

The Jindyworobak Connection in Australian Music, c.1940–1960

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This article will re-address the issue of what has come to be known as ‘Jindyworobakism’ in Australian music. This can be described as the attempt by various composers to establish a uniquely Australian identity through the evocation of the Australian landscape and environment and through the use of Aboriginal elements, in their music, texts or subjects and the connection or otherwise of their work with the philosophy of the Jindyworobak movement in Australian literature which flourished from the late 1930s until the mid-1950s. This article aims to provide a critical re-assessment of the subject based upon some currently accessible sources: music, books, articles and dissertations. Future research, especially into unpublished musical and literary sources, may yet yield a more complete idea as to whether a meaningful link may or may not be established between the artistic tenets of the Jindyworobak writers and the work of apparently like-minded composers.

The Jindyworobak literary movement may be defined as one of a number of manifestations of nationalism prominent in the Australian arts of the early to mid-twentieth century. It was founded by the South Australian poet Rex Ingamells (1913–1955) and included a group of writers such as Ian Mudie (1911–1976), Flexmore Hudson (1913–1988), William Hart-Smith (1911–1990) and Roland Robinson (1912–1992). Ingamells adopted the Aboriginal word ‘jindyworobak’ that was found in James Devaney’s book *The Vanished Tribes*,¹ and put it together with its meaning ‘to annex or join.’ The artistic credo of the Jindyworobaks was then presented in a pamphlet entitled ‘Conditional Culture’, first published in Adelaide in 1938.² In this pamphlet, Ingamells states,

The Jindyworobaks, I say, are those individuals who are endeavouring to free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it, that is, to bring it into proper contact with its material.³

He then goes on to list the three fundamental ‘conditions’ of Jindyworobak art:⁴

¹ James Devaney, *The Vanished Tribes* (Sydney: Cornstalk Press, 1929) 240. It is in the Glossary at the end of the book that the word (spelt ‘Jindy-worabak’) is given together with the meaning ‘to annex or join’, and it is from this reference that Ingamells adopted both the word and Devaney’s definition.

² Rex Ingamells, ‘Conditional Culture,’ pamphlet (Adelaide: F.W. Preece, 1938); reprinted in *The Writer in Australia: A Collection of Literary Documents 1856–1964*, ed. John Barnes (Melbourne: OUP, 1969) 245–65.

³ R. Ingamells, ‘Conditional Culture’ 249.

⁴ R. Ingamells, ‘Conditional Culture’ 249.

1. a clear recognition of environmental values;
2. the debunking of much nonsense; and
3. an understanding of Australia's history and traditions, primeval, colonial and modern.

These three 'conditions', stated thus, appear somewhat vague and unfocussed; however, Ingamells clarified Jindyworobakism with a detailed exposition of each condition.

The first condition, 'a clear recognition of environmental values', was the one that Ingamells regarded as the most important of the three. It refers specifically to the white Australian's identification with the Australian landscape, especially via the natural affinity with it found in Aboriginal spirituality and myth. From today's standpoint this may be seen as a kind of cultural appropriation, as the Jindyworobak preoccupation with things Aboriginal was not primarily for the sake of Aboriginal culture itself, nor yet was it concerned with that culture's relationship with a white displacing culture. It was rather a means for the white Australian to achieve a similarly deep spiritual link with the unique Australian environment. However, in the Jindyworobak period, the concept of 'cultural appropriation' would not have occurred to non-indigenous artists, and certainly not as an ethical issue.

Ingamells's second condition, 'the debunking of much nonsense', refers to the particular use of a language and imagery appropriate to express the 'environmental values' of the first condition. The choice of the word 'nonsense' here reflects Ingamells's attitude to the use by earlier Australian poets of what he saw as outworn Victorian 'poeticisms' which he considered inappropriate to the expression of an Australian poetic idiom. Indeed his concluding definition of 'environmental values' makes this clear, namely, 'the distinct qualities of an environment which cannot be satisfactorily expressed in the conventional terms that suit other environments.'⁵ It is clear from reading much of Ingamells's verse that apart from the use of 'Australian' words such as 'scrub', 'bush' and 'creek' instead of the English words 'wood' or 'brook', he saw a central role for the use of Aboriginal words both for their imagery and for their sheer sound value in establishing a strongly Australian idiom. This aspect of Jindyworobak poetry invites an immediate comparison with the incorporation by twentieth-century Australian composers of Aboriginal melodic and rhythmic material into their music. Since such composers have been criticised frequently for their lack of 'authenticity' in the use of such materials in the context of a thoroughly European musical language, it is worth quoting from Brian Elliott's introduction to an anthology of Jindyworobak poetry and prose, as it bears upon this very issue in relation to the Jindyworobaks' artistic aims:

[T]he Jindyworobaks never set out to write Aboriginal poetry in English words ... [T]hey always retained their white character, shown in the most unmistakable way in their continuation in the European tradition of lyrical styles ... [T]hey were lyrical poets ... in the classical European (tradition) and even (deny it as they might) the English tradition; and they were never anything else.⁶

Ingamells's third condition, relating to the 'understanding of Australia's history and traditions,' emphasises the role of the Aboriginal heritage by virtue of its 'primeval' status. According to Elliott, the Jindyworobak vision entails appropriating the Aboriginal concept of the 'Dreamtime' to include the total history, black and white, of the

⁵ R. Ingamells, 'Conditional Culture' 257

⁶ Brian Elliott (ed.), *The Jindyworobaks* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979) xxviii, xxx.

country.⁷ Ingamells comments thus:

Our traditions are twofold. Inextricably woven with the transplanted European culture are our experiences of the Australian environment ... [T]o ensure imaginative truth our writers and painters must become hard-working students of Aboriginal culture... From Aboriginal art and song we must learn much of our new technique; from Aboriginal legend, *sublimated through our thought*, we must achieve something of a pristine outlook on life.⁸

The remainder of this article will consider the relationship between Jindyworobak literature and the music of various Australian composers written in the period during which this literary movement emerged, flourished and more or less decayed. The main relevant composers from this period are, in order of seniority, Alfred Hill (1870–1960), Mirrie Hill (1889–1986), Margaret Sutherland (1897–1984), Clive Douglas (1903–1977), John Antill (1904–1986), James Penberthy (1917–1999) and Peter Sculthorpe (b. 1929). A fuller study would pursue the theme well beyond the Jindyworobak period itself, provide a much more detailed analysis of relevant scores and include the later music of Sculthorpe as well as that of one or two younger composers. However, such a wider exploration is beyond the scope of this article.

