

Mandji's Wangga



Archival recordings by Moyle & Marett
Notes by Marett, Barwick & Ford



Billy Mandji's daughter, the late Marjorie Bilbil, discussing his songs with Lysbeth Ford and Allan Marett, Mandorah. 1997. Photograph by Linda Barwick, reproduced with the permission of Belyuen community.

Mandji's Wangga

THE INDIGENOUS MUSIC OF AUSTRALIA CD4

Archival recordings by Alice Moyle and Allan Marett; curated and annotated by Allan Marett and Linda Barwick, with transcriptions and translations by Lysbeth Ford.

*Dedicated to the late Marjorie Bilbil, beloved elder of Belyuen
and brilliant cultural worker, who helped us in many ways*

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Introduction

Wangga is a genre of public dance-song from the Daly region of northwest Australia, the country that lies to the north and south of the mouth of the Daly River. This CD is one of a series focusing on the songmen who have composed and performed wangga over the last 50 years. More information can be found in our book *For the Sake of a Song* (Marett, Barwick and Ford, 2013) and the companion website wangga.library.usyd.edu.au.

Wangga songs originate as the utterances of song-giving ghosts (*ngutj*, in Emmi-Mendhe, one of several languages spoken by Mandji) singing to the songman in his dream. But the words that we hear are also the words of the songman as he reproduces what the *ngutj* has taught him for an audience of living humans. This is one of the means by which the singer creates a liminal space that, in the context of mortuary ceremonies, facilitates the passing of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead.

Mandji's repertory was probably substantially more extensive than the 11 songs we have been able to locate for this CD, which are based on recordings by Alice Moyle (1959, 1962, 1968) and Marett (1988). Songs by Billy Mandji have been performed by his 'sons' (brother's sons, or nephews in Western nomenclature) Colin Worumbu Ferguson and Les Kundjil, by the Jaminjung singer Major Raymond, the Wadjiginy singer Kenny Burrenjuck and Mandji's 'daughter' (brother's daughter) Marjorie Bilbil. Despite our intensive efforts at archival research, there may still be unlocated recordings of Mandji himself. The listener is provided with transcribed and translated texts, together with contextual information for each song. Further information, including music analysis, is presented in chapter 6 of our book.

Mandji's Wangga

Billy Mandji was a prolific and popular Belyuen songman. He was first recorded by Alice Moyle in 1959 (and again in 1962, 1964 and 1968) (see *Songs from the Northern Territory* volume 1 for published examples of some of these recordings). He was last recorded by Allan Marett in 1988, shortly before his death. He travelled widely, and was recorded by others in Kununurra, Timber Creek and Beswick Creek (present-day Barunga).

Although Marett met and recorded Mandji, he was never able to work with him on the documentation of his songs. All translations and interpretations presented here are the result of working with other speakers, especially his extremely knowledgeable 'daughter', Marjorie Bilbil. In assessing the musical conventions of Billy Mandji's repertory, we must remember that any generalisations made here are made on the basis of a relatively limited sample of songs.

In addition to composing songs of his own, Billy Mandji inherited songs from the Emmiyangal brothers Robert Man.guna, George Ahmat and Appang Wanggigi. For this reason, several of his songs are in Emmi-Mendhe. Only one song recorded here has text in his own language, Marri Tjavin, and many that are attributed to him comprise only vocable texts (ghost language). This conspicuous use of vocable texts was perhaps a strategy for coping with the fact that he was living in a community, Belyuen, where Marri Tjavin was not widely spoken. Billy Mandji also sang the Emmi-Mendhe songs of Jimmy Muluk (see CD3 in this series), and often took the role of backup singer to Muluk. He was a prominent participant in the tourist corroborees presented by people from Belyuen (Delissaville) in various locations around Darwin and the Cox Peninsula.



