Research Report:
Companion to Music and Dance in Australia

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The Companion to Music and Dance in Australia, the second volume in the Currency Press series of Companions to the Performing Arts and Media in Australia, is currently scheduled for publication in September 1998. The launch of the volume will mark the completion of what is undoubtedly the broadest study of music or dance in Australia ever undertaken. The following report documents aspects of research undertaken for this project and highlights some of the special features of the project. Given the nature of this journal, this report focuses on the music rather than the dance content of the *Companion*.

In 1995 we were approached by Currency Press, on the recommendation of Richard Vella, to come up with a concept for a *Companion to Music and Dance* that would reflect a contemporary and progressive view of the topic. Not the least of the obstacles we faced at that time was the existence of a well advanced and prestigious *Oxford Companion to Australian Music* project.[1]

Our first task was to try to gauge contemporary and emerging perceptions of what is significant about music and dance in post-Mabo, multicultural Australia. As part of this process we re-examined, amongst other things, much of the discourse on Australian music historiography that followed in the wake of Richard Crawford's 'Musicology and the Australian Bicentenary: a Methodological Prospectus from an American Viewpoint.'[2] We were also informed by our combined familiarity with current discourse in the fields of ethnomusicology and popular music studies, and discussions with progressive Australian music scholars such as Graeme Smith, Bruce Johnson, Philip Hayward, and ethnomusicologist Adrian McNeil.

We concluded that there are presently two principal ways of understanding music in Australia. One is the tenuously surviving perception of music as centred on the conservatorium tradition and a historical parade of famous composers, performers, and works of high art. The other is the emerging perspective of past and present Australian music-making (composing, performing, teaching etc.) as various fields of cultural activity, action or 'doing.' This perspective no longer automatically accepts that one sort of cultural 'doing' is necessarily more significant than another. It is reflected in such things as the proliferation of multi-disciplinary music studies, an immense expansion of Australian cultural, popular music and media studies, a similar expansion of interest in music and technology, and growing mainstream Australian interest in the music of non-mainstream Australian cultural groupings. An early indicator of this paradigm shift was the 1992 commencement of the Sydney-based journal *Perfect Beat: The Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture*. A more recent (and quite remarkable) indicator

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[1] Published Melbourne: OUP, 1997.
[2] *Musicology Australia* 8 (1985): 2–13.

are recent issues of *Sounds Australian* such as that on 'Cross-fertilisation: Influential Intersections.'[3] The popular performer content of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Music* provides a further striking example.

The concept we offered Currency Press at the end of 1995 was that of a comprehensive, end-of-millennium survey of those things that have shaped and are shaping our cultural identity in respect to music and dance. Instead of being an attempt to define 'Australian music,' it would represent a celebration of place, that is, of music and dance in Australia. The boldest feature of the proposal was to abandon the traditional biographical or 'who's who' approach and, instead, produce a volume composed entirely of articles on music and dance as cultural activity. Our aim was to generate a vast mosaic of entries that would reveal for the first time the rich complexity of our music and dance culture.

We began our work on the project by constructing a simple chart which proportioned music (and dance) in Australia according to some fairly arbitrary working categories such as art, popular, Aboriginal and Islander, transplanted cultures, and infrastructure. To these we added 'cross-category' topics, that is, entries such as 'Music and Disability,' or 'Music and Politics,' that span various of the other categories.

We used two different approaches to generate a preliminary list of topics. One approach involved intense brainstorming to devise a comprehensive 'wish list' of entries based on a combination of imagination, speculation and our combined existing knowledge of music and dance in Australia. This exercise was in fact extremely valuable, yielding many topics which have never been written about before in the Australian context.

Our other approach was to conceive of past and present Australian music-making and dancing (as represented in our chart) in terms of three very broad themes selected to encompass both the receding and the emerging perspectives of music and dance in Australia. These are:
1. Music-making (and dancing)
2. Identity and sense of place (music-making and dancing as expressions of cultural identity and place)
3. Product (the infrastructure that supports music-making and dancing).

We then divided these themes into what we referred to as 'theme subcategories,' placing as much emphasis as possible on 'action' or 'process' sub-themes. For example, we conceptualised the topic 'education' in terms of the ongoing action and process of educating. Examples of theme subcategories are shown in Table 1.

These theme-subcategories were intended principally as an aid to conceptualising the final contents list. The important thing was that they allowed us to think across such boundaries as art or popular. However, we also found that theme sub-categories such as 'Improvising' or 'Composing' could be used as headings for major subject entries in the volume. The notion of composing, for example, crosses over social and cultural boundaries and embraces diverse genres such as orchestral composing and country song-writing. John Whiteoak's existing study of the history of improvisatory music in Australia (due for publication in August 1998)[4] crosses over art and popular music in a similar way.

In the next stage we took each theme sub-category and listed the type of subject topics suggested by each. The first theme sub-category mentioned above, Accompanying, suggested the topics shown in Table 2, and many more. This process created far too many topics for the volume. However, in addition to its value in the creation and selection of topics, it indicated the areas that needed to be covered by writers of individual entries.

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[3] No. 50 (1997).

[4] 'Improvisatory Musical Practice in Australia 1836–1970: A Melbourne Perspective,' PhD La Trobe University, 1993. This dissertation is to be published by Currency Press under the title *Playing Ad Lib: Improvisatory Music in Australia 1836–1970, A Melbourne Perspective.* See Research Report, *Context* 11 (Winter 1996): 54–55.

Table 1: Theme subcategories

MAKING	IDENTITY/PLACE	PRODUCT
Accompanying	Aboriginality	Archiving
Arranging	Decontextualisation	Broadcasting
Choreographing	Diversity	Celebrating
Collaborating	Ethnicity	Codifying
Concertising	Expatriatism	Competing
Competing	Exporting	Conserving
Composing	Gender	Criticising
Conducting	Globalisation	Documenting
Educating	Importing	Entrepeneurs
Exploring	Nationalism	Festivals
Improvising	Regionalism	Funding
Innovating	Politics	Institutions
Performing	Syncretism	Instrument-making
Researching	Tradition	Marketing
Touring	Transplantation	Promoting
Writing	Urbanisation	Recording

Table 2: Topics

1/1.1   Accompaniment: concert hall
1/1.2   Accompanists: concert hall
1/1.3   Accompaniment: ballet
1/1.4   Accompaniment: opera
1/1.5   Accompaniment: ballet and opera rehearsals
1/1.6   Accompaniment: popular entertainments (cinema, melodrama, variety, circus etc.)
1/1.7   Accompanists: popular stage or silent cinema
1/1.8   Accompaniment: parlor music
1/1.9   Accompaniment: vamping
1/1.10   Dance music (social): bands/orchestras
1/1.11   Dance music (social): genres
1/1.12   Dance music (social): performance practice
1/1.13   Dance music (social): crooners
1/1.14   Dance music (social): transplanted
1/1.16   Dance music: composers (all genres)

With a list of around 500 topics, we entered a more difficult phase of the project. To make the volume as integrated as possible, we decided that it was necessary to write detailed descriptions or 'briefs' for each entry. These also functioned to demonstrate to prospective writers and the publisher that the entry topics were viable, to show the particular perspective we required on a topic, to indicate sub-topics and issues that needed to be mentioned, and to avoid overlap with related entries. In order to write these briefs and discuss their content authoritatively with prospective writers, we had to undertake preliminary research on almost every entry topic listed. After many months the completed list with accompanying briefs was presented to the publisher for approval and it was also sent to various music and dance advisers for criticism and/or suggestions. Unlike most projects of this type, we did not establish a structure or panel

of formal advisers. Instead, we sought advice and feedback from as many informed individuals as possible. Of these, several became key advisers for areas such as transplanted cultures and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and dance. All those who advised us are fully acknowledged in the volume.

Little did we realise—at this stage—that the most arduous research and difficult task still lay ahead, namely, that of locating several hundred writers, convincing them to write, providing research and editing support, and getting them to deliver. It is relatively easy to identify and describe a worthy topic (such as Rom music and dance), but in many cases there is simply no one in the Australian academic field with sufficient knowledge to write the entry. Consequently, we often had to commission a non-academic writer and provide them with various levels of writing and research support. Finding writers for numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and dance entries was difficult, especially as we wanted to include some indigenous writers or co-writers. However, the primary challenge was to get contributions on the music and dance of sixty odd migrant communities. This task fell principally to ethnomusicologist Aline Scott-Maxwell, but neither field could have been covered sucessfully without the expertise and networks of our specialist advisers.

The outcome of the project will be a 650,000 word alphabetically sequenced volume with a comprehensive index which will provide access to individuals, ensembles, works, and institutions, as well as other subjects. The major feature of the volume will be the sheer breadth of its coverage, made possible by its underlying cultural and non-biographical orientation. Many entries are basd on specific genres, which we view not just as types of music or dance to be described but as entire fields of cultural activity, each with its own sociology and unique issues. Jazz, for example, has a main overview article and over thirty sub-genre entries including about 8000 words on pre-jazz African-American influence. These entries seek to describe the music as it is performed in the Australian context.

In the case of cross-category entries such as 'Gender and Music,' contributors were asked to write across boundaries such as art and popular to the best of their knowledge, ability, and resources. We have also created entries that underline relationships between music and dance, such as 'Music and Dance Collaboration,' 'Rave Culture,' or Ballet Class Music.' The largest and most diverse category of entries is that of the infrastructure supporting music and dance activity. This category includes numerous perspectives on education, cyberspace, professions, industry, research, collections, and sites for performance. Some idea of the style and quality of presentation, use of illustrations, and depth of cross-referencing and indexing can be gained by browsing through Currency's *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (published 1995).

The project has been directed towards a volume that will change perceptions about music and dance in Australia and perhaps contribute to redefining the function of a 'companion' to the arts. However, the cultural approach we have taken is also intended to complement the invaluable biographical content of works such as the *Oxford Companion to Australian Music*. The published volume will also be a treasure trove of topics for prospective post-graduates. Some of our writers have already claimed their topics as personal research fields, and two tertiary courses have been developed on the basic of original research for the *Companion*.