

Australia and Asia: Tracing Musical Representations, Encounters and Connections

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European-Australian musical engagement with Australia's Asia-Pacific region spans a history of over one hundred and fifty years and comprises a kaleidoscope of exoticised representations; creative adaptations, transformations and hybridisations; mediated presentations and direct musical encounters in multiple media and art forms. Direct encounters began even before white colonisation, when Yolgnu of north-east Arnhem Land witnessed the ceremonies of Makassan *trepang* fishermen who visited annually from (present-day) Sulawesi, Indonesia, leaving traces of this cross-cultural contact in song, dance and language. Visiting or resident performers from the Asia-Pacific region entered the European-Australian cultural sphere from as early as the mid-nineteenth century, albeit mostly in a sporadic and limited way until relatively recently. For most of post-settlement history, however, music and dance forms that involved 'imagined' representations of Asia or the Pacific and were driven by the appeal of oriental exotica have, arguably, had a more profound cultural impact than any direct contact with music or music cultures from these geographic regions. In the post-World War II period, a growing consciousness of, and sense of belonging to, the Asia-Pacific region, coupled with mass migration, the end of the White Australia policy, and the adoption of multiculturalism, has intensified and diversified musical engagement, manifest in such things as a massive increase in opportunities for European-Australians to experience musical traditions from the region, and the facilitation and production of diverse creative work by composers and musicians demonstrating Asian or Pacific influences. Engagement has also extended to the community-based Asian or Pacific migrant musiccultures that interact with their Australian urban contexts and, to varying degrees, the wider Australian community.

The very broad scope and highly diverse—even disparate—nature of the music activity and types of engagement that make up this overall history, which spans the art music/popular music divide amongst other things, begs the question of whether it can be considered as a single historical narrative or, rather, as comprising a number of distinct histories, underpinned as they are by different socio-cultural processes and ideologies. The article addresses this question by proposing a perspective on the history that distinguishes three principal strands, or narratives, of Australian musical engagement with its Asia-Pacific region. I have provisionally termed these narratives of engagement: ‘imagined,’ ‘direct’ and ‘connective.’ Imagined engagement signifies creative engagement with an imagined or largely imagined Asia-Pacific via exoticised and highly mediated musical representations—or imaginings—of the Asian or Pacific ‘other’ produced or consumed primarily by non Asian-Australians. Direct engagement denotes direct, relatively unmediated encounters between Australians and music and/or musicians from Australia’s Asia-Pacific region. Connective engagement refers to composition and performance that draw directly on aspects of Asian music or are informed directly by Asia in some way and thereby create connections with the region. Using this tri-partite conceptual framework, the article provides a broad mapping or overview of the history, illustrating each strand or type of engagement through small case studies and other examples drawn from my published and ongoing research in this area, mostly with an emphasis on popular music and culture.¹ Due to limitations of space, discussion is restricted to examples drawn from Australia’s musical engagement with Asia, rather than the broader Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on China and Indonesia and largely excluding instances of indigenous Australian-Asian interaction and musical outcomes. However, the theoretical framework and concepts applied to the present study are arguably applicable to musical engagement with ‘the Pacific.’

What is meant by ‘Asia’ and how it is conceptualised have differed according to place and time. For example, designations such as the Near East and Far East represent European perspectives on global regions that bear quite different geographical orientations to Australia. Today, Australia’s immediate Asian region is generally understood as encompassing South Asia, Southeast Asia and Northeast (or East) Asia. In the nineteenth century and later, however, Australian notions of Asia were influenced by European perceptions of ‘the East’ that focused on or derived from the Middle East. And, just as Australians in that era adopted European perspectives and terminology, such as ‘the Orient,’ so also were they influenced by ‘Orientalist’ (in the Saidian sense) European preoccupations with and strategies or modes for representing the Orient and ‘orientals.’²

Besides presenting a broad overview of the ways that Australians have represented, encountered or created Asia musically, the article uses examples to interrogate or problematise

¹ The research is contained in eight published journal articles, book chapters or conference proceedings and ten conference papers. Broad historical coverage that partly develops concepts presented in this article is found in ‘Oriental Exoticism in 1920s Australian Popular Music,’ *Perfect Beat: The Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture* 3.3 (1997): 28–57; ‘Asian and Pacific Links,’ *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, ed. John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell (Sydney: Currency House, 2003) 52–56; and ‘From China Girl to the Butterfly Seer: Episodes in a History of Australian Representations of and Encounters with Asia,’ unpublished paper, 32nd National Conference of the Musicological Society of Australia, University of Newcastle, 26–28 Sep. 2009.

² Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1978).

the three strands of musical engagement, showing in particular how imagined, direct, and connective engagement are not always distinct but intersect and overlap. In other words, the boundaries between the categories I have set up are often blurred, pointing to a model that is characterised more by fluidity than rigidity. Also problematised is the notion of musical engagement as such, which needs to be comprehended as encompassing a diverse range of musical scenarios and differing types of encounter or degrees of interaction.

There is a large and growing body of literature dealing with the intersection of the West with its distant or alien 'other'—including an Asian and Pacific 'other'—through music in its diverse manifestations. This literature ranges across the fields of exoticism, musical modernity and postmodernity, world music and the music of migration, amongst others. However, the place of Australia within this West/'East' musical cross-over has received surprisingly little attention so far, despite the fact of Australia's geographical proximity to Asia and the Pacific.³ Many historians have noted the central role played by Asia in Australia's self-conceptualisation from the late nineteenth century, if not before. As Walker states, for example:

there was a ... belief that the likely global impact of developments in Asia could be more clearly discerned from Australia than from Europe. For good or ill, Australia's future seemed directly bound up with developments in Asia.⁴

Subsequently, a preoccupation with Asia was kept alive through Australia's racially constructed white socio-cultural identity, realised through politically and economically-based policy decisions from Federation on.⁵ A broad-ranging and inspiring work that considers this history through the lens of the arts is Alison Broinowski's *The Yellow Lady*.⁶ In relation to the performing arts, however, Australia's engagement with Asia through theatre has received more attention than music.⁷ In music, perhaps understandably, white Australian interaction with its indigenous 'other' has attracted greater interest.

