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Thesis Proposal Review
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Deepening connections between human and place: A non-Indigenous musician's creative process with Country, informed by Indigenous and environmental learning.

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Abstract

The planet is facing an environmental crisis. It is widely accepted that the dominance of western extractivist ideologies is a major contributor to the unsustainable relationship Westerners have with what we call the natural world (Chagnon et al, 2022, Moreton-Robinson, 2020, Weir, 2021). By contrast, Indigenous peoples in Australia have, for tens of thousands of years, lived sustainably with the land and everything on it, and importantly, see themselves as part of the natural world (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, Dei and Jaimungal, 2018, Cummings, 2023, Kelly, 2023). To address the human/nature dualism (a term coined by Val Plumwood, 2009) that exists within Western worldviews, through this PhD I seek, firstly, to investigate how I, a non-Indigenous person, can build a process of respectful and permissible Indigenous-informed connections to three chosen locations within Australia over time, and secondly, to create works of music which respond to, and manifest these connections. It is my intention that my research and works will provide a model for non-Indigenous artists to similarly engage with Indigenous knowledges, and forge closer relationships with their environments through their artistic practices.

My research and creative processes involve non-linear research, immersion, observation (of surroundings and self), improvisation, experimentation, impulse-following, and imagination. Reading environments as literature, informed by ecological, historical and cultural learning, also impacts my research and interactions with Country. Key themes in Indigenous knowledges that influence my work are decolonial research, the sentience of Country, and relationality.

Positionality

I am a woman of Anglo heritage, with ancestors who came as colonisers of this continent. I was born in Guruk, also known as Port Macquarie, within Biripi Country, on the mid north coast of what is now known as NSW. Ever since I was a child I have always loved being in nature and making music. As a white woman in Australia, I have been brought up in western culture, and have benefited from ongoing colonisation of land with which First Nations people have ancestral bonds, and which they never ceded. It is only in the last six or so years that have I come to have any more than the most cursory knowledge of the First Peoples of Australia. As a musician, I am a composer, performer and improviser, and my main instrument is trumpet. I studied jazz at Sydney Conservatorium, and nowadays see my creative practice within the realms of jazz, experimental and art musics.

Summary of Original PhD Proposal

Overall, my PhD plans have not shifted greatly since I submitted my application in late 2022. The key aims of my initial proposal are still mostly applicable. These were:

- 1. To devise a process of place-responding music creation as a non-Indigenous composer, which is informed by on-Country environmental learning from Indigenous custodians.*
- 2. To compose new works of place-responding music via the above process*
- 3. To foster a closer connection between myself and a chosen on-Country location in a way which is respectful to Indigenous law and culture.*

The significance of the project was that it would achieve these ends:

- 1. A stronger human-place connection between myself and the chosen location, including greater environmental knowledge and ability to care for the site.*
- 2. A greater intercultural connection and understanding between myself and the Indigenous persons I work with.*
- 3. The creation of place-responding works of non-Indigenous Australian music that show a deepened understanding of Indigenous custodianship of the land, and result from cross-cultural connections.*
- 4. The creation of a model for non-Indigenous artists to connect more deeply with the natural landscape and understand its significance to Indigenous peoples when creating place-responding works. This could lead to closer human-nature relationships for both artists and their audiences.*

Changes to PhD Plans

Initially, I wanted to find an Indigenous mentor or mentors who were experts in ecological or environmental fields, perhaps a National Park Ranger, from whom I would learn about specific places over time. If this came about, I would find funds to pay them for their work. This didn't eventuate for a few reasons. Early last year my primary supervisor Dr Christopher Sainsbury, who is Indigenous himself, recommended that instead of seeking out such a mentor, or mentors, I find opportunities to learn from many Indigenous people, building understandings from many sources, and cross-referencing to see which pieces of information are agreed upon. Doing research this way has worked well for me over the past 12 months. It also reflects what I have learned from several authors about the decentralised nature of Indigenous knowledge-keeping in Australia (Blay, 2015, Cumpston et al, 2022, Yunkaporta, 2019). Another reason for deciding against the "environmental mentor or mentors" angle is that Aboriginal people are in high demand for their knowledge at the moment, largely by non-Indigenous run organisations. This is on top of responsibilities to their own people. Aboriginal and Tongan vocalist Hamani Tanginoa calls this the "cultural load" (Simpson, Filewood & Tanginoa, 2024). Therefore, personal mentorship for an individual, non-Indigenous person such as myself is much more of an ask than I initially realised. Additionally, as First Nations' people's environmental knowledge is intertwined with other kinds of cultural knowledge, my initial view to find an "environmental expert" didn't take into account that I could learn a great variety of things that would be relevant to my research and creative practice from the perspectives of a range of Aboriginal people.

