsland, Victoria. That the provenance of the songs was remote to Australia has by no means prevented the items from supplying a cohesive segment of Patten's lifetime soundtrack over the last six and a half decades.

Performed as a unit on the gumleaf, the songs furnish a critical resource for measuring the influence of wartime 'hits' on detribalised Koorie society. In the section below they illustrate what Tia DeNora describes as 'naturally occurring examples of how music is used and oriented to, how it is constructed as a "work space" for the continuation of social life.'<sup>23</sup>

### **Fringe Settlement Music Making: A Personal Account**

Patten's family resided four miles east of Orbost at Newmerella, a Koorie fringe community of approximately fifteen families. As far as mainstream urban society was concerned, the little community might as well not have existed; however, historian Sylvia Kleinert argues that Koories lived on fringe settlements with a greater degree of autonomy than was possible on government reserves.<sup>24</sup> This era of 'high assimilation' (1930s to 1970) followed 'generations of oppression and discrimination experienced by Koories at the hands of colonial governments.'<sup>25</sup> While uniform home ownership by the dominant culture was becoming a reality in mid-twentieth-century Australia, Aboriginal fringe settlers remained devoid of agency. Patten describes the physical environment of his family home:

Our family lived in a hut constructed from sawmill timber and hessian bags. It had a big fireplace, a camp oven, a tank to catch water, and a copper for boiling the sheets and clothes that our mother dried on a barbwire fence. We were washed in the bathtub or the copper. We slept in little bunks, all in one room, and also made space for visitors to stay.<sup>26</sup>

The soundscapes of the fringe settlement were anything but sterile. Patten's early musical exposure was part of a rich Koorie theatre of action, music and meaning that worked to lift the collective mood. As Istvandity has observed, 'initial and often serendipitous experiences create strong mnemonic associations, not only with family members but also with the pace of these interactions.'<sup>27</sup> Patten's lifelong pursuit of gumleaf playing and the nostalgia he feels towards the war songs can be traced back to the mnemonic qualities of family music-making within the fringe settlement.

Patten was very attached to his mother and her three sisters Violet, Delia and Winnie (née Murray) in a society grounded in clan connections. During this era women assumed responsibility for socialisation and eagerly accepted roles as choir members and pianists in a culture that valued dances, anniversaries and weddings.<sup>28</sup> Patten recalls the previous generation:

My grandfather Herb Murray served in the Great War, and afterwards, before I was born, he organised and sang in an Aboriginal Concert Party. He wore a tuxedo suit when

<sup>23</sup> Tia DeNora, 'The Musical Composition of Social Reality? Music, Action and Reflexivity,' *Sociological Review* 43.2 (1995): 311.

<sup>24</sup> Sylvia Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the City: Re-reading Koorie Photographs,' *Aboriginal History* 30 (2006): 72.

<sup>25</sup> Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the City,' 72.

<sup>26</sup> Herb Patten to Robin Ryan, personal correspondence, 20 July 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Istvandity, 'Fostering the Lifetime Soundtrack.'

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the City,' 81.

he conducted music.<sup>29</sup> This was probably at Lake Tyers because Aunty Delia sang in the Lake Tyers Choir.<sup>30</sup>

The adoption of war songs in this context can be viewed as an integral part of changes in musical life occurring as a result of culture contact. Kartomi cites Mark Slobin's view that 'there is no one experience and knowledge that unifies everyone within a defined "cultural boundary" or if there is, it's not the sum total content of their lives.'<sup>31</sup> Since wartime placed all ethnic groups in the same predicament, the associated musical repertoires were mutually contextualising as they spilled across imagined boundaries for all to sing or play. It is possible that groups of Aborigines living in remote rural settings may have initially adopted the war songs as an abstraction, but orally transmitted music became a conduit for social webs of connectedness between Victorian Koorie people, amplifying an experience of community that Patten still draws upon:

I had a lot of musical experience as a young boy. My aunties loved the war songs, and they sang them on many occasions during the Second World War. Aunty Violet and my mother Susie also played them on the piano (by ear) when we visited Aunty Delia's place. They performed the songs in the same style and manner that they heard them sung on the Terry Dear Amateur Hour radio shows when they visited Aunty Delia's place. Delia was married to Uncle Jack Kenny and theirs was the only home at Newmerella with a radio. It was also the home where the piano was kept. Granny Evelyn purchased the piano in Fitzroy in the 1930s for her son Jacky Murray. Jacky wanted to pursue a career in music but he died at about 19 years from choking on a cherry seed from the very same tree I used to raid as a boy.<sup>32</sup>

We can assume, then, that the manner in which Koories adopted the war songs was largely shaped by European musical conventions such as strict tempi, learned via the medium of the wireless set. The noticeable change in the songs' production was one of instrumentation in an environmental setting where the sounds of blown leaves blended with whatever other sounds were present in the surrounding bush. As Schafer has said of the outdoor environment's 'original context' for music: 'it is inclusive rather than exclusive and tends to be free rather than purchased ... it does not seek walls for protection or an impounded audience for its appreciation.'<sup>33</sup> Patten describes how his imagination was ignited in free acoustic space:

One day I noticed my Great-uncle Lindsay (Hobbs) Thomas playing a gumleaf in the bush. He was a compelling player. Like some other men I later noticed playing leaves, Uncle Lindsay was a member of the Bruthen Gumleaf Band managed by Alex Innes—an offshoot of the legendary Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band [see below]. Watching him blow the leaf was an experience I will never forget. I can still remember it very clearly today. I heard this noise like a birdcall. I saw Uncle Lindsay pick a gumleaf from a tree, so I spontaneously copied him and that is when I first made a sound on the leaf. I ran

<sup>29</sup> Herb Murray is pictured in concert in Phillip Pepper, *You Are What You Make Yourself to Be: The Story of a Victorian Aboriginal Family 1842–1980* (Melbourne: The Hyland House, 1980) 92.