While acknowledging the corpus of scholarship dealing with Western music and difference, it is not my intention to engage specifically with it here or with the theoretical concepts, paradigms and issues that are relevant to and underpin the broader discourse, such as orientalism, globalisation, cosmopolitanism, transculturalism and hybridity. Neither do I propose to consider the political or ideological implications of the various musical activities discussed, or their connections to colonialism, imperialism or post-colonialism. Rather, the present article serves simply to illustrate the scope and possibilities of a historical study of Australian musical engagement with its Asia-Pacific region that I am undertaking, as well as some of its complexities and problems, articulating a possible way forward for navigating these and a structure to shape my thinking on the topic.

³ Published scholarship in this area includes that of Cathy Falk (on Hmong music in Australia), Margaret Kartomi (Indonesian music in Australia) and Philip Hayward (Australian musical engagement with Papua-New Guinea) as well as writing about various Australian composers, music education, and world music. A notable forum taking a broad view of regional music has been *Perfect Beat*.

⁴ David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850–1939* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1999) 2.

⁵ Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 11.

⁶ Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (Melbourne: OUP, 1992).

⁷ For example, Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-cultural Transactions in Australasia* (Hampshire: Palgrave 2007).

'Imagined' Engagement

In colonial nineteenth-century and early- to mid-twentieth-century Australia, Asia was 'the Orient.' A musical 'Asia' was brought to Australians through representations of an exoticised and largely imagined Orient presented substantially on the popular stage via diverse music-theatre genres such as melodrama, pantomime, opera and operetta, as well as silent and (subsequently) sound film, and popular, light and serious classical music. Australian consumption of a constructed orientalised Asia formed part of a much larger-scale orientalist phenomenon transplanted to Australia from Europe and America. Productions of British or American musical comedies on oriental themes toured Australia regularly from around the turn of the century, feeding Australian fascination with oriental-style exotica. These included *The Geisha* (staged here in 1898), *A Trip to Chinatown* (1899), *San Toy* (1901-2), *A Chinese Honeymoon* (1902), *Darling of the Gods* (1904), *Kismet* (1912-3) and, after the First World War, *Chu Chin Chow* (1920-1), *Cairo* (1922) and *Desert Song* (1928). Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta, *The Mikado*, opened in Australia at Sydney's Theatre Royal in 1885—only eight months after the first performance in London—and fired local enthusiasm for things Japanese, picking up on a similar craze in Europe.⁸ The major orientalist works of European opera were also performed here, for example, *Aida* (1877, 1883, 1901) and *Madama Butterfly* (1910).

However, there was also much locally produced or adapted work for the popular stage featuring exotic oriental-type themes, with the most frequent settings being—as for imported shows—China, Japan and an Arabian Nights-style Middle East. The action in pantomime, melodrama, burlesque and other nineteenth-century popular stage genres was always underpinned by music, and comedic or burlesqued forms in particular gave great scope for bizarre 'oriental' musical effects, which undoubtedly also owed much to modes of representation originating elsewhere. A notable local Japan-themed production of the pre-Federation period was *Djin Djin the Japanese Bogie Man*, with music by Leon Caron. This featured Prince Eucalyptus and his henchman, Tom Wallaby, rescuing the Japanese Princess Iris from the evil demon Djin Djin.⁹ A reviewer noted that

a liberal use [was] made of the shrill chromatics of the piccolo, the harsh clang of the gong, the roll of the drums, and the blare of brass instruments, which give a strikingly realistic effect to the many weird and remarkable scenes presented.¹⁰

Such productions also often incorporated oriental-themed musical or dance items, such as the 'characteristic Chinese dance' and the vocal duet, *Pretty Little China Maid*, both featured in *The Mandarin*, an 1896 musical show, or 'Chinese comic opera,' created by Adelaide writer Harry Congreve Evans and musician John Dunn.¹¹

As noted above, however, the Orient was not the far-away place for Australians that it was for Europeans, or even Americans. Moreover, representations of 'the orient' in local stage productions and music performances were to some extent informed by Australians' direct experiences of 'Asia' in the form of Australia's large population of Chinese, who came here

⁸ Broinowski, *Yellow Lady*, 31.

⁹ Ian G. Dicker, *J.C.W.: A Short Biography of James Cassius Williamson* (Rose Bay, NSW: Elizabeth Tudor Press, 1974) 131.

¹⁰ *Adelaide Observer*, 28 Nov. 1896: 45.

¹¹ *Adelaide Observer*, 28 Nov. 1896: 45.

from the 1850s to seek their fortunes on the goldfields. As Love, Wang and Doggett have all recounted, many Australians had some familiarity with Chinese music, either from witnessing Chinese opera performances, street festivals or other Chinese musical activity or through the many, generally uncomplimentary reports and comments about the music that appeared in colonial newspapers.¹² There is some evidence that this direct or mediated exposure not only influenced how Chinese music was creatively represented on the popular stage but also how it was received, since audiences were able to compare and evaluate the cleverness of the representations or the sharpness of the parodies against what they knew about Chinese music, as the following quotes from reviews of, respectively, a burlesque pantomime of Aladdin and a one-string fiddle (a.k.a. Chinese fiddle) performance in a visiting blackface minstrel show make clear:

the incidental Chinese ballet, with Chinese music, will be recognised as a most accurate copy of an original which must be quite familiar to a good many persons in this city.¹³

Mr C. Harvey played a couple of solos on a single-stringed Chinese fiddle, and the melody he managed to evolve out of the instrument would hardly be conceivable by those who have only listened to the Celestial making night hideous with his outrages on[sic] sound.¹⁴

The complex relationship between imported and locally-produced musical orientalia in Australia and the way the former became embedded locally are exemplified in the late 1910s/early 1920s craze for ‘oriental fox trots’ and vocal waltzes in popular Tin Pan Alley style. As the abundant extant sheet music in these categories shows, some of these songs were written by Australian composers and lyricists. However, most of the song sheets available in Australia were American compositions that were re-published in Australia under licence to local publishers such as Allan’s, Albert’s and Cole’s. These songs were ‘plugged’ by local artists, who were often depicted on the sheet music cover; they were also often featured in local pantomimes and revues, as also advertised on the covers.