The other change pertains to the locations I have chosen to forge connections with, and write music about. Originally, I hoped to choose a place or places of focus based on the custodianship and expertise of a mentor or mentors. Due to the shift away from pursuing a mentorship, but more importantly because of my own existing connections, my chosen locations are Iron Cove and Bulgamatta, both within the wider Dharug/Eora Nation, as well as places in Dabee Country. Iron Cove is close to where I live, within the Countries of the Wangal and Gadigal people of the Dharug/Eora Nation, and since living here, I have taken to visiting Iron Cove regularly. The next location is the Grose Valley in the Blue Mountains, or Bulgamatta as Dharug elders Chris and Leanne Tobin call it, a Dharug word meaning "mountain water place" (Tobin, 2024, Somerville and Power, 2017). It's an area not far from where I live, which I've been visiting occasionally for at least five years. Both Bulgamatta and Iron Cove are within my primary supervisor Dr Christopher Sainsbury's Country as a Dharug man, adding an extra layer of relevance and connection. The third location, Dabee Country in the northeastern region of the Wiradjuri Nation, is an area I have visited and composed works about since 2021, and I have existing connections with two Dabee people.

Throughout the PhD I will continue to visit these three locations in order to build my knowledge and connection to them, and will continue creating responding works of music.

Additionally, in 2023 I created works about Yuin Country, and some other broader concepts too. Due to living far from Yuin Country, it's not practical to include Yuin Country as one of my chosen locations, however works created there, and discussion of these, will be included in my thesis and portfolio.

Precursors to the PhD

My PhD project is part of an existing long-term music journey. I've been interested in how music can contribute to environmental activism for several years, and I explored this theme in my Honours project in 2020. Having released three albums of my original works by that stage, for large and small jazz ensembles, I had already established a personal aesthetic and approach to composition, so was seeking to augment this in a meaningful way which would help connect listeners with the natural world, whilst also staying true to my existing musical identity. In 2021 I received an APRA Art Music Fund grant to compose music inspired by places in Dabee Country, one of the locations mentioned above, through a process which involved learning from Dabee custodians, and on-Country immersion. I began writing five pieces during a week-long residency in early 2022 for my jazz quartet Underwards, which can be heard on our album "Delve", released last year. As part of our album launch tour, we performed these pieces at Kandos, in Dabee Country, which was a wonderful "full circle" moment of bringing the music back to the area it came from. The 2022 residency and resulting works showed me a doorway into many avenues of research and creative practice that could be explored more deeply, leading to the development of my PhD proposal.

Activities in the Past 12 Months

My PhD-related activities for the past 12 months included a lot of travelling, meeting new people, going to talks, walks and workshops, listening to music, making music, and environmental volunteering. I attended various cultural workshops and talks, mostly in Dharug Country, learning about local plants and ecosystems, and cultural practices and beliefs. Additionally, in my local area I am involved with Bushcare as a volunteer, and have been to several "one-off" Bushcare working bees in the wider Dharug Country area, with plans to participate more regularly in the Blue Mountains. At university, I took the Creative Practice Research class with Dr Pat O'Grady, and Environment Studio

through the School of Art and Design, with Dr Amanda Stuart and Walgalu man Aidan Hartshorn. I also participated in the Sharing Stories Arts Exchange program, which is very similar to Environment Studio, doing a hybrid of the two courses. These courses involve field trips in which students meet and learn from Indigenous knowledge-holders and others who have worked closely with them, and respond to experiences and discussions through their creative practices. Another focus of the courses is community-building, and I made many connections and learned about other participants' art practices. Through these courses I created four works of sonic art. In 2023 I also joined the Fenner Circle; a yarnning group of postgraduates which meets monthly to discuss papers on decolonial research and Indigenous issues. In total, over the past 12 months I've created ten new works. Some of the works and their related research activities will be examined in greater detail, later in this paper.

Literature Review

Academically speaking, I place my PhD project at the overlapping of several areas of research and creative inquiry which are active and lively at this point in time. These are decolonisation, Australian nature and place-responding music, and environmental and climate activist art music.

