

PREFACE

Why, a reader might ask, do we need another book on *wangga*? Surely Marett's volume *Songs, dreamings and ghosts* published in 2005 has already covered this topic fairly exhaustively. The answer is that the present volume, *For the sake of a song: wangga songmen and their repertoires*, is a quite different type of book. *Songs, dreamings and ghosts* focused on showing how, in specific performative moments, performances of *wangga* enact important cosmological, political and personal themes. Insight into these enactments and articulations was sought, through analysis, in the very fabric of the music and dance. Marett showed precisely how singers manipulate performative conventions in order to enact a variety of ontological and cosmological themes, and in order to respond to the personal and political exigencies of the moment. For this reason *Songs, dreamings and ghosts* dealt with only a relatively small number of performances—around twenty—albeit in exhaustive detail. The interpretation of these rested, however, on an understanding of the conventions of music and dance, which in turn rested on the analysis of a much greater body of songs. The vast majority of this larger body of *wangga* songs never made its way into *Songs, dreamings and ghosts*.

By contrast, *For the sake of a song* presents this larger body of material—more than 100 songs, recordings, transcription of texts, linguistic glosses, translation of texts and exegesis. The result of twenty years' work by Marett, Barwick and Ford, it does not attempt the detailed musical analysis undertaken in *Songs, dreaming and ghosts* but rather presents at least one example of almost every *wangga* song recorded in the Daly region over the past 35 years or so and locates each within the broad context of *wangga* musical style.¹

In addition, the repertoires of two important singers, Jimmy Muluk and Billy Mandji, neither of whom were included in *Songs, dreamings and ghosts*, are examined here. On the other hand, recordings of *wangga* composed outside the Daly region—songs from the Beswick/Barunga area or the Kimberley—are not included here. These more marginal songs that were composed in the wider diaspora were dealt with in some detail in *Songs, dreamings and ghosts*.

The recordings, texts, glosses and translations in *For the sake of a song* form the core of the volume. They are preceded by an outline of the broader historical and ceremonial contexts of *wangga* and a summary of its main musical and linguistic characteristics.

In the years since the publication of *Songs, dreamings and ghosts*, Marett's relationship with the *wangga* tradition has changed in significant ways. Up until 2005, he had been invited to perform as a singer only in informal contexts and in minor celebrations such as CD launches or the opening of the Belyuen sound archive. This changed in 2007 when he was invited by Kenny Burrenjuck to join him as the second singer at the funeral service for an important Marranungu elder, and two years later he was invited by the family to perform at her final rites with singers of the Walakandha *wangga* repertory. After only a year singing with Burrenjuck, Marett found himself performing and at times leading the singing for the final mortuary rites (*kapuk* or *burnim-rag* ceremony) for Kenny Burrenjuck himself, who had tragically passed away during the previous year (Barwick & Marett, 2011; Marett, 2010). This experience of performing, rather than writing about, the ritual in which songs given by the dead are sung by the living in order to send the deceased into the company of the ancestors, was profound, and represents a major realignment with the tradition. While he has chosen not to write

1 Apart from a few rare exceptions, songs from earlier recordings, for example those made at Belyuen by Hemery (1942) Simpson (1948) and Elkin (1948–52) as well as those made by Stanner at Port Keats in 1954, have not been included, largely because of the difficulties of documenting the songs so long after the event. *Wangga* is a dynamic tradition in which few songs survive beyond a couple of generations.

about this experience in any detail in the present volume, something of this experience will inevitably have flowed into these pages.

The loss of Kenny Burrenjack in his late 50s underscores yet again the fragility of traditions such as *wangga* and the urgency of not only documenting them for future generations of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, but also positioning them as integral, but as yet unrecognised, treasures of the world's intangible cultural heritage. Everything we know about the history of *wangga* suggests that it was always a tradition in which new songs were dreamt as others became forgotten; but in recent decades, songs that are lost are not replaced at anything like the same rate, so that over the period covered by this book whole repertoires have been lost. But the loss of songs and dances, of repertoires and ceremonies, is more than just a cultural loss. It has practical implications for the health outcomes of Indigenous Australians and for closing the gap in life expectancy between the indigenous and non-indigenous population. Tragically, almost every voice that you will hear in this book is that of a ghost. These ghostly voices call on us to do whatever is necessary to ensure that the extraordinarily powerful and beautiful, but frighteningly endangered, traditions of Aboriginal song and dance are not lost to future generations. The title of the volume, *For the sake of a song*—an English translation of the Batjamalh term *bangany-nyung* which occurs in the songs of both Barrtjap (chapter 4, track 3) and Lambudju (chapter 7, track 1)—expresses the commitment of the *wangga* songmen, their families and communities, and the authors, to upholding the knowledge, skills and values embodied in the these repertoires. It is in this spirit that we dedicate our book, the second volume in the National Recording Project's series, *The Indigenous music of Australia*, to the *wangga* songmen, of the past, present and future, and to the great late Marri Tjavin ceremonial leader, Frank Dumoo, who has inspired, encouraged and guided our work over several decades.

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A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

The spelling system for Marri Tjavin and Marri Ammu, which are closely related dialects of the same language, has been developed by Lysbeth Ford in consultation with the staff of the Wadeye Language Centre and the teacher aides at the Wadeye school. The spelling system for Emmi and Mendhe, which are closely related dialects of the same language, and for Batjamalh were also developed by Lysbeth Ford in consultation with fluent speakers at Belyuen.

HOW TO READ MARRI TJAVIN-MARRI AMMU WORDS

Vowel	Marri Tjavin-Marri Ammu	English (Standard Australian unless otherwise stated)
middle i	nidin (country)	bit
end i	wudi (water)	ski
u	kuwa (he/she stands)	put
a	ma-yawa (Marri Ammu ancestor)	but
e	yendili (place name)	bet
Consonant		
t	titil (clapstick)	tar
d	nidin (country)	hid
rt	rtadi (back, on top)	American English “part”
th	thanggurralh (Marri Ammu and Marri Tjavin people)	Not in English but as in Italian “tu”
dh	walakandha (Marri Tjavin ancestor)	and this
tj	tjiwilirr (Hairy Cheeky Yam)	chat
dj	djindja (here)	ginger
p	purangang (salt water)	put
b	bugim (white)	but
k	kuwa (he/she stands)	cut
g	gapil (big)	gut
rz	rzamu (sea turtle)	Dr. Zhivago
sj	gisji (like this)	fusion
v	verri (foot)	very
n	nidin (country)	nut
ny	pumininy (spring)	onion
m	mana (brother)	mud
ng	ngata (house)	sing
l	wulumen (old man)	holy
lh	kavulh (he/she lies down)	stealth
rr	verri (foot)	trilled r as in Scottish “sporrán”
r	yeri (child)	very
y	yeri (child)	yes
w	wudi (fresh water)	wet

HOW TO READ BATJAMALH WORDS

Vowel	Batjamlh	English (Standard Australian unless otherwise stated)
middle i	yine (what?)	bit
end i	nga-mi (I sit)	ski
u	nya-mu (sit!)	put
a	yagarra (Oh no!)	but
e	werret (quick)	bet
ü	tjüt (foot)	few
Consonant		
t	tjüt (foot)	cut
d	dawarra (belly)	dot
tj	batjamlh (language)	batch
dj	badjalarr (place)	badge
p	nga-p-pindja-ng	happy
b	bangany (song)	but
k	maka (for; perfective marker)	lacquer
g	yagarra (Oh no!)	bugger
v	nga-ve (I go)	having
n	nüng (him)	nut
ny	nyung (for)	onion
m	maka (for; perfective marker)	mud
ng	nga-mi (I sit)	sing
l	badjalarr (place)	holy
lh	batjamlh (language)	stealth
rr	badjalarr (place)	trilled r as in Scottish “sporrán”
r	rak (patri-country)	very
y	yagarra (Oh no!)	yes
w	werret (quick)	wet

HOW TO READ EMMI-MENDHE WORDS

Vowel	Emmi-Mendhe	English (Standard Australian unless otherwise stated)
middle i	-pit (clean)	bit
end i	endheni (now)	ski
u	gumbu (foot)	put
ö	mörö (buttock)	word
a	mandha (throat/ song)	bat
e	derr (native bee; policeman)	bet
Consonant		
t	-tit (bend)	tar
d	dörr (ground)	hid
rt	rtedi (back, on top)	American English “part”
th	thawara (mangrove)	Not in English but as in Italian “tu”
dh	dherr (cheek)	and this
tj	tjelmundak (garfish)	chat
dj	djedjet (sit down)	ginger
p	pöndör (elbow)	put
b	-bet (open)	but
k	kuman (he/she pokes)	cut
g	gulukguluk (cough)	gut
rz	-werzame (shriek)	Dr. Zhivago
sj	musjulng (swag)	fusion
v	viye (head)	very
n	na (he/him)	nut
ny	-gurriny (belonging to)	onion
m	mana (older brother (M))	mud
ng	ngany (I/me)	sing
l	mele (older brother (E))	holy
lh	lhumbu (leg)	stealth
rr	-wurri (to speaker)	trilled <i>r</i> as in Scottish “sporrán”
r	mari (belly)	very
y	kaya (s/he lies down)	yes
w	wörörör (mudcrab (M))	wet

ABBREVIATIONS IN MORPHEME-BY-MORPHEME GLOSSES TO SONG-TEXTS

Each of the following abbreviations represents a morpheme (chunk of meaning). The morpheme-by-morpheme glosses consist of ordered strings of morphemes, each separated by a period; some morphemes are bundles of more than one chunk of meaning. For definitions of terms, see chapter 3.

Ø	Zero	NC	Noun Classifier
1	First person	O	Direct Object
1/2	First person inclusive of addressee	PERF	Perfective
2	Second person	POSS	Possessive
3	Third person	PRES	Present Tense
AUG	Augmented	PRO	Pronoun
A	Agent of transitive verb	PURP	Purposive
ABL	Ablative case marker	R	Realis
ADVERS	Adversative	REDUP	Reduplicated
ANAPH	Anaphoric	REFL	Reflexive
BEN	Benefactive	S	Subject of intransitive verb
CAUS	Causative	S/A	Form is identical for Subject or Agent
CONT	Continuant	SIM	Simultaneous
DAT	Dative	SW	Song word
DEIC	Deictic	TOP	Topic
DTOP	Different topic	UAUG	Augmented by one
EXCL	Exclusive of addressee		
F	Female		
FUL	Full of		
INC	Inclusive of addressee		
IO	Indirect Object		
IR	Irrealis		
LOC	Locative		
M	Masculine		
MIN	Minimal		
NEG	Negator		

A NOTE ON THE SOUND RECORDINGS

This book is intended to be read in conjunction with the relevant sound recordings, which are available online as virtual CDs via the website wangga.library.usyd.edu.au, as well as in a separately issued set of seven CDs (see the 'List of CD tracks' at the end of this volume). The song structure summaries in chapters 4 to 9 are intended to be read while listening to the relevant tracks.