All aspects of these songs—titles, subject matter, lyrics, music and sheet music cover art—are highly conventionalised and the music contains formulaic devices, or ‘orientalisms,’ designed to contribute colour and an exotic effect. Songs with a ‘Chinese’ or Chinatown theme, such as *China Girl* or *Down in Chinatown*, exhibit gapped pentatonic scales, parallel fourths and fifths, and repeated stilted ‘click-clack’ rhythms.¹⁵ Songs in the ‘Araby’ category make conspicuous use of chromatically altered scales, drone-like sustained notes and simple rhythmic representations

¹² Harold Love, ‘Chinese Theatre on the Victorian Goldfields, 1858–1870,’ *Australasian Drama Studies* 3.2 (1985) 45–86; Anne Doggett, “‘Strains from Flowery Land’: Responses to Chinese Musical Activity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ballarat,’ *Context: Journal of Music Research* 33 (2008) 107–120; Wang Zheng Ting, *Chinese Music in Australia—Victoria: 1850s to mid 1990s* (Melbourne: Australia Asia Foundation, 1997).

¹³ *Argus*, 22 Feb. 1877: 5.

¹⁴ *West Australian*, 26 Apr. 1890: 3. Chinese fiddles were generally ‘one stringed fiddles,’ which were a Western novelty instrument; see Alison Rabinovici, ‘Bridging the Gap: Minstrel Origins of the Japanese Fiddle,’ unpublished paper, 32nd National Conference of the Musicological Society of Australia, University of Newcastle, 26–28 Sep. 2009.

¹⁵ Henry Halstead, *China Girl* (Sydney: J. Albert, c.1924); Joe Meyer, *Down in Chinatown* (Sydney: Allan & Co., c.1920).

(long-short-short) of ‘tom-tom’ drumming, galloping horses, or the loping gait of a camel, as in *Kismet* or *In Dreamy Araby*.¹⁶ However, these various musical devices were often applied indiscriminately in ‘oriental-style’ songs with little regard for consistency of representation.¹⁷ The musical language of these songs might derive from nineteenth-century or much earlier musical codings for different oriental locales, but it was further essentialised, genericised and mediated by the commercial imperatives of American Tin Pan Alley production and marketing processes.¹⁸

Australian-composed ‘oriental’ songs in Tin Pan Alley style from this period mainly use Chinese and Middle-Eastern themes, with titles including *My Chinee Girl*, *China Doll*, *I'll Spend a Week in Pekin*, *In Dreamy Araby*, *Arabia Land*, *I've Built a Desert Home for You* and *Sheba Queen of the Orient*.¹⁹ While still relentlessly formulaic, these Australian-composed songs tend to be more diluted than their American counterparts: the stereotypes are somewhat less strongly drawn and the musical orientalisms are less pervasive and exaggerated. To an even greater degree perhaps than Tin Pan Alley originating songs, these representations bear little relationship to any specific place, people or culture. The Orient as presented in this music is colourful, mysterious, strange and not strongly connected with a perceived reality. The exotic fantasy world that they depict is deliberately make-believe, playful and absurd—hence perhaps their common use in pantomime.

While this engagement with an ‘imagined’ Asia, ‘East,’ or ‘Orient’ had little to do with Asia as such, its powerfully persistent musical markers left traces in other forms of musical engagement and continue to do so, as elucidated further below. In the early twentieth century, Asian performers themselves engaged with this Western-constructed, orientalised and ‘othered’ Asia, especially when performing for European-Australian audiences. Thus, Chinese acts appearing on the Australian vaudeville stage in the 1910s and 1920s often played to audience expectations of what Chinese performance and music constituted by adopting various of the representational conventions familiar from the popular stage and popular music, thereby reinforcing notions of a strange, other-worldly exotic East. For example, the cover of the Australian-published Tin Pan Alley-composed oriental-style song, *Hong Kong Dream Girl*, announces that it was performed on their Australian tour by visiting vaudeville act, Sun Moon Lee and his fourteen oriental stars, which included a Chinese jazz band.²⁰ There is evidence,

¹⁶ Herschel Henlere, *Kismet* (Sydney: J. Albert, c.1920); Jack O'Hagan, *In Dreamy Araby* (Melbourne: Allan & Co., 1921).

¹⁷ See also Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), regarding the malleable associations of such style features. Locke’s list of ‘exotic’ style features (pp. 51–54) is equally applicable to the popular songs of this era.

¹⁸ For early uses and forms of exoticism in Western music, see Miriam K. Whaples, “‘Forreine Conceites and Wandring Devises’: The Exotic, the Erotic, and the Feminine,” *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998) 26–42; Locke, *Musical Exoticism* 87–149; Timothy D. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 43–72.

¹⁹ Vince Courtney, *My Chinee Girl* (Sydney: W.J. Deane, 1917); Alf Lawrence, *China Doll* (Adelaide: Jack Fewster, [1910s]); Morris Lutzen, *I'll Spend a Week in Pekin* (Melbourne: Dinsdales, n.d.); O'Hagan, *In Dreamy Araby*; Andrew MacCunn, *Arabia Land* (Sydney: Albert, 1920); Alf Lawrence, *I've Built a Desert Home for You (The Oasis of my Heart)* (Sydney: L.J. Collin, c.1922); Jack O'Hagan, *Sheba Queen of the Orient* (Melbourne: Allan & Co., 1922).

