

Landscape, Spirit and Music: an Australian Story

ANNE BOYD*

(An accompanying compact disc holds the available music examples played. Their place is indicated by boxes in the text.)

*We belong to the ground
It is our power
And we must stay close to it
Or maybe we will get lost.*

Narritjin Maymuru Yirrkala, an Australian Aborigine

*The earth is at the same time mother. She is mother of all that
is natural, mother of all that is human. She is the mother of all,
for contained in her are the seeds of all.*

Hildegard of Bingen¹

The main language in Australia', David Tacey writes, 'is earth language: walking over the body of the earth, touching nature, feeling its presence and its other life, and attuning ourselves to its sensual reality'.² If Tacey's view might be taken to embrace all the inhabitants from diverse cultural backgrounds now living in this ancient continent, then the language that connects us is what he calls 'earth language'. Earth language is a meta-language of the spirit which arises as right-brain activity based upon an intuitive connection with our natural environment, the language of place. Earth language has little to do with the left-brain language of human intellectual discourse. It is the territory of the sacred, long known to artists and deeply intuitive creative thinkers from all cultures through all time. It is the territory put off-limits by the

* Anne Boyd holds the Chair of Music at the University of Sydney. This professorial lecture was delivered to the Arts Association on 16 May 2002.

European Enlightenment with its tendency to remove mystery from matter. It is the territory we must reclaim if the human race is to survive into the next century by re-establishing an harmonious relationship with the Earth upon which we are finally and irretrievably dependent.

For 50,000 years Australian composers have developed musical ideas through listening to the land. The music I will play will show how each of the Australian composers represented has reacted in a deeply spiritual but individual manner to Australian landscape. I will investigate such concepts as 'belonging' and 'spirituality', and show in musical works something of the on-going process of 'aboriginalisation' in the development of Australian cultural identity.

At the same time, through an investigation of this music I will suggest we bear in mind some of the big questions about the nature of music itself, asking why the study of music needs to continue to occupy a place at the centre of the humanities, as it has done since the foundation of the medieval university. How does music construct meaning? Why is it culturally significant? How can music communicate an understanding at the deepest level—of self and, as a community, of others? How does music link us to the earth? Why through all time has music been associated with healing? Can Australian music promote deep cultural healing by revealing the developing soul of our nation, recording our history (in a magical vibrating form), forging cultural identity, and binding us together? Can music promote peace?

Ross Edwards: *Dawn Mantras*

Ross Edwards' *Dawn Mantras* was performed on the edge of the Harbour from the sails of the Sydney Opera House at the dawning of the new millennium. It was Australia's message to a television audience estimated at two billion people. Listening to this music, you are likely to have experienced a sense of relaxation, of peace—of being uplifted. The music does not impose itself on the listener but rather invites attention. There is nothing

intellectually confronting; in an existential sense this is music of being, not of becoming. While seeming to connect us to a remote past, it is music that nevertheless seems remarkably fresh. *Dawn Mantras* might best be understood as a product of a musical collective unconscious.

To begin with you cannot fail to have noticed that the music is organised over a low pitched drone in the didjeridu. This is a low resonant C which sounds from beginning to end and which provides a meditative framework from which the rest of the fabric of the composition draws its significance. In a mythical and mystical sense this drone acts as the creative presence of God.

The cultural significance of the use of the Aboriginal wooden trumpet in this role should not escape us. The sound of the didjeridu in the minds of most Australians evokes the sacred feeling of our landscape—its vastness, its monotony (note, mono-tone), its brooding grandeur, its static, eternal time-feel. Sacred time is transcendent time, not to be confused with measured clock-time, which so controls our daily lives. As an activity, meditation invokes a sense of timelessness and a feeling of transcendence, and when regularly practised is known to heal and refresh.

Music works in and on time and therefore works upon a psychological trajectory that clearly affects our sense of time passing. Generally speaking the busier the surface of a musical work, in terms of the information it presents, the longer that work will seem. Much European music in the past century became more and more complex, developing well beyond the comprehension of even a highly educated concertgoer, reflecting the complexity and fragmentation of the civilisation it represents.