In order to assess the degree to which a genuine relationship may be considered to exist between Jindyworobak literature and music, four broad criteria are proposed. Against these criteria, examples of the music and ideas of the above-mentioned and other composers will be tested, as will comments in the critical literature on the subject. These criteria are:

1. a perceived connection between Jindyworobak literature and music on the part of the relevant writers and composers;
2. the use by these composers of texts or other extramusical subject matter of a Jindyworobak character;
3. their incorporation of recognisably Aboriginal melodic, rhythmic and other musical elements; and
4. The use of such musical and extramusical materials and associations for the primary purpose of creating an Australian identity in their music.

On the basis of the first of these criteria, it would seem that the notion of a Jindyworobak composer is almost disqualified at the very outset. Although further detailed research may yet uncover comments or references by composers of the time to the literary movement (and vice versa), so far such references appear to be conspicuous by their near-absence. To consider first the question as to whether the Jindyworobak writers recognised any association with the work of contemporary composers, the answer seems distinctly unpromising. The vast bulk of the critical literature produced during the heyday of the Jindyworobaks is, not surprisingly, concerned solely with the literature itself, predominantly, but not exclusively poetry. Apart from the central corpus of verse, published in annual collections titled *Jindyworobak Anthology* from 1938–1953, there were a number of books, pamphlets and reviews largely concerned with critical debate surrounding Jindyworobak theory as set out in Ingamells's *Conditional Culture*. Of these, two significant publications deserve mention, both of them published under

⁷ Elliot, *The Jindyworobaks*, xxviii.

⁸ R. Ingamells, 'Conditional Culture' 264. Emphasis added.

the Jindyworobak imprimatur. The earlier of these was *Cultural Cross-Section*, a collection of twenty-one essays by various authors, published in 1941 and edited by John Ingamells, the brother of Rex Ingamells.⁹ These essays include one on painting by Margaret Preston, one on sculpture by Mary Harris and two on music by A. N. Ingamells¹⁰ and Hooper Brewster-Jones. Ingamells's short essay, 'The Next Step in Music,'¹¹ however, is little more than a 'sermon' on what the author considers to be the ideal composer, no mention being made of 'Australianism' or of Jindyworobak theory, although written, no doubt, from the standpoint of such ideals. Typical of the essay's tone is the following:

Man must vibrate to the inspirational forces emanating from the peaks of consciousness. Thus he will be able to sense, select and combine sounds, colours, forms and movements in a far finer way than any purely technical and intellectual knowledge, however great, would enable him to do.¹²

It is this statement that was also quoted by A.D. Hope in his review of *Cultural Cross-Section* in the journal *Southerly*. Commenting that 'the Jindyworobaks have not yet been able to nationalise music,' Hope goes on to say that, '[i]t does appear, however, that the Jindyworobak composer is going to get there in the end.'¹³ Hope's reading of Ingamells in relation to Jindyworobak ideals is noteworthy. He is probably the first writer to admit the concept of a 'Jindyworobak composer,' even if it is not clear as to whether he deems that such a composer exists yet. Perhaps even more curious is Brewster-Jones's essay 'Australian Musical Composition—What of It?'¹⁴ Brewster-Jones (1887–1949) was a notable composer, conductor and music critic during these years and lived in Adelaide, the birthplace of the Jindyworobak movement. However his essay, while comprising a discussion of Australian musical composition at the time, is nevertheless cast in very general terms, with no consideration of a 'national' (let alone Jindyworobak) style, either actual or potential, in Australian music. In quoting the views of Joseph Post on the then current state of musical composition, Brewster-Jones mentions works by such composers as Clive Douglas, Margaret Sutherland, Frank Hutchens (1892–1965) and Lindley Evans (1895–1982), but even here there is no mention of Douglas's 'national' works: the short opera *A Bush Legend* of 1938 and the orchestral 'Australian Bush Scenes' extracted from it, such as *Carwoola* (1939) or *Corroboree* (1940). Each of these had received its first performance prior to the publication of *Cultural Cross-Section*.¹⁵ Finally, Brewster-Jones made no mention of his own works written up to this time, at least two of which could be seen as being relevant to the subject of 'Australianism.'

⁹ John Ingamells (ed.) *Cultural Cross-Section* (Adelaide: Jindyworobak, 1941).

¹⁰ No identification is given for 'A.N. Ingamells' in *Culture Cross-Section*, nor is he/she mentioned in contemporary *Who's Whos* or in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* or *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*. However, *Who's Who* (1944) states that Rex Ingamells's father, Eric, is said to have had two sons and two daughters. As John Ingamells is known to be Rex's brother, A.N. Ingamells could perhaps be Rex's sister, or a cousin.

¹¹ A.N. Ingamells. 'The Next Step in Music,' *Cultural Cross-Section*, ed. John Ingamells (Adelaide: Jindyworobak, 1941) 47–48.