²⁰ Harry Barris, *Hong Kong Dream Girl* (Sydney: J. Albert, c.1924). See Wang, *Chinese Music in Australia*, 38–45, regarding the inclusion of oriental-style songs in the repertoire of the Oriental Orchestra, a 1930s Victorian amateur orchestra.

conversely, that members of the Chinese-Australian community attended performances by Chinese delineators, for example, that of famous American Chinese imitator and magician, Chung Ling Soo.²¹

'Direct' Engagement

Asian music—whether presented in Australia by visiting artists or Asian performers living here—has been a consistent part of the panorama of musical possibilities for Australian audiences since at least the 1980s. In the initial post-World War II period, visits by troupes or artists from Asia were exceptional events. An early such visit was in 1956 by The Classical Theatre of China, which presented what were probably the first performances of traditional Chinese opera seen in Australia since the nineteenth century.²² Indian dancer, Shivaram, introduced Australian audiences to Indian classical dance in tours sponsored by Louise Lightfoot in 1947, 1949–50 and 1957 while, from the late 1960s, many major Indian classical artists in various traditions performed here beginning with Nikhil Banerjee in 1968.²³ The renowned Peliatan Gamelan and Dancers, who came in 1971, was the first visiting Indonesian ensemble.²⁴ From the late 1970s, socio-political and cultural shifts in Australia, manifest in multicultural policies that provided financial and other forms of support or endorsement for 'ethnic arts,' the migration of many musicians from diverse Asian countries, flourishing community-based musical activity among Asia-originating immigrant groups and the emergence of world music as a Western marketing category, have all contributed to the enormous increase in opportunities for direct encounters with Asian musical and other performance traditions in Australia.

European-Australians were able to witness Asian music and theatre performances long before the mid-twentieth century, however. A substantial Asian presence in northern Australia in the nineteenth century, which included Japanese, Malays and Javanese involved in the pearl and sugar cane industries, created some opportunities for direct encounters with diverse Asian musical forms. As noted above, Chinese music was known to many European-Australians in the nineteenth century. Touring Chinese opera companies staged performances for the entertainment of local Chinese populations and some Europeans chose to attend these out of interest or curiosity, although the plots, costumes and acrobatics tended to be tolerated more than the music—described in one contemporary report as 'the perpetual din of gongs, tom-toms and other instruments of dissonance indescribable.'²⁵ Many more people had inadvertent

²¹ Sydney Morning Herald, 22 April 1909: 11. For further regarding the Australian appearances of Sun Moon Lee and Ching Ling Soo, see Aline Scott-Maxwell, 'Representation and Authenticity Intertwined: Early Australian Constructions of "China" through Popular Music and the Popular Stage,' *Instruments of Change: IASPM Australia-New Zealand Conference Proceedings, 24–26 November 2010, Monash University, Melbourne*, ed. Shane Homan, Graeme Smith and Jennifer Cattermole, ([Clayton, Vic.]: School of English, Communications and Performance Studies/School of Music–Conservatorium, Monash University, 2011) 120–21.

²² J.C. Williamson Program of the Classical Theatre of China: New Zealand & Australia 1956. Performances comprised selections from Peking Opera and some folk dances.

²³ In a review of his Melbourne Town Hall concert, Bannerjee is described as 'the first sitar virtuoso to visit Australia' (*Farrago*, 9 July 1968:16). The Louise Lightfoot Collection is held in the Monash University Music Archives.

²⁴ A somewhat anomalous predecessor is described in Margaret Kartomi, *The Gamelan Digul and the Prison Camp Musician who Built it: An Australian Link with the Indonesian Revolution* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2002).

²⁵ Bell's *Life in Victoria*, 25 Sep. 1858: 2.

exposure to the music and the complaints of nearby residents kept awake by it were reported in the press in particularly graphic and derogatory terms. Numerous Japanese acrobatic troupes toured Australia after the opening up of Japan to the West, the first arriving here in 1867. Besides juggling and balancing, their acts included *shamisen*-playing and, sometimes, excerpts from *kabuki* plays.²⁶ Such performances were viewed mainly as bizarre exotic spectacles—displays of difference.²⁷ It was not until half a century later that gradual signs of an acceptance or even appreciation of Asian music on its own terms begin to appear in the commentary in the form of, for example, 1930s newspaper reports of lectures on Javanese or Chinese music or, in 1941, when China and Australia had a common enemy, a Chinese exhibition and bamboo fair held in the Myer department store's Mural Lounge in Melbourne. This was opened by the Lord Mayor with the Chinese Consul-General in attendance. Associated events included a pageant of famous Chinese women arranged by Miss Strella Wilson and 'enacted by members of the Chinese community to oriental music by Misses Lorna and Alma Quong' and a performance by the visiting Chinese soccer team who will 'sing and play their national war song and give music on Chinese instruments.'²⁸

'Direct engagement,' as I refer to it, signifies a form of cross-cultural communication through music that is relatively unmediated: neither filtered by the lens of exoticised representation (as discussed above in relation to 'imagined' engagement) nor that of creative alteration or transformation (as discussed below in relation to 'connective' engagement). In fact, however, performances of Asian traditions presented in a Western concert or festival setting to a Western audience always involve some 'translation' or mediation, if only in their presentation. Further, stage performances of these forms are themselves a representation in the sense that they necessarily have to be accommodated to or are altered by the social space of the concert setting and the relationships and meanings it establishes. As Aubert states, this 'privileg[es] the aesthetic dimension ... while eluding what constitutes its common environment.'²⁹ Even in the present-day, this mediated or translated presentation, or representation, may incorporate elements of exoticisation—in stage dress, for example, or the textual content of printed programs or verbal introductions to acts or items—serving as a distancing strategy that is seen as a requirement for presentations of 'art' or, alternatively, as a means to better engage an audience via a process of othering. A small but growing number of Australians have been able to interact even more directly with Asian traditions by learning to perform them, in a process that is itself mediated by modes and bearers of transmission. Recordings are also a highly significant medium for consuming and thereby engaging with Asian musics. Arguably—and perhaps ironically—the absence in recordings of visual stimuli and other paraphernalia of

²⁶ David Sissons, 'Japanese Acrobatic Troupes Touring Australasia 1867–1900,' *Australasian Drama Studies* 35 (1999) 73–107.