Dawn Mantras returns us to a conception of music primally conceived. In terms of its notes the music is very simple, being based upon a cycle of fifths fanning from C, both upwards (C–G) and downwards (C–F–B flat), complemented by the note E sounding as the strong major 3rd in relation to the fundamental (the 4th partial). Spread out as scale these intervallic relationships produce the notes of a five-note pentatonic scale: C–E–F–G–B flat. This is a scale which makes some claim to universality as it occurs in the folk traditions of all the world's musical cultures,

though more usually constructed around a minor rather than a major 3rd. Adding the decorative pitches D and A into this scale, by modal extension, transforms it into a mediievally conceived Mixolydian mode beloved of the early Christian composers of plainsong—the basis of Western conceptions of melody from around the sixth century (possibly before).

In modern Western theoretical terms we could describe the scale of *Dawn Mantras* as a C major scale with the all-important 7th degree flattened (i.e. B becomes B flat). Why all-important?

Modern Western tonality works on a scale system in which degrees of tension are established which need resolution to a neighbouring or home pitch, providing a sense of fulfilment and rest, however temporary, and eventually, at the end of a musical work, producing a sense of arrival at a destination and permitting closure. The neutralisation of the leading note, therefore, because it is the most active degree of the scale, divests that scale of its intensity, setting up a modal feel which evokes a sense of antiquity and, because of its special acoustical relationship to the fundamental drone, of tranquillity. Now you should be beginning to understand why you felt the way you did listening to *Dawn Mantras*.

Conceived in a modern harmonic sense as a dominant 7th in F major (the key with B flat in its signature) the effect of the 7th is always to fall—just as in *Dawn Mantras* the primary melodic contour always falls, arriving on one of the primary 5ths (G or F), or on the Tonic (C), signalling resignation (rather than upward striving), providing a sense of peace and obedience to the dictates of the droned sense of God-like Being.

This droned sense of God is further reinforced from the beginning of the work where the low male voices intone a G. C–G makes up the interval of a perfect 5th. The interval of a perfect 5th signals the presence of God in music. (Flattening this interval by a semi-tone, in the same pervasive mediieval Western cosmology, indicates the Devil—the unsettling exact mid-point of the octave—to be avoided at all costs.)

The presence of a major rather than of a minor 3rd in relation to the fundamental (i.e. E instead of E flat) has a similarly profoundly

consequential effect, projecting a radiant major sonority and capturing what sounds and feels like typically Australian light—brilliant, harsh even. The words intoned by the God-like male voices are the Latin ‘aurora’ meaning dawn, and the Aboriginal words ‘dhilbi-dhilbi’, which in the Bundjalung language of north eastern New South Wales also means dawn.

The music proceeds as accumulation of texture and colour. Over the droned 5th between the didjeridu and the male voices, the shakuhachi (the traditional Japanese bamboo flute associated with Buddhist meditation) and tenor saxophone (associated with the low throaty warbles of American Jazz) intertwine in a conversational relationship based upon the articulation of a kind of sighing, singing shared melodic phrasing anchored to the drone and its 5th (C and G).

The entrance of the children’s voices adds another layer of meaning:

Hei-wa, Hei-wa, Ake gu-re,
Hei-wa, Hei-wa
Hei-wa, pen-yem-buh-an,
Su-buh, u-tuh.

(*Heiwa* is Japanese for peace. *Ake gure* is Japanese for dawn. *Penyembuhan* is Indonesian for healing. *Subuh* is Indonesian for dawn. *Utuh* is Indonesian for whole.)

Sung by the Australian Children’s Choir (whose voices are associated with Peter Allen’s popular song ‘I still call Australia home’, virtually a second Australian national anthem), this text is an invocation of understanding and harmony between the culturally diverse regions of the Pacific, a message that is given special hope and poignancy by the pure voices of our children. The culminating moment in this beautiful and powerful work is the entry of the child soprano intoning in the stratosphere the words of the Latin Pentecostal chant ‘Sancti Spiritus adsit nobis gratia’: ‘May the grace of the holy spirit be with us’, the Introit from the Mass of Pentecost. Pentecost is the season of the Christian calendar that celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit. (Ross Edwards discovered the chant in an old musical exercise book used by his

wife Helen in Winsome Evans' 'Concepts' class in First Year in our Department of Music.) To Edwards, the Holy Spirit signifies 'the life force, the imagination'. The message of *Dawn Mantras* is one that it shares with his Symphony No 2, *Earth Spirit Songs* (1997–98)—Renewal. In his words, these works represent 'The Renewal we have to have'.