¹² A.N. Ingamells, 'The Next Step in Music' 48.

¹³ A.D. Hope, 'Cultural Corroboree.' *Southerly* 2.3 (November 1941); reprinted in Elliott, *The Jindyworobaks*, 250.

¹⁴ Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'Australian Musical Composition—What of It?' *Cultural Cross-Section* (Adelaide: Jindyworobak, 1941) 49–51.

¹⁵ It is interesting that on 31 December, 1945, the Jindyworobak writer Roland Robinson, in a letter to the Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, acknowledged *Carwoola* to be a valid example of the achievement of an Australian idiom via the use of Aboriginal materials.

In the second Jindyworobak publication warranting mention, namely *The Jindyworobak Review 1938-48*,¹⁶ the only significant reference to music occurs in an essay by Flexmore Hudson entitled 'A Prophet in His Own Country'.¹⁷ Here Hudson refers critically to Rex Ingamells's demand in *Conditional Culture* (see above) for writers and painters to gain inspiration from the study of the technique of Aboriginal art and song (see footnote 8). Apropos of Aboriginal music he comments,

the music of our aborigines, so far as I know, is very undeveloped—I remember that it uses the pentatonic scale, and that it has not attained even the use of 'contrasting figures' but only to simple 'repetitive figures' which are merely a stage or two higher than the primitive whine of descending semitones. I cannot see how our composers will be able to make much of that.¹⁸

Hudson, presumably writing in 1948, not only showed a lack of understanding of Aboriginal music and its subtleties of expression and structure, but also betrayed his lack of awareness of the music of the previous ten years by Antill, Douglas and others, by speculating upon what composers might be able to make use of in the future or by refusing to accept them as being relevant to the Jindyworobak movement.

The earlier reference to Brewster-Jones's essay relates to the second aspect of the first criterion above, that is, the recognition of the Jindyworobak movement by composers and music critics and their identification with it of relevant compositions. The fact that Brewster-Jones's essay was written for a Jindyworobak publication might be seen as at least an indirect acknowledgement of a possible connection, which makes the lack of reference to either actual or potential Jindyworobak characteristics in music here all the more puzzling. Moreover, in the musical literature of the period from the 1920s (when the famous collection of essays entitled *Australia's Musical Possibilities*¹⁹ by composer/journalist Henry Tate (1873–1926) was published) through to the end of the Jindyworobak years, there was sporadic debate as to what a distinctly Australian musical idiom might comprise. The use of Aboriginal materials loomed quite significantly in this debate, but without any apparent reference to the Jindyworobaks or to Jindyworobak theory. The major candidates in the 1940s and '50s for Jindyworobak status—Douglas, Antill, Penberthy and Alfred and Mirrie Hill—all commented on the use of Aboriginal materials to varying extents in their work. Douglas's essay 'Folk-song and the Brown Man'²⁰ was the most extended and overt statement of what may be regarded as a 'Jindyworobak' theory of music. None of the composers in their published

¹⁶ Rex Ingamells, et al. (eds), *The Jindyworobak Review 1938–1948* (Melbourne: Jindyworobak, 1948). This is another collection of short essays and reviews, published to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the movement.

¹⁷ Flexmore Hudson, 'A Prophet in His Own Country,' *The Jindyworobak Review 1938–1948*, ed. Rex Ingamells et al. (Melbourne: Jindyworobak, 1948) 82–89. Hudson's cavalier dismissal of the subtleties of Aboriginal music clearly suggests that he was ignorant of the pioneering studies of Aboriginal music by people like Strehlow. Also he had a far less sympathetic view of the music even than the early colonial musicians who made inappropriate vocal and choral settings of Aboriginal music, such as Nathan and Lhotsky, and indeed, even of the writings of the journalist Barron Field in the 1820s, who, for a London magazine, was the earliest professional writer to give an account of a corroboree.

¹⁸ Hudson, 'A Prophet in His Own Country' 86–87.

¹⁹ Henry Tate, *Australia's Musical Possibilities* (Melbourne: Vidler, n.d.).

²⁰ Clive Douglas, 'Folk-song and the Brown Man: A Means to an Australian Expression in Symphonic Music,' *The Canon* 10.3 (1956): 81–85.

writings or comments on their work mentioned any link with, or awareness of, the Jindyworobak writers. This is also true of Sculthorpe who has made many observations in his numerous published or reported comments on aspects that may be relevant to the Jindyworobak issue. However, in response to recent correspondence from the author directly addressing this issue, Sculthorpe gave a possible clue as to why there was a virtual silence on the question of a Jindyworobak connection in music:

While Jim Penberthy and I were well-aware of the Jindy movement, and shared many of the ideals, we did not feel part of it. In those times, there was something of a chasm between music and the other arts. It may be that we hadn't shaped our beliefs into anything wholly tangible, or, it may be that we hadn't shaped our music according to our beliefs.²¹

This enormously valuable comment from probably the most 'literary-aware' composer of those discussed in this article, would seem to go far towards explaining the apparent lack of awareness or even disavowal on the part of other such composers, of any link between their activities and those in any other art form.

Turning now to the general critical literature on Australian music, it seems that Roger Covell, in his *Australia's Music* (1967), may have been the first musicologist and critic to directly confront the possible equation of 'Jindyworobakism' and music at any significant depth. Interestingly, this was published well after the demise of Jindyworobakism as a coherent and organised movement. In his book, as in subsequent literature on the topic, Covell points to parallels between the literary movement and music, but says nothing about any awareness by the composers of the writers.²² Since that time a number of writers have discussed the connection, notably Gregg Howard,²³ Deborah Crisp,²⁴ Patricia Shaw,²⁵ Nicole Saintilan,²⁶ and Matthew Orlovich.²⁷ Of these, Howard, Crisp and Shaw appear to share Covell's stance that a link may be valid on the grounds of what this paper classifies as the last three criteria, but are also silent on the question of a direct link. Saintilan, in both her 1990 dissertation 'The Myth of the Musical Jindyworobak' and her 1991 *Sounds Australian* article 'Clive Douglas, or, When is a Jindyworobak not a Jindyworobak?' directly confronts the question, in that one of her grounds for disqualifying Clive Douglas as a Jindyworobak composer is the absence of reference in his writings to the Jindyworobaks. Also he, surprisingly, disavows any link with, or knowledge of, musicians or other artists with similar aims to his own.²⁸ Orlovich, referring to Saintilan's work, also discusses this issue briefly in his own dissertation, 'The Music of Clive Douglas.'

²¹ Peter Sculthorpe, Letter to the author, 21 February 2002.

²² Roger Covell, *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1967).

²³ Gregg W. Howard, 'Clive Douglas (1903-77),' *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Frank Callaway and David Tunley (Melbourne: OUP, 1978) 37-43.

²⁴ Deborah Crisp, 'The Influence of Australian Aboriginal Music on the Music of Contemporary Australian Composers,' *Australian Aboriginal Music*, ed. Jennifer Isaacs (Sydney: Aboriginal Artists Agency, 1979) 49-56.

²⁵ Patricia Shaw, *The Development of a National Identity in Australian Contemporary Music*, BMus(Hons) thesis, University of Melbourne, 1988.

²⁶ Nicole Saintilan, *The Myth of the Musical Jindyworobak: Some Aspects of the Appropriation of Aboriginal Culture in the Music of Clive Douglas and Other Arts in Australia*, BCA(Hons) thesis, University of Wollongong, 1990; 'Clive Douglas, or, When is a Jindyworobak not a Jindyworobak?' *Sounds Australian* 30 (Winter 1991): 32-36, 38.

²⁷ Matthew Orlovich, *The Music of Clive Douglas*, BMus(Hons) thesis, University of Sydney, 1993.

²⁸ Saintilan, 'The Myth of the Musical Jindyworobak' 55-56.

If no conscious link between Jindyworobak literature and music can easily be established, the question that remains is whether a metaphorical connection may be said to exist on the basis of shared or parallel aesthetic aims or techniques. While heeding warnings by Saintilan²⁹ and many others about making links that are too superficial between movements in the different artforms (a subject too diffuse and complex to be debated in detail here), aspects of this question may nevertheless be explored using the criteria above as reference points.

The second criterion, the use of subjects drawn from Aboriginal myth and legend, is met in many works written during the Jindyworobak period. These are mostly programmatic orchestral pieces or theatre works (operas and ballets). Moreover, just as the Jindyworobak writers had some precursors in the two or three previous decades, such as Bernard O'Dowd (1866–1953) and James Devaney (1890–1976), so too there were earlier parallels in the works of Australian composers such as Henry Tate, Fritz Hart (1874–1949) and Hooper Brewster-Jones. Examples include Tate's orchestral piece *Dawn – An Australian Rhapsody* (1922), Hart's *The Bush* (1923), a symphonic suite based on an O'Dowd poem of the same name, Brewster-Jones's six books of *Australian Bird Call Impressions* for piano (1920s) and his orchestral *Australia Felix* (1940). These earlier works, although not based on Aboriginal subjects, were nevertheless indirectly linked via their central preoccupation with the evocation of the atmosphere and sounds of the Australian landscape, a direct link to Ingamells's first 'condition' regarding 'environmental values.' During the Jindyworobak period in the 1940s and 1950s there was a veritable efflorescence of scores with Jindyworobak-like subjects. However, of the major composers with Jindyworobak credentials according to the present criteria, it should be stressed that all of them—including Douglas, the most commonly discussed composer in relation to Jindyworobakism—used such associations in only some of their works, in some cases only occasionally.

Douglas's earliest work relevant to the theme is his 'operetta' (in reality, a short one-act opera) entitled *A Bush Legend* (1938), which was subsequently reworked in 1956 and presented under the title *Kaditcha*. A note on the 1938 score shows clearly the composer's Jindyworobak-like stance:

In this composition an attempt has been made to capture in music the atmosphere of the Australian bush, and at the same time weave an idealized conception of the primitive [*sic*] aboriginal as he was in ages past, long before his 'civilization' by the whites ... In the text, free use has been made of aboriginal names and expressions both for their euphonious beauty and the added local color [*sic*] which they suggest.³⁰

A Bush Legend/Kaditcha is based on the composer's own libretto which is an adaptation of an Aboriginal legend. However, despite its heavy use of Aboriginal words, Douglas's Jindyworobak status has nevertheless been questioned by Saintilan on the grounds of the libretto's rather excessive use of the very stylised English 'poeticisms' or 'florid, antiquated English,'³¹ for example, in his use of words such as 'naught,' 'knowest,' 'thou,' 'thy,' 'thee' and 'art,' which the Jindyworobak writers wished to eliminate from their work. While accepting

²⁹ Saintilan, 'Myth of the Musical Jindyworobak' 57.

³⁰ Clive Douglas, note on *A Bush Legend*, unpublished, 31 March 1938, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, National Archives of Australia, Series SP827/2.

³¹ Saintilan, 'Myth of the Musical Jindyworobak' 40.

this criticism, it may nevertheless be claimed that if Douglas is to be judged as a Jindyworobak *composer*, then it is his musical imagery—to be considered later—that should be the primary basis for comparison, rather than his verbal style.