²⁷ One exception is described as 'a form of cultural mediation' in Wang Zheng Ting and Anne Doggett, 'Chinese Music on the Victorian Goldfields,' *Victorian Historical Journal* 78.2 (2007) 178–79. This was a concert of Chinese music held in aid of the Mechanics' Institute, Ballarat, in 1863, at which a written explanation of the instruments and the musicians' names were provided to and reported by the *Star* newspaper (see Doggett, "'Strains from Flowery Land,'" 115).

²⁸ *Argus*, 30 May 1941: 6; 26 June 1941: 6.

²⁹ Laurent Aubert, *The Music of the Other: New Challenges for Ethnomusicology in a Global Age* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2007) 35. Regarding the concert-hall setting, see Christopher Small, 'Musicking: A Ritual in Social Space,' *Aflame with Music: 100 Years of Music at the University of Melbourne*, ed. Brenton Broadstock, et al. (Parkville, Vic.: Centre for Studies in Australian Music, University of Melbourne, 1996) 526 ff.

staged translation can make this form of 'disembodied,' decontextualised musical engagement a more direct and less mediated one.

Direct forms of musical engagement by Australians with Asia do not just involve traditional musics but also Asians performing Western musical forms. Even on the early twentieth century vaudeville stage, Chinese artists did not confine themselves to Chinese-referenced acts, as seen in the case of Sun Moon Lee above, or the two daughters of Long Tack Sam, a world-famous Chinese-American acrobat and magician, who toured with their father on the Australian Tivoli circuit numerous times, confounding audience expectations with their toe dancing and violin-playing.³⁰ Today, there is no longer novelty value in non-Europeans performing Western musical traditions, whether this comprises the middle-of-the-road popular ballads sung by Kamahl or the Bach violin sonatas played by Miwako Abe. Yet 'difference' can be significant in such circumstances, as in the case of Kamahl who, I have argued elsewhere, has played on his exotic otherness and his colour through various self-orientalising strategies.³¹ Asianness thus becomes a signifier when otherness or ethnicity is articulated or invoked in some way by the performer or performance.

The present-day performance and consumption of a mainstream Indonesian popular music style known as 'pop Indonesia' by Indonesian students in Australia presents a somewhat contrasting example, whereby a Western musical form has, in effect, become an Asian musical form and presents as such in an Australian context. The case study also illustrates some issues surrounding the notion of direct engagement. In the last fifteen to twenty years large numbers of young Indonesians have come to Australia for higher education. Mostly, they are temporary residents and they form a sub-set of the wider Indonesian community in that they are an in-group that socialises overwhelmingly with fellow students from Indonesia and has its own organisations and networks. Music is an important articulator of Indonesian student social life, along with other pop culture forms including film, multimedia and fashion. Music-making includes extensive band and song-writing activity, CD production, and participatory events such as 'battles of the bands.'³² Pop Indonesia employs what can broadly be described as the musical idiom of Western pop but with lyrics in Indonesian. Stylistically, it has a subtle Indonesian pop inflection characterised by a particular vocal timbral quality and clean melodic lines, metres and rhythms. But it is music that is not strongly marked by difference, that is, it is not conspicuously Indonesian for a non-Indonesian audience. It is Asian without otherness, and while it might appear to lack the 'authenticity' of other more overtly Indonesian forms, it can in fact be seen as authentic (rather than representational) in not mediating its Asianness in any way.

In fact, the audience for the students' music is almost exclusively other Indonesian students; there is little direct interaction through their music with a broader Australian, or even Indonesian, community—or perceived need for it. Nor is there much beyond superficial engagement with

³⁰ *Argus*, 30 Oct. 1928:16; Tivoli Theatre Program, 'Celebrity Vaudeville,' 1931.

³¹ Aline Scott-Maxwell, 'Otherness and Ordinariness, Blackness and Whiteness: Making Sense of Kamahl,' *Sounds and Selves: Selected Proceedings from the 2005 IASPM Australia/New Zealand Conference*, Wellington, ed. Ian Collinson and Mark Evans (Sydney: IASPM Australia New Zealand Branch and Perfect Beat Publications, 2007) 31–34.

³² See Aline Scott-Maxwell, 'Making Music to Feel at Home: The Indonesian Student Music Scene in Melbourne,' *Music on the Edge: Selected Papers from the 2007 IASPM Australia/New Zealand Conference*, Dunedin, ed. D. Bendrups (Dunedin: IASPM Australia / New Zealand, 2008) 149–54.

the Australian context that enables it. For example, a compilation compact disc of songs by student bands titled *Pengamen Melbourne* (2004) contains various references (in band names, track titles, and CD artwork) to specific sites or landmarks of the musicians' lived spaces and lives in Melbourne. But these also point to the nature of the relationship, which is more with a physical place than with its people or cultural aspects. Melbourne and the other Australian cities where the students live provide new, exotic sites for their activities and a frame for their social space, but these sites do not act in a transformative way on their music or music-making. Despite its Australian references, the music and other pop culture activities of the students are arguably more connected to Indonesia than to Australia. Direct engagement in these circumstances can therefore be said to be highly circumscribed.

Conversely, direct engagement with Asian music has often involved Australians abroad. Encounters with Asian music in Asia have largely been linked to tourism and, while direct, have often entailed extensive mediation, as is typical of much touristic performance. Asia did not become a major tourist destination until the 1970s. However, *Music Maker*, the journal of Australian professional musicians, reveals a diverse and surprisingly sustained direct engagement with Asia and Asian music via Australian musicians in Asia from the late 1930s. A principal focus of interest in the journal was the professional opportunities for dance band musicians in major Asian cities. Articles written by returned musicians provide tips and information for prospective new arrivals and details on bands and the hotels where they played (supplemented by occasional travellers' tales) as, for example, in a three part article titled 'The Orient and what it holds for the Musician.' by Pilot Officer W.R. Billy Heaton.³³ In addition, there are sometimes more broad-ranging articles about the music of various Asian countries, such as a 1938 contribution titled 'Music Life in Japan' which describes traditional Japanese music and instruments and the contexts in which they are performed, as well as the role of Western music in Japan.³⁴ After a hiatus during the war years, a regular column from 1947 was devoted to the popular music and dance scene in Malaya. This monthly column, which provides detailed information about artists, bands, venues and music events in various cities, treats music news from Malaya in a similar fashion to the news from another geographic neighbour, New Zealand. The connection with Malaya that is highlighted in the magazine is undoubtedly due partly to Australia's earlier war-time military activities there. But, if so, it is also a direct expression of Australia's identification and sense of belonging to the region arising from ties formed during the war.

These regional ties with Malaya are also expressed in a musical example that arises from direct encounter and comprises a form of connective engagement, while also carrying echoes of the imagined engagement of earlier decades. This is an Australian arrangement of the widely-known Malay popular song, *Terang Bulan*. It was recorded in 1952 by Sydney nightclub band leader, Paul Lombard, under the title *Malayan Moon* as a beguine, with lyrics in both English and Malay.³⁵ On the track, the opening bongo roll and Latin rhythm, 'tropical' flute flourishes and an overlayed Hawaiian (or perhaps quasi-*kroncong*) feel clash with an 'oriental'-

³³ *Music Maker*, 20 Jan. 1942: 14; 20 Feb. 1942: 9; 20 Mar. 1942: 9.

³⁴ John Kay, 'Music Life in Japan,' *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*, 11 Jan. 1938: 25–26.

³⁵ Columbia DO-3460. Magazine cuttings in 'Papers of Paul Lombard,' National Library of Australia, MS 9788.

sounding instrumental vamp, complete with exposed melodic minor intervals, chromaticisms and grotesquely exaggerated off beats, inserted between the two vocal renditions of the song. A Chinese gong sounds faintly in the coda fade out, providing a final reminder that this is 'oriental' music. *Terang Bulan* was subsequently published in a waltz time version by Allan's with a dedication to the 'members of the 7th, 8th and 9th divisions who were in Malaya,' who would undoubtedly have been familiar with the song.³⁶ The original Malay lyrics and a poetic English translation are reproduced in the inside cover. In the song, however, these lyrics are replaced (after the opening phrase 'Terang Bulan') with alternative English lyrics that reprise a theme familiar from Tin Pan Alley oriental-style songs, that of love remembered from across the seas.

'Connective' Engagement

The third strand of musical engagement with Asia focuses on the interventions of composers and performers—interventions which are themselves a form of mediation—in referencing or transforming Asian musics, musical ideas or non-musical materials by means of various processes. Transformative processes involve, as Born and Hesmondhalgh state, not only evoking the music that is referenced but creating a distance from it, incorporating and transcending it.³⁷ Somewhat different is the explicit, self-conscious hybridity of much Asian-inflected (and other) world music, which speaks to Bakhtin's concept of double-voiced, 'intentional hybridity'.³⁸ These and other types of intervention commence with some form of direct engagement with the source music or culture rather than a reliance on recycling the sorts of stereotypical representations that pervade oriental exotica.

With a few exceptions such as composers Percy Grainger and Alfred Hill, connective engagement has mostly been a post-World War II phenomenon, especially from the 1960s on, when a new openness to musical philosophies, concepts, and sounds beyond the European tradition emerged. In jazz there were some isolated Australian experiments with 'Eastern' music, such as Bruce Clark's 1963 recordings of Indian-influenced improvisations by his studio ensemble and Charlie Munro's more extensive 1967 experiments on the album, *Eastern Horizons*. The same year brought Indian musical sounds into the mainstream of Australian popular culture, partly through the release of the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. One Australian rock group, The Twilights, with sitar-playing guitarist Terry Britten, was quick to take up this trend and others subsequently followed.³⁹

In classical music, many Australian compositions from the 1960s and 1970s exhibit influences from various Asian musics, applied either literally or in more abstract, conceptual ways. Composers' knowledge of Asian music-cultures at this time was generally limited to what was offered on non-Western music in some university music departments, very brief

³⁶ Mal Hoffman and Frank Parker, *Terang Boelan (Malay Moon)* (Melbourne: Allan & Co., 1956).

³⁷ Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 15.

³⁸ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 358–60. Bakhtin distinguishes intentional hybridity from 'unintentional, unconscious hybridity,' which is characterised by unreflective borrowings and appropriations that evolve historically.