Born in Sydney in 1943, by the mid-1970s Ross Edwards had rejected the 'dead' musical language of European modernism. He listened instead to the sounds of nature, fashioning a musical language from his experience of Australian landscape, defined in increasingly mystical and spiritual terms, and reflecting Australia's cultural diversity. The sounds of the Australian bush—especially of insects—have had a seminal influence both upon sound and structure in his compositions. Bird-song, too, has played a significant part. When he is composing, Edwards spurns pre-compositional planning, working intuitively, as though in a dream, responding to the promptings of his very richly developed musical unconscious mind. Although rich inter-relationships can be found connecting all his work, for him every new composition is a voyage into the unknown whose destination can never be predicted but serving an aesthetic which insists that his music is conceived as being functional rather than as entertainment.

In this sense Ross Edwards' creative processes might be thought to be not so very distinct from those of the Aboriginal song-man whose music is derived from his 'dreaming'. The symbolic power of landscape in the Australian Aboriginal culture has been well documented, but not perhaps well understood. James Cowan has pointed out that landscape for the Aborigines is 'a complex and luminous spiritual edifice reminiscent of an open-air cathedral'.³ The Australian story of landscape in music would be entirely lopsided without reference to Aboriginal musical culture from which white Australian composers have drawn significant influence.

The late Tommy Barrtjap Barandjak, an Aboriginal song-man from the Belyuen district in the far north of Australia, is the composer of the next song. It is part of a *wangga* cycle studied by University of Sydney ethnomusicologist Allan Marett and

discussed by him in a recent paper, 'Ghostly Voices: some Observations on Song-Creation, Ceremony and Being in NW Australia'.⁴ 'Ghostly Voices' refers both to the song-man himself and to the spirit ancestor who has taught him the song in the first place. These *wangga* songs are used in *kapuk* ceremonies designed primarily to separate the ghosts of deceased persons from human society, to send them on their way through the cycle of re-incarnation finally to emerge from totemic sites in the landscape as conception spirits upon whom the continuity of life depends.

The powerful spirituality of the next song is as unmistakable as it is succinct. You will notice the similarity to the Edwards *Dream Mantras* in that the momentum of the song is established by the entry of the didjeridu drone. The melodic line, too, falls as though drawn into the earth. The text is in Batjamahl, the everyday language of the singer, and shows something of the process of the song's creation:

Yagarra ngabindjang ngami
Yagarra yine ngave-menuung
Ngappindjang ngappuring-djo nong
Yagarra nyebindjang nyamu

Yagarra dawarra wagatj-maka ngabindjang ngami 'ni'
Yagarra nyebindjang nyamu

(Yagarra! I'm singing
Yagarra! What have I come to do?
I'm going to sing and then go back.
Yagarra! You sing.

Yagarra! I was sitting on the open beach and singing 'ni'.
Yagarra! You sing.)

It is unclear in the song-text if the 'I' is the singer, or the ghost who has taught him this song. The presences of both singer and ghost are contained in the song.⁵

Tommy Barandjak: *Yagarra ngabindjang ngami*
(not available for compact disc)

'Aboriginal culture is of the land.... The sacred dances are earth dances.... Stamping the feet gives connection to the land, spiritual quickening, and focus to the mind.' Music has a special capacity to tap into what Tacey has described as 'earth language', to give form to the feelings which arise in the deep world of the psyche. Defined in Jungian terms, this deep world of the psyche 'is really "nature" inside us' and is 'directly influenced by the forces of nature "outside" us. In Australia, where land and aboriginality are fused, this means that white Australians, virtually in spite of themselves, are slowly aboriginalised in their unconscious.'⁶ A view recently subscribed to as well by Germaine Greer is that Australia's future as a healthy nation, rather than being trapped in 'a strange nightmare of alienation', depends upon its becoming Aboriginal.⁷

No Australian composer has made more extensive use of Aboriginal music than Peter Sculthorpe, whose music is liberally criss-crossed with influences and song-lines drawn from Aboriginal sources. Born in Tasmania in 1929, Sculthorpe was acutely aware of the genocide committed upon the Tasmanian Aboriginal population. Fearing that the information would be irretrievably lost, long before it was fashionable he was building archives of Tasmanian Aboriginal materials.

