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The National Recording Project For Indigenous Performance in Australia: Year One in Review

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The National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia was conceived at Gunyangara in Arnhem Land during the inaugural Indigenous Performance Symposium in August 2002. The symposium was funded by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation (YYF) as part of the fourth Garma Festival of Traditional Culture. Convened by Mandawuy Yunupingu, Allan Marett, Marcia Langton and Aaron Corn, it was attended by Indigenous performers from Gunyangara, Yirrkala, Galiwin'ku, Maningrida, Ngukurr, Borroloola and Belyuen, and scholars with interests in Indigenous performance from Australia and Papua New Guinea.

The Symposium explored a broad range of possibilities for understanding, recording and circulating Indigenous performance traditions. These included:

- performing and analysing traditional songs;
- transcribing and translating song lyrics;
- re-setting traditional materials in new media;
- performing and learning traditional dances; and
- exploring the role of Indigenous archives in gathering and caring for local collections.

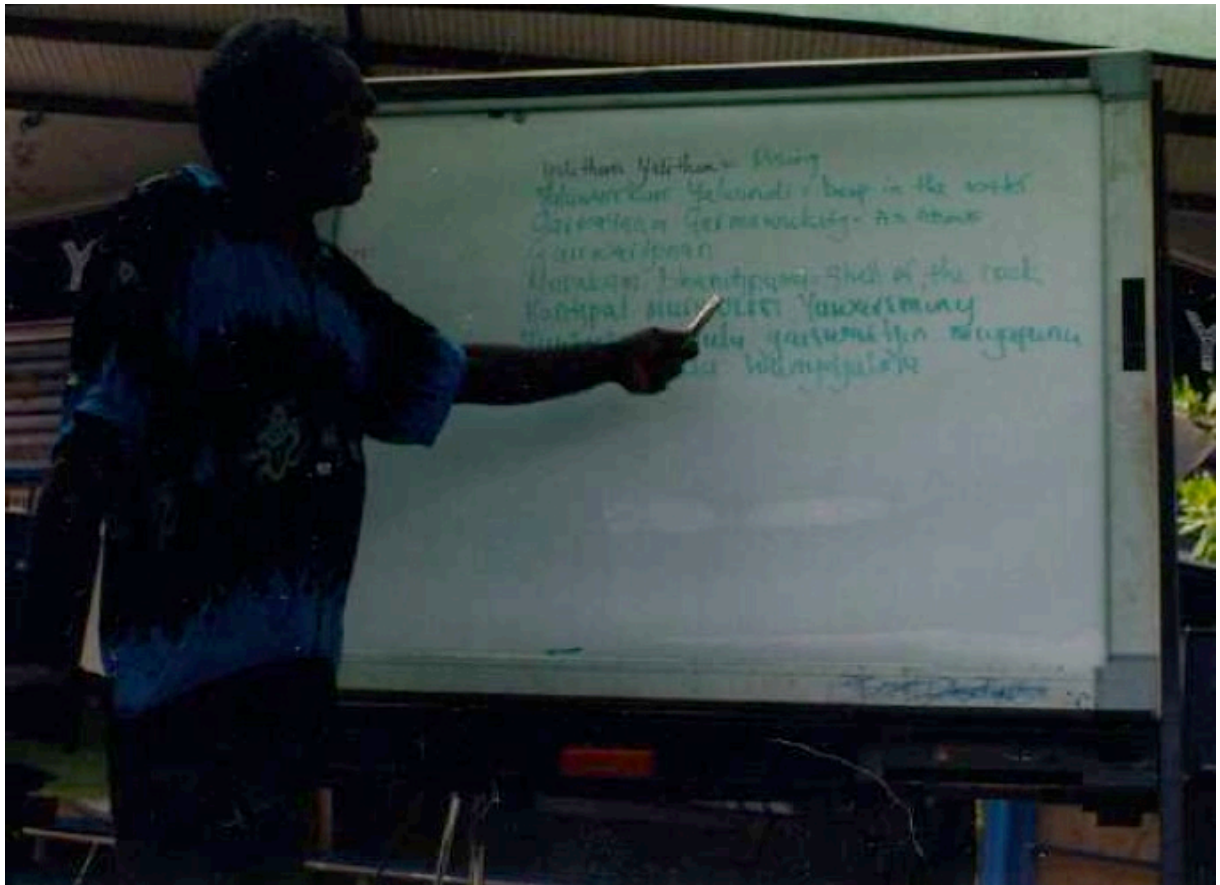


Figure 1: Mandawuy Yunupingu transcribes and translates a Gälpu *manikay* item that had just been performed by Gurrutjiri and Djalu Gurruwiwi.

The Symposium determined that a National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia should be established to:

- ensure that the performance traditions of as many Indigenous performers as possible are held for future generations;
- support the establishment of community archives with storage and retrieval systems that will facilitate the repatriation of digital materials to Indigenous communities;
- publish well-documented and readily-accessible recordings of Indigenous performance repertoires; and
- create new education and employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians.

These aims are outlined in greater detail in the Garma Statement on Indigenous Performance, which contains the following preamble:

Songs, dances and ceremonial performances form the core of Yolngu and other Indigenous cultures in Australia. It is through song, dance and associated ceremony that Indigenous people sustain their cultures and maintain the Law and a sense of self within the world. Performance traditions are the foundation of social and personal wellbeing, and with the ever-increasing loss of these traditions, the toll grows every year. The preservation of performance traditions is therefore one of the highest priorities for Indigenous people.