<sup>30</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 20 July 2015. John Bulmer (1833–1913) founded Lake Tyers Mission in 1861 for members of the Gunai-Kurnai and Bidwell tribes.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Slobin, 'Micromusics of the West: A Comparative Approach,' *Ethnomusicology* 36.1 (1992): 2, cited in Kartomi, 'Editor's Preface,' *Music-cultures in Contact*, xvii.

<sup>32</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 27 Nov. 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Schafer, 'Music and the Soundscape,' 60.



straight home to show my mother what I could do and I soon started practising secretly in an old gravel quarry in the bush that we called 'The Pit'.<sup>34</sup>

Fortunately the enculturation of Patten's talent was not to be constrained:

Aunty Violet noticed my leaf playing and encouraged me to enter an amateur music contest for the general public held at the Mechanics Hall, Orbost, sometime between 1949 and 1951. Violet was a very beautiful Aunty. She suggested I play the choruses of the three war songs as a medley, so I practised them with her at the piano.<sup>35</sup> Aunty Violet accompanied my gumleaf playing at the contest and I was placed second in front of my cousin Phyllis Kenny, who sang Al Jolson's 'Mammy'.<sup>36</sup>

Following the contest the young Patten was in demand to supply regular entertainments at community parties:

It came naturally for me to be able to sing the songs, and to play them on the gumleaf at parties along with my older brother George on boogie-woogie jazz piano. Our father George was a sawmill hand who worked throughout Gippsland. We accompanied him on his long assignments, staying in sawmill huts at Cabbage Tree and on a plateau near Combienbar, Far East Gippsland. There would have been a dearth of music in these sawmill huts if George and I hadn't kept singing together. We also sang the war songs at Newmerella Primary School, where our teacher, Mr George Collis, was highly respected by the Koorie Elders. In 1954, our class travelled by bus to Sale to catch a glimpse of the Queen and Prime Minister Menzies. I didn't experience any singing classes until I attended the Orbost High School, where the teacher promoted me to 'front of class' on account of my strong voice. I have sung a lot during my life, and I have never stopped playing the gumleaf.<sup>37</sup>

To thicken the history of this humble instrument it is worthwhile exploring the role that it played in banding leading up to its use in the performative context of World War Two.

### Gumleaf Bands and War Song Repertoire

A backward glance sees gumleaf banding as an inexpensive proposition for Aboriginal musicians. Indeed, Chris Sullivan described mission-instigated gumleaf bands as 'the most significant instrumental tradition of southeastern Aboriginal Australia in the post-colonial period.' Secular influences on the gumleaf bands included drum-and-fife, brass and pipe bands, pan-European dance forms, and touring British and American shows.<sup>38</sup> As a result of musical culture contact with White Australia, gumleaf bands were common in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria in the early twentieth century, often featuring at mainstream fancy dress balls, concerts, and the like.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 16 July 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Following the contest, Patten played the three war songs separately or in medley style at family parties; however, over the last few decades, he has mostly performed them as a medley (Patten, personal correspondence, 12 July 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 27 Nov. 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 20 July 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Chris Sullivan, 'Non-tribal Dance Music and Song: From First Contact to Citizen Rights,' *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (1988): 66.

<sup>39</sup> Robin Ryan, *A Spiritual Sound, A Lonely Sound: Leaf Music of Southeastern Aboriginal Australians, 1890s–1990s* (PhD thesis, Monash University, 1999).

Leaf bandmen residing at Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Station, NSW, created syntheses of indigenous and introduced elements to produce new and unique artistic expressions from at least 1900. Their indigenous elements included traditional dance steps, 'painting up,' and playing the leaf 'no hands' or to clapstick accompaniment, while the introduced elements of their repertoire spanned many forms of popular music and some light classical items. Anecdotal evidence also exists for the inclusion of war songs in their performances.<sup>40</sup> On their 1920s tours, the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band exploited a kangaroo-skin drum for the song 'Boys in Blue are Fighting' as the leafists played loudly, in parts, to simulate the shots and shells of the battlefield.<sup>41</sup>

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Cummeragunga and Wallaga Lake Aboriginal concert groups combined to tour the Goulburn Valley and Riverina districts to raise money for local hospitals and wartime charities.<sup>42</sup> The 1930s touring Leaf Band Vaudeville Show from Ulladulla, NSW would whip the audience up to excitement pitch before closing with 'The Battlefields of Europe.' Since the chorus line 'Tell mother not to wait for me, for I'm not coming home' would always make the audience crumble, the cast made it a practice to pass out paper handkerchiefs to the audience as they entered the hall.<sup>43</sup>

Motivated by a visit of Wallaga Lake leafists, a gumleaf band formed around 1917 at the Lake Tyers Church of England mission, East Gippsland. Along with boomerang throwers, the band entertained hundreds of tourists from 1918 up until the Second World War.<sup>44</sup> In the mid-1930s they performed 'the latest airs of the gramophone record,'<sup>45</sup> ending their performances with 'Now is the Hour,' the 'Po Atarau' that New Zealanders had sung to farewell Māori soldiers going to the First World War.<sup>46</sup> Before detailing the Second World War recruitment of Lake Tyers soldier-leafists, we will situate this trajectory within the general record of Aboriginal war involvement.