Following the advice of Percy Grainger, Sculthorpe rejected European musical models, instead seeking his inspiration from Australia and Asia—especially from the landscape, with which, like Edwards, he feels a deep spiritual affiliation. Sculthorpe describes himself as a religious composer but subscribes to no orthodox religious creed, his very private beliefs being closer to the kind of animism that underlies Aboriginal culture. An element of ritual runs through all his music, expressed sometimes in long-drawn sorrowing melody, and at other times in motoric dance-like rhythmic energy, as in the first movement of his String Quartet No 11.

The music of this movement, sub-titled *Jabiru Dreaming*, draws upon northern aboriginal dance-rhythms and is isorhythmic in character. The viola's line evokes the strange, seemingly backwards gait of the jabiru, a kind of stork. The 'cello follows the

rhythm pattern of a dijeridu drone transcribed by Trevor Jones.⁸

As in Edwards's *Dawn Mantras*, the pitch organisation in Sculthorpe's music is centred upon a droned C and its related 5ths, G and F. The appearance of the four flats in the key signature is not an indication of tonality but rather indicates a darkening of each of the central pitches by a semi-tone. For example C is darkened by D flat and G by A flat and G flat. As in *Dawn Mantras*, B flat appears as an important modally flattened 7th.

The second main section of the movement, marked *Ancora deciso*, shifts the main melody away from the viola (indicating the gait of the jabiru bird) into the First Violin. The motive here is built around A flats and G's, a constant in Sculthorpe's musical language recalling the seventeenth century astronomer Kepler's sound of planet earth as it revolves in space: G–A flat–G was first noted by Sculthorpe as the main motive of Mahler's 'Farewell' in the *Song of the Earth*.

This section dissolves away into the humming of insects typical of Kakadu National Park. The recapitulation of the opening material presents a ghostliness, rather like the feeling of liminality projected in the Tommy Barandjak song, while clapping sticks, typically used to indicate dance movements in Aboriginal performance, are clearly indicated in the tapping *col legno* rhythms of Second Violin.

The return of the second section places the First Violin material in a compound rhythm, combined with the viola's jabiru motive, over the dijeridu patterns; leading to a climax in which the jabiru viola motive is pitched on the earth motive G–A flat–G. At this moment, the strong presence of the minor 3rd (F–A flat) suggests F minor darkness over the C drone, made even darker by the continuing presence of G now clashing ominously with A flat.

The movement resolves into birdcalls surrounding a rising natural 5ths cycle in the viola, which comes to rest in the thin light projected by a high C. This ending is aboriginal-like in that the 'Dreaming' of the title takes on a new meaning suggesting liminality: that space between life and death indicated in Tommy Barandjak's song, where the living and the dead mingle in a dream-world inhabited by the presence of both the living creative

composer and the spirits of the recently dead song-giver, such spirits often inhabiting the form of birds.

This is a fascinating correspondence between aboriginal and white Australian musical creation especially, as in Sculthorpe's case, it is here an unconscious affinity.

Peter Sculthorpe: String Quartet No 11,
Jabiru Dreaming (First Movement.)

David Lumsdaine (born Sydney, 1931), another early graduate from the Department of Music, has lived most of his adult creative life in the United Kingdom. Since 1973 Lumsdaine has returned to his native Australia to spend increasingly lengthy periods in country areas, including several trips to the far north. The recording and editing of Australian birdsong has formed an increasingly substantial part of his activity. Lumsdaine has written:

In any relatively undisturbed area, the sounds of the creatures—birds, frogs, mammals, grasshoppers, crickets, cicadas—reflect the shape of the landscape. The sounds characterise the diversity of the habitat. They articulate a network of communications between individuals, groups and species that are responding to diurnal and seasonal rhythms, the weather and to one another ... on the largest and smallest time-scales these sounds are a sonic sampling of the intersection of a variety of chaotic systems: geological, climatic, biological and so on ... For me composing is usually the notation on paper of what goes on *inside* my head. By contrast, these soundscapes are recordings of a very active listening which we may say has gone on *outside* my head. In the making and editing of these recordings I'm organising my listening: that is to say, I'm composing it.⁹

Lumsdaine's soundscapes 'are studies in harmony, rhythm and texture in the sounds of the natural world'. To use Levi-Strauss' convenient distinction, their essential stuff is raw, as opposed to the cooked stuff of what is usually called music.

The following recording features the song of the Pied Butcher Bird. It was made in the Warrumbungle Range in northern central New South Wales at dawn on a spring morning in 1996. Moving from the 'raw' music of nature to the 'cooked' stuff of human

composition, it will be followed immediately by the beginning of Lumsdaine's *Kali Dances* (1994). I think your ears will tell you why.

David Lumsdaine: *Pied Butcher Birds Of Spirey Creek*
David Lumsdaine: *Kali Dances*

Using a complex mathematically conceived musical language following the stylistic tropes developed by modern French composer Olivier Messiaen's pupils, most notably Pierre Boulez, the music of *Kali Dances* bears some deliberate resemblance to the chaotic harmony of nature. It is an extended chamber-work for eleven players conceived in nine movements: as three Hockets, two Strophes, three Choruses, and a centrally placed movement of Antiphons containing solos for wind, brass and vibraphone entitled 'Aubade', which compliments the 'Nocturne' of the first Strophe.

The sections we heard were Hocket 1, Chorus 1, Hocket 2, and the first sections of the nocturnal Strophe 1. The Hockets in particular bear more than a superficial resemblance to the Warrambungle dawn chorus.

Aspects of the fearsome Hindu deity Kali are singled out by the composer: Kali as the female personification of time; Kali as an extreme embodiment of the creative and destructive aspects of our nature; and Kali as a vortex of energy—benign, beautiful, cruel, grotesque.

Kali Dances was Lumsdaine's last major composition. He has now turned 70, and for the last five years has steadfastly insisted that he no longer composes music, although he does continue actively to study and record bird-song.

There is another correspondence here with the aboriginal conception of birds as spirit ancestors occupying that liminal area between life and death. Could it be that now, with his musical creativity focussed in recording and understanding the language of birds, Lumsdaine too is behaving unconsciously much in the manner of an aboriginal song man, negotiating the liminality in

the process of becoming re-absorbed into the land of his birth?

Like many other Australian composers, David Lumsdaine has drawn both from landscape and from the musical traditions of Asia, the common element being a sense of time, or rather the timelessness of the sacred. Mapping the sacred musical traditions of Asia onto an experience of Australian landscape may seem a rather bizarre way of establishing cultural identity; but is it?

In his recent short introduction to music, Nicholas Cook writes:

... if we use music as a means of insight into other cultures, then equally we can see it as a means of negotiating cultural identity ... a comprehensive example is post-war Australian music: composers like Peter Sculthorpe have brought together native Australian and East Asian influences in such a way as to contribute towards the broader cultural and political repositioning of Australia as an integral part of the emerging region of the Pacific Rim, rather than European culture on the wrong side of the world.¹⁰

Stephen Fitzgerald writes about the kind of Australian who '... acknowledges the European cultural heritage and sees no reason to deny it, but who sees the Australian identity as the here and the now and not the there or the yesterday, and whose here and whose now is in an Asian setting. This is, if you like, the Australian Asian, which has nothing to do with race.'¹¹ This quotation appears in Peter Sculthorpe's recently published autobiography, in which he adds, 'Over the years, I seem to have become this same kind of Australian that Stephen Fitzgerald defines, and I am cited as one. In a sense it just happened, beginning when I was very young.' Of particular importance in Sculthorpe's early life was the advice he received from composer Percy Grainger, to 'look North to the Islands'.¹²

The orchestral work *Mangrove* (1979), regarded by many as his orchestral masterpiece, occupies a special place in Sculthorpe's output. *Mangrove* is fascinatingly related to Eliza Fraser and to the Convict story told in Patrick White's novel *A Fringe of Leaves*, and painted in a famous series by Sidney Nolan. The main source for this work, however, is Japanese *saibara*. Adapted from folk song, *saibara* is the sung repertory of the ancient Japanese court. Of particular importance is a transcription

of a chant called *Ise-no-umi*, which Sculthorpe reproduces in *Mangrove* nearly in full.

Peter Sculthorpe: *Ise No Umi*

Sculthorpe writes:

Usually, I employ Japanese aesthetic and musical ideas when they are related to my own, or when they be easily incorporated into my musical language. The melodies of *saibara*, for instance, are very similar to the melodies I fashion myself.¹³

The correspondence between Christian plainsong, used in Sculthorpe's 'cello *Requiem* of the same year, and Japanese *saibara* has not escaped eminent English music critic Wilfrid Mellers:

This chant, first enunciated by cellos, fulfils the same function as the plainsong quotations in the 'cello *Requiem*, only this time it is based on a Japanese *saibaru* court melody, 'Isé-no-umi.' It no more imparts a flavour of exoticism than the Christian incantation renders the *Requiem* European. These rudimentary themes are ab-original in singing of the acoustical bases of song, which makes Sculthorpe a global village composer at the deepest possible level. This is allegorised in that the chant sung by one group of cellos is echoed by another, playing the same pitches in independent rhythm, *fuori di passo* (literally 'out of step'). This ghost of the tune is its and our rebirth, which inspires a paean of praise from created nature, evoked by *sul ponticello* and vibrato devices on the 'human' strings, but over the bridge, *come veduta a volo d'uccello*. This duet of humanity and nature leads to a return of the 'savage' brass music in snarling fragmentation, hounded by percussive ostinatos. At the climax the strings wail their original broken sighs, no longer muted, but *largamente, con desiderio d'amore*. This may be Sculthorpe's most powerful statement of the spiritual as well as well as ecological interdependence of humans and the world they inhabit.¹⁴

In a number of ways, *Mangrove* is bonded to Sculthorpe's 'Sun Music' series, especially to *Sun Music I* (1965), with which it shares the same orchestration of Brass, Percussion and Strings. In *Sun Music I*, Brass colours signify the earth and Strings, the air—heat-filled cluster sonorities create the feeling of a desert

landscape. Percussion serves a ritual function, punctuating important moments in the score and adding colour and mystery to the orchestral palette. In *Mangrove* the association of brass and earth is maintained but in the final section, harnessed to the Japanese chant, it binds together the spiritual attributes of the great sun goddess *Amaterasu Omikami* with the Australian earth and Australian light.

Peter Sculthorpe: *Mangrove*

Mapping the ancient court music of Japan onto Australian landscape was for me a formative creative experience, giving birth to my own musical language, which I feel to be as quint-essentially Australian as it is a woman's voice. The Japanese aesthetic of *yugen*—of great beauty and sorrow conjoined—is one that I have appropriated as my own.

Separated by death and economic circumstances from my parents at three years of age, I was sent from Sydney, where I had been born in 1946, a thousand miles away to live with relatives on a large sheep station, 'Maneroo', outside Longreach in central Queensland. The five years I spent in the outback was a relatively happy and stable part of my childhood. All there was out there was Landscape, which dwarfed the relatively few human inhabitants into insignificance. It was to me was etched with the pain of separation from mother and siblings, and came to stand in the place of these all- important and formative human relationships. It was a landscape that inspired dreams and fertile imagination; it was a vast empty space in which to play.

Many years later, when as an undergraduate student in Peter Sculthorpe's ethnomusicology class I first heard the ancient court music of Japan, it seemed to me, with a shock of revelation, to provide the only music image I could link with my early childhood experience of the landscape around 'Maneroo'. The decade I spent in England only heightened my fascination with Asian culture, and I adopted Lady Sarashina, a medieval Japanese lady, as a muse. The English translation of her Buddhist account of her spiritual

journeys, *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams*, became my second Bible.

Another highly significant muse was the Australian pianist Roger Woodward. The two muses are drawn together in a watershed composition he commissioned for my 50th birthday, *Meditations on a Chinese Character*. This work is essentially an unresolved meditative dialogue for shakuhachi, flute, 'cello and counter-tenor (myself) and solo piano extended through the sonorities of a second piano, harp and percussion (himself). Using a much earlier composition, *Angklung*, as a kind of *cantus-firmus*, the work is textless for most of its duration, until the sudden appearance of Lady Sarashina's ghost, who sings these words:

There was nothing but the flowers desolate on the hillside
and there I wrote this poem:

Here they bloom in mountain depths
far from any dwelling place
and no-one comes
to view their blooms.

These words seemed to me to summarise the creative output of women artists through all time. These feelings of separation, of sorrow linked with great and finally unobtainable beauty, are inescapably linked with my own feelings for the Australian landscape, with which I long to become a unity, but to which I can never truly belong—in the way that Tommy Barrtjap Barandjak belongs—at least on this side of life.

Anne Boyd: *Meditations on a Chinese Character*

From the idea of beauty as sorrow, we return to the idea of beauty as joy. Ross Edwards's Symphony No 3, *Mater Magna*, is conceived as 'a meditation on the need for ecological rebalancing, using as a symbol the Earth Mother, Mater Magna, the vital female force in nature'. I continue to quote the composer's programme note:

[This symphony] is about healing and ultimately achieving

wholeness. It follows a tendency in my recent work to juxtapose exuberant, earthy, sometimes spiky dance rhythms with moments of profound introspection. I expect that in thus highlighting the schism our society has inherited between matter and spirit, masculine and feminine, mind and body and so on, I'm subconsciously reflecting our increasingly felt collective need for balance and conciliation.¹⁵

The final movement of this symphony combines dance-like energy with plainsong, birdsong and amplified insect sounds preparing for the final moment of jubilation, the trumpets reiteration of the plainsong fragment we heard as the climax of *Dawn Mantras*.

Ross Edwards: Symphony No 3 3rd Movement
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I conclude with the words of Nicholas Cook :

... in a world in which we struggle for understanding we cannot afford to overlook what music has to offer ... we need to know, and indeed to go on telling ourselves as we listen to it, that music is *not* a phenomenon of the natural world but a human construction. It is, *par excellence*, the artifice which disguises itself as nature. That is what makes it not only a source of sensory pleasure and an object of intellectual speculation , but also the ultimate hidden persuader.¹⁶

I can only speculate about what you may have been persuaded of by the music and reflections about music I have offered. But of one thing I have become convinced in the preparation of this paper: that is, that the process of aboriginalisation notwithstanding, no deep sense of belonging in this country is possible without the healing of an act of genuine reconciliation with Australia's indigenous population. That is the deep need expressed in all the music presented.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, San Francisco, 1988, p.11.
- 2 David J. Tacey, *Re-Enchantment: the New Australian Spirituality*, Sydney, 2000, p.96.

- 3 James Cowan, *Mysteries of the Dreaming: the Spiritual Life of Australian Aborigines*, Sydney, 2001, p.38.
- 4 *Oceania* 71.1 (September 2002): 18–29.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.19.
- 6 David J. Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred*, Melbourne, 1998, p.135.
- 7 See Peter Ellinsen, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 August 2001.
- 8 An early graduate of the Department of Music in this University, who, under the influence of the foundation Professor of Music, the late Donald Peart, and the guidance of the late Professor Elkin, became one of the first white Australian experts in Aboriginal music.
- 9 David Lumsdaine, *Chaotic Harmony*, 1996, unpublished lecture at the University of York.
- 10 *Music: a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 1998, pp.129–30.
- 11 *Is Australia an Asian Country?*, Sydney, 1997, p.70.
- 12 *Sun Music: Journeys and Reflections from a Composer's Life*, Sydney, 1999, p.275.
- 13 *Sun Music*, p.147.
- 14 *Singing in the Wilderness*, Illinois, 2001, p.155.
- 15 Note for Melbourne performance, March 2001; see Peter Sculthorpe, *Music for Federation*, disc and booklet.
- 16 *Music: a Very Short Introduction*, p.131.