Indigenous songs should also be a deeply valued part of the Australian cultural heritage. They represent the great classical music of this land. These ancient musical traditions were once everywhere in Australia, and now survive as living traditions only in several regions. Many of these are now in danger of being lost forever. Indigenous performances are one of our most rich and beautiful forms of artistic expression, and yet they remain unheard and invisible within the national cultural heritage.

Without immediate action many Indigenous music and dance traditions are in danger of extinction with potentially destructive consequences for the fabric of Indigenous society and culture. (Garma Forum on Indigenous Performance Research, 2002)

The National Recording Project for Indigenous Music in Australia was launched by Mandawuy Yunupingu and Jack Thompson at the sixth Garma Festival of Traditional Culture in August 2004.

Tradition and Technology

Indigenous communities have used recording technologies to circulate and support the inter-generational transmission of their performance traditions for several decades now. Many Indigenous performers now keep recordings of their forebears' past performances and listen to them for inspiration before performing themselves. In recent years, community digital archives have been set up in various Northern Australian communities (Barwick, Marett, Walsh, Reid, & Ford, 2005; Barwick & Thieberger, 2006).

There are also instances in which repertoire that has fallen from circulation has been re-introduced through historical recordings. The power of recordings to reinforce memory and restore lost repertoire to performance traditions was witnessed by Linda Barwick and Allan Marett during the launch of the Bangany Wangga song archive at Belyuen in 2002. After hearing an archived recording of the late Jimmy Muluk singing a long-forgotten song at this event, his grandson, Kenny Burrenjuck, restored it to the ceremony he was leading that very afternoon (Marett, 2003).

Not only can recordings reinforce memory and facilitate the recovery of lost repertoire, they can also provide inspiration for creative extensions of tradition. "Treaty" by Yothu Yindi stands as a

compelling example of this phenomenon. Mandawuy Yunupingu explains that the musical beginnings of this famous song lie in an historical Gumatj *djatpangarri* by Rrikin Burarrwanga which was recorded at Yirrkala by Richard Waterman circa 1952 and repatriated to the Yirrkala Community Education Centre by Jill Stubington in 1989 (Stubington, 1994).

This song was written after Bob Hawke, in his famous response to the Barunga Statement of 1988, said there would be a Treaty between Indigenous Australians and the Australian Government by 1990. The intention of this song was to raise public awareness about this so that the government would be encouraged hold to his promise. The song became a number one hit, the first ever to be sung in a Yolngu language, and caught the public's imagination. Though it borrows from rock 'n' roll, the whole structure of "Treaty" is driven by the beat of the *djatpangarri* that I've incorporated to it. It was an old recording of this historic *djatpangarri* that triggered the song's composition. The man who originally created it, Rrikin Burarrwanga, was my *gurrung* (mother's mother's mother's mother's brother's son) and he passed away a long time ago in 1978. He was a real master of the *djatpangarri* style. (M. Yunupingu, 2001)

Pilot Studies

In 2005, the National Recording Project for Indigenous Music in Australia conducted two one-year pilot studies through which its methodologies and protocols could be refined. The first, 'Planning for Sustainability of the National Recording Project on Indigenous Performance in Australia', was funded as an Australian Research Council Linkage-Project between Linda Barwick, Aaron Corn and Allan Marett of the University of Sydney, Marcia Langton of the University of Melbourne, and Alan James, Witiyana Marika and Mandawuy Yunupingu of the Yothu Yindi Foundation. The second, 'Documenting the Realisation of Indigenous Performance Traditions on Country: A Pilot Study Towards the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia', was funded by the University of Sydney with a Research and Development Grant won by Aaron Corn and Allan Marett.

A series of consultative meetings convened under the auspices of the first pilot study, 'Planning for Sustainability', determined that the National Recording Project for Indigenous Music in Australia should:

- be informed by international best practice;
- draw on new technologies in ways that invert conventional relationships between performers, researchers and archivists;
- be driven by local priorities within Indigenous communities rather than the agendas of visiting researchers; and
- aim to empower Indigenous communities by providing new leadership opportunities through its field recording and documentation operations.

It was determined that primary responsibility for the management of all archived data including issues of documentation, preservation, access, rights management and commercialisation should reside with local agencies such as Indigenous knowledge centres with support from partner organisations such as the Northern Territory Library (NTL). In the Northern Territory, this arrangement will build on existing relationships between NTL and local repositories such as the Galiwin'ku Indigenous Knowledge Centre which is managed by Neparrnga Gumbula and plays a vital role in repatriating precious copies of historical Yolngu materials held in public and private collections worldwide for local access.

Other results of these consultative meetings were:

- a commitment from NTL, AIATSIS and the National Library of Australia (NLA) to develop a national archiving infrastructure that will support these aspirations among Indigenous communities; and

- a commitment from NTL and Charles Darwin University (CDU) to work with Indigenous communities in tailoring training programs in recording, documenting and archiving to suit the needs of local repositories.

Under the auspices of the second pilot study, ‘Documenting the Realisation of Indigenous Performance Traditions on Country,’ a series of field trips were undertaken to test recording and documentation protocols for possible use in the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia. In addition to invaluable insights into the management of digital recording and documentation operations in deep field conditions, the field trips yielded recordings of:

- Birrkili Gupapuyngu *manikay* at Lunggutja in North–East Arnhem Land under the supervision of Djangirrawuy Garawirrtja;
- Dhalwangu *manikay* at Gurrumuru in North–East Arnhem Land under the supervision of Mandawuy Yunupingu;
- Wora *manikay* at Djiliwirri in North–East Arnhem Land under the supervision of Neparrnga Gumbula; and
- Recordings of *karrabarda kunborrk* at Kunbarlanja and of *morrddjanjno* hunting songs at Kabulwarnamyo, part of a preliminary study undertaken by Allan Marett and Linda Barwick with linguistic anthropologist Murray Garde to discuss the National Recording Project aims and methods with senior traditional owners in Western Arnhem Land.

Due to the high density of discrete performance styles and repertoires within regions like Arnhem Land, Neparrnga Gumbula, Mandawuy Yunupingu and Aaron Corn have concluded that responsibility for the completeness of recordings and documentation will, through necessity, have to be taken by senior performers at the local levels. Discussions about this topic in April yielded this preliminary list of Yolngu *mala* (hereditary groups), and the traditional responsibility areas into which their homelands and affiliated performance repertoires might fall.

Gatjirrk

- Wora, Mildjingi, Manharrngu, Gamalangga, Mälarra, Yan-Nhangu, Walamangu

Marthakal

- Djambarrpuynu, Liyagawumirr, Gupapuyngu, Liyagalawumirr, Marrangu, Bararrngu, Bararrpararr, Gunbirrtji, Golpa, Yalukal

Miwatj

- Munyuku, Gälpu, Golamala, Dhalwangu, Rirratjingu, Dhurili, Lamamirri, Wangurri, Manatja, Warramiri, Dätiwuy, NGaymil, Djapu, Marrakula, Marrangu, Dhäpuynu, Gumatj, Maḍarrpa-Monuk, Djawarrk

Wanba

- Murrungun, Bidingal, Bunatjini, Buwarrpuwarr, Ritharrngu, Maḍarrpa-Dhudi, Djawarrabing, Balnbi, Djadiwitjbil, Wulaki, Dabi, Djinba, Manydjalpingu, Walmapuy, Ganalpingu, Malibirr, Djinang, Marrangu, Murungun, Munggurpi, Gamalangga

Bäway

- Nungudulbuy, Wägilak

In addition to these two pilot studies, a number of other studies have become associated with the National Recording Project for Indigenous Music in Australia. They include:

- the Australian Research Council Discovery Project, ‘Preserving Australia’s Endangered Heritages: Murrinhpatha Song at Wadeye,’ involving Linda Barwick and Allan Marett with linguists Michael Walsh, Nicholas Reid, Lysbeth Ford and postgraduate student Joe Blythe;

- the Australian Research Council Discovery Project, ‘When the Waters Will Be One: Indigenous Performance Traditions at the New Frontier of Inter-Cultural Discourse in Arnhem Land,’ led by Aaron Corn and Marcia Langton;
- the Volkswagen Endangered Languages Project, ‘Yiwarruj, Yinyman, Radbiyi Ida Mali: Iwaidja and Other Endangered Languages of the Cobourg Peninsula (Australia) in their Cultural Context,’ led by linguists Nicholas Evans and Hans-Jürgen Sasse, with song documentation by Linda Barwick, Bruce Birch and Joy Williams;
- the Volkswagen Endangered Languages Project, Jaminjung and Eastern Ngumpin: A Documentation of the Linguistic and Cultural Knowledge of Speakers in a Multilingual Setting in the Victoria River District, Northern Australia,’ led by Eva Schultze-Berndt and Patrick McConvell, with the participation of Allan Marett and Linda Barwick;
- the Australian Research Council Linkage Project, ‘The Place of Song in Warlpiri Culture,’ led by anthropologist Nicolas Peterson and linguist Mary Laughren.

Building a National Strategy

Infrastructural needs for the National Recording Project for Indigenous Music in Australia that were identified through the two pilot studies were:

- national and regional advisory boards to coordinate the planning of individual recording and documentation operations; and
- a national and regional infrastructure for archiving and accessing collected materials.

Also identified were the following regional planning needs.

- Each affiliated recording operation is to be registered with the national advisory board in association with local archives and researchers;
- high priority traditions are to be identified by the regional advisory boards; and
- regional work plans are to be developed through the formation of research teams comprising senior local elders, sound engineers and ethnographers.

The following field protocols were developed through the second pilot study.

- Individual research teams will plan for their logistical needs, negotiate payments with performers and inform them of the NRP data management and access framework;
- Core metadata, to be collected in the field, includes information on where recordings are made, when they are made, who performs on them, who records them, and who has rights to make decisions about future access and management of the recordings;
- Materials are to be recorded in accordance with international archival standards and formats will include digital audio, video, photographs, and GPS readings as appropriate;
- Preliminary documentation of each recorded performance will identify its genre, repertory, subjects, relationships to country, and core musical practices;
- Rights information to be gathered about recorded songs and dances is to include who holds rights to perform them, who holds rights to speak for them, who owns them, and how rights in them are transmitted;
- Access and suitable use information to be gathered about recorded materials is to include what is restricted and to whom, what is suitable for community access through local archives, what is suitable for general public discovery or access via webcast, what material is suitable for commercialisation via the project’s series of albums, and what is suitable for localised incorporation into community health and education programs;
- Preliminary indexation and data management is to take place during fieldwork, including preparation of a complete file listing, making of backup copies, preparation of copies of recordings for local access purposes;
- Local access copies of recordings on disc, cassette and hard drive (as appropriate) are to be distributed to performers and left in suitable secure location as soon as practicable before recording team members leave the field.

Discussions between NTL, CDU, AIATSIS and NLA through the first pilot study have generated the following data management strategy.

- Recordings and metadata will be transported to Darwin on hard drives, uploaded to the NTL server located at CDU and then transferred to the AIATSIS Mass Storage System (MSS) via AARnet;
- AIATSIS will ingest and map metadata for discovery (or not) and/or access (or not) (project metadata will harmonise with the metadata systems currently being developed by AIATSIS);
- Communities and/or performers will have a direct relationship with AIATSIS for ongoing management of their data, including remote access if needed;
- Data previously identified by communities as suitable for discovery and access will be transferred with AIATSIS identifiers from AIATSIS to the NTL server via AARnet;
- NTL will structure data identified as suitable for community access to be delivered via ‘Our Story’ or similar interfaces;
- NTL will transfer relevant data to local community archives and, under agreement, satellite computers;
- Data identified as suitable for public discovery through the NLA’s Music Australia web portal will be moved to the NTL public web server; and
- Material identified as suitable for publication in the project’s series of albums will be documented in greater detail to elicit transliterations and translations of song lyrics, associated stories, and performers’ biographies.

As well as providing for ongoing sustainability of the recordings, the project’s data model has been designed to exploit digital and networking technologies to allow for maximum re-usability of the recordings, for example, in research projects, community health and education programmes, as well as for public interest and commercial publications where agreed.

Preliminary Outcomes and Directions

YYF already holds a strong commitment to recording Indigenous performance traditions. From 2001–2003, six albums featuring musical traditions of eastern Arnhem Land were released through the YYF Contemporary Masters Series (D. Gurruwiwi, 2001; Gurruwiwi, 2003; G. Gurruwiwi, 2001; Marika, 2001; Nundhirribala, 2002; G. Yunupingu, 2001). As part of its campaign to raise awareness about the artistry and importance of Indigenous performance traditions, the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia intends to build on this commitment by releasing its own series of albums that conforms to new rigorous standards of documentation and technical excellence. We will take as a model *Jurtbirrk* (2005), an album of traditional Iwaidja songs from Minjilang Community, recorded and documented by Linda Barwick, Bruce Birch and Joy Williams as part of the Iwaidja Project, published by Batchelor Press and released commercially through Skinnyfish Music (Barwick, Birch, & Williams, 2005). Project management and photography was by Sabine Hoeng, and design by David Lancashire Design (Melbourne). In 2005 *Jurtbirrk* was voted Best Traditional Album and Best Album Design at the Northern Territory Music Awards. The package includes performer biographies, background information on the community, language and song style, musical transcriptions of selected tracks and for each song a transcription of the original Iwaidja text and free translation into English, with standard linguistic glossing.

Ultimately, the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia hopes to aid Indigenous communities in sustaining cultural survival by stimulating lifelong interest in performance traditions through its serial recording and documentation initiatives, and the collections that it will deposit in local repositories for perpetual community access. Field trips taken under the auspices of the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia in 2005 have not only generated stable collections for the edification and enjoyment of future

generations, but have also afforded some participating performers and their families opportunities to visit very remote homelands for the very first time.

The observations made by and training received from elders by the young in these contexts will stay with them throughout their lives. As these young people themselves mature and inherit the burden of sustaining their performance traditions into the future, they will be personally connected to recordings made by their elders and the sites at which they were recorded, and will be able to draw strength and sustenance from their ability to readily access this new thread of hereditary knowledge left to them by their immediate forebears.

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