³⁹ John Whiteoak, *Playing Ad Lib: Improvisatory Music in Australia, 1836–1970* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1999) 271, 275–76.

visits to the countries in question, or available recordings and books and, whatever their expressed intentions, their use of textures, rhythms and tonal materials representational of Asia invoked, to a greater or lesser degree, an exotic otherness. In subsequent decades, the emphasis has tended to be on works which are more explicitly intercultural, sometimes using Asian instruments and often involving collaboration with Asian artists, whether resident in Australia or in Asia. Asian-Australian composers such as Julian Yu or Liza Lim have also produced intercultural work in diverse styles and collaborative contexts. In jazz, there have been various intercultural collaborative experiments with Asian artists, for example, projects of the Australian Art Orchestra with South Indian or Balinese musicians, or the current Korean *pansori* (traditional vocal genre) collaboration, Chiri.⁴⁰

The ‘transformations’ or applications of Asian music involved in connective engagement—whether these takes the form of arrangement, adaptation, selective or wholesale deployment of musical, conceptual or thematic ideas, or something else—often differ from the musical outcomes of imagined engagement or direct engagement by degree rather than in substance.⁴¹ A recent new work, *Harvest of Endurance*, premiered in Brisbane in 2010, exemplifies the way that these different types of engagement can overlap to form a continuum.⁴² This collective work alternates twenty short compositions commissioned from seventeen different composers with spoken narrative, all inspired by episodes in a fifty-metre long scroll that illustrates two centuries of Chinese contact with Australia. The compositions are in a diversity of styles and also involve vastly different approaches to the representation of China in music. In some, Chinese allusions are confined to a sung text. Others employ textural devices or more explicit Chinese musical references, such as use of particular timbres or instruments, including percussion. Two feature conspicuous use of stereotypical musical devices such as blatant pentatonicisms, repeated open chords, and clashing Chinese gongs that hark back to types of representation and the ‘imagined’ engagement of a previous era. Yet another is played by Chinese-Australian *sheng* player, Wang Zheng Ting, who foregrounds both his virtuosic skill as an exponent of this traditional Chinese instrument and his subtle approach to creatively extending the instrument’s musical possibilities and repertoire.

Australian musicians’ and audiences’ enthusiasm for creative experimentation with Asian musics can be linked not just to wide acceptance of and support for so-called multicultural arts in Australia but to one of the musical outcomes of globalisation, that is, the broader world music movement’s take-up of musics from beyond the Western cultural sphere and its privileging of hybrid fusions that ‘blend’ vernacular forms from Asia or elsewhere with Western music, whether popular music, jazz or sometimes a more ‘classical’ style. This has provided opportunities for Australian exponents of particular Asian musical traditions who are prepared to creatively adapt their musical skills and knowledge to new, often improvisational, collaborative contexts. *Tabla* player Bobby Singh, for example, has been involved in diverse collaborative projects, including with electronic artists (The Bird), Slava Grigoryan (classical guitar) and, most recently, with blues

⁴⁰ *Into the Fire* (1996) and *Theft of Sita* (2000). Chiri’s membership is Bae Il Dong, Scott Tinkler (trumpet) and Stephen Barker (drums).

⁴¹ See also Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism* 214 ff, 248. Locke, similarly, frequently qualifies his designated categories of transcultural composing, submerged exoticism and overt exoticism.

⁴² Curated by Nicholas Ng for ‘Encounters: Musical Meetings between Australia and China,’ Queensland Conservatorium, and performed by The Golden Orb and The Song Company, 9 May 2010.

guitarist Jeff Lang and Malian kora player, Mamadou Diabate as the group Djan Djan, which won the 2010 ARIA world music award. For other musicians, world music's popularity and cachet has allowed them to extend their stylistically Western-based musical practice by exploring new traditions, instruments and musical influences. Sometimes, this has also involved these musicians engaging with their cultural roots in a way that is personally meaningful and contributes to identity construction—an outcome of Australia's post-war ethnically diverse population. Two examples of Indonesian-inflected Australian world music demonstrate both of these trends.⁴³ They also exhibit differing approaches to connective musical engagement that, in the first case, projects an exoticism evocative of an imagined engagement with Asia.

Genggong is a Sydney-based world music band that blends rock music with Indonesian and Balkan instruments and sounds. It was formed by singer/guitarist/composer Sawung Jabo, a well-known Indonesian musician who is based in Australia but maintains a parallel career in Indonesia. Its other three members comprise Indonesian-Australian, drummer Reza Achman, and two non-Indonesian Australians: Ron Reeves, a professional percussionist who has spent many years in Indonesia and is a highly regarded player of West Javanese drums, and Kim Sanders, a Balkan music specialist who plays various Bulgarian, Turkish wind instruments or saxophone. The band foregrounds energetic and intricate rhythms and a strong beat for dancing, but Jabo provides the main focus for the band with his compelling stage presence and vocals and his driving guitar-playing.

The songs that Genggong performs are either arrangements of traditional tunes from various Indonesian regional cultures or original compositions that draw on regional music traditions. In Indonesia, Jabo is best known for his expressive, passionate, socially engaged songs. In Genggong, his intense, often raw vocal style is retained, but lyrics are minimal and song words function principally as sounds. In some songs, for example, the vocal line consists primarily of repeated rhythmic riffs or patterns using the onomatopaeic syllabic vocalisations of instrumental sounds that are part of traditional music practice in Indonesia. Equally important as the music in Genggong is the presentation, which includes dance and movement, mask work, modified traditional dress, textiles and other Indonesian iconography. In Australia, in the absence of an audience who can understand Jabo's socially and politically-charged songs or identify with the issues he cares about, lyrics and semantic content have been discarded for other aural and visual carriers of meaning—sounds, gestures, props, and instruments—and the cumulative effect of abundant markers of Indonesianness in the performance and presentation is almost exaggeratedly, excessively 'other.' Individually, the various elements are all rich in signification, not least due to their regional references, but in Australia, they collapse into a generalised, Indonesian-flavoured exotica in which 'difference' tends to be the dominant impression.