Decolonisation

In making music that is a response to Indigenous-informed connections with Country, decolonisation of myself and my practices is imperative. Dei and Jaimungal (2018), describe decolonisation as “the important challenge of...subverting the taken-for-granted, everyday assumptions deeply held by society that work to routinely reinforce White power and privilege” (p. 1). To comprehend Indigenous ways of relating to the natural world, and guard against the perpetuation of damaging ideologies, I, as a white person, have to understand the colonial underpinnings of my culture and be able to critique them. Extractivism is one colonial concept that has led to environmental issues worldwide. It is the pervasive, large-scale practice of unsustainable resource extraction (Chagnon et al, 2022). Indigenous peoples, by contrast, believe that “humanity is part of the natural world, has responsibilities to the world, and is born from, lives for, and dies to return to, the living world known as country” (Rose, James & Watson, 2003, p. 2). Related is the belief that Country itself has sentience (Cumpston et al, 2022, Yunkaporta, 2019, Mahood, 2022, Behrendt, 2023). The sentience of Country is key to my research and creative process, and I'll expand on this later in the context of some of my compositions.

The concepts of objectivity and categorization in Western science are also in opposition to Indigenous knowledges. In illustrating differences between Maori and Western sciences, Moko-Painting et al (2023) assert that Western science seeks to achieve objectivity by distancing the scientist from the object of study, an approach that is underpinned by the idea that culture and nature are separate (p. 13-14). Counter to this is the concept of relationality. Through relationality, Indigenous knowledges recognise the complex systems connecting everything. Relationality refers to the relationships and connections among humans and between humans and non-human entities, the transfer of energies and responsibilities, how these relationships influence our judgements, actions and identities, and other related complexities (Moreton-Robinson, 2016, Yunkaporta, 2019). An excerpt from Hannah Bell's book "Storymen" illustrates the conflict between these Indigenous and Western ideas well:

"It baffled (Ngarinyin lawman David Mowaljarllai) that whitefellas developed their knowledge by *busting things up*, reducing things to little pieces separate from everything else that contributes to their nature. For him, everything in creation is not only living and interconnected, but existence story and story cycle" (2009, p. 80-81).

I plan in the near future to explore academic writings and examples of artistic output exemplifying creative decolonial approaches. In my own creative practice, I am challenging Western ideologies of extractivism and separation between humans and nature, with processes of Indigenous-informed collaboration and connection with Country, as a form of decolonisation.

Australian Environmental and Landscape Music

My work is situated within the canon of Australian environmental and landscape music, and the current worldwide climate activist music and art movement. In Australia, music and art has been made about the land for as long as Indigenous peoples have inhabited it. It is through music, dance, art and story that knowledge, law and spirituality was, and continues to be, taught and kept alive (Stubington and Marika-Munungiritj, 2007, Ellis, 1984, Bell, 2009). Because all facets of life are tied to the land, so too are these practices. Once the European colonisers arrived, it was nearly a century and a half before they began a movement to create distinctly Australian music as part of efforts to forge a cultural identity distinct from their British origins. This was part of the wider Jindyworobak movement, which began with literature, and sought inspiration from the Australian landscape and its original inhabitants (Ford, 2002, Symons, 2002). The works that came out of this movement include much of what would now be identified as appropriated content, which was almost certainly used without permission. Beth Dean and Victor Carrell's touring show featured performances of works by Alfred and Mirrie Hill, which combined European and Indigenous song, and Dean also performed

dances copied from video footage shared with her by anthropologists (Harris, 2020). Composers in this era, also including Antill and Sculthorpe, have been criticised for perpetuating simplistic tropes of Aboriginal music which overlook nuance, meaning and diversity (Curkpatrick, 2013, Harris, 2020).

In recent times, many examples exist of more culturally respectful meetings of Indigenous and non-Indigenous musics which respond to environment and place. Many Aboriginal artists and groups including Archie Roach, Ruby Hunter, the Young Wagilak Group, and Daniel and David Wilfred, have worked alongside the Australian Art Orchestra in performance and recording, telling stories of Country and culture (Australian Art Orchestra, n.d., Curkpatrick, 2013, Deadly Vibe, 2007, Australian Art Orchestra, 2021). In the Ngarra Burria program, a professional development initiative for Indigenous art music composers led by Dr Christopher Sainsbury, composers including Aaron Wyatt, Will Kepa, Brenda Gifford and James Henry evoke themes such as weather, journeys through Country, and places of significance to them, in works performed and recorded by Ensemble Offspring (Ngarra Burria, 2022).

Some non-Indigenous Australians whose music challenges human/nature dualism are Jim Denley, Hollis Taylor, and Liza Lim. In his practice of improvising outdoors with, and in response to, environmental sounds, Denley seeks to de-centre the human and give greater credence to a fuller “sonoverse” (Denley, 2023). Taylor’s dedication to transcription and performance of pied butcherbird song similarly honours non-human music, and through this practice she has created a deep relationship with these birds (Denley, 2017). Evoking likenesses between human and plant communities, Liza Lim utilises instruments whose sound-making processes echo ecological phenomena in her long-form work “How Forests Think” (Lim, 2016).