### Aborigines at War: The Historical Record

It is not generally known that Australia's First Peoples have fought in every war that the nation has been involved in, for, as Reed points out, neither Commonwealth nor State governments kept adequate records of the racial background of those enlisting.<sup>47</sup> David Huggonson has estimated that over four hundred Indigenous servicemen fought for the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) in the Great War, returning only to face the burden of white negative stereotypes

<sup>40</sup> Robin Ryan, 'And We Marched to the Tune of the Gumleaf Band ... But to Whose Tune Did We March?', *Popular Music: Commemoration, Commodification and Communication, Proceedings of the 2004 IASPM Australia-NZ Conference, held in conjunction with the Symposium of the International Musicological Society, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, 11–16 July 2004*, ed. Denis Crowdy (IASPM-ANZ, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> The late Yuin Elder Guboo Ted Thomas, interviews with Robin Ryan, 7 and 8 July 1994.

<sup>42</sup> Alick Jackomos, 'Gumleaf Bands,' *Identity* 1.1 (1971): 33.

<sup>43</sup> 'Down Memory Lane,' *New Dawn*, Dec. 1971, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Australian Archives and the Public Record Office of Victoria, 'My Heart is Breaking': A Joint Guide to Records About Aboriginal People in the Public Record Office of Victoria and the Australian Archives, Victorian Regional Office (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1993) 70; Phillip Pepper (with Tess de Araugo), *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, vol. 1 (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1985): 242–3, 248.

<sup>45</sup> Percy Leason, 'Introduction,' *The Last of the Victorian Aborigines* (Melbourne: State Library of Victoria, 1934) 5.

<sup>46</sup> Greater consideration is given to these performances in Ryan, *A Spiritual Sound, A Lonely Sound*.

<sup>47</sup> Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli*, 144.



and a legal system that rendered them ineligible for the vote, equal wages, and retired soldier's blocks.<sup>48</sup> Neither did they participate in the ticker-tape parades that expressed the jubilation and gratitude of the nation.<sup>49</sup>

A quarter of a century has lapsed since Major Bob Hall, in his groundbreaking book *The Black Diggers*, 'wrote' Indigenous people back into the history of World War Two.<sup>50</sup> Several books and exhibitions have succeeded Hall's book. Jackomos and Fowell contributed war biographies,<sup>51</sup> Reed analysed ways in which Australia remembers the war,<sup>52</sup> James described the man-powering of Aboriginal people into a labour corps,<sup>53</sup> and Riseman interpreted how the arts have depicted Aboriginal participation in the war as being central to Australian Indigenous history.<sup>54</sup> This message resonates with contemporary understandings of Indigenous citizenship and reconciliation as, four years on from Riseman's publication, momentum is building towards Recognition of Australia's Indigenous peoples in the Constitution.

Approximately three thousand Indigenous Australians formally enlisted during World War Two. Others were involved as *de facto* personnel, or as laborers in the war industries, thus making their overall contribution higher per capita than that for Australians as a whole.<sup>55</sup> The recruitment of Lake Tyers soldier-musicians followed the visit of a hundred tourists to the Station just before the outbreak of the war.

### The Lake Tyers and Bonegilla Soldier-leafists

The Koorie writer Phillip Pepper claimed that thirty-seven Lake Tyers men volunteered for the army,<sup>56</sup> however reports varied concerning the actual number of men recruited.<sup>57</sup> Whatever the case, the twenty-six men who passed the medical test could all play the gumleaf and were co-opted to practice appropriate tunes along with the bagpipe players training at the Caulfield Racecourse depot. On the strength of their top number, 'Roll Out the Barrel,' a Lake Tyers Military Gumleaf Band was mobilised for fundraising and recruiting purposes. They performed

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<sup>48</sup> David Huggonson, *Too Dark for the Light Horse: An Exhibition of Photographs and Documents Depicting Aboriginal Involvement in the Australian Army*, Albury Regional Museum, NSW, 11 Aug.–27 Sept. 1988; Alick Jackomos and Derek Fowell, *Forgotten Heroes: Aborigines at War from the Somme to Vietnam* (Melbourne: Victoria Press, 1993), introduction and back cover.

<sup>49</sup> Dorothy Cook, 'Aborigines' Battle on the Home Front,' *The Age*, 30 Nov. 2000, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Robert A. Hall, *The Black Diggers: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989).

<sup>51</sup> Jackomos and Fowell, *Forgotten Heroes*.

<sup>52</sup> Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli*.

<sup>53</sup> Jan 'Kabarli' James, *Forever Warriors: Honouring Indigenous War Graves* (Northam, WA: Jan Goodacre Collection, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Noah Riseman, 'Rectifying "The Great Australian Silence"? Creative Representations of Australian Indigenous Second World War Service,' *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (2012): 35–48.

<sup>55</sup> Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli*, 144. Compensation was paid in the 1980s to more than 800 Indigenous people who had been underpaid (Reed, *Bigger than Gallipoli*, 146), however it was not until Anzac Day 2007 that the first parade to commemorate their efforts was held in Sydney (Lindy Kerin, 'From the Archives: Indigenous Soldiers Get Their Own Parade,' 25 Apr. 2007, ABC AM transcript, <[www.abc.net.au/am/content/2007/s1906114.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2007/s1906114.htm)>).

<sup>56</sup> Pepper, *You Are What You Make Yourself to Be*, 103. Nine Indigenous men from Lake Tyers had served in France and Palestine in World War One (Jackomos and Fowell, *Forgotten Heroes*, 14).

<sup>57</sup> In 1940, the number mentioned in the *Argus* alone varies from between fifteen (16 July, 5) to fourteen (28 June, 5) and seventeen (27 June, 5). A photograph of fourteen men waiting at Caulfield to be issued with uniforms was featured on 28 June.

at rallies almost every Friday on the tray of a military truck stationed outside the Melbourne Town Hall, or outside Flinders Street Station.<sup>58</sup>

The poet Ethel Phillips Fox (1872–1951) was intent on reviving the Great War tradition of posting gumleaves to soldiers when she patriotically penned ‘The Song of the Gum Leaf.’<sup>59</sup> Florence M. Donaldson-Ewart (1864–1949) orchestrated Fox’s poem to a quick march for voice and piano, ‘Dedicated to the officers and men of the R.A.A.F.’ being sent off to fight under the Empire Training Scheme (see Fig. 1).<sup>60</sup> Donaldson-Ewart’s concern with social issues in the wider strata of society may well have influenced her noticing the gumleaf band playing outside Melbourne Town Hall or Flinders Street Station in late 1939 or 1940.<sup>61</sup>

**Figure 1.** ‘The Song of the Gum Leaf’ by Ethel Philips Fox, song and orchestral music by Florence M. Donaldson-Ewart, estimated date 1940. Image courtesy of National Library of Australia, MUS N mbb 783.2421897 E94.

The image shows a page from a musical score for 'The Song of the Gum Leaf'. The score is written for voice and piano in 2/4 time. It includes an introduction, a first verse, and a second verse. The tempo is marked 'Marching time' and 'A Tempo'. The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *mf*, *p*, and *mp*. The lyrics are: 'I'll sing you a song of a Gum leaf of a leaf that is tough and true emblem of those who are fighting for me and for you so wear a'.

<sup>58</sup> Jackomos and Fowell, *Forgotten Heroes*, 14; and Braybrook, *Australia Remembers the Black Diggers*. A photograph of ‘Lake Tyers Servicemen, 1940’ can be found in: Alick Jackomos and Derek Fowell, *Living Aboriginal History of Victoria: Stories in the Oral Tradition* (Melbourne: CUP, 1991) 195.

<sup>59</sup> The date of the score is approximated from an *Argus* advertisement of Saturday, 9 March 1940; see ‘Edition details,’ *The Song of the Gum Leaf [Music]: A Quick March*, <[trove.nla.gov.au/work/37288257?versionId=48591958](https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/37288257?versionId=48591958)>.

<sup>60</sup> The first contingent left for the United Kingdom on 28 November 1939 to fight in the Middle East in the early 1940s.

<sup>61</sup> This is a suggestion raised by Ewart’s biographer Faye Patton during a phone conversation with the author in 1999.

Eight of the soldier-leafists joined the 4th Training Battalion at Bonegilla Military Camp via Albury.<sup>62</sup> They remained there for almost a year, entertaining as a gumleaf band at functions,<sup>63</sup> and marching through the streets of Albury, Ararat and Ballarat to boost morale. This route march featured tunes such as 'Colonel Bogey March,' composed in 1914 by Kenneth J. Alford. The band's skill in executing European harmonies is evidenced in the newsreel *Aborigines are True Soldiers of the King* mentioned above.

Much to their disappointment, the leafists were by-passed for being 'too old' to be included in the second 23rd Battalion. Ex-serviceman George Birkett, who described the gumleaf band as 'terrific,' rued the fact that the army did not give them jobs in base ordnance depots, or as cooks, when he declared: 'I think they were only brought in as a publicity stunt.'<sup>64</sup>

Hall has expressed an alternative view that the use of the gumleaf band in the war should not be viewed solely as 'exploitation.' White brass, military and pipe bands were also used in the recruiting drives of 1940–1942 in a dramatic attempt to expand the defence forces, as a result of the Japanese entering the war.<sup>65</sup> When the soldier-leafists were discharged back to Lake Tyers, their loyalty had nevertheless been severely weakened, for some were said to have remarked: 'we have no King now, and no country.'<sup>66</sup>

### The Wartime Wedding of Patten's Parents

On 21 September 1940, Patten's father George married Susie Murray at Ormond Baptist Church, Melbourne. Published in the *Argus*, 23 September 1940, the wedding photograph features a guard of honour composed of uniformed gumleaf players from Lake Tyers crossing boomerangs over the couple's heads (see Fig. 2). As noted above, boomerang demonstrations had been a drawcard for the aforementioned Lake Tyers tourism industry.