Billy Mandji (second from right, holding clapsticks), with Bobby Lane, Jackie Woodie (holding didjeridu) and Henry Jorroock. Photograph by Alice Moyle, Delissaville (Belyuen), 1968, courtesy of the family of Alice Moyle and AIATSIS (Moyle.A3.Cs – 25033), reproduced with the permission of Belyuen community.

TRACK 1

Song 1: Duwun

dagan mele dagaldja dagan mele nele
dagan mele dagaldja dagan mele nele
ee

karra duwun-ngana-yi
gidji-djedjet-mandha-ya
karra ka-me-yi

'Dagan mele dagaldja dagan mele nele'
This came from Duwun
Where he sat down and sang that song
That's what he sang

This song, composed by Robert Man.guna (an Emmiyangal songman active in the first half of the 20th century), belongs to a series about *pörrme* (Emmi-Mendhe 'sea') made by Man.guna's brother Appang Wanggigi. First recorded by Alice Moyle in 1962 at Bagot (Darwin), it invokes Duwun, an island off the west coast of the Cox Peninsula known in English as 'Indian Island'.

The text comprises untranslated ghost language (presented twice in verse 1, but only once in later verses), followed by text in Emmi-Mendhe, which explains that the preceding ghost language came from Duwun, where 'he' (that is, the song-giving ghost) sat down and sang it. The composer is here describing the dream vision in which he received his song. Speaking to Alice Moyle in 1968, Billy Mandji said, 'I sat down and sang the song from Duwun' (*nginen-djedjet-manhdha duwun-ngana-yi*).

After every second verse there is an instrumental interlude using fast beating.

TRACK 2

Song 1: Duwun

This recording of ‘Duwun’ was made by Marett at a mortuary ceremony at Batchelor in 1988. It was the only time Marett recorded Mandji, who was already advanced in years.

In comparing this version with track 1, recorded over a quarter of a century earlier by Alice Moyle, it is remarkable how little ‘Duwun’ has changed. This version presents the same text, the same melody and the same stick beating patterns as the first two verses of the 1968 performance, right down to the repetition of the ghost language text in verse 1.

The most striking differences lie in the instrumental interludes. First, in the 1988 performance, instrumental interludes follow each of the two verses, whereas in 1962 instrumental interludes occurred only after every second verse. Secondly, Mandji used different beating patterns in these instrumental interludes. The reason for these changes is that in 1962 he was performing the song at Bagot for Belyuen dancers, whereas in 1988 he was performing for a group of dancers from Peppimenarti, where the Walakandha *wangga* is used for all public ceremonies.

To make the performance work for these Peppimenarti dancers who were relatively unfamiliar with his songs, Mandji chose to adopt the form of stick beating with which they were most familiar, the same pattern as used in most of the Walakandha *wangga* songs (CD6 in this series). Here Mandji showed his command of the *wangga* style as performed across the whole Daly region.

TRACK 3

Song 2: Happy (lerri) Song No. 1

nye nye nyelene nye nye nye nye
nye nye nyelene nye nye nye nye
ngammanya-mu-viye ngammiya
ngandhi mandha na-gurriny yakarre

*'Nye nye nyelene nye nye nye nye'
Let's both always keep dancing
(with our hands above our heads)
That song of his, yakarre*

This 'happy' (*lerri*) dance song was recorded by Alice Moyle at a tourist corroborree at Mandorah in 1968. As is often the case with *lerri* dance-songs, which also occur in the repertoires of the other Belyuen singers Barrtjap and Muluk, the tempo is fast and the song text is comprised of a high proportion of vocables.

In this song, the section in Emmi-Mendhe (line 3) is an exhortation to dance. Dancing with hands above head is a characteristic of women's dancing and a similar text occurs in Jimmy Muluk's song 'Pumandjin' (see CD3 in this series). The sounds of dance-calls and the dancers' feet beating on the ground can be heard during the instrumental interludes on this recording.

TRACK 4

Song 2: Happy (lerri) Song No. 1

In this short ceremonial performance of the song, which follows that of 1968 in all major respects (including the suspension of beating for the first line of the second verse), the sounds of dancing and/or mourning relatives can be heard. At 141 beats per minute (bpm), the tempo of the 1988 performance is slightly



Billy Mandji's grandson Ian Bilbil plays kenbi (didjeridu) for Kenny Burrenjuck at Belyuen, 2006. ABC2006-02-32. Photograph by Gretchen Miller, ABC Radio National, reproduced with the permission of Belyuen community.

faster than the 1968 performance (138 bpm), perhaps because it is danced in a ceremonial context. Songs with a happy mood may be performed even on solemn occasions, to comfort mourners.

TRACK 5

Song 3: Happy (*lerri*) Song No. 2

da ribene ribene ana anarra
da ribene ribene ana anarra
at bwat bwane ribene yenet di

Like ‘Happy Song No. 1’, Billy Mandji’s second happy (*lerri*) song uses fast beating, although it is suspended in verse 1. Like many happy songs, it consists entirely of untranslatable ‘ghost language’, that is, it is made up entirely of vocables. Like the track 3 performance of ‘Happy Song No.1’, it was recorded by Alice Moyle in 1968 at Mandorah.

Later that year, Moyle returned and had Billy Mandji speak the words of the song for her. Although there is no exact correspondence between the sung version and his spoken text—which is given in disjointed fragments and includes some text not actually in the song—there is enough for us to transcribe what is sung with some confidence, although the performance of the vocable ‘word’ *ribene* seems to be frequently elided to *rene*. Note that lines 1 and 2, which repeat the vocable text *da ribene ribene ana anarra*, are performed with a strong nasal timbre, contrasting with the throatier and smoother timbre of line 3, *at bwat bwane ribene yenet di*. This gives the effect of two alternating voices, as in a conversation.

This long, danced performance comprises ten repetitions of the verse, with an instrumental interlude following each verse except the first.

TRACK 6

Song 4: Happy (Ierri) Song No. 3

Happy (*Ierri*) Song No. 3 was recorded by Alice Moyle at Bagot in 1962 and published with the title 'Song from Anson Bay' (on the LP/CD *Songs from the Northern Territory*, volume 1). She used the same title for a quite different Billy Mandji song recorded in 1959 (tracks 9 and 10). Mandji may have applied this description to many of his songs, because the ancestral country of Emmiyangal and Mendheyangal people (from whom he inherited much of his repertory) lies on the shores of Anson Bay, in the Daly region to the south of Darwin.

Like the previous happy songs, this performance uses fast beating and mostly vocable text (ghost language). In verse 5, some text in Emmi-Mendhe can be heard: *karra ka-me-ngana-yi gidji-djedjet-mandha-ya* 'This [i.e., the vocable text] is what he sang when he gave me this song'. Despite many hours working with native speakers, we have not been able to arrive at a reliable version of the text, so have decided not to include a text transcription here.

TRACK 7

Song 5: Duwun Crab Song

yene ne yene ne
yene ne yene ne
karra ka-me-ngana-yi kaya

'Yene ne yene ne'

This song came from the one who is always singing this

As in the preceding track, the text in Emmi-Mendhe (line 2) explains that the preceding section in ghost language (line 1) came from a ghost, that is, 'the one who is always singing this'.



One of Billy Mandji's relatives to have inherited rights to sing the repertory was the late Les Kundjil (pictured here in Wadeye, 1999), who, however, usually preferred to sing Walakandha wangga songs. Photograph by Allan Marett, reproduced with the permission of Wadeye community.

This long performance—12 verses—was recorded by Alice Moyle in 1968 at a tourist corroborree at Mandorah (Jimmy Muluk was also recorded on this occasion, see CD3). The dancers can be heard occasionally in the background. It accompanied the Crab dance, during which the dancers mimed hunting for and catching a crab, but the text has no direct relationship to the subject matter of the dance. The Crab dance continued to be performed at tourist corroborrees at the Mandorah Hotel into the 1990s and beyond (albeit to a different song). Unusually, there is only one instrumental interlude in this performance, which occurs after the final verse. Here the dancers, having caught the crab, perform the stamping movements typical of *wangga*.

TRACK 8

Song 6: Karra Mele Ngany-endheni-nö

nyele nye nyele nye [repeated]
karra mele ngany-endheni-nö
ngawanya-bet-mörö-gumbu ngayi ya

'Nyele nye nyele nye'
This is for my brother now
let me always sing it for him all night long

nyele nye nyele nye [repeated]
karra mana ngindivelh-ni-bik-mi-ni
kan-djen-ndja-wurri
kani-gulukguluk
kinyi-ni-venggi-tit-ngangga-wurri kani

You have to always look out for my brother,
who is truly here now singing to us
and who keeps coughing

*and who keeps appearing in 'number four leg' and
singing to us whether we like it or not*

nyele nye nyele nye [repeated]
karra mele ka-me-nganila-ngana-yi
ngany-endheni-nö nganya-bet-mörö-gumbu ngayi ya

*This is from my brother who sang this for me now
let me always sing it for him all night long*

nyele nye nyele nye [repeated]
karra mana ngindivelh-ni-bik-mi-ni
kan-djen-ndja-wurri
kin-verri-wut-wurri kani ya

*You have to always look out for my brother
who is really here now singing to me
and he keeps walking towards me*

Marett recorded this at the 1988 mortuary ceremony. The translatable text in verses 1 and 3 is in Emmi-Mendhe (one of Mandji's languages), while verses 2 and 4 are in Marri Tjavin (Mandji's ancestral language, and also the language of some of the dancers from Peppimenarti). We may speculate that this song might have been formed from two previously independent songs, which here have been interleaved. Instrumental interludes occur after every two verses, that is, following the Marri Tjavin verses 2 and 4.

Although there is still a great deal that we do not understand about this song—including the reason for the combination of these particular two languages—the subject matter of the two pairs of verses is clearly a song-giving ghost. The word for 'brother' (*mele* in Emmi-Mendhe or *mana* in Marri Tjavin) is the relationship term used in these languages and other *wangga* songs

to address ancestral ghosts, and the reference to ‘number four leg’ (standing or lying with one leg crossed over the other at the knee) evokes a characteristic of song-giving ghosts that is mentioned often in *wangga* songs (see, for example Muluk’s song ‘Piyamen. ga’ on CD3).

It may be noted that there seems to be some instability in the form of the vocable text ‘nye! nye nye! nye!’ that begins each verse. In verse 3, the Emmi-Mendhe expression *mörö-gumbu*, literally ‘buttock-foot’, is an idiom meaning ‘from top to bottom’ or ‘right through’, which here means ‘all night long’.

TRACK 9

Song 7: Song from Anson Bay

Item 1

ne rrene ne ne rrene ne
ne rrene ne ne rrene ne
ee ö

Tracks 9 and 10 were recorded by Alice Moyle at Bagot in 1959. This song, which Moyle titled ‘Song from Anson Bay’, is entirely in the language of a ghost (*ngutj*), that is, it comprises entirely untranslatable vocables, the transcription of which is only approximate.

The first item (track 9) begins with wordless melody, from which the vocable text and the clapstick beating gradually emerge. The text as given is repeated with little change in the three subsequent verses. Note that a final clapstick beat that might have been expected at the end of track 9 (compare with the end of track 10) was missing from Moyle’s original recording of this item.

TRACK 10

Song 7: Song from Anson Bay

Item 2

rrene rrene ne ne rrene ne
rrene rrene ne ne rrene ne
ee ö

In item 2 (track 10) a slightly but consistently different version of the text can be heard throughout.

TRACK 11

Song 8: Robert Man.guna's Song

This song was composed by the Emmiyangal songman Robert Man.guna, the composer of Duwun (tracks 1 and 2). Various features suggest that this may be another 'happy' song. As in tracks 9 and 10, the text comprises untranslatable ghost language, but here each verse begins with wordless melody. Once again, it has proven impossible to obtain a reliable transcription of the vocable text.

TRACK 12

Song 9: Happy (Ierri) Song No. 4

Tracks 12–14 were recorded by Marett at the same mortuary ceremony as tracks 2, 4 and 8. We have identified all three as 'happy songs', based on their musical and textual characteristics. All have un glossable and unstable vocable texts, which we do not include here. Track 12, which occurred earlier in the ceremony than the other two, is in moderate tempo, slower than most happy songs.



Colin Worumbu, 'son' of Billy Mandji, teaches Allan Marett to sing one of his songs at an AIATSIS conference, Canberra, 2001. Photograph by Linda Barwick, reproduced with permission of Belyuen community.

TRACK 13

Song 10: Happy (Ierri) Song No. 5

As one expects of performances at the height of ceremony, the tempo is at the high end of the fast tempo band (about 140 beats per minute). This performance begins with a ritual call, or *malh*, by the dancers. This and the following track 14 were recorded from amongst the dancers, so the singing is somewhat distant; we have decided to include these recordings here because they give a sense of the lively atmosphere at a ceremony.

TRACK 14

Song 11: Happy (Ierri) Song No. 6

Like the preceding track, this song has a purely vocable text and is performed at faster tempo than usual, although here the beating is in a different rhythmic pattern.

Works cited

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'Corroboree group' at Mandorah, 1968, photographer unknown. Billy Mandji is holding a spear, fourth from the right. Northern Territory Library, Evan Luly collection, photo PH0784/0099, reproduced with the permission of Belyuen community.

Track	Song	Title	Recording*	Singer
Track 01	1	Duwun	Moy62-27-s09	Mandji
Track 02		Duwun	Mar88-40-s12	Mandji
Track 03	2	Happy (Ierri) Song No. 1	Moy68-01-s01	Mandji
Track 04		Happy (Ierri) Song No. 1	Mar88-41-s04	Mandji
Track 05	3	Happy (Ierri) Song No. 2	Moy68-01-s02	Mandji
Track 06	4	Happy (Ierri) Song No. 3	Moy62-27-s10	Mandji
Track 07	5	Duwun Crab Song	Moy68-01-s03	Mandji
Track 08	6	Karra Mele Ngany-endheni-nö	Mar88-40-s13	Mandji
Track 09	7	Song from Anson Bay	Moy59-03-s03	Mandji
Track 10		Song from Anson Bay	Moy59-03-s04	Mandji
Track 11	8	Robert Man.guna's Song	Moy62-27-s08	Mandji
Track 12	9	Happy (Ierri) Song No. 4	Mar88-40-s09	Mandji
Track 13	10	Happy (Ierri) Song No. 5	Mar88-42-s04	Mandji
Track 14	11	Happy (Ierri) Song No. 6	Mar88-42-s05	Mandji

*For a list of codes used to identify recordings, see Appendix 2 of our book *For the Sake of a Song*, pages 417–18.



TRACK 1 Song 1: Duwun

TRACK 2 Song 1: Duwun

TRACK 3 Song 2: Happy (*lerri*) Song no. 1

TRACK 4 Song 2: Happy (*lerri*) Song no. 1

TRACK 5 Song 3: Happy (*lerri*) Song no. 2

TRACK 6 Song 4: Happy (*lerri*) Song no. 3

TRACK 7 Song 5: Duwun Crab Song

TRACK 8 Song 6: Karra Mele Ngany-endheni-nö

TRACK 9 Song 7: Song from Anson Bay

TRACK 10 Song 7: Song from Anson Bay

TRACK 11 Song 8: Robert Man.guna's Song

TRACK 12 Song 9: Happy (*lerri*) Song No. 4

TRACK 13 Song 10: Happy (*lerri*) Song No. 5

TRACK 14 Song 11: Happy (*lerri*) Song No. 6



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