Environmental and Climate Activist Art Music

Looking further abroad, there can be seen a wide range of approaches in environmental activist music. In their survey, Hurley and Taylor (2015) list common approaches in music and sound art. These include works that celebrate places in nature, works that examine human-nature relationships, works that evoke places in nature and how they are changing, and lastly, works which utilise sonic sculptures and installations to draw attention to aspects of the environment. Some key contributors to the worldwide canon of environmental activist art music are John Luther Adams, Meredith Monk, and Hildegard Westerkamp. John Luther Adams’ mission, through his music and sonic works, is to draw awareness to the complexity of nature and its systems, and our role within them, so as to grow better understandings of how to live in harmony with these systems and avoid our own extinction (Adams, 2012). In Meredith Monk’s album “On Behalf of Nature”, she uses the human voice and body as a kind of conduit for nature, and with her vocal ensemble accompanied by

percussion and woodwinds, suggests elements of the environment through evocation rather than reproduction or illustration (UM Stamps, 2017, Tornow, 2020). The soundscape-based work of Hildegard Westerkamp is concerned with the health of sound environments, and how this reflects the overall ecological health of their associated physical environments (Westerkamp, 2002).

Whilst some of the approaches mentioned here have some similarities to my own, I see my own works and processes for this PhD as being unique contributions to research due to the methods and ideas they combine. Firstly, sentience of Country and relationality have led to my focus on relationships to specific places, with an emphasis on expanding upon pre-PhD connections across the span of my PhD. Secondly, my process and resulting music is informed by Indigenous cultural and environmental learning, rather than Indigenous music itself. Thirdly, my engagement with Indigenous culture is locally-focused, rather than on remote (at least in relation to where I live) Indigenous communities which are often, questionably, perceived as more “culturally authentic.” Lastly, there is an overarching focus in my creative practice of challenging human/nature dualism and Western extractivism through my emphasis on sentience of, and collaboration with, Country.

New Works

Go Mangrove!

The first piece I wrote for this PhD was an etude for solo trumpet. Writing solo trumpet etudes was not something I had tried before last year, and was suggested as a starting point by my primary supervisor Dr Christopher Sainsbury.

The piece is called “Go Mangrove!” and it is an Iron Cove piece. Iron Cove branches off Parramatta River, or Burrumatta, close to where I live. I regularly ride my bike around what is known as the Bay Run; a continuous loop of path around the Cove. Around mid-2022 I noticed a lone mangrove seedling growing out of the mud in an exposed spot where there are no other mangroves, and there is a 45 degree wall down to the water. The first time I saw this little mangrove, it seemed very vulnerable, tossed around by the wind and choppy water. Since then I’ve visited this little, lone mangrove many times, in various weather conditions and tidal levels.

It’s come to symbolise some things for me. Ecological knowledge I have gained through my life, and at Bushcare volunteering in recent times, has contributed to how I read environments. Additionally, recent research into pre-colonial landscapes (Gammage, 2011, Smith, 2022, Sherrard, 2023) has caused me to try to picture places as they may have been before 1788. My environmental

literacy leads me to believe that this stretch of shore would probably once have been home to many thriving mangroves, back before colonisation and the pollution of Burramatta. I therefore see this mangrove's existence as a small act of defiance. Also, for me it represents hope. I was reminded of the mangrove when I heard Uncle Chris Tobin, a Dharug elder, give a talk about environmental activism (Tobin, 2024). He feels hopeful that things are past their worst, in terms of mistreatment of the environment in general, but also in terms of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

So, I began the process of writing an etude about the mangrove by improvising on the trumpet. As I did so I imagined the movement of water, wind and plant, using sounds that I felt suggested these elements. I wanted to put myself in the place of the plant. In recent years I have been doing a lot of experimental improvisation, and through this have widened my vocabulary of extended and expressive techniques on the trumpet. After the initial improvisation, which I recorded on my phone, I went back and transcribed what I had played. The extended techniques I used include half-valve squeezes producing quieter, choked tones, plus breathy tones, and air blown without sounding the instrument. I also used very pronounced vibrato, plus appoggiaturas, mordants, and rapid, repeated dynamic swells, all to suggest movements of water, wind and plant. Through several further development sessions, I altered and augmented the material, experimented with the structure, and cut sections that I didn't think served the piece, all the while staying true to the overall flavour and story of the original improvisation.

Fig. 1: Excerpt from "Go Mangrove!"

The musical score consists of four staves of music for trumpet, starting with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature (C). The first staff is labeled 'Trumpet in Bb' and begins with the tempo marking 'Molto rubato' and the performance instruction 'Breathily, with much vibrato'. The dynamic marking is 'mp'. A slur covers the first two measures, with the annotation 'rippling dynamic fluctuations' below it. The second staff is labeled 'Tpt.' and starts at measure 3. It includes a 'vib.' marking above the first note and a dynamic marking of 'mp'. A slur covers measures 3 through 6, with the annotation 'smear btwn half-valve and full at will' below it. The third staff is labeled 'Tpt.' and starts at measure 7. It is marked 'Breathily' and has a dynamic marking of 'mp'. A slur covers measures 7 through 10. The fourth staff is labeled 'Tpt.' and starts at measure 11. It has a dynamic marking of 'mp' and a slur covering measures 11 through 14. The score concludes with a final note marked with an accent (^).

The piece itself, when listened to by others, won't convey what it symbolises for me in terms of environmental defiance, renewal and hope. However, the music may instead convey a sense of the organic, and of movement and life. For myself, there are more layers to it. The piece, in addition to evoking the mangrove and its place in the world, also renews in my mind the ideas the mangrove has come to represent for me. This is similar to the way that Tyson Yunkaporta, in his book *Sand Talk* (2019), carves objects with symbols which have meaning for him, helping him to remember detailed information and lessons he's learned. I expect that all of the pieces created for this PhD will encapsulate meanings for me in this way, and may also develop extra layers of meaning over time.

A Place, A Day, A Summer

"A Place, A Day, A Summer", is a Bulgamatta piece. For several years before starting my PhD I felt drawn to Bulgamatta. I visit it at times when I feel the need to get out of the city, and I have a high place I like to sit, looking over the huge expanse of the valley. Usually my visits last for two to three hours. I observe. I watch the clouds and their shadows on the valleys and cliffs. I watch the light change on the rock faces as the sun moves across the sky, and I notice the difference in light on different visits, and the sounds of different bugs and far off birds, as well as the river in the valley below. Trucks can be heard on the highway a few kilometres away, and planes sometimes fly over too. Sometimes I draw what I see. I also observe my mental and physical states. My thoughts can be active and distracted by other things in my life, and I slip in and out of awareness of myself and where I am. Usually, over time, my thoughts calm and slow down. There also often seems to be a dreamy, or even sleepy, mood to the place, and occasionally a kind of loneliness. Being in that high place makes me feel small, sometimes suspended.

When writing pieces about Country, and with Country, I have begun to think of Country as a friend, or a teacher. Aboriginal people's relationships to Country are bonds of kinship; they came from the land, their ancestors are alive in the land, and their totemic relationships are familial (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, Rose, James & Watson, 2003, Cummings, 2023). As a non-Aboriginal person I do not, and can not, have this kind of relationship to Country, but I can, and do, perceive it as sentient and relate to it that way. Through seeing Country as friend and teacher, I can still connect with it, and in forging these kinds of connections, building and maintaining relationships over time is important. Getting to know a place over time also ties in with the concept of the everywhen. I've read about the everywhen in Saunders (2022) and Gilchrist (2016) and in my own words, it's an understanding of time in which past, present and future overlap and cycle. Through stories, art and ceremony, it is possible to visit other times, keep memories alive, and see recurring cycles of nature. By making recurring visits to Bulgamatta, I am attempting to get a small glimpse of its everywhen. I

also have come to see these works as co-written by Country and myself. This is another way that I'm leaning into the idea of Country's sentience, and also the idea of relationality.

"A Place, A Day, A Summer", one of two works now written with Bulgamatta, is an atmospheric mood piece, with hints of the sounds and sights at the high place I go to above Bulgamatta on a hot summer's day. When writing it I aimed for serenity and majesty, which to me exemplify that place. The title eludes to the everywhen; this piece, on this day, is just a blip in time for an ancient place. For the most part, it has a slow but insistent crotchet-based groove in 4/4, with modal harmony mostly in major tonalities, and upper extensions typical to jazz, including 11th, 13th, dominant 7 sus4 and major 7 #11 chords. There are also segments to the piece which bring in a slightly experimental angle which is atypical for big band composition. One of these segments recurs three times throughout the piece, firstly occurring as the introduction. The piano, playing solo, begins the piece:

Fig. 2: Excerpt from piano part of "A Place, A Day, A Summer"

Piano

A Place, A Day, A Summer

Ellen Kirkwood and Bulgamatta

Rubato, lingering, spacious

Solo

mf

PED.

2 3 4

The musical score is for a piano piece in 4/4 time. It features two staves: a right-hand staff in treble clef and a left-hand staff in bass clef. The right-hand staff begins with a whole note chord (F4, A4, C5) and is marked 'Rubato, lingering, spacious'. The left-hand staff begins with a solo melodic line of eighth notes (F4, G4, A4, B4) and is marked 'Solo' and 'mf'. A 'PED.' (pedal) line is shown below the left-hand staff. The score is divided into four measures, with measure numbers 2, 3, and 4 indicated below the right-hand staff. Each measure contains a whole note chord in the right hand and a melodic line in the left hand. The chords are: Measure 2: F4, A4, C5; Measure 3: F4, A4, C5; Measure 4: F4, A4, C5. The melodic line in the left hand consists of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, B4 in each measure.

Following this, the above is repeated on the piano, with trumpets, saxophones and flutes echoing segments of the established piano motif at will:

Fig. 3: Excerpt from full score of “A Place, a Day, A Summer”

The image displays a page of a musical score, labeled '2' in the top left and 'Full Score' in the top right. The score is for a section marked 'A'. It features eight staves for different instruments: Alto 1, Alto 2, Tenor 1, Flute (Fl.), Bari. Sax., Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, and Tpt. 3. The Tpt. 1 staff is mostly empty. The music is written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano). Performance instructions are provided for several parts: 'Play as echo of piano - vary timing' is written above the Alto 1, Tenor 1, Bari. Sax., Tpt. 3, and Tpt. 4 staves. A red instruction, 'Play these after you hear high piano note. Vary timing.', is placed between the Alto 1 and Tenor 1 staves, and between the Tpt. 2 and Tpt. 3 staves. The Alto 1, Tenor 1, and Tpt. 3 parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Alto 2, Fl., and Tpt. 2 parts play a pattern of quarter notes. The Tpt. 4 part plays a pattern of eighth notes.

The other experimental segment, occurring twice in the piece, involves pointillistic textures, with musicians repeating a given pitch using staccato articulation, increasing then decreasing in rapidity at their own pace. During this, the brass blow air through their instruments, without pitch, to create the effect of wind.

Fig. 4: Excerpt from full score of “A Place, A Day, A Summer” showing saxophone and trumpet parts

The image displays a musical score for five instruments, likely saxophones and trumpets. The score is divided into two sections. The first section, marked with a box containing the letter 'F', consists of five staves. Each staff contains a series of staccato notes. Above the first staff, the text reads: "out of time staccato notes (number of notes doesn't matter) slow.....get faster.....fast.....slow down.....". This instruction is repeated above each of the five staves. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below each staff. The second section consists of four staves, each with the instruction "Blow air only (On cue)" written above the staff. The notes in this section are represented by a single horizontal line with a diamond-shaped cue mark, indicating that the instruments should play without sound.

These sections of the piece were devised with imagery of Bulgamatta, on that particular day, in mind. The music in Figures 2 and 3, with its “spacious and lingering” expressive direction and tempo-less, echoing characteristics, suggests expansiveness, and the upward movement relates to both heat shimmers rising from grass and rocks, and being in a high place. The pointillistic passage with wind, shown in figure 4, is inspired by the very large number of insects I observed that day, many blowing in the wind, some on the ground, making clicking sounds.

Part of my method for generating the initial ideas for this piece stems from a process which I have used in the past, resulting in other works for big band and my group Underwards. I had a mentorship with pianist and composer Barney McAll for 12 months in 2016 and 2017. He introduced me to the idea of using volition to bring ideas into existence. This involves a kind of translation of

experiences and observation into music. I have adapted this for myself, often asking myself at times of heightened emotion, or out-of-the-ordinary experiences, how would this feeling or experience sound if it were music? It is a purposeful imagining of sound. Sometimes music will arrive in my imagination without any such effort at all, and I think of music that arrives in this way as being attached to that time and place. Much of the content for “A Place, A Day, A Summer” was conceived of in these ways, while I was overlooking Bulgamatta on a hot day last December. Whenever these kinds of ideas come to me, I scribble down notes, words, or occasionally rough shapes, or record voice memos on my phone, to be fleshed out later on.

“A Place, A Day, A Summer” is written with Spectra Jazz Orchestra in mind; a youth jazz orchestra for young women and gender diverse musicians in Sydney, which I direct. It would also be suitable for advanced high school and intermediate-level university or community big bands, and I hope to get it published. Spectra will premiere the piece in May.

Cormorant’s Dive

In January of this year I camped for four nights at Ganguddy, in Dabee Country. This trip was to continue the relationships both with Country and the Dabee custodians I had learned from previously, and to expand upon these with new responding works of music for my PhD. I have two pieces in development as a result of this trip, and a few other ideas which may come to fruition. One of them is called “Cormorant’s Dive” and it’s written for my quartet Underwards, with the instrumentation of trumpet, guitar, electric bass, and drums.

The Cudgegong River flows through Ganguddy, also known as Dunn’s Swamp. It’s a picturesque area, on the western edge of the Wollemi National Park, which is north of the Blue Mountains. There are fascinating pagoda-like rock formations, and an intriguing variety of plants and animals. Kandos Weir is situated at Ganguddy. It was built by the Kandos Cement Company in 1930 to ensure a water supply for cement production (Greater Blue Mountains Drive, n.d.). Because of the weir, the water level of the Cudgegong at Ganguddy is significantly higher than it would have been before settlers arrived.

On a hot day at Ganguddy, after going on a long walk, I stopped for a dip in the river at a spot called Platypus Point, not far from the campground which is a popular summer holiday spot. At Platypus Point, largely submerged, is a sandstone shelf jutting out into the water before the river turns a bend to run between low cliffs. Imagining this place before the weir, it’s possible that this rock shelf may have been a spot where you could sit and look down at the water running past below, maybe as a

waterfall. I sat in the water, on this rock shelf, thinking about what was beneath the surface. I wondered, what did the river and its shores look like before they were altered by colonisers? What was life like for the Dabee people who came to this place?

As I sat pondering this, a little musical motif popped into my head. It reflects the day and the situation. It has a lightness to it, a little magic. It starts with some repeated high notes, mimicking a bird call I was hearing, and then a cascading semiquaver movement suggesting diving into the water. While I sat in the water I watched, and took some footage of a small flock of cormorants feeding on what must've been a school of fish. They were the inspiration for the title. After the diving motif, the next element which came to mind was a single-note tremolo on guitar, possibly with some delay, to evoke the rippling water reflecting the sunlight.

Fig. 5: Excerpt from “Cormorant’s Dive” showing diving motif (trumpet, guitar) and tremolo (guitar, bass, drums)

The image shows a musical score excerpt for the piece "Cormorant's Dive". It consists of four staves: Trumpet (Tpt.), J. Gtr. (Jazz Guitar), E. Bass (Electric Bass), and Dr. (Drums). The score is marked "Free in time" and "Full Score". A common time signature (C) is indicated at the beginning of each staff. The Trumpet part features a diving motif starting at measure 34, consisting of a series of repeated high notes followed by a cascading semiquaver movement. The J. Gtr. part features a tremolo effect, with the instruction "Tremolo - free in time" and "Echo trumpet". The E. Bass part also features a tremolo effect, with the instruction "Tremolo - free in time". The Dr. part features a tremolo effect, with the instruction "Tremolo - free in time, move around kit if desired".

Sitting for longer, I let more ideas unfold. The diving motif could be repeated, transposed to lower pitches to symbolise different water levels – the surface level now, the surface level in 1788, and the very bottom of the river. Three differently transposed iterations of the diving motif represent these water levels; G falling to C, Bb falling to Eb and Db falling to Gb.

Fig. 6: Excerpt from “Cormorant’s Dive”

The musical score for "Cormorant's Dive" is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Trumpet (Tpt.), Jazz Guitar (J. Gtr.), Electric Bass (E. Bass), and Drums (Dr.). The second system, starting at measure 70, includes staves for Tpt., J. Gtr., E. Bass, and Dr. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 70. The key signature changes to G-flat major (Gbmaj7) and the dynamic is mezzo-piano (mp). The drum part in the second system is marked "ad lib, gentle, sparse".

When I got back to camp from my walk, I jotted these ideas down with a general idea of the piece’s structure, and plans to expand upon them later on. About a month later, when I began further work on the piece, I found I needed to re-watch the footage, as well as imagine myself back in that place, visualising the scenery. Through this process I found the flavor of the piece I wanted in the sections between the diving motif iterations. I decided on a gentle and curious kind of energy for the piece; the energy I felt on that day, in that place, with a hint of melancholy for the past. With this in mind, I sat at my keyboard and devised two chord progressions to which I added simple melodies. The drum part features brushes on the snare using semiquaver-based rhythms, and the usage of off-beats on the ride cymbal is echoed in the guitar rhythm at B. These elements bring a gentle, flowing liveliness. Section A features a short, repeated theme, and section B is a contrasting bridge-like section concluding with a short re-iteration of theme A. Section C, featuring the diving motif (Fig. 5) acts as a tempo-less interlude.

Fig. 7: Excerpt from “Cormorant’s Dive”

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system starts at measure 13 and ends at measure 24. It features a Tpt. part with a 'Legato' instruction and a 'Tacet 1st x' instruction. The J. Gtr. part includes a 'mp' instruction and a 'mf' instruction. The E. Bass part includes a 'mp' instruction and a 'mf' instruction. The Dr. part includes a 'mp' instruction and a 'mf' instruction. The second system starts at measure 25 and ends at measure 30. It features a Tpt. part with a 'mf' instruction. The J. Gtr. part includes a 'mf' instruction. The E. Bass part includes a 'mf' instruction. The Dr. part includes a 'mf' instruction. The score includes chord diagrams for various chords such as A^bmaj7, Gm, B^bm/F, D^bmaj7, A^bmaj7, Gm, B^bm/F, G⁷/D, E, A^b, E, and E^bm. The score also includes dynamic markings like *mp* and *mf*, and performance instructions like 'Brushes - pattern ad lib' and 'A little more movement, emphasis on offbeats'.

Following this, two more sections to the piece repeat this structure, including improvised solos. The three sections, each at a different transposition arrived at via the diving motif, represent three levels of the Cudgegong at Platypus Point: the current surface, the pre-weir surface, and the very bottom of the river. Underwards will premiere “Cormorant’s Dive” at our next performance in May, in Sydney.

Plans and angles of enquiry for the remainder of the PhD

My plan for the remainder of my PhD candidature involves a continuation of my current trajectory. I will strengthen relationships with Iron Cove, Bulgamatta and Dabee Country, continue Indigenous and environmental learning relating to those Countries, continue to create music in response to visits and learnings, and examine and write about my research and creative processes. Additionally, there are two concepts I wish to explore through research and creative practice. The first pertains to where performances are situated, and what changes in response and meaning occur when the pieces are performed on their Country of origin, as opposed to other Countries. The second is to do with permission and consent of Country. If these works are a collaboration between myself and my chosen on-Country locations, how do I know whether Country is a willing participant? Is it possible

to know? If so, how? And if not, what can I do to ensure I have taken steps to ensure my inclusion of Country's input is respectful, and to "give back" to Country?

This year, I plan to record some of my works at ANU. I am currently looking into plans to bring Underwards and Spectra Jazz Orchestra down from Sydney within the next 12 months. Ideally, performances will form part of their visits to Canberra. Additionally, once I have written two or three more solo trumpet etudes, I will have those recorded, and I also have some graphic-notated pieces in development which will be performed by experimental brass and woodwind quartet Alloy. I plan on releasing an album, possibly two, of works by the end of my PhD. The works will make up a portfolio of scores and recordings which will be submitted alongside my thesis at the completion of my PhD.

Thesis Questions

Currently, my Thesis Questions are:

As a non-Indigenous person, how can I forge sustained connections with chosen locations in Australia in a way that is respectful to Indigenous custodians, and informed by Indigenous law and knowledges?

Within works of music created in response to the relationships built between myself and these on-Country locations, how do these connections manifest?

Can these connections and works be of benefit to the chosen locations, and if so, how?

Proposed Thesis Structure (exact chapter titles to be determined):

Introduction (including positionality statement, abstract and acknowledgements)

Chapter 1) Literature review

Chapter 2) Methods

Chapter 3) Preliminary works (including discussion of Yuin Country works, and early works not tied to specific Countries)

Chapter 4) Discussion of a selection of Iron Cove pieces

Chapter 5) Discussion of a selection of Bulgamatta pieces

Chapter 6) Discussion of a selection of Dabee Country pieces

Chapter 7) Distillations and conclusions

Bibliography

Closing Thoughts

I feel extremely grateful to have the guidance of a strong and inspiring team of supervisors in Chris, Kim and Amanda, and feel very lucky to be doing a PhD in areas I am passionate about with them. I am also very thankful for all the support I have received from friends and family, and all the new people I have met through activities of the past 12 months, in particular those Indigenous persons who have generously shared knowledge and stories. I want to thank Country as well, in the areas I'm focusing on, for welcoming me and teaching me new things. So far I have thoroughly enjoyed researching, connecting and creating music for this PhD, and look forward to seeing where it will lead me.

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