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for Sec. Ph.D. and Scholarships Committee

# "A SPIRITUAL SOUND, A LONELY SOUND":

# LEAF MUSIC OF SOUTHEASTERN ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS, 1890s-1990s

*by*

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

**June 1999**

*In memory of my parents,*

*Mary Woodhams*
(1922-1982)

*and*

*John Woodhams*
(1922-1995)

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# LIST OF CODES AND EXAMPLES ON COMPILATION TAPE

## (attached to thesis cover)

*** = Transcription Number**

**PERFORMERS**

RB = Roseina Boston
JGD = James Goorie Dungay
CL = Cyril Lindsay
AM = Annie Mason
HP = Herbert Patten
SGB = Scratch Gumleaf Band (Jarrod Atkinson, James Goorie Dungay, Philip Elwood, Keith Graetz, Herbert Patten, Virgil Reutens, Gaynor Tabe, Jeff Wilmott)

**LEAF SPECIES IDENTIFIED**

BG = Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*)
FRG = Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*)
GG = Ghost Gum (*E. papuana*)
SG = Spotted Gum (*E. maculata*)
TT = Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*)
YB = Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*)
n/a = not available (unidentified)

**RECORDISTS**

RB = Roseina Boston
CE = Cath Ellis
RH = Ron Haymes
HP = Herbert Patten
JJ = Jobi Jerrett
RR = Robin Ryan
GW = Greg White

## SIDE A (total running time: 37'10")

| No. | Item | Performer | Leaf Species | Recordist | Tape ID | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **WAR SONG MEDLEY** | | | | | |
| 1. | "Pack up your Troubles", "Roll out the Barrel", and "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" | HP | n/a | RH | RRC T15 | 1' 57" |
| | **INTERVIEW** | | | | | |
| 2. | James Goorie Dungay speaks about the gumleaf and plays "Waltzing Matilda" and the Skippy leaf signal | JGD | FRG | RR | RRC T14 | 7'25" |
| | **LEAF BIRDCALLS** | | | | | |
| 3. | Laughing Kookaburra | RB | BG | RR | RRC T11 | |
| 4. | Leatherhead (Noisy Friarbird) | RB | BG | RR | RRC T11 | |
| 5. | Willie-Wagtail | RB | BG | RR | RRC T11 | |
| 6. | Eagle (Square-tailed Kite) story | RB | SG | RR/JJ | RRC T7 | 6'44" |
| | **DRAMATIC LEAF RE-ENACTMENTS** | | | | | |
| 7. | Koori Lone Whistle (signal) | HP | YB | HP | RRC T4 | |
| 8. | *Dulligar* (Ghost) | HP | YB | HP | RRC T4 | |
| 9. | "Mouthed" gumleaves | HP | YB | HP | RRC T4 | |
| 10. | Snake hissing (sound effects) | HP | YB | HP | RRC T4 | |
| 11. | Spear dance (sound effects) | HP | YB | HP | RRC T4 | 3'22" |
| | **TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL SONGS** | | | | | |
| 12. | "Yumi Yumi Yari" (*1) | HP | GG | RR | RRC T9 | |
| 13. | Yorta Yorta Love Song (*2) | HP | YB | RR | RRC T10 | 1'49" |
| | **LEAF HYMN IN PARTS** | | | | | |
| 14. | "The Old Rugged Cross"(*3) | AM & CL | n/a | CE | AIATSIS (Ellis 3324) | 1'09" |
| | **MINSTREL SHOW SONG** | | | | | |
| 15. | "Swanee River" ("Old Folks at Home") | RB | BG | RB | RRC T1 | 1'14" |
| | **ABORIGINAL COON/FOLK/PROTEST SONG** | | | | | |
| 16. | "Jacky Jacky" | HP | T/T | GW | CD (1999) | 1'00" |
| | **LEAF HYMN SOLO** | | | | | |
| 17. | "How Great Thou Art" | RB | BG | RB | RRC T1 | 1'52" |
| | **GUMLEAF JAZZ IMPROVISATION** | | | | | |
| 18. | "Petite Fleur" | HP | YB | RR | RRC T10 | 1'28" |
| | **SCRATCH GUMLEAF BAND** | | | | | |
| 19. | "The Drover's Dream" | SGB | various leaves | RR | RRC T13 | 0'54" |

## SIDE B (total running time: 26'22")

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20. | **STATE-OF-PREFERENCE TEST 3** (1 June 1995) | HP | native leaves | BW | RRC T18 | 27'19" |

## SUMMARY

The history of music played on simple leaf reed aerophones in Australia may be divided into six periods. The first - "pre-contact" - period extends across the period of early British settlement (1788-1830s), the sources for which are confined to indigenous insights into the instrument's origins, roots, and traditional functions in Aboriginal culture.

During the second - "missionary music" - period (1840-1910s), hymns were played on gumleaves by Lutheran immigrants (from *c.* 1839), Salvation Army instigated Aboriginal gumleaf bands (from 1892), and itinerant evangelists (from the 1900s). Among Aboriginal societies, the bands served to promote social and cultural cohesion within and between disparate tribal groups.

In the third - "touring gumleaf band" - period (1920s-1940s), leaf playing was more widely practised, with Aboriginal bandsmen performing as independent ensembles and in collaboration with concert parties. Their music was syncretic; they combined hymns and secular styles of music such as jazz with indigenous performance techniques, creating a unique artistic expression. Prominent gumleaf bands from Wallaga Lake and Lake Tyers were subjected to political exploitation before and during World War II.

In the fourth - "post-war dissemination" - period (1950s to 1977), the total amount of leaf playing was gradually reduced, as bandsmen splintered into solo busker performers and leaf duos and trios.

The fifth- "gumleaf competition" - period - began in 1977, when local government officials at Maryborough, Victoria, revived the non-Aboriginal tradition and included Aboriginal soloists on terms determined by non-Aboriginal adjudicators. Some traits of indigenous musical behaviour became evident when Aboriginal leafists performed the same compulsory tunes as non-Aboriginal leafists at the annual Australian Gumleaf Playing Competition (1977-1997).

Three practitioners independently selected Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) leaves when they participated in my leaf instrument state-of-preference test. The timbre, wide tessitura,

lightness, durability and pliability of a Yellow Box leaf is germane to its physical and chemical structure, including its morphology, texture, venation, moisture content, and quantity of oil glands and air spaces.

In non-competitive contexts, Aboriginal musicians have always used a variety of native leaves. Non-Aboriginal musicians have found leaves introduced from Europe, Asia and elsewhere easier to play because they are less tough and more palatable than eucalypts. Leaf physiology, in addition to human playing techniques and creativity, determines sound quality. A simple acoustic model explains their sound production, regardless of their size, shape and texture or the manner in which they are folded, held and blown.

Non-Aborigines have mostly ignored Aboriginal cultural usage of the leaf in their attempts to appropriate gumleaf music as a national icon. Conversely, a mere handful of Aboriginal leafists appropriate the gumleaf for nativistic revival.

In the sixth period, which dates from the bicentennial year - 1988 - to the present, Aboriginal exponents perform leaf birdcalls associated with their clan cultures; thus the leaf serves to strengthen their Aboriginal identity. The perpetuation of a healthy indigenous gumleaf music tradition is dependent on continued live human engagement with the Australian flora and fauna and the transmission of indigenous techniques to future generations of musicians.

## SIGNED STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution, although some aspects augment work presented in my MA thesis (1992). To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. Some material resulting from this research has been jointly published with Mr Herbert Patten, the principle Aboriginal collaborator/practitioner involved (see details in bibliography).

**SIGNATURE** [redacted]

**DATE** 22/6/99

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Secondly, I am most appreciative of the cooperation, goodwill and loyalty of principle collaborator Mr Herbert [illegible] who as Aboriginal Cultural Officer for Melbourne liased with me to initiate a [illegible] information on the gumleaf, and kindly read over the arguments presented in this [illegible] His and his gracious wife Lorraine (Bunta) arranged for Mr Terry Garwood to endorse my research proposal during his term of office as Head of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria. Herbert's CD/booklet *How to Play the Gumleaf* (Sydney: Currency Press 1999) is the direct outcome of this collaborative research.

Several other Aboriginal practitioner-advisers willingly supported this project. Those I interviewed in NSW were Gumbainggir Elder Mrs Roseina Boston of Nambucca Heads, Bundjalung Elder Mrs Eileen Morgan of Coraki, Yuin Elder Mr Gaboo Ted Thomas of Sydney and Eden, the late Biripi Elder Mr Bert (Goonabahn) Marr of Purfleet, the late Wiradjuri/Wadi Wadi Elder Mr Ambrose Golden-Brown of Nowra, and Dainggatti descendants Mr John Ivan Ballangarry of Bowraville and Mr James Goorie Dungay of Kempsey. Victorian practitioner-advisers were Kurnai descendant Mr Wayne Thorpe of Melbourne and Gippsland, and Gunditjmara/Yorta Yorta descendant Mr Jarrod Atkinson of Melbourne. I was tremendously privileged to meet with and share the knowledge of these leafists.

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Ms Alison Goding, author, Kew, Victoria

Mr Ray Grieve, author, Glenbrook, NSW

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## PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS WITH RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

| NAME | DATE | RECORD |
|---|---|---|
| Atkinson, Ian (Moonie) | 26 March 1994 | notes/photos |
| Atkinson, Jarrod | 1 and 2 October 1994 | RRC T6; V2 |
| Atkinson, Sharyn | 12 January 1996 | notes |
| | 16 January 1996 | phone/notes |
| Ballangarry, John Ivan | 27 April 1995 | notes/photos |
| Berris, Mike | 2 and 3 October 1993 | notes/photos |
| Blanasi, David | 2 September 1994 | notes |
| Boston, Roseina | 27 April 1995 | RRC T7/photos |
| | 6 and 7 October 1995 | RRC T9/photos |
| | 5 and 7 October 1996 | notes/photos, RRC T11 |
| | 25 November 1996 | phone/notes |
| | 6 February 1997 | phone/notes |
| | 10 August 1998 | phone/notes |
| | 23 March 1999 | phone/notes |
| Boston, Harry | 7 October 1996 | RRC T11 |
| | 2 November 1996 | phone/notes |
| | 23 March 1999 | phone/notes |
| Briggs, Ken and Nancy | 12 January 1996 | phone/notes |
| Brunette, Wambaya Bill and Beryl | 22 November 1994 | phone/notes |
| | 19 May 1995 | notes |
| | 2 December 1997 | notes/photos |
| Calder, George | 7 October 1996 | notes/photos |
| Doyle, Leo | 6 September 1995 | phone/notes |
| Dungay, James Goorie | 2 October 1997 | RRC T14 |
| | 5 October 1997 | RRC T13/photos |
| Edwards, Michael | 30 November 1996 | phone/notes |
| Elwood, Philip | 2 and 3 October 1993 | notes/photos, RRC T5 |
| | 31 October 1994 | RRC T17 |
| | 5 and 6 October 1996 | RRC T10; V4 |
| Eva, Wendy | 10 August 1995 | RRC T8/photos |
| | 12 August 1995 | phone/notes |
| | August (undated) | letter |
| | 5 October 1996 | notes, RRC T10 |
| Fury, Jim and Monica | 7 March 1997 | notes/photos |
| Golden-Brown, Ambrose and grandson Wahringa | 13 January 1995 | notes |
| Graetz, Keith | 7 and 8 October 1995 | notes/photos |
| | 2 August 1996 | phone/notes |
| Grant, Pastor Ces | 6 February 1994 | notes |
| Grant, Flo | 26 September 1995 | phone/notes |
| Huggins, Jackie | 5 February 1994 | notes |
| Jackson, Ozzie and Shirley | 8 and 9 February 1994 | notes |
| Lethbridge, Keith | 7 and 8 October 1995 | notes/photos |
| | 7 February 1996 | letter |
| | 7 March 1996 | letter |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lockwood, Will | 2 October 1993 | notes/photos |
| | 7 October 1993 | letter |
| | 24 October 1993 | letter |
| | 28 April 1994 | letter |
| Lyons, Lucy | 7 February 1994 | notes |
| Marr, Bert (Goonabahn) | 9 July 1994 | notes |
| and Elsie | 27 April 1995 | notes |
| McLaughlin, Walter | 19 February 1995 | phone/notes |
| | 25 April 1995 | notes/photos |
| Morgan, Eileen | 10 July 1994 | notes/photos |
| | 13 July 1994 | notes |
| Patten, Herbert | 10 April 1992 | notes/photos |
| | 6 May 1992 | notes |
| | 7 July 1992 | notes |
| | 2 and 3 October 1993 | RRC T5; V1 |
| | 6 December 1993 | RRC T15 |
| | 20 September 1994 | phone/notes |
| | 1 June 1995 | T18 |
| | 26 June 1995 | joint broadcast |
| | 7 October 1995 | RRC T9; V3 |
| | 5 and 6 October 1996 | RRC T10; V4 |
| | 16 November 1996 | notes |
| | 15 February 1997 | notes |
| | 7 July 1997 | RRC T12 |
| | 25 July 1997 | notes |
| | 5 October 1997 | RRC T13 |
| | 2 December 1997 | notes |
| | 10 January 1999 | notes |
| Paulson, Rev. Graeme | 21 November 1993 | notes |
| Reutens, Colleen and Virgil | 2 and 3 October 1993 | notes, photos |
| | 30 May 1994 | RRC T16 |
| | 1 and 2 October 1994 | notes, photos |
| | 7 and 8 October 1995 | notes, photos |
| | 5 and 6 October 1996 | notes, photos |
| | 5 October 1997 | notes, photos |
| Riley, Lance | 22 and 27 May 1995 | phone/notes |
| Rooke, Nancy | 7 February 1994 | notes |
| Tabe, Gaynor | 5 October 1997 | notes/photos |
| Thomas, Guboo Ted | 7 and 8 July 1994 | notes/photos |
| | 27 April 1995 | notes |
| Thomas, Anne | 6 July 1994 | notes |
| Thorpe, Wayne | 23 December 1995 | notes/photos |
| | 2 December 1997 | phone/notes |
| Walker, Emily | 26 April 1995 | phone/notes |
| Saunders, Russell | 9 July 1994 | notes |
| Williams, Darren | 7 April 1995 | phone/notes |
| Wilmott, Jeff | 5 and 6 October 1996 | notes/photos/RRC T10 |
| | 11 November 1996 | phone/notes |

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AAL | Aborigines' Advancement League |
| AAM | Australian Aborigines Mission |
| ABC | Australian Broadcasting Corporation (formerly Commission) |
| ABM | Australian Board of Missions |
| AEF | Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship |
| AFA | Aborigines' Friends Association |
| AIAS | Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, now known as: |
| AIATSIS | Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies |
| AIF | Australian Imperial Forces |
| AIM | Australian Inland Mission |
| AMOS | Aboriginal Movement for Outback Survival |
| ANU | Australian National University |
| APB | Aborigines Protection Board |
| approx. | approximately |
| ASRA | Australasian Sound Recordings Association |
| ATSIC | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission |
| *b.* | born |
| CASM | Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (University of Adelaide) |
| cat. | catalogue |
| CD | compact disc |
| Cummera' | Cummeragunga, NSW |
| CSC | The Chris Sullivan Collection |
| *d.* | died |
| *dec.* | deceased |
| D-K | Alice Duncan-Kemp |
| *E.* | *Eucalyptus* |
| *EAA* | *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* (ed. D.R. Horton, 1994) |
| ed(s). | editor(s) |
| LTGB | Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band |
| NADOC | National Aborigines Day Observance Committee |
| NAIDOC | National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee |
| n/a | not available |
| n.d. | no date supplied |
| NFSA | National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra |
| *NGDMI* | New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments |
| NLA | National Library of Australia, Canberra |
| NSW | New South Wales |
| NT | Northern Territory |
| NZ | New Zealand |
| *OED* | Oxford English Dictionary |
| Q'ld | Queensland |
| RRC | The Robin Ryan Collection, Glen Iris, Victoria |
| SA | South Australia |
| SLV | State Library of Victoria, Melbourne |
| *sp.* | species (singular) |

| | |
|---|---|
| *spp.* | species (plural) |
| trans. | translated by |
| UAM | United Aborigines Mission |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| USA | United States of America |
| *var.* | variety |
| Vic | Victoria |
| WA | Western Australia |
| WLGB | Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band |
| WWI | World War I |
| WWII | World War II |

## LIST OF PROMINENT LANGUAGE GROUPS DISCUSSED IN THESIS

**[Orthography standardised according to the *EAA* (Horton, 1994) where available]**

Bidwell
Biripi
Birria (Marulta)
Bundjalung
Dainggatti
Dharug
Gumbainggir
Kamilaroi
Karangura
Karuwali
Kurnai
Maiawali
Mayali
Mithaka
Muruwari
Ngarigo
Tharawal
Wiradjuri
Wurundjeri
Yarluyandi
Yidinjdji
Yorta Yorta
Yuin

# INTRODUCTION

*In so far as the debilitation of a minority musical tradition is the result of actions of a dominant minority based partly on ignorance of the tradition concerned, it is up to scholars to correct that ignorance in the majority* (Stubington 1987: 8)

Leafists, most commonly gumleaf players, practise a minor musical tradition at the margins of Australian society. It is called "gumleaf" (gum leaf or gum-leaf) music because Australians use what is in fact a misnomer - "gum tree" - to designate all eucalypt trees.[1] It is only in recent years that any detailed attention has been paid to the history, science and characterisation of leaf music in southeastern Australia, which for the purposes of this thesis encompasses New South Wales, Victoria, eastern South Australia, Tasmania and southern Queensland.[2] The great majority of twentieth-century leafists are to be found in southeastern Australia, although the leaf has been played throughout Australia.

The main body of this thesis focusses on Aboriginal leaf music and musicians, thereby aiming to (i) uncover the history and significance of gumleaf playing as an Aboriginal cultural activity, (ii) investigate the important changes in its uses and functions as a result of contact with non-Aboriginal Australians,[3] and (iii) define the botany of Australian leaf instruments.

As the above quotation from Stubington suggests in the present context, the widespread ignorance of Aboriginal culture among Australians needs to be dispelled by Aboriginalist

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[1]The botanist Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) noted a treacle-like substance exuding from eucalypts near Botany Bay in 1770; Governor Phillip therefore called the eucalypts "gum-trees" when he sent specimens of *E. resinfera* to Banks from Sydney on 15 May 1788. Foresters, however, reserve the term "gums" for one group of eucalypts having smooth barks (*e.g.* River Red Gum, *E. camaldulensis*). Most "gumleaf" instruments derive from the first three of the remaining five groupings of eucalypts: boxes, ironbarks, stringybarks, bloodwoods, and peppermints (according to their bark).

[2]This blanket designation approximates the geographical area outlined in the preface to *Field Guide to Eucalypts: South-eastern Australia* (Brooker and Kleinig 1983). It also corresponds to the Southeast, Riverine, Spencer, Tasmania and eastern Eyre regions mapped out in the authoritative *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* (Horton 1994).

[3]While I shall occasionally make use of the blanket terms "Black" and "White" to emphasise political division, I shall normally introduce individual leafists with the terms "Aboriginal" or "non-Aboriginal". Aboriginal leafists are not necessarily black-skinned, whilst some non-Aboriginal leafists are of Asian or mixed racial descent.

scholars. Now that Australia is approaching the 2000 Sydney Olympics as well as the centenary of Federation, the intensification of nationalist discourse places particular importance on musical and other icons.[4] The gumleaf is undoubtedly an icon from which people have squeezed a quintessentially "Australian" essence; and its musical capabilities represent an evocative manifestation or projection of this icon.

However, the sentimental, "true-blue", "give me a home amongst the gumtrees" style of nationalism projects gumleaf playing primarily as a White Australian folk music tradition.[5] Through gumleaf contests and television commercials, this musical activity has increasingly become a site of hegemonic domination. The musical standardisation demanded of participants in contests exposes the few remaining Aboriginal contestants to a subtle loss of distinction which all but disenfranchises them from their long cultural, economic, spiritual and environmental attachment to gumleaves as sound producers.

To understand these contemporary uses and abuses of gumleaf playing, it is necessary to study the changing tradition in Aboriginal society over the last hundred years. A key question to be asked in this thesis is whether early twentieth-century Aboriginal leaf playing represents the survival and the revival of an ancient tradition of leaf playing, or the adoption of an entirely new musical model in the face of European contact.

Three major themes therefore permeate this thesis:

(i) the nature of musical culture contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, including concepts of tradition, transmission, exchange and appropriation. This includes a discussion on the various indigenous, sacred and secular musical influences on the repertoire and performance behaviour of Aboriginal leafists, and a case study made in a cross-cultural competitive context.

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[4]An icon is an image, which stands for a sacred object by virtue of a resemblance or analogy to it. Some icons carry specific cultural overtones, often propagated through their representation in art and subsequent popularisation by the media.

[5]This song, by Brown and Johnson, is often used as a cliché. For the purpose of this topic, I define "folk music" as music of a community having commonality of experience. It is passed from person to person or one generation to another without depending upon the printed word for its continuity.

(ii) the changing relationship of native leaf music to Aboriginal concepts of identity manifest in cultural revival; and

(iii) typologies of leafists' instruments, including discrete species and locations of native plants - as well as those introduced from Europe and Asia. This thesis attempts, for the first time, to systematise Aboriginal epistimologies of leaf instruments in their natural environment, thus linking the study to the discipline of ethnobotany (the study of contextualised plant use).

These themes characterise the development of gumleaf playing in Aboriginal cultural, social, spiritual and environmental activity from the 1890s to the present in the face of its diminishing position in Australian society as a whole.

## PREAMBLE AND HYPOTHESIS

Australian Aborigines have probably made use of the leaf as a soundmaker for many thousands of years, and they certainly have since the time of non-Aboriginal settlement. Kennedy (1933: 155) was the first writer to comment on the origins of gumleaf music, based on an observation by the former Chief Protector of Natives in Queensland, Dr Walter E. Roth (1898: 1; 1902: 24).[6] Although missionaries are generally believed to have initiated the institution of the gumleaf band, Kennedy argued that Aborigines in their 'primitive state'[7] had previously elicited music from gumleaves. His belief was probably based on the fact that music is an important element of the Aboriginal people's intense belief in, and reliance on, the natural world.

Doubtless any musical or extramusical functions which Aborigines ascribed to leaves in various parts of Australia slowly changed with non-Aboriginal contact. Settlers played gumleaves from at least the mid-nineteenth century; and in the early twentieth-century a Europeanised gumleaf music idiom prevailed over Aboriginal popular musical taste

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[6]Whilst working as a surgeon at Boulia, Cloncurry and Normanton hospitals, Roth compiled notes on the language, habits and customs of Aborigines, beginning in 1894. His observations are distinguished by a facility for scientific detachment and comparison of customs.

throughout the coastal and inland areas of southeastern Australia. Leaf playing, more than any other aspect of Aboriginal music-culture at the time, facilitated a point of engagement between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural worlds. Such musical contact was ultimately creative, producing a new Australian musical model: the gumleaf band.

Missionisation was the first and single most important influence on the Aboriginal adoption of a European form of gumleaf playing. In the first half of the twentieth-century, gumleaf ensembles functioned in southeastern Australia as a lively entertainment outlet for detribalised people; in crossing barriers of age, gender, ability, and clan affiliation, they also promoted social and cultural cohesion among disparate tribal groups. As a frequently camouflaged, *i.e.* hidden artistic expression, the activity was more widely practised than previous writers assumed; Aborigines played leaves behind the scenes; *i.e.* in the bush, and on mission stations and reserves which were rarely visited by non-Aboriginal people.

One important factor differentiating Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal leaf playing lay in characteristic approaches to soundmaking, which derived from two diametrically, opposed aesthetic systems. Since Aborigines already possessed a long ecological/cultural association with gumleaves, they enthusiastically developed the art of leaf playing - which many non-Aboriginal musicians rejected - into a vehicle for straight-from-the-heart expressiveness, just as they might have picked up a piece of discarded metal or glass and fashioned it into an artistic object of immense personal or community value and/or functionality.

Furthermore, I propose that Aboriginal leaf bandsmen skilfully incorporated European and Black American music into their own cultural worlds. Influenced by the secular entertainment industry as well as by church hymnody, they created various syntheses of indigenous and borrowed musical elements to produce new and unique artistic expressions within their own performance contexts. Most notably, they adapted Western tunes to suit the pitch ranges and idiomatic qualities of specific leaf instruments, generally adhering to native leaves which, in many cases, were culturally significant markers of seasonal change and clan

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[7]The now partly discredited adjective "primitive" (from the Latin *primus* meaning "first") remained in common parlance at least until the 1950s.

identity. In recent years, environmental tenets have impacted on and pervaded the Aboriginal cultural revival of leaf playing.

Throughout the twentieth-century, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists influenced each other by contributing their specialised musical practices and ideas. In the wake of the British occupation of the continent, interference with the original vegetation inevitably led to some changes in leaf instrument selection, with citrus leaves becoming a popular substitute for gumleaves. Many non-Aboriginal leafists have dispensed with native leaves altogether in favour of non-native leaves.

The iconic activity of gumleaf playing has survived many social changes, including increasing degrees of urbanisation, and commercial and political penetration. At gumleaf competitions the two cultural and aesthetic systems of performance collide, thus perpetuating the provocative issue of ownership.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MUSICAL CHANGE

Since an understanding of indigenisation processes was crucial to my historical exposition, I reviewed Kartomi's seminal study (1981) of how musical change[8] results from culture contact as well as a collection of case studies of music-cultures in contact over prolonged periods of time (Kartomi and Blum 1994). In Australia, many traditional Aboriginal musical expressions have been lost because the dominant, invading culture has either rejected, suppressed, or devalued them.[9] Endemic to this loss is the condition of anomie,[10] whereby the absence of accepted values results in loss of cultural identity and individual unplanned living:

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[8]Musical change may be defined as changes of ideas from within musical systems (Blacking 1986: 11).

[9]This process is endemic to colonialism (see, for example, Kartomi 1981 and Kartomi and Blum 1994: xi-xii).

[10]This term "anomie" was coined in sociology, but is similar in meaning to the Aboriginal Channel Country word *ungutcha*, the condition of a "dead" soul in a live body (Duncan-Kemp 1968: 300-301). Murray *et al* (*OED* Vol. 1, 1989: 493) cites E. Mayo (1933) as the earliest source of the English term.

> Historically, the most decisive change occasioned by contact was the dissolution of the autonomous native society and the adoption of its remnants as a minority group, whose interdependence with the dominant Europeans has always been limited by their social rejection (Reay 1949: 98).

Gumleaf playing helped to alleviate this tenuous cultural situation typified by anomie, as detribalised people in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries began to play European tunes on gumleaves with facility and enthusiasm. Leaf music was a music of shared understanding; the gumleaf had long been a familiar part of the Aboriginal people's material and cultural environment. It enabled disparate clanspeople to bond together and redefine themselves in relation to the surrounding landscape. Spurred on through individual creative endeavour and the missionary network, this communal means of expression readily captured the Aboriginal popular imagination in the face of their increasing powerlessness as a group.

A culture that has been dominated by another and has neglected its own music may eventually become aware of the danger of that music's possible extinction and make efforts to revitalise it (Kartomi 1981: 237-238). One of the less publicised facets of the southeastern Australian nativistic musical revival[11] has been the search for cultural roots through the playing of native leaf instruments. In a burst of creative activity, a handful of Aboriginal musicians are taking stock of their own cultural knowledge in order to revive their communities' traditions of gumleaf playing. Their enthusiasm was partly motivated by the protest movement accompanying the 1988 Bicentenary celebrations of British settlement in Australia, which provoked an increased self-awareness amongst the Aboriginal peoples.

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[11] A term introduced in the US, "nativism" embraces protection of the interests of native inhabitants against those of immigrants. A nativistic movement is a conscious attempt on the part of a society's members to perpetuate selected aspects of its culture (based on Linton 1943: 230, cited in Kartomi 1981). "Revival" usually involves the restoration of genres by practitioners and teachers; skills may be transformed into new forms deemed appropriate for desired uses and functions. These concepts are particularly relevant to gumleaf music, since it is variously perpetuated for nationalistic, historical, nostalgic, touristic, and artistic reasons.

The revival embodies a purposeful restructuring of pan-Aboriginal[12] culture and consciousness within the broader "society of Aboriginality", which Jones (1995: 63) sees as the urban equivalent of the (publicly consumable) "Dreaming"[13] or Aboriginal belief system(s) of the bush. A sense of Aboriginality - which incorporates the maintenance of family ties, links with the ancestral land, common values, and artistic approaches - is shared by contemporary Aboriginal leafists. However, the extent to which an "essence" of Aboriginality in gumleaf playing can be defined in musical or sociological terms is problematic because Aboriginality is a mental construct. Concepts of pure, primeval authenticity tend to pervade its character, but as with other musical "traditions", these are unrealistic concepts on which to build (based on Kartomi 1981: 238).

Hobsbawm (in Hobsbawm and Ranger 1991: 1-14) argues that traditions are timebound, datable, and often quite recent in origins. Yet despite its inherent contradictions, doubtful empirical status, and ideological entanglements, the term *tradition*[14] has remained current and indispensable in ethnology, folklore and ethnomusicology, with current approaches stressing its invention and the reification of cultural patterns as invariant group identifiers for political purposes (Coplan 1991: 36-37).

For this reason Bradley (1995: 10) describes the twentieth-century practice of gumleaf playing as having taken on "the aura" of Aboriginal authenticity. I shall simply refer to a

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[12]Pan-Aboriginality is a twentieth-century construction which dates back to the 1970s, when many Aboriginal people from across the nation first united to fight for their rights. The homogenised associations of those Aboriginal cultural traits, which have become generally dispersed across Australia, are distinct from those, which were formerly the property of certain language groups.

[13]"The Dreaming", or just "Dreaming", is the preferred Aboriginal English term for the anthropological term "Dreamtime" which Baldwin Spencer coined at the beginning of the twentieth-century to describe the *alcheringa*, the highly complex religious system of the Arrernte (see Stanner 1987). Taken up by Aborigines to become the main central symbol of cultural revivalism, these interchangeable terms facilitate a polite distance between authentic indigenous beliefs and the prying of outsiders.

[14]Tradition may be defined as the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends and customs from generation to generation by word of mouth and by practical application. Coplan (1991: 39) stresses that tradition is a dynamic social and historical process.

tradition as being authentic if the relevant society or cultural group regards it to be its 'true" tradition. Rather than drawing hard or fast conclusions about matters for which the evidence is thin, I will engage with the Aboriginal peoples' own mindset concerning the ancient roots and functions of this tradition in their culture.

*Transmission*, the process whereby Aborigines teach gumleaf playing skills to novices (including non-Aborigines) on a casual basis, has now entered the formal educational sphere, with leafists visiting primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. From at least the 1920s up until the present time, non-Aboriginal men have acquired skills taught them by Aboriginal leafists and adapted leaf playing to suit their own particular cultural contexts, whilst at the same time introducing new tunes to their Aboriginal acquaintances. This exemplifies the process of *musical exchange*, whereby traditional Aboriginal repertoires and musical styles have gradually been replaced by a corpus of Western music. Although the media now promotes a much more active *appropriation*[15] of gumleaf playing by non-Aboriginal leafists and competition organisers than ever before, Aborigines have also appropriated gumleaf music for cultural revival; and this has even included the performance of tunes originally belonging to language groups different from their own. An ongoing debate over the cultural ownership of gumleaf music persists, even though appropriation and cultural borrowing are universal norms.

One by-process dealt with in this thesis is *transaction*, which means entertainment commissioned by negotiation, for example for vice-regal performances, where gumleaf music represents a specific aspect of the cultural record of Aboriginal society. Another by-process is *transmutation*[16] or substitution into altered performance forms, for example by substituting the gumleaf for a conventional instrument in an ensemble context, or substituting non-native leaves for gumleaves. The terminology of leaf music needs to be carefully defined from the outset, since previous writers on this subject have tended to confuse the issue.

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[15]By "appropriation" is meant a strategy adopted to gain control of a system of knowledge or beliefs after detaching it from its cultural source, then decontextualising it and finally recontextualising it for a new set of purposes or situations (Kartomi 1992: 85). Appropriation is most evident in representations of Aboriginality where indigenous artefacts, activities, and even people are deployed as national icons in popular culture.

## LEAF ORGANOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY

The literature refers to the gumleaf as a "sound tool",[17] a "sound instrument"[18] or a "musical instrument". Broadly speaking, a "musical instrument" means any implement used to produce music, where music itself, as humanly organised, structured sound, has different meanings according to its cultural context. Music is whatever we ourselves, any other individuals, groups of people, societies, or cultures on planet earth (and perhaps elsewhere) comprehend as being music (based on Reck 1977: 14).[19] The blown extramusical sounds of leaves might well be produced by "sound tools", but the gumleaf is a "musical instrument" whenever it fulfils the role of melody-maker and/or rhythm-maker.

In bush settings, Aborigines achieve remarkable visual and musical effects with the limited materials at hand. Leaf playing has often been seen and heard in the company of other sound-producing instruments of Australian Aboriginal culture - but primarily in association with instruments introduced by non-Aborigines. Nevertheless, some writers have ignored the non-pretentious, non-threatening gumleaf because it is an unmodified music-maker. Its inclusion was not seen to be relevant, for example, in Michael Atherton's book *Australian made ... Australian played ... Handcrafted musical instruments from didjeridu to synthesizer* (1990).[20]

Another problem associated with the study of unmodified music-making objects in musical culture is their lack of physical durability. As a consequence, no historical gumleaf instruments are housed in museum collections. Decomposed eucalypt leaves can not be

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[16]A term which came into use in the 14th century (*e.g.* Wyclif, 1380; Chaucer, 1384) according to Murray *et al* (*OED*, Vol. XVIII, 1989: 416).

[17]"Tool" implies something (usually) held in the hand to perform a mechanical operation. This aptly describes the normal gumleaf grip discussed in Chapter 5. However, unlike (manually operated) clapsticks, the leaf can be played "no hands" (*i.e.* a jet of air rather than the hands produces sound excitation).

[18]Moyle (1978: 1) defined a "sound instrument" as "a means of producing non-vocal sounds". Few of those employed by the Australian Aborigines are sounded alone, usually for specific ritual purposes.

[19]See Seeger (1992) for a more thoroughgoing discussion on definitions of music.

[20]The didjeridu is a large, durable aerophone to which a substantial body of literature has already been devoted. It commanded high status in its original location of Arnhem Land, in central-northern Australia, and in recent times has evoked national and international attention, which has virtually eclipsed that of the gumleaf instrument.

radiocarbon-dated because they do not bear the identifying marks, which characterise more durable sound-producers. By contrast, information about the instrumental musical life of the past is obtainable from bone, ivory, shell and wood analysis (pers. comm. from archaeologist Joanna Freslov, 14 March, 1996).[21]

The gumleaf may be described as a simple ribbon reed[22] aerophone. Children the world over produce a loud and satisfying blast of sound by blowing air past a blade of grass held between the hands to act as a simple form of vibrating reed (Backus 1970: 188). The anthropologist Keith Kennedy (1933: 155) first classified the gumleaf as a reed instrument, although he omitted to add that it is not the leaf vibration but rather the pulsating flow of air that produces the sound:

> The leaf is folded along its mid-rib, and the lower fold pressed against the lower lip with the tips of the first and second fingers, letting the upper fold touch lightly against the protruded upper lip. When a current of air is directed against the upper fold, it vibrates rapidly. This vibration gives rise to the sound waves, so it is clear that the gumleaf, so played, is not a whistle, but must be classed with instruments that have a single vibrating reed, such as the modern clarinet.

The commonly used terms "gumleaf whistle" and "folded-leaf whistle" suggest the shrill, high-pitched sounds which children emit to simulate an umpire's whistle.[23] However, since a whistle is readily definable as an instrument, which lacks moving (vibrating) parts, Kennedy is correct when he writes that the leaf instrument, with its malleable shape, is not strictly categorisable as a whistle. A leaf produces a significant number of harmonics in addition to

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[21] Further to this, I studied the writings of the archaeologists Pardoe (1988) and Flood (1995).

[22] From the French *anche á ruban*; a reed in which the air stream is directed against the edge of a stretched band or ribbon (*NGDMI* 1: 29). Sachs (1940: 38) described the ribbon reed as the prototype of all reed aerophones. A source list on the ribbon reed aerophone is supplied in Fischer (1983: 78-79).

[23] Nettl (1990: 55) described "leaf whistles", together with grass and bone whistles, as simple, archaic instruments shared by tribal cultures and European folk cultures alike. Associated with children's games, signalling practices, and remnants of pre-Christian ritual, they were evidently distributed throughout the world many centuries ago at different periods of time.

the fundamental (the first harmonic). It is an ideal medium for the production of "chaotic" (muddy) sounds; indeed spectral analysis proves that leafists rarely produce "pure" tones.

Leaf instruments occur in many contiguous music-cultures, which influence each other. However, I found that there were no consistent physical similarities between the gumleaf instrument of Aboriginal Australia and the more complex leaf-derived instruments of its indigenous neighbours in the Indian Ocean littoral and Oceania, *e.g.* those documented by Ammann (1997), Chenoweth (1976), Fischer (1983), Flora (1983, 1986), Kartomi (1984, 1985), McLean (1984, 1995) and (R.) Moyle (1974).

If anything, the mainland Australian "gumleaf" more closely resembles the simple[24] leaf instruments of some more geographically remote and culturally diverse societies such as Southern China (Cheng 1997), Ecuador (Casagrande and Stigberg 1986), the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico[25] and Romania (Sarosi 1986), taking into account some variation in the ethnoecological evidence with respect to botanical diversity and indigenous music-systems. The existence of leaf instruments which vary markedly in species, timbre and accompanying performance traditions, undergirds the case for universal indigenous participation in the origins of leaf blowing across the world.

## THE ACOUSTICS OF LEAF PLAYING

Leaf playing is mastered through experiential knowledge, *i.e.* the accumulation of various types of aural and physical experience. Several items of leaf repertoire from my collection formed the basis of the recently published CD/booklet *How to Play the Gumleaf* (Sydney: Currency Press 1999) - the first kit of this type to cover the basic tenets of leaf playing. With the aid of illustrations, Herbert Patten presents in it a tried-and-true, detailed method for beginners, including tips on selecting and folding a leaf. There is no one correct method; those used by Patten and other leading leafists introduced in this thesis are outlined in Appendix 1.

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[24]Whole, complete leaf in its natural condition, as opposed to the more sophisticated leaf instruments of Australia's closest neighbours.

[25]Information kindly supplied by the anthropologist Karl Neuenfeldt (see Chapter 3).

Sound is produced as the leaf vibrates against the upper or lower lip in resonance with a fluctuating air flow. The leafist relies on this power supply - a steady air pressure rather than a jet of air from the lungs (since there is nothing to form a jet) - to strike the leaf and maintain vibrations. The correct placement of the leaf ensures that no air escapes around the leaf except at the centre of the top lip, where the air stream passes between the leaf edge and the lip. Controlled breath inhalation is vital for rejuvenating the energy needed for attack and decay, as well as to extend phrases. The skilled use of the tongue and facial muscles also contributes far more to the performance than most leafists realise. The effects of tension, leaf thickness, and vibration conditions are summarised in Figure 1.

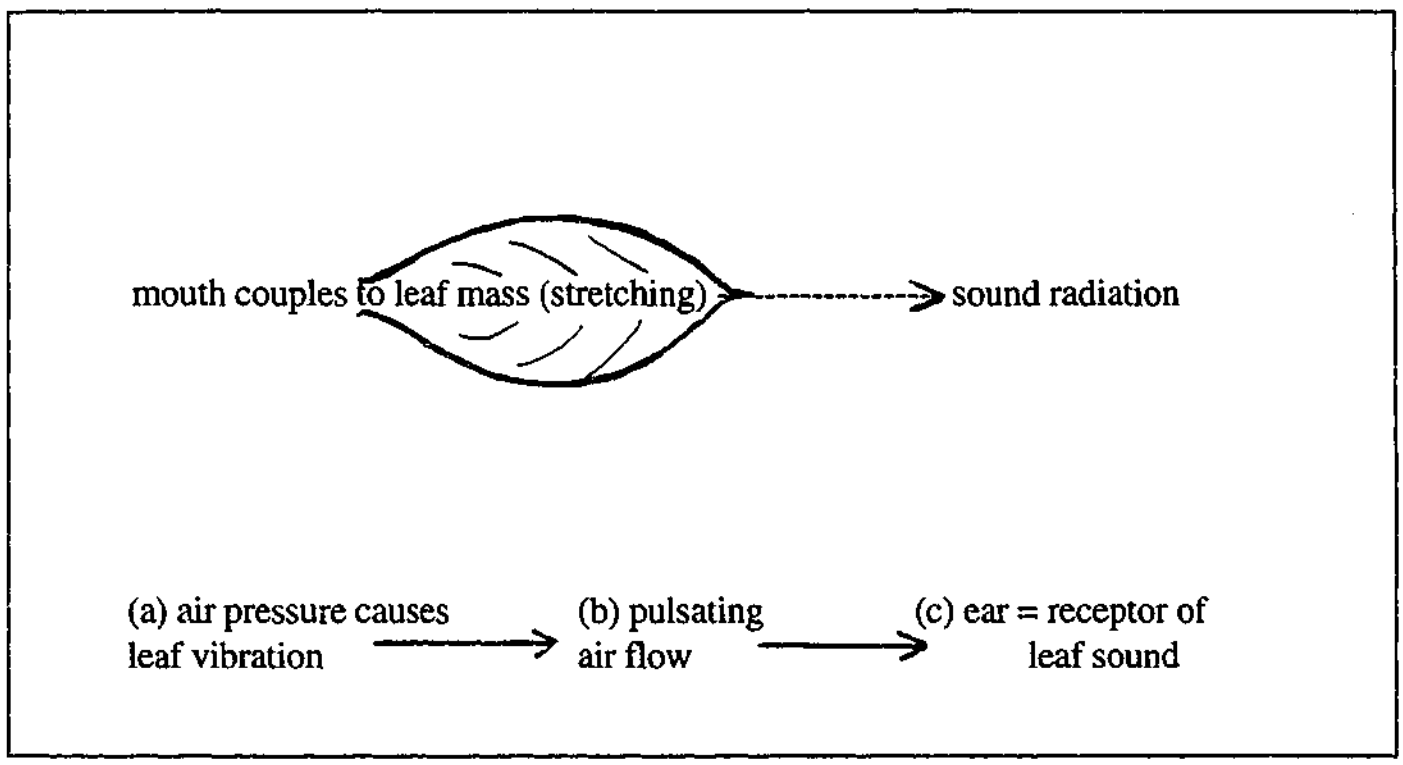


**FIGURE 1: ACOUSTIC MODEL OF A VIBRATING LEAF REED**

(according to the "upper lip method" commonly used by Aborigines)

1. The curved leaf provides a reed of variable length, which is controlled by the mouth.

2. The fingers act to seal off the corners of the mouth, *i.e.* lip and fingers form the walls of the coupled air column; lips provide damping resistance additional to the restoring force in the leaf itself. The oral and nasal cavities act as a sound box.

3. Flow of air comes in pulses as the leaf-valve opens and closes; pulses excite resonances of the vocal tract, producing resonant formant bands. "Coupling" can be conceptualised as the interchange of energy between (a) the leaf and (b) the human organs.

4. The tension of the leaf and lip is increased to raise frequency, and released to lower it. Changing the angle at which the air stream strikes the leaf edge produces higher or lower sounds. All leaves possess the same natural acoustic functions, but variations in their size, shape and texture necessitates minor changes in technique.

Physicist Neville Fletcher published the first detailed study on the acoustics of the didjeridu in 1983. In contributing his preliminary thoughts on gumleaf acoustics to this thesis (pers. comm., 4 November 1993 and 12 January 1995), Fletcher suggested that the leaf behaves like a "backward clarinet". Whereas the sound produced by a clarinet occurs only in the pipe itself (according to the closed pipe theory), the leaf couples to the human throat to set up resonance in the vocal cords, which vibrate at the same frequency as the leaf itself. In accordance with the open pipe theory, the voice box becomes the actual instrument, *i.e.* the chief resonator. This is similar to the behaviour of the didjeridu, which in coupling to the throat, shares the same diameter of pipe so that its sounds are transmitted down into the throat cavity. By comparison, the diameter of a clarinet pipe differs from and is unconnected to the human cavity. Not all of what is happening in the back of the throat is transferred down through the clarinet. Instead, a limited amount of resonance is filtered out.

The late Catherine (Cath) Ellis (1994: 436-37) believed that if a single leaf is used, it should be regarded as a single reed instrument, whereas if it is folded and the two blades are set vibrating, it operates as a double reed instrument. However, Reis Flora (pers. comm., 30 May 1997) conceptualises the theory of the "double-reed" action of a leaf instrument quite differently from Ellis. According to Flora, the leaf is a reed and the human lips are another reed, even though they represent two different materials (see Figure 2). Initial impact therefore determines which reed principle applies. The leaf actually vibrates more than the lip, producing a tickly feeling as one begins to play.

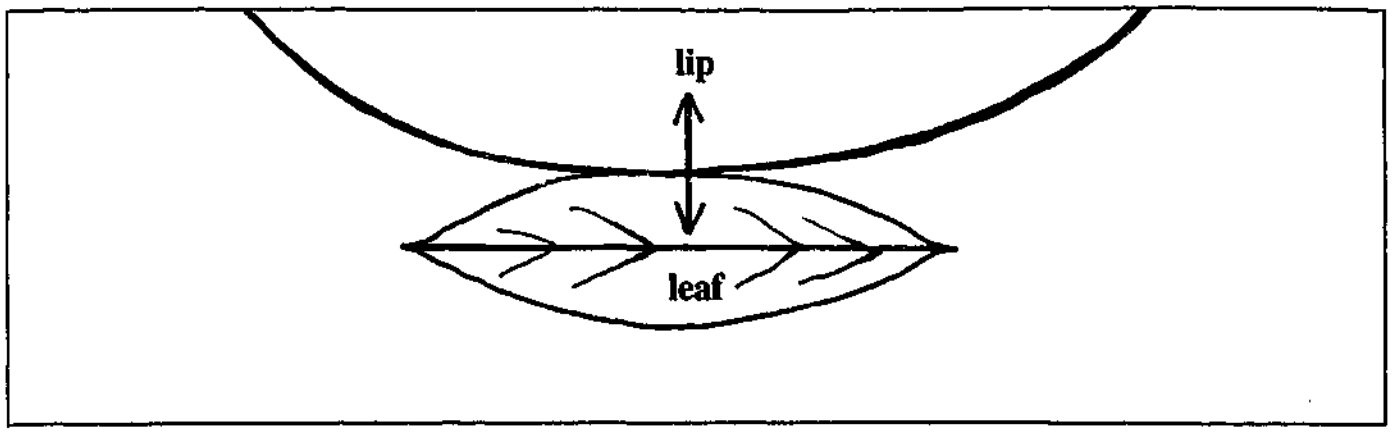


**FIGURE 2: LEAF-LIP "DOUBLE REED" ACTION (after R. Flora)**

## METHODOLOGY AND DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

Since this is the first attempt to systematise a very broad field, I have needed to take several forms of evidence into account, namely the oral-historical, the ethnomusicological (musical-anthropological), the geographic, and the scientific (botanical and acoustic). My main sources were Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal oral history compiled by myself and others, ethnomusicological fieldwork, the written records of non-Aboriginal writers, and botanical/acoustic inquiries and experiments.

I conducted fieldwork in selected locations in New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria, where it could be shown that gumleaf playing had been closely woven into the cultural fabric of Aboriginal community life throughout the first half of the twentieth-century. Whilst in the field, I observed, photographed and recorded leafists' performances and oral history. I also recorded the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship held annually in Victoria during the last five years of its operation.

Eighteen of the excerpts on the audiocassette tape accompanying this thesis are from my personal collection, which augments a number of gumleaf recordings held at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the National Library of Australia (NLA). The tape samples were recorded in a variety of acoustic environments dictated by need and opportunity. Difficult conditions prevailed in the Maryborough Town Hall, Victoria, where it was impossible to arrange for optimal microphone positioning, or to screen background noise which, in a positive sense, conveyed the charged atmosphere of

competition. Fieldworkers such as I have often had to compromise between obtaining a high level of recording fidelity and recording a musical event in its proper context.

As well as collecting and preserving leaves and constructing maps, diagrams and charts, I set up a research team with a eucalyptologist and an acoustician.[26] In my library research, I uncovered useful background information about the relevant musical styles practised in nineteenth-century Australia, and historical information concerning the history of leaf playing in eastern South Australia (SA) and southern Queensland.

By and large, the older Aboriginal participants in this project could not (or did not wish to) divulge, exact times and dates of events in their lives.[27] The reason they gave was that their cultures are based on the natural markers of sunrise and sunset and seasonal flora and fauna calendars rather than the clock. Some Elders were happy to mention beliefs and concepts handed down over the generations, but declined to be recorded because previous researchers had not supplied them with taped copies of the stories and knowledge which they had so generously imparted. Those Elders who retain(ed) tribal names requested that I adhere to them in my writings, which I of course did.

I felt especially privileged to be able to work in close conjunction with Australia's most distinguished male and female Aboriginal leafists. The leading male leafist is Herbert Patten, who lives and works in Melbourne (Victoria) and Narooma (NSW); while the leading female leafist is Roseina Boston of Nambucca Heads (NSW). Patten and Boston are distanced from each other geographically, as well as by clan affiliation, yet each say they have clung closely to the gumleaf tradition because it is associated with their early childhood. Through it they have forged meaningful relationships with the natural and social environments in which they live. This orientation has given Patten and Boston a means by

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[26]Venues for experiments into the structure and sonic capabilities of leaf instruments were a botany laboratory, a recording studio, and an anechoic chamber, all at Monash University. For reasons of space, only the botanical experiments will be presented in detail in this thesis.

[27]An absolute date denotes a specific point in time as opposed to a relative date, which helps to establish the comparative age of two items.

which to retain their identity and to survive as leading musicians in the present-day nativistic musical revival.

Several years ago, one onlooker expressed an opinion to Patten that the gumleaf was "not really a musical instrument", yet Patten performs daily and the leaf defines his everyday musical identity and creativity. On hearing this comment to Patten, I was challenged to begin my study of Aboriginal gumleaf music in 1992. It has proved to be a provocative field of inquiry, filtering as it does into the larger public construction of a collective Australian identity.

My motivation was also to research the potential usefulness of the project to the various Aboriginal leafists and communities involved. I realised, of course, that my own research and ethnographic work could not yield an exclusive historical account of the activity of gumleaf playing, since the Aborigines' own evaluations of oral testimony and their interpretations of the past often differ vastly from mine. At best I have initiated a discovery process, a dialogue in which Patten played an important role in deciding what information should be gathered and what should be done with it. This tentative process characterises the evolution of knowledge in ethnomusicology; it is a mutual exchange of knowledge that creates common ground for speaking as well as listening.

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## LITERATURE PERTAINING TO GUMLEAF PLAYING

Before setting out my detailed aims, I will briefly review the existing literature. The details of nineteenth-century musical culture contact in Australia in theses, books, musicological journals and monographs are scant, and a search through early colonial accounts reveals no mention of Aboriginal leaf playing at the time of contact, beginning in 1788.[28] What then, have Aboriginalist musicologists discovered about gumleaf playing?

Alice Moyle (1974: 45, 397) wrote about the gumleaf instrument as a "folded-leaf whistle" or "gumleaf whistle", ascribing to it eleven documented localities (see Map 1). These localities extend southwards down the eastern seaboard from Cape York Peninsula to Wallaga Lake, further round the coast to Lake Tyers, Victoria, and inland to Cummeragunga, NSW.[29] Moyle cited Roth (1902); Holmer (see Moyle 1966: 150-151); and Mathews (in AIAS Cat. 3, 1968: 13; see also Moyle 1966: 164-165), and Jackomos (1971) as important sources. She also claimed that gumleaves had been played inland at Balranald, NSW and Gerard Reserve, SA (Ellis in Moyle, Cat. 1, 1967: 13); and at West Moree (Gordon's 1968 recording,[30] see AIAS Cat. 4, 1969: 7). Neither Moyle nor any of these other scholars (apart from Gordon) identified the local species of gumleaves, which Aborigines played, a topic, which I address in Chapter 6.

Trevor Jones (1980: 158) noted that the only indigenous aerophones to be found apart from the didjeridu were a bullroarer, folded-leaf whistle, and a bone or reed pipe, only the first of which was at all common. In the same year Ellis (1980: 722) reiterated Moyle's statement that little was known of the traditional use or distribution of the folded-leaf whistle or the blown-reed pipe, both of which had been observed but not recorded in sound along the River Murray in southeastern Australia. Fourteen years later, Ellis (1994: 436-

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[28]Likewise, ancient iconographical sources in the form of rock art throw no light on the cultural worth or significance of gumleaf music, and nineteenth-century paintings reveal no use of leaf instruments held to the mouth, even though they point strongly to the use of foliage in dancers' costumes. By contrast, twentieth-century photographs at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, Canberra), the Mitchell Library, Sydney, and the State Library of Victoria (SLV), Melbourne, were valuable supplements to my readings.

[29]Cummeragunga was entered incorrectly in Moyle 1974: 397. The settlement is situated in NSW, not on the Victorian side of the Murray River.

437) wrote that performers had also been found along the eastern coastal regions, as far north as Cape York. Her colleague Marylouise Brunton also researched non-tribal Aboriginal music in SA, southern NSW and Victoria, but did not refer to a body of traditional music for the leaf in the region.

With respect to northern NSW, Margaret Gummow (1992: 176-178) described some typical contexts for gumleaf music-making in Western idioms by the Bundjalung people, citing one man's belief that the gumleaf was a genuine Aboriginal instrument. Barry McDonald (1996: 113) also reported instances of "bush leaf" playing in corroborees[31] conducted in the nearby New England district by descendants of the Baanbai, who danced and sang a mixture of traditional and European music. Stephen Wild (1994: 497) maintained that Aborigines enthusiastically adopted the gumleaf in the nineteenth-century.

Apart from the contributions of Brunton, Ellis, Gummow, Jones, McDonald and Moyle, a lot of historical information on gumleaf music has survived by chance rather than as the result of ethnomusicological inquiry. Most notably, reports by proselytising missionaries served as fruitful primary sources. The Lutheran Almanacs provided evidence that South Australian settlers played gumleaves in the mid-nineteenth century, and *Our AIM, A Monthly Record of the Aborigine's Inland Mission of Australia*, supplied copious details of gumleaf playing in the early 1900s. However, I found no references to gumleaf playing in the diaries and records of explorers, squatters, pastoralists and public servants, *e.g.* Smyth (1878), Dawson (1881), Curr (1883), Beveridge (1889), Howitt (1904) and Mackaness (1965). Nor were any made in the sample of nineteenth-century newspapers I examined, with the exception of the Salvation Army *War Cry* (1892).

Periodicals about Aboriginal Australia such as *The Koori Mail* newspaper and *Dawn* and *New Dawn* magazines contain useful eye-witness reports by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

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[30]Gordon's recording was incorrectly dated at 1965 (Moyle 1974: 397).

[31]"Corroboree" is a loose description for local indigenous singing or dancing, but usually of these activities in combination. The term emerged as a corruption of *carib-erie* (a mode of dancing), as Captain John Hunter heard it spoken by members of the Dharug clan in the Sydney district more than two centuries ago (Moyle 1974: ix). Corroborees were once the main form of social entertainment in Aboriginal camps although their functions, meanings, decorations and instrumentarium varied from place to place.

observers, whilst stereotyped images of gumleaf bands are diffused through documentary films and magazine articles edited by non-Aborigines.[32] Advertisements, press releases and media reviews associated with the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship (1977-1997) were usually laced with anecdotes by organisers, performers and observers.

In Canberra, the oral history/leaf recordings held in the John Meredith Collection at the National Library of Australia supplement the AIATSIS gumleaf recordings made by Cath Ellis, John Gordon, Nils Holmer, Janet Mathews, and Chris Sullivan. Sullivan (1988) makes an important contribution to the knowledge of Aboriginal use of adopted instruments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In recent years, NLA oral archivist Kevin Bradley expanded Meredith's collection of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaf music recordings, and published on the topic of gumleaf playing in 1993 and 1995 respectively. Some documentary footage is held at AIATSIS and the National Film and Sound Archives (NFSA).

For the purpose of understanding the leaf as a musical sound instrument in context, I investigated botanical and ornithological parameters that bear on the sound quality and totemic significance of Australian native leaf instruments. These questions have, in the main, been ignored by ethnomusicologists, except for Feld's ethnographic study of sound as a cultural system (1982) and Moyle's investigation into the botanical species of the didjeridu (1974). The novelist Alice Duncan-Kemp (1933, 1952, 1961 and 1968) also emphasised the (perceived) importance of flora in her articulations between Aboriginal culture and the environment.

The fairly extensive literature on the ethnobotany of Australian Aborigines[33] - *i.e.* how they adapted plant material for food, medicine, ceremony, shelter, ropes, etc. - makes only scant reference to the musical and extramusical functions of plants. (By the same token Philip Jones, in his 1995 ethnography on the boomerang, overlooks the artefact's use as a musical

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[32]The first magazine reports on the subject of gumleaf music (only) were by Richards (1959) and Jackomos (1971).

[33]Joseph Henry Maiden (1859-1925) provided a priceless record of Aboriginal foods, fibres and medicines. His 1889 lists include some foods used by settlers for which no Aboriginal record exists. Approximately 50 species of eucalypts are now known to have been exploited for medicinal use. Some notable publications on Australian ethnobotany are Cribb and Cribb (1974, 1981), Gott (1982), Low (1985, 1988), Lassak and McCarthy (1990), Gott and Conran (1991), and Zola and Gott (1992), and Latz (1995).

instrument). Two field reports cited in Brock (1988) provided the precedent for my attempt to situate leaf blowing in an ethnobotanical context in my final chapter. I also draw heavily on publications by eucalyptologists, most notably Blakely (1934), Jacobs (1955), Penfold and Willis (1961), Kelly (1969), Pryor and Johnson (1971), Brooker and Kleinig (1983), Cronin (1988), McMahon (1990), and Costermans (1994). The ornithological writings of Pizzey (1988) and Christidis and Bolles (1994) were also valuable references.

Thus the written sources which provide a springboard for the present thesis include anecdotes, eye-witness accounts, gossip and legends, as well as ethnomusicological reports and scientific publications. Taken singly, the first four of these sources must be treated with caution, but I place some reliance on them as a collective body of data. A detailed account of the death in custody of Aboriginal leafist Bill Bull in 1954 was published by Hugh Anderson in 1995 based primarily on newspaper accounts.

Two of my journal publications, Ryan 1997a and 1999 respectively, derive from my research for this thesis. The first situates gumleaf playing in the context of southeastern Australian Aboriginal performances of hula dancing in the 1920s and 1930s, whilst the second focusses on the performance styles and socio-cultural contexts of gumleaf playing competitions. Publications by Ryan (1997b) and Ryan and Patten (1995, 1998) also appear in encyclopaedic or dictionary format. A chronological list of written sources on gumleaf music is supplied in Appendix 2.

## DETAILED AIMS AND PROCEDURES

In consideration of the literary, theoretical and scientific matters introduced above, this thesis sets out to extend the work of others by:

- devising a history and periodisation of Australian leaf music.
- explaining the link between native leaf instruments and the prevailing concept of Aboriginal identity as a motivation for players or listeners for whom the sound of the gumleaf evokes special cultural meanings in personal and communal life.

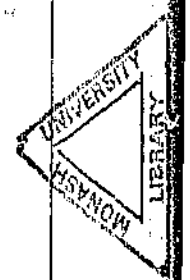
- describing the impact of missionisation and the secular entertainment industry on Aboriginal gumleaf playing, with a view to uncovering its broader proliferation in southeastern Australia.

- ascertaining the impact of non-Aboriginal interests and expectations on aspects of Aboriginal musical culture through a representation of the gumleaf band as a point of articulation between the two societies.

- analysing the performance behaviour, including gesture, quality of tone/timbre, degree of loudness and production of improvisatory techniques, of a sample of Aboriginal leafists in the context of the non-Aboriginal practice of the musical competition.

- enhancing our knowledge of leaf instrument selection and treatment by means of botanical investigations into (i) leaf physiology and (ii) species of leaves, taking into account the need for a particular musical tessitura and preferred sound quality.

- emphasising the importance of (i) traditionally preferred leaf instruments (*e.g.* various eucalypts and kurrajong) as markers of Aboriginal environmental/clan identity; and (ii) citrus leaves as popular substitutes for eucalypt leaves.




In the chapters that follow, I shall link the leaf instrument to a century and a half of Black/White culture contact by tracing some of the intersections and directions of influence between the carriers of this orally transmitted music-culture in Australia's history and contemporary society. There are some apparent gaps and contradictions in the evidence, but there is still sufficient data to construct a chronological account and suggested periodisation of the history of gumleaf playing, based on the principle that some periodisation is better than none. Although the popular notion of immemorial tradition too often evaporates under the scrutiny of historical research (Coplan 1991:36), Kartomi (1997: 224) notes that:

> The writing of the musical history of a cultural form, whether it be mainly oral or literary in its transmission, may take into account two kinds of knowledge of the past, namely "historia", which is a valid and important kind of knowledge based on appeal to ancient or modern authority and myth, and "history", or knowledge based on the critical examination of more or less reliable sources gathered.

My sources suggest that the history of Australian leaf music may be divided into six periods, namely the "pre-contact period", the "missionary music period", the "touring gumleaf band period", the "post-war dissemination period", the "gumleaf competition period", and the "nativistic revival period". In Part 1, I shall focus on the Aboriginal tradition of leaf music in its first four historical periods, while in Part 2 I shall cover the fifth and sixth periods and also refer to periods 2 and 3 in their overlap with the non-Aboriginal tradition.

Most Aboriginal participants whom I have interviewed believe that native leaves were first blown in the pre-contact period, dating from an unknown but probably ancient date in the Dreamtime, until the time of European settlement, which varied from 1788 in Sydney to the 1830s elsewhere in Australia.

Due to a lack of sources, the early stages of the missionary music period (1840-1910s) cannot be discussed in any detail in this thesis. However, some early twentieth-century sources refer to the practice of non-Aboriginal gumleaf playing at the end of the early-colonial period, *i.e.* in the decade or so before the gold rush began in the 1850s. Moreover, two of three sources which I located, written at the end of the high-colonial period (1850-1901), confirm the use of an Aboriginal leaf music toy and the use of blown leaves in a corroboree respectively. Most importantly, the third, about a South Australian Salvation Army march performed in 1892, marks the earliest documented Aboriginal use of gumleaves in a European-style ensemble. This tradition stabilised in the post-colonial/post-Federation period which began in 1901, and culminated in the "touring gumleaf band period" (late 1910s-1940s).

As I shall explain, the post-war dissemination period begins in the 1950s. Caught up in the drift of Aboriginal people seeking employment in cities, a number of stalwart bandsmen splintered into casually-grouped leaf quartets, trios, duos and solo buskers. As amply described in Chapter 9 of Griffiths (1995), this era included the 1967 Referendum, which technically granted the Commonwealth of Australia the power to include Aborigines for census purposes.

The gumleaf competition period, dating from 1977 to the present, is marked by the revival of the non-Aboriginal tradition, and the incorporation of Aboriginal soloists on terms determined by non-Aborigines who appropriate the "gumleaf" instrument as an icon of Australianness.

The nativistic revival period, which began in 1988, overlaps with the competition era. Perpetuated by a mere handful of Aboriginal practitioners who play specific leaf types partly to reinforce their sense of identity and place, gumleaf playing has been transformed into new forms appropriate for specific functions. For example, leaf birdcalls demonstrated in public performances substitute for the general loss of traditional Aboriginal vocal repertoires brought about by culture contact.

Taking the above periodisation into account, Part 1 of this thesis will focus exclusively on gumleaf music as an indigenous cultural articulation. Relying in part on the data of "historia", Chapter 1 explores the various meanings which Aboriginal people ascribe to the gumleaf - including ways in which they conceive of the instrument's origins and roots in the culture, real or imagined. My task of correlating the retrospective thoughts of Aboriginal people will centre on the key words and concepts that I collected in the field. In my attempt to distinguish the perceived prehistory of the instrument from its origins as determined by empirical research, I provide counter-evidence for no less than five extramusical functions - and two musical functions - of native leaves in the various post-contact traditional Aboriginal societies.

By distinguishing indigenous links from imported European links in Chapter 2, I shall sketch a broad characterisation of the gumleaf's post-contact Aboriginal musical production, and extend knowledge of the prevalence of the tradition. Two major leaf ensembles were visible in southeastern Australia from the 1920s-1940s. In Chapter 3, the resonant local traditions emanating from Wallaga Lake, NSW and Lake Tyers, Victoria closely illustrate the sociological dimensions of gumleaf playing. Compensating in part for the cultural loss experienced by their respective clanspeople, these bands were inevitably packaged for exploitation by the ex-colonial civic, religious and military powers.

Since the gumleaf instrument is actually a straddler of cultures, I delve more deeply into the nature of Black/White musical culture contact in Chapter 4. The documented activities

of non-Aboriginal leafists can be traced back to a mid-nineteenth-century South Australian immigrant model. Some late nineteenth-century Aborigines were missionised by Lutheran settlers and missionaries (who may have been familiar with the established tradition of leaf playing in their homelands), and by Salvation Army officers who organised them into leaf bands. Twentieth-century gumleaf music, by contrast, is portrayed as a cultural foil, indeed, a means through which culturally-deprived Europeans - or Europeans rejecting their own culture - have adopted an Aboriginal custom on the cultural fringe.

Following a case study of Aboriginal performance behaviour in the non-Aboriginal organised "gumleaf competition period" (Chapter 5), the typology of leaves becomes a key concern in Chapter 6. The genus *eucalyptus* contains over 500 species of which more than 200 occur in southeastern Australia (Brooker and Kleinig 1983: 1). Since the leaves of many species can be discounted for physiological and sonic reasons, and foliage and form may vary markedly even within the remaining individual species, leafists need to discriminate carefully between both trees and leaves. Accordingly, I shall match distinct leaf sounds with discrete species of leaves (the results of an original State-of-Preference Test), and tabulate the characteristics of the leaf instrument equally favoured by three leading practitioners.

In the course of my study it became clear that exclusive concentration on the eucalypts could lead to the neglect of other highly significant data; thus it is necessary also to consider the alternative native Australian leaf instruments and a number chosen from introduced European and Asian plants. In accordance with scholarly practice, I shall introduce each plant and bird by its English common name; followed by its Aboriginal language name[34] if known; and finally by its botanical or scientific name (genus followed by species name).

Not all eucalypt species have stable common names, since they are subject to change following new discoveries and ideas about plant relations. Unless confusion is likely to arise, I shall adhere to common names only in subsequent references to species, using the upper case system adhered to by Hallam (my botanical consultant) and other botanists such as

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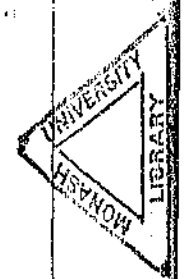
[34]The use of Aboriginal names can be confusing, taking the many different language groups into account. However, popular usage of the eucalypt names *Moitch* and *Bangalay* supersedes common names in particular parts of Australia.

Blakely, Brock, Costermans, Gott, and McMahon.[35] A glossary of all the plants and birds mentioned in this thesis follows the appendices. Where possible, the orthography of language group names used in this thesis has been standardised in accordance with Horton (1994). Alternative clan spellings and more detailed information regarding clan location and traditions may be found in Tindale (1974). I have needed to retain original terminologies in quotations, even where they would now be considered out of date or derogatory.

* * * * * *

Since I began my research six years ago, many of the leafists and Elders whom I interviewed have died. Indeed, if it were not for the dedicated efforts of a mere handful of practitioners who bring vitally self-affirming meanings to the fragile Aboriginal tradition, it might already have disappeared. The recovery of this absent story is an urgent task, and for this reason I now begin by framing the history of gumleaf playing in terms of its meanings and functions in Aboriginal culture.




[35]This system is also used in *Botanica: The Illustrated Guide to Over 1,000 Australian Plants and How to Cultivate Them* (Random House 1997).

# PART 1

# THE ABORIGINAL TRADITION

# OF LEAF PLAYING

## CHAPTER ONE

# CONSTRUCTIONS OF MEANING FOR THE ORIGINS AND PRACTICES OF LEAF BLOWING

*The leaf is a spiritual sound, a lonely sound ...*
*the sound when someone dies and you feel the spirit there ...*
*it's the recognition of a fellow Aboriginal person, a long way from home*

(leafist George Brown, in conversation with John Meredith)[1]

This opening chapter relies heavily on the Aboriginal people's own insights concerning the importance of gumleaf playing in their cultures. This is in keeping with two ethnomusicological principles, firstly of allowing the carriers of a tradition to identify the tradition (Stubington 1987: 8), and secondly of understanding the people and eras involved as far as possible in their own terms, according to their specific thought processes and view of the past (Kartomi 1997: 222). During my fieldwork I met many southeastern Australian Aboriginal people who still live in awe of their sacred sites, respecting and abiding by the laws passed on to them, however meagre that knowledge might now be.

The first section of this chapter is therefore discussed within a contemporary context, according to the beliefs of research participants and current practitioners. The second, my compilation of eight hypothetical solutions for the roots of gumleaf blowing, is also couched within an anthropological context, taking into account that aesthetic and symbolic formulations of social ideology found in oral traditions, including musical sound, are often rooted in historical processes and events (after Harms 1983: 812; cited in Coplan (1991: 46). The main locations for gumleaf playing gleaned from research participants and other sources are presented in Map 2 (see Appendix 3, including list of sources).

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[1]Meredith (Wreck Bay NSW 1991), recording held by the collector; first cited in Bradley (1995: 10).

Although the customs of individual clans varied from each other, the high degree of mobility on the part of many Aborigines has resulted in their once localised artefacts becoming pan-Aboriginalised. (The didjeridu, for example, is now appropriated as the main sonic symbol of Aboriginal Australia.) Nevertheless, each language group regards itself as unique, as do the larger regional and urban Aboriginal communities which now have a land council, cultural centre and/or festival to facilitate the preservation and teaching of distinctive aspects of their societies. It is precisely because of this emphasis on tribal uniqueness that my research consultants ascribed different meanings to their various leaf instruments.

In spite of the dehumanising processes associated with cultural destruction and the social fragmentation of Aboriginal society, each contemporary Aboriginal leafist develops his/her sense of Aboriginality in a unique way, as in the case of the principal collaborator/practitioner involved in this project. Herbert Osley Patten (Plates 1a & b) was born on 3 May 1943 at Orbost, Victoria. His maternal ancestors had tribal affiliations with the Brabuwooloong, the branch of the Kurnai which held Central Gippsland,[2] whilst Patten's father was descended from the Ulupna of the Upper Murray district. Patten adopted gumleaf playing at about seven years of age, after he had observed his great-uncle Lindsey Thomas producing deep, strong notes on a stringybark leaf in the bush near the Newmerella Aboriginal settlement near Orbost.[3] The young boy snatched a leaf, blew a sound on it and went home to tell his mother, thus beginning a musical journey into his Aboriginal cultural heritage. The next person Patten noticed playing a gumleaf was Ted (Chook) Mullett, who frequently camped in the

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[2]Patten's ancestor George Thomas was a young boy when the last great tribal battle between the Brabuwooloong and the Bratowoloong took place at the mouth of the Tambo River. Thomas was orphaned and subsequently raised by tribespeople Dick Cooper and Kitty Johnson, who persuaded John Bulmer to found the mission at Bunyarnda (Lake Tyers, see Chapter 3). The adult Thomas settled with his family at Newmerella (Lochend) in 1887.

[3]Patten wrote the country ballad "Newmerella Pines" (Haymes, Clayton Vic 1993, RRC T15; Breen 1989: 88). As a fringe-dwelling child from one of the nine families who lived at Newmerella, Patten's cultural environment was anything but dull. Granny Evaline bought a piano for home entertainments and grandfather Herbert Murray organised and sang in the local Aboriginal Concert Party along with his daughters Winnie, Violet and Delia.

district. Patten began to hide in a large, disused gravel pit where he blew sounds on the strongly smelling eucalypt leaves which grew out of the sticky stringybark tree stumps.

Patten's first public performance on the gumleaf took place in the Orbost Mechanics Hall in the early 1950s. Aged about eight years, he came second in an amateur competition. Accompanied by his Aunt Violet at the piano, Patten played the war song medley "Pack up your Troubles", "Roll out the Barrel", and "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" (Tape Example 1).[4] Following this early success, he was often asked to play the leaf at parties, where he was introduced to the musical styles of Winifred Atwell, Little Richard and Earl Grant. After moving to Wallaga Lake, Patten played leaf and guitar in small rock groups, and led *The House of the Rising Sons* in tours along the eastern seaboard in the early 1960s. He worked in Queensland, where he was known as the Northern Rivers Crooner, and toured with Harry Williams and *The Country Outcasts*.

This thesis also features Roseina Boston (nee Davis, formerly Quinlan), a talented leafist whose Aboriginal-given name, Onena-Knarr, means "one and only". I will refer to Roseina (Plate 2) mostly by her first name to avoid confusing her with leafist husband Harry Boston. Roseina was pleased to perform on tape and record her oral history on 27 April 1995 when she realised that she could be the only remaining Australian Aboriginal woman who still plays the leaf (*janggwrr*) earnestly as part of her daily routine. Born on 3 March 1935 under a lantana bush on Stuart Island (a former Aboriginal camping area off Nambucca Heads, NSW), Roseina identifies herself as Gumbainggir because she was raised in their territory, speaks much of the lingo, and now holds the status of Elder.[5] As a great-niece of the

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[4]Patten (Reservoir Vic 1992) RRC T2; Haymes (Clayton Vic 1993) RRC T15.

[5]The Gumbainggir frequented the region around Evans Head, Macksville and Glenn Innes. In spite of disruptions imposed by pastoralists, their customs were maintained for a relatively long time. Roseina's father Ray McDonald had knowledge of the Gumbainggir language, even though he was of Biripi descent. Her mother was Beatrice ("Birdie") Davis of the Dainggatti language group, daughter of Jack Davis (brother to Possum Davis).

legendary George ("Possum") Davis, conductor of the Burnt Bridge Gumleaf Band, NSW, Roseina feels called to carry on the gumleaf tradition of the Nambucca Heads area.

In addition to Patten and Boston, I interviewed several other Aboriginal leafists and Elders throughout NSW, Victoria and Queensland. Most responded to my questions spontaneously and unselfconsciously because gumleaf playing had at some stage been a familiar facet of their everyday community lives, *i.e.* the ideas and the realities which they disclosed were naturally and indissolubly bound up together. Geertz (1983: 61) based his ethnographic "experience-near" theory on similar sorts of responses from his subjects.

## PART 1: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

My conversations elicited three main responses, namely that

1. gumleaf playing is "traditional"
2. the art of gumleaf playing was transmitted by the Elders, some of whom blew leaves during walkabout, and
3. gumleaf playing is a predestined talent/symbol of identity.

In an attempt to define an indigenous grounding trope for "traditional" gumleaf music, I begin with the first response.

### 1. Gumleaf playing is "traditional"

> Just what is meant by "traditional"? Maintenance of the term perpetuates a belief held by many non-Koories that our society was fossilized in some undefined reference point in the past. Our society has always been changing and adapting to meet the differing needs created by the environment and in the last 200 years, the changes caused by the invasion of our lands (Fesl n.d.: 2).

By defining tradition fluidly as something which each generation partly invents (or reinvents), Gubbi Gubbi/Gangulu descendant Eve Fesl complements Kartomi's broad conceptualisation of culture as a series of processes that construct, reconstruct and dismantle cultural materials (Kartomi and Blum 1994: xvii). This insight serves to redress the notion that gumleaf music might be regarded as "untraditional". If we evaluate or rank the more ancient "traditional" components of Aboriginal culture above the Aborigines' performances of Western tunes on gumleaves - just because the latter developed as a consequence of the changed conditions of

contact - we place severe limitations on artistic freedom.[6] With these thoughts in mind, the perspectives which individual leafists and their communities hold on traditional belief and musical behaviour deserve closer attention.

First of all, Patten explained that leaves have personal sounds that become part of himself and the vibrations in his body. As he plays the leaf, he remembers the many Aboriginal leafists who have gone before him, knowing that he holds a place among these past generations of musicians as well as among his contemporaries. Patten's explanation is basically metaphysical because he is aware of the simultaneous existence of the timeless "pastness" of his cultural past as well as its presence in the moment.

Eighty-eight year-old Yuin Elder Guboo[7] Ted Thomas (Plate 3) is the only remaining living member of the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band which toured extensively from its base on the southern coast of NSW in the 1920s and 1930s. Guboo (pers. comm., 7 July 1994) remarked that it was "traditional" for his clansmen, the Yuin, to play the leaf (*gar*). However, since he had no knowledge of any ceremonial leaf instrument, he was apparently connecting the concept of "tradition" to his living memory of the early twentieth-century and the fact that the bandsmen always played the leaf every day. Cyril Parsons of Wallaga Lake independently reinforced this view in Chittick and Fox (1997: 51):

> There's not too many play it now, the leaf. That goes right back to the old people - they played the gumleaf, that was their music. They're good musicians, the Aboriginal people. They just learn themselves, you know, wasn't taught.

Guboo's former wife, the Elder Anne (Wimmera Woman) Thomas of Wallaga Lake, originally hailed from Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve south of Taree,[8] NSW, where she too claimed (pers. comm., 6 July 1994) that gumleaf playing was "traditional" amongst the Biripi

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[6]This stance is based on a warning first aired by Stubington (1987: 7).

[7]Guboo means "great spirit" or "good friend". Guboo's personal history is summarised in Chapter 3 and explained in more detail in Ryan (1997a: 106-108); information on the Yuin is included in Chapters 3 and 6.

[8]*Taree* means "Old Man Fig Tree". The native fig trees, which abound in the area, furnish playable leaf instruments.

people. Her senior Elder, the late Bert (Goonabahn)[9] Marr (1921-1996), independently confirmed this opinion. Goonabahn (Plate 4, pers. comm., 9 July 1994 and 27 April 1995) was motivated to practise the leaf faithfully as a child because it was the "done thing" - the old people around him were always playing leaves - but he was unable to supply evidence of its practice beyond the generation of his father, Pastor Bert Marr, who was born in the late nineteenth-century.[10]

Dainggatti descendent James (formerly Eric) Dungay was born in 1958 at Burnt Bridge Aboriginal Mission, via Kempsey NSW. He recently adopted the name "Goorie" for fear of losing his identity (Aborigines of the northeast corner of NSW now use the term "Goorie" to distinguish themselves from the Koories of NSW and Victoria). Goorie (Plate 5) calls the gumleaf by its traditional Dainggatti name of *yili*.[11] For him it is the Aboriginal people's "bush trumpet" because it "stirs the soul". Whereas the mouth organ makes European sounds, the *yili* makes the unique, beautiful sounds of the bush. As both a woman's and a man's medium, it "doesn't come second to any other instrument". Goorie's notion of the traditional use of the *yili* was that the Dainggatti played it for their own personal enjoyment, as they made the most of the resources that were around them (Tape Example 2).[12]

In her attempt to examine native, European and unique elements in songs of northwestern NSW, Marie Reay (1949: 97) made the comment that

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[9]Goonabahn (meaning "wisdom" or "a teacher of many things") used to pray to the Great Spirit when the Rainbow Serpent appeared to him in the spray of a mountain waterfall. He volunteered information concerning the movements of the wind, water, land and trees. For example, when the flowering gum starts to blossom, one should avoid hunting pregnant kangaroos.

[10]Accepted as a "native helper" to AIM missionaries in Walcha from 1907 (*Our AIM* 1/2), Marr (Senior) served on the Manning River (Telfer 1939: 54). In about 1909 he posed with his fiddle (see Sullivan 1988: 65).

[11]Goorie gave a televised performance on the *yili* on Australia Day, 1995. Winner of the 1997 Tamworth Golden Didjeridu Award for Busking (in this case, on a gumleaf) he opened Tamworth-on-Parade at the NSW State Sports Centre on 28 July 1997 with "Waltzing Matilda".

[12]Ryan (Glen Iris Vic 1997) RRC T14.

> These songs are sung in communal entertainment, when numbers of mixed-bloods gather together with European musical instruments, either guitars or accordeons (*sic*), and the only native instrument used is the gumleaf.

This comment is consistent with a remark made by Gumbainggir descendant Maisie Kelly of Armidale, NSW who was told by her father Frank Archibald that while the Aborigines from the "highlands" (Arnhem Land, etc.) had the didjeridu, the traditional music of NSW was the gumleaf.[13] Maisie adhered to this belief respectfully because Archibald (*d.* 1975) had been instructed in tribal lore by his grandfather King Bobby of the Baanbai[14] clan before the Elder's death early in the twentieth-century. Archibald himself became a "clever man" with spiritual powers. He and his wife Sarah reared their children in an intensely musical and spiritual environment:

> Every evening a large fire would be built, and singing and dancing proceeded until the late and early hours. Corroborees were danced by both men and women, Frank singing to Sarah's clapstick accompaniment, and European songs and dances were also performed. Frank and Sarah both played the accordion, and some of their children would accompany their tunes with music on bush-leaves. Besides corroboree songs and white folk music, the Archibalds also taught their children "hymn songs" and didactic ditties, called by them "little choruses" (McDonald 1996: 113).

The musical culture handed down by the Archibalds, whether in indigenous or European form, was considered by the family to be "genuine Aboriginal culture". It was distinguished from mainstream non-Aboriginal expression by its "spiritual" nature - a designation used to indicate a dynamic essence, and one emphasising the special means by which it is handed on from generation to generation (McDonald 1996: 114).

In 1968, 70 year-old Kamilaroi leafist Albert Dennison of West Moree, NSW commented to John Gordon that Aborigines began playing leaves long before contact was made with Europeans.[15] In going so far as to say that leaf playing was "the only form of music they had", Dennison was probably speaking specifically on behalf of the Kamilaroi rather than the non-

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[13]This information was first relayed to Barry McDonald.

[14]The Baanbai clan centred around Oban and Backwater (McDonald 1996: 112-113).

[15]Gordon (West Moree NSW 1968) AIATSIS LA1220B, first cited in Gummow (1992: 178).

didjeridu playing Aboriginal clans in general. Since he did not say "blown music", his statement also implies the absence of clapsticks. Considering that his father taught him to play the leaf,[16] I would suggest that leaf music was one of the few (perhaps the only?) forms of melodic instrumental music available to him (and other Aboriginal people) in this remote outback region. However, since Aborigines often use the term 'music' to mean 'instrumental music', it may be vocal music that is excluded here rather than melodies as such.

Dennison's belief resonates with a remark made by Koorie Country Gospel singer and songwriter Ian (Moonie) Atkinson (*b.* 1951) of Mildura, