

shyly incurious and unobservant' (p. 53). Powell's considered analysis is one of the unique features of the book, elevating it from a cautious retelling of Britten's life to a warm and interesting portrait of the composer.

Neil Powell's *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music* serves as an introduction to the composer for those interested in Britten but with little prior knowledge of his life. Paul Kildea, on the other hand, in *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, offers a thorough exploration of Britten's life and music, making for fascinating but sometimes exhausting reading. Both, however, are well worth the collective 1,200-page effort, and provide much needed revised perspectives on the composer.

### **Allan Marett, Linda Barwick and Lysbeth Ford.**

#### ***For the Sake of a Song: Wangga Songmen and their Repertories***

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#### **Reviewed by Myfany Turpin**

*For the Sake of a Song: Wangga Songmen and their Repertories* documents an Indigenous ceremonial genre of the Daly River region in northern Australia, called *wangga*. The book discusses its history, music and song texts, and assembles six sets (repertories) of *wangga*, totalling some 150 songs recorded over a fifty-year period. The publication is a result of twenty-two years of fieldwork by Allan Marett and his collaboration with musicologist Linda Barwick and linguist Lysbeth Ford. To date, there is no comparable publication of an entire Aboriginal performance genre analysed in such detail with accompanying audio (which is presented on the University of Sydney website along with the text: [wangga.library.usyd.edu.au](http://wangga.library.usyd.edu.au)). *For the Sake of a Song* can be seen as a reference work that underpins Marett's earlier book *Songs, Dreamings and Ghosts*.<sup>1</sup> *For the Sake of a Song*, however, has value not only to the people of north-western Australia, but to the community at large. For the people of north-western Australia, it is an astounding record of their history, law, culture and identity, and will no doubt play a significant role in their cultural survival.

In Chapter One, 'A Social History of *Wangga*,' we learn that *wangga* is performed at circumcision and mortuary ceremonies, which are major social events in the region. *Wangga* is performed to accompany dance and, like most Aboriginal music, it is primarily vocal. It is sung by two or more songmen who accompany themselves with clapsticks, and who are accompanied by a male didjeridu player. Songmen are not just talented musicians, but individuals who have inherited particular *wangga* repertories. The *wangga* documented in this book were created in the advent of large community societies in the 1950s to assist social cohesion (p. 37). These *wangga* were part of a new tripartite system of ceremonial reciprocity and they varied from their earlier forms, which was in line with the changing social situation.

<sup>1</sup> Allan Marett, *Songs, Dreamings and Ghosts: the Wangga of North Australia* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).

For example, it was no longer necessary to import singing groups from outside the community, as the tripartite system drew upon the clans residing within the community. There is a long history of learning *wangga* from recordings, which, as the authors point out, aligns with traditional methods of song transmission. In the Daly River region, as in much of Aboriginal Australia, ancestors are the original source of all songs, and recorded voices are placed in the same category as the ghostly voices of ancestors singing in dreams (p. 36). Despite this, the future of the *wangga* ceremonial system is tenuous, as modern performances merge formerly distinct traditional repertoires (p. 42).

Chapter Two, 'The Music and Dance Conventions of *Wangga*', examines various elements of the *wangga* music in detail, including the rhythm and instrumentation. Each *wangga* song belongs to a particular repertoire. This chapter demonstrates how songs within a repertoire share particular musical and textual features but are still distinct from one another in more subtle ways. According to the authors, a song in the *wangga* genre consists of alternating instrumental and vocal sections (diagrammed clearly on p. 46). The length and complexity of these contrasting sections vary depending on the songmen. Underpinning the rhythmic differences between songs is the accompanying dance, illustrated in many colour photographs throughout the book and website. Dancers synchronise their movements with the clapstick beating, thus treading 'in the footsteps of the ancestral ghosts summoned by the power of song' (p. 49).

Chapter Three, 'The Language of *Wangga*', examines the grammar and phonology of the five languages encountered in the lyrics of *wangga*. Given that the five languages are no longer viable, these songs will no doubt play an important role in language revival, if they do not already (p. 65). In comparison to speech, the song texts employ greater grammatical complexity. This is possibly because songs, unlike speech, 'do not just come out cold ... but are polished and elaborated through numerous retellings', as noted by linguist Nicholas Evans.<sup>2</sup>

Like many song genres, *wangga* also makes use of vocables, which the authors refer to as 'song words'. These 'song words' do not have any lexical meaning and are used for their sound alone. The authors note that most 'song words' have two syllables, each consisting of a consonant plus vowel (p. 69). When sung, certain consonants in 'song words' can lenite (e.g. 'dj' → 'y'), depending on the position in the breath-phrase. Perhaps this is a factor in the choice of consonants in 'song words'.


Unlike the variation found in vocables (such as 'dj'~'y'), allophonic variation of the spoken languages is represented in the lyrics. For example, the dative morpheme *-nung* is written as *-nyung* following a word like *bangany* (meaning 'song'), as it assimilates to the same place of articulation as the preceding nasal consonant, 'ny'. While this representation is useful to people unfamiliar with the sounds of the languages, it could cause confusion for people literate in these languages. For example, if one were to look up what is written here as *-ve*, one would have to know that it is an allophone of *-be* (meaning to 'go'). The phoneme tables provided in this book (3.1, 3.3, 3.6) are thus useful to help identify variations of standard spellings.

Chapters Four to Nine are devoted to each of the six *wangga* repertoires, for which the accompanying web-based audio is essential. The program notes to each song greatly enhance appreciation and understanding of this highly emotive music. For example, in song two (track

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Evans, *Dying Words: Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell Us* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2009) 185.

two on accompanying CD) the tense vocal timbre commences on a sustained note a seventh above the didjeridu drone. Then, with a brief melisma, the voice descends to the tonic and fades out. 'What am I?' the songman is singing. The authors draw our attention to the ambiguity here and ask 'Whose voice are we hearing: the voice of the ghost or the voice of the man?' (p. 100). Through this commentary, which is based on detailed knowledge of both the song (text and music) and social context, we are privy to how songs evoke a multitude of meanings, such as the actions of the ghost, the singer, their particular kinship relationship, and the nature of this kin relationship in Daly River societies.

Chapter Four presents the twenty-two songs (twenty-six song items, or tracks) of the *Barrtjap* repertory. A feature of this repertory is the use of a coda consisting of didjeridu mouth syllables. The use of mouth syllables is similar to the use of syllables for rhythmic patterns encountered in singing traditions from other parts of the world (such as 'Ta Titi': ). Another feature of this repertory is the high proportion of vocables as well as long phrase-final nasals, which I find highly emotive. A particularly good example of these long phrase-final nasals is the end of the first text phrase of song four (track five; p. 105).

Chapter Five presents the nine songs (twenty-two song items) of Jimmy Muluk, described as the virtuoso of *wangga* (p. 155). This repertory has a high proportion of 'ghost language' (i.e. words with an unknown meaning), possibly because it is the oldest repertory. Many of these songs are about particular ancestors, such as the crow—whose call is performed by the dancers—as well as buffalo, seagull, and crab. The subject of a song is not always explicitly stated. Contextual knowledge, however, can reveal the subject instead. For example, song six refers to the dancer's 'number four pose' (p. 178), for which one foot is crossed over the knee of the other leg. This stance is adopted by spirits (possibly because of its association with resting) and is referenced in songs throughout the repertories. Conversely, song seven (track thirteen) refers to a stance associated with one who receives songs while lying with one's head resting on one elbow. A subsequent version of this song (track fourteen) switches to the perspective of the song-giver by replacing the stance term with a word connoting lameness, which is a condition associated with the dead. The detailed musical analysis in this chapter shows how a songman such as Muluk draws on a large set of rhythmic modes, juxtaposing these in the contrasting vocal and instrumental sections of a *wangga* song.

Chapter Six presents the eleven songs (fourteen song items) of Billy Mandji. Few of his songs are in his own language, as he lived outside his country and thus was not able to receive songs from his ancestors. Instead, most of his songs are in ghost language. The authors suggest that in a multi-lingual community such as Belyuen this 'neutral' language may facilitate social cohesion because the texts do not privilege any one group (p. 234). Interestingly, the musical structure of many of his songs resembles those of his own language group (the Ma-yawa repertory discussed in Chapter Nine). By bringing musical and social knowledge together, Billy's artistic strategies for negotiating new locations and circumstances becomes apparent. This chapter, like much of the book, details the close relationship between dance and song. For example, in song two we read how the vocables of text phrase three signal for the dancers to come out. It also demonstrates how idiomatic gems of language can be found in song. In song six we encounter a phrase meaning 'all night long,' which uses imagery based on the body—literally translated as 'buttock-foot', i.e. 'from top to bottom' (p. 228).

Chapter Seven presents the sixteen songs (twenty-nine song items) of Bobby Lumbadju Lane. This is the most diverse repertory discussed in this book. The first song, 'Rak Badjalarr', is perhaps the repertory's signature song. It is fascinating to hear six versions of 'Rak Badjalarr', recorded over a forty-seven year time span. The fourth version of this song is particularly spectacular, with its stirring vocals in synchrony with the didjeridu rhythms. The association of *wangga* with ancestors and the dead is powerfully demonstrated with song five, which was composed in reaction to the death of a renowned songman (p. 259). From song six, we learn that songs, as symbols of places and thus kin, are in relationship to one another; and that musical similarities between songs reflect this close relationship (p. 260). In this chapter, as throughout much of the book, the authors reflect on associations that a song can evoke. For example, song seven, 'Tjerrendet', refers to a particular songman. The authors write, 'Given that *wangga* are so often concerned with the activities of song-giving ghosts, we cannot but wonder whether this song in fact describes a visitation of Tjerrendet's ghost to the songman, Lambudju, whose turn it is now to sing the song.' (p. 261). The authors' musings on associations with this song, which are based on a thorough understanding of the local networks of meaning, highlights the productive symbolism inherent in many Aboriginal songs.

Chapter Eight presents twenty-six songs (thirty-nine song items) of the Walakandha repertory—the largest and most frequently performed repertory today. Walakandha is the word for the ancestral dead of the Marri Tjavin speaking people, the theme of many of these songs (p. 281). Many songs refer to tide, which is 'a metaphor for the cycle of birth, death and rebirth' (p. 309). This repertory has the highest proportion of words from everyday speech. The songmen who have contributed to this repertory span generations, and the long timespan enables us to clearly track its development. The authors distinguish four time periods within the era of the Walakandha repertory where different musical styles can be observed. The period 1986–96 is described as the 'golden age' of the Walakandha repertory, with a large number of composers and some distinctive musical characteristics such as the highly melismatic singing of the final text phrase (p. 197). While there are fewer composers and singers in the later decades of this genre, the songs of Stan Mullumbuk stand out for their emotive vocals, use of the major mode and broad ranging themes, such as song twenty-four, 'Kinyirr', which refers to a site damaged in the course of making an airstrip (p. 336).

Chapter Nine presents twelve songs (twenty-nine song items) of the Ma-yawa repertory. As with the previous repertory, Ma-yawa is the word for the ancestral dead, but in the Marri Ammu language. The main themes of this repertory are the Dreamings and the sites of the Marri Ammu people, and all such songs are in the Dorian mode. Thus the tune of the vocal line alone is enough to evoke the Marri Ammu places, Dreamings, and contemporary descendants. The association of melody with country, which has been found in other parts of Australia, is clearly at work in the Daly River region of Australia. The main composer of this repertory, Charlie Niwilhi Brinken (ca. 1910-1993), was never recorded, but Maurice Tjakurl Ngulkur inherited and performs these songs here. He too has passed away and the future of this repertory is in doubt, although a glimmer of hope comes from the Walakandha singers, who have learnt songs from recordings provided by Marett (p. 357).

That so many *wangga* songs have been handed down and could be performed at the time of Marett's fieldwork in the face of colonisation is testimony to the Daly region people's determination to retain their classical culture, and the role recordings play in realising this.

Across Australia there is a resurgence to protect such heritage. Noel Pearson writes, 'For the shards of classical culture of this continent to vanish would be a loss not only to its Indigenous peoples but also to all Australians, and to the heritage of the world generally.'<sup>3</sup> Rachel Perkins fears 'we are one generation from losing our [central Arrernte] songs,'<sup>4</sup> echoing Strehlow's 'hour before sunset' assessment of Southern Arrernte songs.<sup>5</sup> *For the Sake of a Song* is not only a treasure trove of the classical Indigenous culture of one part of our nation, but it also illustrates how a project to record and revitalise classical performance arts might look.<sup>6</sup>

This publication is a truly remarkable compilation of songs from one of Australia's unique performance traditions, born from a deep attachment to land. The text, audio, and images are brought together superbly. *For the Sake of a Song* is a must for anyone seeking a greater understanding of Aboriginal music, poetry, and song.

<sup>3</sup> Noel Pearson, 'A Rightful Place. Race, Recognition and a More Complete Commonwealth,' *Quarterly Essay* 55 (2014): 36.

<sup>4</sup> Pearson, 'A Rightful Place,' 34.

<sup>5</sup> T.G.H. Strehlow, 'One Hour Before Sunset' Public talk presented at the University of Adelaide, 16 June 1954 [manuscript], 14 pp.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of Indigenous calls for such a project include the Garma Statement on Indigenous Music and Dance, [www.aboriginalartists.com.au/NRP\\_statement.htm](http://www.aboriginalartists.com.au/NRP_statement.htm) and Rachel Perkins, 'Correspondence,' *Quarterly Essay* 56 (2014): 82–6.

## **Paul Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles, 1875–1918***

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### **Reviewed by Rachel Landgren**

The music and musical cultures of the British Isles during the long nineteenth century have been the subject of increasing interest over the last thirty years, with academics eager to dispel the long standing claim that Britain was '*Das Land ohne Musik*.' At first glance, the topic of Paul Rodmell's latest contribution to scholarship on nineteenth-century music, *Opera in the British Isles, 1875–1918*, seems a rather sparse subject. The history of opera in England, and more specifically the history of English opera, has long been portrayed as a lost opportunity and one of continued disappointment.

Rodmell, a Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, has published widely in the field of nineteenth-century British music making. His notable publications included *Charles Villiers Stanford* and *Music and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. This latest book is part of a series from Ashgate Publishing, *Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, which seeks to explore the 'wealth of music and musical culture' in Britain during this time (p. xv).

Rodmell sets the scene of the study by first limiting and justifying his research scope. He acknowledges that 1815 and 1914 have become canonic in the study of nineteenth-century history