Kleinert describes this photo as 'remarkable for the rich insights it provides into the life stories of key figures in the Melbourne Koorie community' (including the groom's Best Man, Doug Nicholls mentioned below), and 'crucially important' because 'it documents a moment in time in the history of Aboriginal involvement in the Australian military forces.'<sup>67</sup> It is 'poignant and powerful,' she continues, in 'capturing an occasion for celebration in the political struggles for equality and recognition, a euphoric moment that would soon be swept aside by the force of institutionalised racism.'<sup>68</sup>

The glowing press account of the wedding masks the level of daring activism mentioned below in which George Patten and other Koories were engaged, and the ongoing discrimination

<sup>62</sup> According to Jackomos and Fowell (*Living Aboriginal History of Victoria and Forgotten Heroes*) and Anderson ('Lost in the Streets,' 31), the Lake Tyers Military Gumleaf Band comprised Laurie Moffatt, Oliver Jackson, Bob Nelson, Dicky Harrison, Frank Wandin, Noel Hood, and Otto Logan. An interview with Oliver Jackson's widow Shirley Jackson of Albury on 8 and 9 February 1994 revealed that Jackson had only posed for the photo, although he served in the same unit as the gumleaf band and played leaf in hotels.

<sup>63</sup> This information derived from Huggonson N4390.15a (Canberra: AIATSIS Pictorial Collection).

<sup>64</sup> George Birkett, cited in Jackomos and Fowell, *Forgotten Heroes*, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Major Bob Hall, personal correspondence, 21 Mar. 1996.

<sup>66</sup> Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *Thinking Black: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004) 23.

<sup>67</sup> Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the City,' 76.

<sup>68</sup> Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the City,' 82.

**Figure 2.** The wedding of Susie Murray and George Patten, 21 September 1940, Ormond Baptist Church, Melbourne. Image courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Herb Patten.



and opposition they endured.<sup>69</sup> Kleinert notes that although Susie Murray was born at Lake Tyers, her father Herb Murray's family were excluded by discriminatory legislation and forced to move to the nearby fringe camp of Toorloo Arm.<sup>70</sup> Herb Patten elaborates on this family history:

Murray and his wife Evelyn then moved on to Orbost, thence to Newmerella. Susie, who had worked in Brighton as a teenager, met George Patten around 1938 when she was residing at 19 Little George St, Fitzroy. George and his brother Jack Patten (1905–1957) were giving political talks in Melbourne following their involvement in the historic 1939 Cummeragunga Walk-off.<sup>71</sup> Descendants of the Yorta Yorta and Wiradjurie followed the brothers across the Murray River to Barmah, where they endured refugee status on tribal land. The NSW police arrested Uncle Jack, whose actions are now revered as integral to the Aboriginal struggle for justice. Uncle Jack co-founded the Aborigine's Progressive Association in Sydney, and I am proud to say that he was included in the 2014 Indigenous Honour Roll for War Service.

My father George entered the army at Caulfield but never served on account of his flat feet. Following their wedding my parents settled in Newmerella because my mother had family connections there, but she often revisited her sister Winnie Onus in the city.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the City,' 78. Attwood and Markus ('Thinking Black,' 119) note that in 1939 George Patten was the organising secretary of the Australian Aborigines' League.

<sup>70</sup> Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the City,' 79.

<sup>71</sup> The Cummeragunga Walk-off was the subject of the opera *Pecan Summer* by the Yorta Yorta soprano and composer Deborah Cheetham.

<sup>72</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 20 July 2015. Tragically, George Patten was killed in a work-related accident at the Orbost mill when son Herb was eleven years old. About a year later, Susie Patten moved to Bega, and thence to Wallaga Lake, NSW, to avoid the removal of her eight children by the police.

### Koorie Music Scenes in Mid-twentieth-century Melbourne

The closure of Aboriginal missions and stations during the urban drift and the arrival of television and rock 'n' roll during the late 1950s splintered the institution of the gumleaf band into trios, duos and soloists. The main locus for urban leaf playing was the inner suburb of Fitzroy, home to relocated families from Cummeragunga (NSW), Framlingham (southwestern Victoria) and Lake Tyers (southeastern Victoria). Their musical activity during and after World War Two remained syncretic.

Lone Aboriginal buskers now rendered tunes on the corners of Brunswick and Gertrude Streets, Fitzroy.<sup>73</sup> The minstrel-leafist Hector Bull (born in 1884 at Lake Tyers) played 'Tipperary' on a gumleaf outside Young and Jackson's Hotel, Melbourne;<sup>74</sup> and a song called 'The Gum-Leaf Musician' recounts how, in 1951, Hector's brother the gumleaf busker Bill Bull (b. 1891) was sentenced to six months jail for 'soliciting alms' on Princes Bridge, Melbourne.<sup>75</sup> Barrister Galbally lodged an appeal and Bull's sentence was revoked. A gumleaf trio played at the lowering of Bull's coffin following his death in custody in 1954.<sup>76</sup>

Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls (1906–1988; born in Cummeragunga) most roundly influenced the performance patterns of Koorie music-making during this era, as a model of how an Aboriginal person could overcome cultural and social adaptation. Hitching a ride to Melbourne in 1927 on a cattle truck, Nicholls—a future Governor of South Australia—spent his first night sleeping on some cabbage leaves under a Victoria Market trestle.<sup>77</sup> Nicholls initially distinguished himself as a VFA and VFL footballer. In an antidote to segregation, he taught scores of children—both black and white—how to play the gumleaf on the Fitzroy football ground.<sup>78</sup> A year after Nicholls acted as Best Man at the 1941 Patten–Murray wedding, he was recruited to the 29th Battalion from the Fitzroy Depot. The hit tunes Nicholls blew on gumleaf to entertain his comrades were listed by his biographer, Mavis Thorpe Clark (including 'When the Lights of London Shine Again,' and 'I've Got Sixpence').<sup>79</sup>

In his ordained role as 'Pastor Doug,' Nicholls embodied a stable spiritual focus for Melbourne's Koorie community during and after the war. The services he led at Fitzroy's Gore Street Church of Christ provided a 'good sing,' and at mission social nights gumleaves formed part of the instrumental accompaniment to war songs and crowd favourites like 'Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer' and 'The White Cliffs of Dover.' A gumleaf band and piano were sufficient to provide all the music required at community weddings and dances.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Aborigines have busked in country towns and cities since at least the 1920s, and most notably during the Great Depression of the 1930s (Ryan, *A Spiritual Sound, A Lonely Sound*, 154).

<sup>74</sup> Pepper, *You Are What You Make Yourself to Be*, 98–9.

<sup>75</sup> 'The Gum-leaf Musician,' words by Len Fox, tune by Joy Durst from the musical *Lord Franklin*, *Joy Durst Memorial Australian Song Collection* (republished by the Victorian Folk Music Club, 1980): 63.

<sup>76</sup> Based on Hugh Anderson, 'Lost in the Streets: A Gumleaf Requiem for Bill Bull,' *Journal of Australian Studies* 44 (1995): 22–37.

<sup>77</sup> Mavis Thorpe Clark, *The Boy from Cumeroogunga: The Story of Sir Douglas Ralph Nicholls, Aboriginal Leader* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979) 66–8.

<sup>78</sup> Thorpe Clark, *The Boy from Cumeroogunga*, 126–7.

<sup>79</sup> Thorpe Clark, *The Boy from Cumeroogunga*, 120.

<sup>80</sup> See Robin Ryan, *Koorie Sociomusical Practice in Melbourne Since 1988* (MA thesis, Monash University, 1992) 31–6 for a detailed account.



The gumleaf was still being used as a financial drawcard. Patten, who was Nicholls's volunteer driver for a period of time, assisted him at some of the annual 'Shake the Tin Day' appeals approved by Melbourne City Council before 1967:

Members of the team would shake the tin and I would perform tunes on the gumleaf. This proved a particular attraction at the Uniting Church, Mordialloc, where we raised between \$300 and \$400 for Aboriginal welfare. I am likely to have played the war tunes at these events.<sup>81</sup>

Ted (Chook) Mullett, who had been a member of the Lake Tyers Gumleaf Trio of the 1930s, became a leading post-war catalyst for gumleaf playing in Koorie Melbourne. Patten recalls how, like many Koories, Mullett was a 'transient' who passed through Newmerella:

I noticed Mullett playing the gumleaf outside the Lindsays' home, around the campfire at night, and at the parties Auntie Delia hosted around the piano. It is possible that 'Roll Out the Barrel' was one of the tunes he played on the settlement, for when my uncle Bill Onus produced his 1949 *Easter Corroboree Season* at Wirth's Olympia,<sup>82</sup> 'Chook Mullett's Gumleaf Band' was filmed playing the war tune. The commentator described the gumleaf rendition of 'Roll Out the Barrel' to the accompaniment of a Chinese woodblock as being 'only moderately ancient.'<sup>83</sup>

The degree of syncretism in the all-Aboriginal pageant advertised as 'novel, wild and wonderful' was apparently more noticeable to the *Argus* reviewer, who commended the show for its 'interesting mixture of vaudeville and native ritual.'<sup>84</sup>

Another stalwart contributor to Koorie music was Patten's second cousin, Margaret Tucker MBE (1904–1996).<sup>85</sup> Born at Warangesda Aboriginal Reserve, NSW, Tucker worked as a domestic servant on an outback station where she overheard recordings of Melba singing.<sup>86</sup> During World War Two, Tucker sang her way through night shifts at the Footscray ammunition factory: 'I couldn't help myself, I loved singing and would go for my life on the top notes.'<sup>87</sup> The lead soprano in Harold Blair's choir,<sup>88</sup> Tucker was decorated for her charity work in organising an Aboriginal Concert Party to raise money for the Red Cross, and for her entertaining of troops and repatriated servicemen. Patten played gumleaf laments at Tucker's burial ceremony in Melbourne in 1996, and at Nicholls' funeral in Cummeragunga in 1988.

### Perpetuating the War Songs Through the Gumleaf Tradition

Patten has perpetuated the activity of gumleaf playing through a musical repertoire of his own making. He moves with relative ease between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains in both

<sup>81</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 8 Jan. 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Site of the present-day Melbourne Arts Centre.

<sup>83</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 8 Jan. 2016. In a viewing of 'Native Talent in Aboriginal Corroboree—1949 Style,' *Cinesound Review* 0942, released 28 Nov. 1949, Patten identified five of the six men in Chook Mullett's Gumleaf Band as Bruce McGuinness, Chook Mullett, Albert Mullett, Eric Onus and Clem Briggs, and the boy as Jimmy Moyle.

<sup>84</sup> 'Bright Abo [sic] Show,' *The Argus*, 18 April 1949: 2. Joel Crotty kindly alerted us to this source.

<sup>85</sup> Tucker's Aboriginal name Lilardia means 'flower,' however she was known to black and white alike as 'Auntie Marge.'

<sup>86</sup> Anna F. Vroland, *Their Music Has Roots* (Box Hill, Victoria: self-published, 1951) 3.

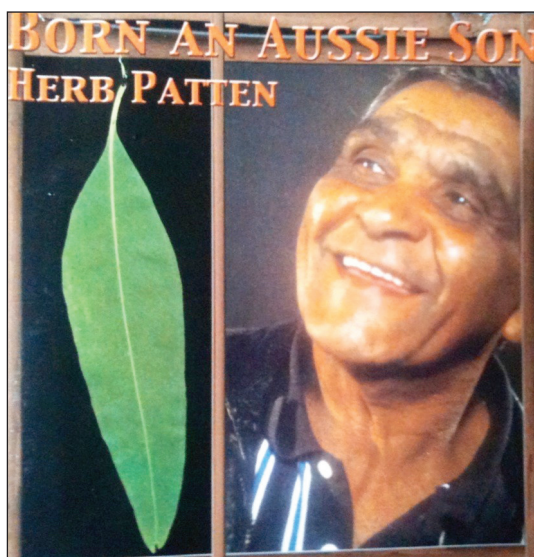
<sup>87</sup> Margaret Tucker, cited in Jackomos and Fowell, *Forgotten Heroes*, 35–7.

<sup>88</sup> The acclaimed Aboriginal tenor Harold Blair, AM (1924–1976) led a choir comprising 'Aborigines or Europeans married to Aborigines' [advertisement]. They sang at many churches and for the opening night of GTV9 in Melbourne in 1956 (Robin Ryan, *Koorie Sociomusical Practice in Melbourne*, 34).



rural and urban Victorian contexts, using the gumleaf for cultural educational representation within broad social and cultural milieus.<sup>89</sup> Patten also reinvigorated the leaf tradition at Wallaga Lake, NSW during his residencies there in 1994, 1998, and 1999. His knowledge of the old gumleaf bands and his early experiences of the bush and family hearth as sites of musical memory came to the fore in his autobiographical solo album *Born an Aussie Son* (see Fig. 3).<sup>90</sup>

**Figure 3.** Cover of the CD *Born an Aussie Son* (Coral Music CM002 2002). Image of Herb Patten by Veronica Casetta, reproduction courtesy of executive producer Phil Hayward and Herb Patten.



Denis Crowdy produced this album in 2002 when Associate Professor Philip Hayward granted Patten the first Indigenous Recording Fellowship at Macquarie University, NSW.<sup>91</sup> Musical transculturation is evident in the album's examples of local transitional / mixed language songs, country-and-western, Koorie Country Gospel, gumleaf jazz, and rock'n'roll—all genres that evoked special cultural and communal meanings in post-war Koorie musical life. In addition to playing gumleaf, Patten uses his broad musical skill set in voice, guitar, didjeridu, clapsticks, body percussion and leaf percussion, further reinforcing the album's syncretic mix of indigenous and introduced musical elements.

Patten's choice of the *War Song Medley* for the album's final track represents a symbolic return to the beginning of his musical career as well as a tangible means through which the musical involvement of southeastern Australian Aboriginal people in World War Two can be understood and (re)evaluated. Patten had always preserved the integrity of the European war song style, often in marked contrast to his performances of the mixed language song 'Jacky-

<sup>89</sup> For detailed descriptions see Robin Ryan, 'From Faint Aeolian Whisperings to a Pop Instrument on YouTube: Discourse on the Origins, Adaptability and Sociability of the Gumleaf,' *Instruments of Change: IASPM Australia-New Zealand Conference Proceedings, 24–26 November 2010*, ed. Jen Cattermole, Shane Homan and Graeme Smith (Melbourne: Monash University, 2011) 103–10.

<sup>90</sup> Herb Patten, *Born an Aussie Son: Herb Patten*, CD produced by Denis Crowdy, liner notes by Robin Ryan, exec. prod. Philip Hayward, Coral Music CM002 (Sydney: Macquarie University, 2002).

<sup>91</sup> See Herb Patten, 'Stories of Aboriginal Heritage through a Multi Media Exploration of Gumleaf Music,' (Practice-led MA exegesis, RMIT University, 2007).

Jacky' in which he performs tribal steps (learned from his mother) to reaffirm his Aboriginality.<sup>92</sup> Although there are musical limitations on what can be altered in the war songs, he managed to graft in a military gumleaf band presence that might otherwise be erased from memory.<sup>93</sup>

My vision was to reconstruct the spirited regimental style in which Lake Tyers men in the Bonegilla Gumleaf Band played in parts to boost military morale. Broadly speaking, I reference their appearance in the Cinesound newsreel *Aborigines are True Soldiers of the King* (1941), which was described by the commentator as 'the regimental march, gumleaf style.' I also conceived the medley to be a tongue-in-cheek novelty item, since some dogs bark when they hear multiple gumleaves being played.<sup>94</sup>

Patten is a relaxed vernacular musician who occasionally changes the order of the choruses. He commenced the recording with 'Pack up Your Troubles' (in the key of B), followed it with 'Roll Out the Barrel' (in the key of E), and concluded with 'Tipperary' (in the key of C). This juxtaposition of keys enables automatic flow between the choruses, for in Patten's words, 'to pitch it in a key higher than E would risk personal strain and inaccurate pitch.'

Considering Patten's need to accommodate the limited pitch range available to leaf players with the need to maintain continuous flow between the three songs, he successfully orients the medley around a strong, regular march-like pulse. Rhythmic variety is created by various means including the subdivision of short duration notes, and instances of hocket (the off-beat hiccupping of a second part).

Patten's overdubbed part weaves unpredictably around the principal part. He employs fleeting instances of contrary motion, doubling at the unison and at the octave, parallel thirds and sixths, staggered entries, and echo effects, while also surprising the listener with some idiosyncratic interpolated 'gumleaf squeals.' Keeping in mind the unsuitability of assessing this transculturated musical style through the prism of traditional western musicological analysis, the energetic leaf item is musically coherent, highly expressive, and convincing. Musicologist John Whiteoak, who coached Patten in the lead-up to the recording, insightfully adds:

Patten employs a range of harmonic devices but the uniqueness and musical cultural richness of the item is largely embodied in the colourful unorthodoxy and variegation of his leaf sound production and, similarly, in the unorthodox and improvisatory play of dissonance and consonance in 'voice-leading' that sometimes culminates in evocative heterophony. His inimitable interpretation of the tunes provides the ideal musical metaphor for the collective blending of strong, untrained voices singing (and whistling) wartime songs on the march—singing expressively from the heart to banish the fatigue and fears of being at war.<sup>95</sup>

Since enough was already happening musically to inject vitality into the item, Crowdy and Patten discarded their initial idea of using a drumbeat to represent the cultural trait of the kangaroo skin drum played by the old Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band. Crowdy edited out a degree

<sup>92</sup> For further details see Robin Ryan, 'Herb Patten—"Jacky-Jacky"', *Verandah Music: Roots of Australian Tradition*, ed. Graham Seal and Rob Willis (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2003) 64–7.

<sup>93</sup> Broadly speaking, in the words of ethnomusicologist Aline Scott-Maxwell, 'Uncle Herb's medley captures that rough-and-ready sort of tuning, singing and musical energy that you'd find in a group of soldiers' (personal correspondence, 14 July 2016).

<sup>94</sup> Patten, personal correspondence, 20 July 2015.

<sup>95</sup> John Whiteoak, personal correspondence, 14 July 2016.

of breathiness between the last two songs and, at the author's suggestion, decreased the leaf volume at the start of the first song so that the leaf sound could *crescendo* into the middle song and *decrecendo* into a faint finish on the last song (and final track) to give the impression that the band had moved on down the street.

The World Wars were a catalyst for the creation and near-universal distribution of popular new British songs, but in Australia, at least, the songs were adopted as musical emblems of a unified national identity. Although referents for a military narrative, they furnished a comforting counterpoint to the dissonant sounds of war. To reinvoke our opening comments on the gumleaf's iconic status during the World Wars, we argue that war songs performed on a gumleaf can illuminate geopolitical context, and vice versa. The Indigenous Military Gumleaf Band's distinct mode of transculturated musical production and cultural difference gave the songs a fresh sound and a new way of being characteristic to the vexed Koorie history of World War Two.

In the fringe community of Newmerella, East Gippsland, the songs crossed cultural barriers via the medium of radio. Patten heard them performed in his early childhood, and—with full-bodied response to the sounds he heard around him—has performed them ever since. For the purposes of this article we viewed the medley as an isolated component within Patten's repertoire, explaining why he finds war songs personally significant, how they assist his memory of fringe music, and how he has recorded them to memorialise 'the regimental march.' His technical competence and communicative skills with the gumleaf have grounded the war songs in a fluid way that does not restrict them to one culture or another.

It is clear from this situated account that family life helped develop a lifetime love of Koorie musical heritage that Patten continues to express through gumleaf playing. The telling of this one story of generational influence, modelling, and imitation does not account for them all, but it does point to the need for more comprehensive research into the music-making of Indigenous Australians during, between, and after the World Wars.

#### About the Authors

Dr Robin Ryan researches eco- and ethno-musicological themes within the broad continuum of Australian music history. She has produced articles on the history and practice of Aboriginal gumleaf playing through affiliations with Monash University, Melbourne; Macquarie University, Sydney; and, currently, the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University.

Elder Uncle Herb Patten of the Gunai-Kurnai Nation of East Gippsland is Australia's only professional Indigenous gumleaf performer. The author of *How to Play the Gumleaf* (Currency Press, 1999), and a visual and recording artist with an MA in Education (RMIT, 2007), he successfully promotes cross-cultural relationships through music.