Following *A Bush Legend*, Douglas produced a number of orchestral works during the next twenty years or so that make use of Aboriginal titles largely for evocative purposes. These ‘landscapes’ or programme pieces include two drawn from the music of *A Bush Legend*, namely *Carwoola* (1939) and *Corroboree* (1940), together with *Sturt 1829* (or *Kaiela*) (1953), *Wongadilla* (1954), *Symphony No. 2 (Namatjira)* (1956) and *Coolawidgee* (1957).

There were a considerable number of ballet scores based on Jindyworobak-like scenarios written during the 1940s and 1950s. Joel Crotty, in his doctoral dissertation on choreographic music in Australia,³² lists ten or so works with recognisably Jindyworobak-like themes. These include a number of works by Antill and Penberthy, together with Esther Rofe’s *Terra Australis* (1946) and *Mathinna* (1954), Camille Gheysens’s *Aboriginal Spear Dance* and *Trilogy of Central Australia Suite* (both 1956) and Henry Krips’s *Aboriginal Legend* (1959). The most significant ballets were those by Antill and Penberthy. Antill’s *Corroboree* (1946) is, of course, the most celebrated example, while other works include *The Unknown Land* (1958), based on Rex Ingamells’s poem of the same name, *Burragorang Dreamtime* (1959/1964) and *Black Opal* (1961); the latter two works are entirely based on Aboriginal legend.

Penberthy concentrated his endeavours heavily in the theatre during the years 1947–60 and wrote both ballets and operas on Aboriginal subjects. It is noteworthy in this connection that the subjects for the respective stage genres carry significantly different agendas. In commenting on Penberthy’s work during this period, John Meyer has pointed out that

his ballets, *Euroka* (1947), *Brolga* (1949), *Boomerang* (1951), *The Whirlwind* (1954) and *Kooree and the Mists* (1960) are based on Aboriginal stories and legends ... [while] the operas *Larry* (1955), *The Earth Mother* (1957–58) and *Dalgerie* (1958) are all concerned with the uneasy relationship between the Aboriginal and European races.³³

Meyer’s first group of subjects (Penberthy’s ballets), then, may be seen as distinctly Jindyworobak in character, while the latter group (the operas) may not, notwithstanding the composer’s direct use of Aboriginal musical materials in both *The Earth Mother* and *Dalgerie*. A similar situation exists in the case of Margaret Sutherland’s opera *The Young Kabbarli* (1964), which also fits Meyer’s second category of subjects. Sutherland’s only other work with Aboriginal associations is the tone poem *Haunted Hills* (1950).³⁴ Sutherland appended the following note to the manuscript score:

A sound picture written in contemplation of the first people who roamed the hills—their bewilderment and their betrayal—frenzied dance: its seeming gaiety born of despair.³⁵

³² Joel Crotty, *Choreographic Music in Australia, 1913–1964: From Foreign Reliance to an Independent Australian Stance*, PhD thesis, Monash University, 2000, 130.

³³ John Meyer, ‘James Penberthy (b. 1917),’ *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Frank Callaway and David Tunley (Melbourne: OUP, 1978) 81.

³⁴ Margaret Sutherland, *Haunted Hills* (Sydney: Australian Music Centre, n.d.). The title refers to a description sometimes given to a mountain area in Gippsland, Victoria.

As in the case of her opera, the tone of this programme is one of social/cultural concern, rather than that of evocation of the landscape for the primary purpose of creating an Australian identity in the music. However, unlike the opera, there is no Aboriginal musical material quoted or imitated.

Between them, Alfred and Mirrie Hill also contributed a number of scores making use of Aboriginal titles and materials during these years. Like Antill and Douglas, the Hills composed a number of scores for film and radio documentaries about Australia's outback and Aboriginal life that were made during the late 1940s and 1950s. A notable source for both the documentaries and the Aboriginal materials used in the scores were the recordings of Aboriginal music made by the anthropologist C.P. Mountford during field trips to central Australia at this time. In many cases material from these scores was reworked in concert works. Perhaps the most curious case of such reworking is Alfred Hill's *Symphony No. 3 in B minor* (1951). This was, like all of Hill's symphonies, itself a reworking of an earlier piece, in this case the *String Quartet No. 14 in B minor* (1937). To create his symphony, Hill orchestrated three of the quartet's four movements and substituted a scherzo (third movement) reworked from a film score and based on Aboriginal melodies. He then appended the title *Australia* to the work and provided the score with a quotation from the poem entitled *An Australian Symphony* by George Essex Evans (1863-1909), which begins: 'Her song is silence, unto her/Its mystery clings.' The four movements (three of them hitherto entirely without extramusical associations) were then given programmatic titles:

- I. Introduction. 'The lonely silent land;' Allegro.
 - (a) The Workers.
 - (b) The Thinkers.
- II. Australia—mysterious and beautiful.
- III. The Aborigines.
- IV. The Challenge.

Mirrie Hill's *Three Aboriginal Dances* (1950) and, more ambitiously, her *Arnhem Land Symphony* (1954) were also based on, or made use of, Aboriginal songs recorded by Mountford, which had previously been the source of film music.

Finally, the early 1950s saw the earliest works of Peter Sculthorpe exhibiting what was to be a life-long preoccupation with the Australian landscape and its indigenous inhabitants.³⁶ Sculthorpe's *Sonatina for piano* (1954) was the first work definitively to establish his mature style and was also the work that, according to Sculthorpe, 'firmly established that all my music would be based on a programme of some kind, an extramusical idea or image.'³⁷ Sculthorpe reports that,

at the time of writing [the *Sonatina*], as well as working on [a dictionary of Tasmanian Aboriginal words and their meanings], I was attempting to write a book on Tasmanian Aboriginal music. This interest in indigenous culture caused me to base the *Sonatina* on an Aboriginal legend.³⁸

³⁵ Sutherland, *Haunted Hills*, title page.