Singer Ria Soemardjo has a part-Indonesian background (her father is Javanese and her mother Anglo-Australian) and she has been exploring her Javanese heritage through her music. Although Javanese music was a part of the soundscape of Ria's family home when she was young, as a teenager she turned away from all things Indonesian and expressed

⁴³ This section of the article is drawn from a paper presented at the international workshop, Cultural Performance in Post-New Order Indonesia: Structures, Scenes, Meanings (Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, 28 June–1 July 2010), to be published as 'Creating Indonesia in Australia: Bridges, Communities and Identites through Music,' *Musicology Australia* (in press).

herself musically in other ways. In fact, it was her experience of singing Bulgarian music in the Melbourne Bulgarian Women's Choir that first brought her to Javanese vocal music. She subsequently studied the Javanese female *sindhen* vocal tradition in Surakarta, and is the solo vocalist (*pesindhen*) in the Melbourne Community Gamelan ensemble, as well as a frequent guest *pesindhen* in the gamelan and wayang performances of other groups. However, she has also moved beyond the strictly Javanese music sphere and into world music, extending her studies to North Indian vocal music, developing her own personal Javanese-influenced vocal style and writing her own songs. She collaborates with a range of other world music practitioners who perform together in varying combinations and have expertise in different traditions, such as Indian music, Middle Eastern and Japanese music. They include the members of her current group, Fine Blue Thread, a trio that includes—besides voice—tuned *tabla*, light hand percussion and gut-stringed baroque cello.

The music of this group can be categorised as world music. However, it is in a chamber rather than 'world beat' style and, with its very spacious textures and a delicately meditative quality, has an almost classical sensibility. Ria's vocals, in particular, have a rhythmic looseness, a floating improvisatory quality, an absence of dynamic change and a sometimes almost instrumental colour, all of which subtly connects them to the Javanese *macapat* and *sindhen* traditions that she brings to her music. A less subtle influence is evident in the extensive use of Javanese pentatonic scales, especially *pelog*-type scales, and Ria's preference for singing seated on the floor alongside the other musicians rather than positioned front of stage. Sometimes she sings passages in Javanese from traditional *macapat* songs, but these arise almost organically out of her original English-language songs and are not clearly distinguished as traditional material for the audience. 'I have a sense that these old songs live inside of me,' she says. 'I've lived in Melbourne all my life, but I feel that my connection to Javanese music has shaped my whole approach to my artistic practice.'⁴⁴ Yet Ria's music does not conspicuously or self-consciously flag its cultural otherness—rather, its understated character gives it the authenticity that audiences seek and reinforces its integrity.

Conclusion

Australia's non-Indigenous musical history has been largely shaped by the transplanted ideas, practices and artefacts which are the corollary of over two hundred years of European settlement. Yet the unique circumstances of Australia's geographical positioning within an Asia-Pacific global sphere that is itself culturally diverse has been an ever-increasing shaping force. This article eschews comparison of the Australian experience of musical engagement with Asia to that of either Europe or America. Rather, it has mapped selected examples over the trajectory of Australia's distinctively different cultural history in order to make sense of Asia-Australia engagement on its own terms. Arguably, it offers a starting point for the categorisation of the various forms of musical engagement that are specific to the Australian context, as defined. But it also reveals the complexities and problems inherent in such a project, both in terms of the perplexing diversity of data that needs to be deployed and the multiple approaches required to interpret this data.

⁴⁴ Ria Soemardo, unpublished lecture-demonstration script for Indonesia Calling: Indonesian Arts Today, Asialink Annual Arts Public Forum, 18 July 2008.

Whilst acknowledging that fixed categories can only partially accommodate the complexities and continuum of variations, or ‘in-betweens,’ that belong to the history of the diverse cultural constructions and forms of engagement addressed in this article, I proposed, nevertheless, that this history can be usefully considered in terms of three categories which are also tools for interpretation, namely, ‘imagined,’ ‘direct’ and ‘connective.’ Engagement with an ‘imagined’ Asia (or ‘The East,’ ‘The Orient,’ ‘Araby’ or ‘The Pacific’) was often creative—or not so creative—exoticised othering, which drew on recycled modes of musical representation and was generally presented as novelty entertainment while also expressing, at various times, curiosity, fear, loathing, ridicule and, very occasionally, admiration. ‘Direct’ engagement, whilst necessarily mediated, has tended to engender appreciation and understanding and enhanced cross-cultural exchange between Asia and Australia—at least from the mid-twentieth century. The creative outcomes of ‘connective’ engagement have been far more complex, especially through post-1980s entwinement with world music in Australia. It should be noted, however, that the referencing of other musical practices—whether via imagined or connective engagement—has always been intrinsic to the Western tradition of music-making and composition.

The examples and case studies showed, amongst other things, that the ‘strands’ or narratives of engagement are not necessarily distinct, with episodes or occurrences of musical engagement often exhibiting characteristics of more than one strand. Notably, the ‘astonishing resilience of exoticisms’⁴⁵ is evident in recent instances of direct engagement and connective engagement, although at times deployed in highly self-conscious or ironic ways. In relation to this, it should be recognised that much performance or composition in these categories continues to hold some exotic appeal for the mainly European-Australian middle-class audiences that consume it. Other instances of crossover between the categories directly reflect Australia’s in-between status as a ‘Western’ country situated in Asia, whether these instances arise, for example, from direct contact with Chinese and Chinese performance in the nineteenth century, the presence of Australian musicians and soldiers in Asia in the mid decades of the twentieth century, or the outcomes of post-war mass migration.

The rich field of Australian-based or derived music sketched out in this article points to many avenues for in-depth research. Exploring these avenues will either reinforce the conceptual framework provided here, require its modification, or perhaps reveal a more fruitful approach. One area that my further research must address is how the reception of the music discussed supports or extends the types of reading presented in the article. Finally, the examples of Australian musical engagement with Asia discussed above represent only part of what a comprehensive study must address. As flagged in the introduction to the article, musical engagement with Australia’s immediate northern neighbour, Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific—whether the imagined Pacific of the ‘South Seas’ and the palm-tree island idylls of Hawaiian-style song, or the diverse presentations of or interactions with the music of Maori and other Polynesian and Melanesian musics and cultures—provides the other part of the story. Extending this study to musical interactions with Australia’s Pacific region will potentially affirm and also provide a fascinating counterpoint to an account of Australia’s history of musical representations, encounters and connections with Asia.

⁴⁵ Born and Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and its Others*, 19.