³⁶ His other chief source of inspiration was Asian music.

³⁷ Peter Sculthorpe, *Sun Music: Journeys and Reflections on a Composer's Life* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2001) 31.

³⁸ Sculthorpe, *Sun Music* 30.

The programme, briefly summarised at the top of the score's first page, reads, 'For the journey of Yonecara to the land of his forefathers, and the return to his tribe.' During the early 1950s, Sculthorpe produced a group of works based on Aboriginal legends or Australian landscape images. His String Trio *The Loneliness of Bunjil* (1954) includes a programme based on an Aboriginal creation myth, while *Irkanda I* (1955), for solo violin, marks the first of a series of works for various instrumental media, with varying programmes but carrying the same title, which for Sculthorpe denoted 'a remote and lonely place.'³⁹

The foregoing general description or mention of many compositions with Jindyworobak-like associations in their (extramusical) subject matter has been presented here to provide some idea of the considerable extent to which Australian composers were attracted to such subjects during the decades under review. These compositions coincided with the period in which the vast bulk of Jindyworobak literature was produced. Perhaps the most contentious issue in relation to a possible Jindyworobak connection in music is the question as to whether a 'Jindyworobak' musical style may be said to be established by musically paralleling the use of Aboriginal or specifically 'Australian' words and imagery as used by the Jindyworobak poets to express Ingamells's 'environmental values.' The most central concern in this regard is the incorporation of recognisably Aboriginal melodic, rhythmic and textural or 'sonic' features—the subject of this article's third criterion.

To begin with, it may be observed that the interest of European musicians in Aboriginal song can be traced back to the earliest period of white settlement. However, early arrangements of such materials in the form of songs for voice and piano by John Lhotsky and Isaac Nathan, for example, were scarcely more than curiosities having little to do with the more serious attempts by some composers to appropriate such materials as a way of creating a genuinely Australian idiom. Nevertheless, even when composers of the Jindyworobak period (and later) did show this more serious engagement with Aboriginal music, the results have been of variable effectiveness, one significant factor being the degree to which their own musical styles resembled nineteenth-century Romanticism. To take Alfred Hill as a first example, we may consider the scherzo of his *Australia* Symphony mentioned earlier. Its main theme is based on a transcription of an Aboriginal melody with its familiar descending pattern. All other features—harmony, rhythm and orchestration—are thoroughly conventional nineteenth-century European. The result, in terms of its evocation of Aboriginal music, can only be described as extremely superficial and even comparable to the colonial excursions of Nathan and Lhotsky. The treatment of a second Aboriginal melody a little later in the same movement is possibly slightly more convincing, since Hill momentarily reduces the harmonic content of the setting and produces a more evocative orchestral texture, which indirectly evokes the sounds of the didjeridu and clapping sticks in the accompaniment to the melody. Perhaps the first example may be compared, in Jindyworobak terms, to the use of English 'poeticisms,' while the somewhat starker, more 'realistic' imitation of Aboriginal sounds could be likened to the Jindyworobaks' extensive use of Aboriginal words and imagery.

Further examples of Aboriginal quotation or evocation during the Jindyworobak period may be found in the music of Mirrie Hill, Antill, Douglas, Sutherland and Penberthy. Their musical styles range from impressionism and/or the English 'pastoral' style to a more dissonant

³⁹ Sculthorpe, *Sun Music* 68.

'primitivism' characterised by rhythmic ostinati and abrasive harmonies and textures. The main stylistic affinities here are some early works of Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Bartok.

From the late 1940s until 1954, Mirrie Hill made use of Aboriginal melodies from Mountford's collection of recordings in at least three works: the music for the documentary film *Aborigines of the Sea Coast* (1948), the *Three Aboriginal Dances* for piano (1950), later orchestrated, and the *Arnhem Land Symphony* (1954).⁴⁰ In the four-movement *Arnhem Land Symphony*, Mirrie Hill uses Aboriginal melodies in the second, third and fourth movements, although the general style of the music is firmly in the Bax/Ireland/Delius 'English pastoral' mould and the quoted Aboriginal melodies are treated in a variety of ways which in most cases eliminate any direct feeling of association with their source. For instance, the second (slow) movement commences with an Aboriginal melody 'adapted to the Western scale' (according to the anonymous liner notes to the ABC's LP recording of the work). It is scored initially for unaccompanied flute and later passed around various instruments, with delicate impressionistic harmonies and orchestration. The result is undeniably attractive but hardly 'Aboriginal' in character. The treatment of thematic material in the third (scherzo) movement is far more directly evocative of corroboree-like sounds with its use of ostinati, clapping stick imitations and orchestral 'shrieks', no doubt inspired by Antill's famous example written some eight years earlier (to be discussed later). Mirrie Hill's finale returns to relative anonymity, as far as Aboriginal evocation is concerned, where the main subject, another Aboriginal melody, is treated as a theme for variation.

Similar use of Aboriginal melodic material is to be found in places in Clive Douglas's work from the time of *A Bush Legend* up until the *Namatjira Symphony* of 1956. In the latter work, the harmonic idiom is harsher and more dissonant than Douglas's earlier post-impressionist scores. This in part reflects Douglas's shift of emphasis from the depiction of more coastal or pastoral vistas toward that of the 'harder' landscapes of 'Namatjira country' or the 'Red Centre,' as the composer indicates in a note on the title page of the score. However, despite the shift from impressionism towards primitivism, the essential technical apparatus is identical: the language of Debussy, early Stravinsky and Bartok. The Aboriginal imagery is relatively submerged in an overall musical style that is nevertheless totally derived from the technical and expressive resources of early twentieth-century European music. This occurred despite Douglas's pains to establish an idiom that was specifically 'Australian.' This is not intended as a negative criticism of the music; it merely points out a central dilemma of 'identity' that will be addressed further below.

James Penberthy's use of Aboriginal quotation in several works for both the theatre and concert hall is basically similar to Douglas's. Examples include the opera *The Earth Mother* (1958) and its derivation, his sixth symphony (1962). However, in another opera, *Dalgerie* (1958), Penberthy inserted a sequence of actual Aboriginal dances, which were performed by a group of dancers from Arnhem Land and the Kimberleys at a production in 1973 at the Sydney Opera House.⁴¹ This direct inclusion of actual Aboriginal music is also found in the *Earth Mother Symphony* where (as Penberthy preferred) a recording of the *Earth Mother* song is

⁴⁰ One of the melodies used in the film score, incidentally, seems to have been recycled by Alfred Hill with little alteration in melody, rhythm or texture. This was the second melody from the scherzo of his *Australia Symphony*.

⁴¹ Meyer, 'James Penberthy' 82.

played at the opening of the work. A similar use of literal quotation occurs in Margaret Sutherland's opera *The Young Kabbarli*, where an optional didjeridu solo, not included in the score itself, is performed at the outset of the work. Later in the opera, however, the hero, Goonderwell, sings a diatribe against the 'white man,' making use of a text which today seems an embarrassing imitation of 'Aboriginal' English: 'No good, no good, no good, no good, wha for, wha for.' Once again, the melodic line is the chant-like descending pattern characteristic of many traditional Aboriginal melodies, although it is probably not a direct quotation. The accompaniment is of a distinctly Stravinskian cast and is dissonant and ostinato-driven.

Sutherland's employment of such orchestral devices as the imitation of the didjeridu by bassoon and double bass, and the Aboriginal clapping sticks by wood blocks, echoes similar onomatopoeic procedures in the music of Alfred and Mirrie Hill already noted. This use of onomatopoeia may be traced back to the most famous and influential score associated with the evocation of Aboriginal culture, that is, John Antill's *Corroboree* (1946). *Corroboree* is notable in that Antill employs no Aboriginal melodies, nor does he attempt to imitate them. Rather, the music attempts to capture the sounds and 'atmosphere' of the Aboriginal ritual by using similar onomatopoeic devices. Antill, however, actually calls for both a pair of Aboriginal *trora* sticks and a bullroarer in the orchestra, while using a contrabassoon to imitate the didjeridu.

The 1950s works of Peter Sculthorpe, mentioned earlier, make use of neither Aboriginal quotation nor evocation, although Sculthorpe was to use quoted Aboriginal melodies many years later in a number of scores, the first of which was *Song of Tailitnama* (1974). Sculthorpe, however, from the time of these early scores, thought deeply about what might constitute an essentially 'Australian' idiom. His ideas form a significant part of an on-going debate that began with Grainger's theories, continued with those of Henry Tate and also included the ideas of the composers of the Jindyworobak period. For Grainger, Tate and Sculthorpe, this debate centred on the evocation of the Australian landscape including ideas of sparseness, monotony, repetition and the sounds of the natural environment such as bird calls.

Returning, however, to the more specific notions of Aboriginal imagery relevant to Jindyworobak philosophy, the foregoing examples raise two issues when attempting to formulate such notions in musical terms. The first is that of 'authenticity.' Such writers as Covell, Crisp and Howard have all debated this question. Crisp, for example, asserts that Antill's *Corroboree* 'cannot be viewed as a successful synthesis of Aboriginal and European cultures.'⁴² This point is well taken in its context; however, as shown earlier, this is not an issue from a Jindyworobak perspective. Just as the poets incorporated Aboriginal words and imagery within a totally English language syntax, so composers such as Antill and others may be said to be simply evoking aural/musical images from Aboriginal culture within a thoroughly European musical syntax. As in the case of all borrowings from folk sources by nationalist composers, it may be argued that such incorporation works more effectively in the emancipated post-tonal idioms of the twentieth century than in the closed harmonic system of classical tonality. With the partial exception of Alfred Hill, all composers discussed in this article can be said to have located the bases of their compositional techniques in a post-tonal context.

The second issue concerns the very nature of the imagery employed. Whereas in poetry the medium is language with its ability to use specific words and meanings, in music the

⁴² Crisp, 'Influence of Australian Aboriginal Music' 52.

nature of the imagery necessarily must be less specific. Therefore, the question of a musical imagery or vocabulary paralleling the Jindyworobaks' use of Aboriginal or 'Australian' words remains somewhat vexed. The only obvious candidate for such imagery would seem to be the use of Aboriginal melodies and rhythms, and here the composer encounters a dilemma that was well addressed by Howard, who makes the point that Aboriginal materials may be found in Australian compositions in three categories:

- (1) the derived material may be so abstracted from its original form as to lose its recognisable identity; (2) in an attempt to accommodate this fact, the composer may contrive the musical expression to the extent that the derived material is caricatured; and (3) the material may be allowed to retain its recognisable identity and is 'framed' by rather than integrated into the musical fabric.⁴³

Howard makes the valid claim that Douglas's relevant works fall into the first of the above categories. The opening of the scherzo in Alfred Hill's *Australia* Symphony, Mirrie Hill's *Arnhem Land* Symphony and Penberthy's *Earth Mother* Symphony (if performed without the recording of the song at the outset) and opera also fit this category. Here it may be argued that the melodic profile of an Aboriginal song, when devoid of any other features of vocal style and accompaniment from its original source, is insufficiently strong to carry the required 'Australian' image comparable to the Jindyworobak writers' use of Aboriginal words.

Howard's second category, direct imitation (which may or may not amount to what he claims to be caricature), has also been noted in the scherzo of Alfred Hill's *Australia* Symphony and in Mirrie Hill's film score, *Aborigines of the Sea Coast* and in the scherzo of her *Arnhem Land* Symphony. Direct imitation could also be claimed for Antill's *Corroboree* although here it is of the general textures and sounds of Aboriginal music rather than of the use of actual Aboriginal melodies. Finally, Howard's third category, the 'framing' of directly quoted Aboriginal music, was noted earlier in Sutherland's *The Young Kabbarli*, in the song recording at the outset of Penberthy's *Earth Mother* Symphony, and in his opera *Dalgerie*.

The dilemma, then, is that if the use of Aboriginal melodic and rhythmic materials is too abstracted it ceases to have the required property of 'imagery.' More direct evocation or even the quotation of Aboriginal materials may be seen to be far too limited in scope. Compositions that use these materials immediately appear as stereotypical, too predictable, *clichéd* and limited in stylistic and expressive range. Finally, the desire—as mentioned by Douglas, Sculthorpe and others—to express the spirit of the Australian landscape and environment is likewise problematic with regard to the establishment of stylistic features that may be sufficiently specific as to be regarded as 'Australian,' as distinct from the general stylistic and technical vocabulary of early twentieth-century European music. Such a question merges into wider issues of 'Australianism,' which have been extensively debated elsewhere.

The fourth and last of the proposed Jindyworobak criteria can now be addressed, that is, the use of the Aboriginal connection for the central purpose of establishing an Australian musical identity. While the composers mentioned in this article evoked Aboriginal themes in only a minority of their works, most of them are known to have made comments that can be

⁴³ Howard, 'Clive Douglas' 38.

interpreted as being at least partly Jindyworobak in spirit. Only a few can be quoted here. First, in 1950 Alfred Hill, commented on the Mountford recordings:

There is enough material in these recordings to start an entirely Australian school of music, as different in idiom as Vaughan Williams and the English school from anything else.⁴⁴

Antill's reflection on his *Corroboree* also carried Hill's enthusiasm for an independent Australian style through the use of Aboriginal materials or associations:

Corroboree was the first breakthrough for an Australian contemporary style. I hope it was, without being presumptuous, one step ahead in the right direction. Don't let us get away from the fact that we're Australians and we don't want to get into European ways or any other ways. We want something distinctly Australian. I hoped that *Corroboree* began this contemporary style.⁴⁵

Clive Douglas's article 'Folk-song and the Brown Man' contains sentiments similar to those of Hill and Antill, but carries a more explicitly Jindyworobak feeling of spiritual connection:

The absence of a national music in the white man's idiom adds to the difficulties which confront an Australian composer who attempts to infuse his music with a recognisable Australian identity. Unless some link can be forged which will serve to connect the composer's thought with the land itself, the music written will be strongly derivative of what has been recorded in some other country earlier.

A musical idiom must be found which is so entirely Australian that no other influence can be felt. In this arduous search the imported traditions of the white man disappear in the mists of long ages before he came to this country; and only there, in the mystical 'dreamtime' of antiquity can be found the all-important link—the tribal ceremonial chants of the brown man.⁴⁶

Finally, James Penberthy also shows Douglas's Jindyworobak-like aspirations to achieve a spiritual connection with the Australian landscape, although his approach is also strongly tinged with a less Jindyworobak-like social conscience and compassion regarding Aboriginal dispossession. In his article 'The Aboriginal Influence' published in *Sounds Australian* he wrote:

The Aboriginal people were right for this country. They and their age-old partnership with the land, its skies, its trees and its animals, made a harmony—stark, heroic, beautiful, unique. We, the white interlopers, in 1788 immediately commenced the destruction of the people and the environment, and have perpetuated the destruction ever since.⁴⁷

This comment carries little evidence of 'annexing' or 'joining' in the Jindyworobak sense, although the Jindyworobak writers were not without compassion regarding the prospective loss of Aboriginal culture. However, Penberthy continues:

⁴⁴ John Mansfield Thomson, *A Distant Music: The Life and Times of Alfred Hill* (Melbourne: OUP, 1980) 225.

⁴⁵ Beth Dean and Victor Cardell, *Gentle Genius: A Life of John Antill* (Sydney: Akron Press, 1987) 91.

⁴⁶ Clive Douglas, 'Folk-song and the Brown Man' 81.

⁴⁷ James Penberthy, 'The Aboriginal Influence,' *Sounds Australian* 30 (Winter 1991): 23.

Yet this tragedy has appeared so great as to take on inspirational, even noble proportions ... I have found the land and its people a source of great stimulus to musical expression ... Australian composers have to live at home where they are part of the sky, sea and land-amongst their own people. Composers cannot be international.⁴⁸

Although these comments were made in 1991, decades later than the period under review, they certainly echo sentiments that were clearly implicit in the subjects, texts and scenarios of his stage works of the 1940s and 1950s.

As suggested earlier, the musical realisation of such strong aspirations to an independent Australian style of composition, which run like a *leitmotif* through all the above quotations, is distinctly problematic. Nevertheless the aspirations themselves, however imperfectly realized, are an important factor in assessing the Jindyworobak credentials of the composers discussed in this article.

In conclusion, it may be claimed that, while no evidence has so far emerged of a direct identification with the Jindyworobak literary movement on the part of the composers discussed in this article, and practically none on the part of the writers with the composers, there are nevertheless aspects of the work of various Australian composers during the 1940s and 1950s that suggest parallels with a number of the artistic aims and methods of the writers. Whether we are therefore entitled to infer from this the existence of a 'Jindyworobak composer' is a question to which no doubt there will continue to be a disparity of responses. This article has sought to offer some further perspectives that may indicate possible directions for future enquiry.

⁴⁸ Penberthy, 'Aboriginal Influence' 23.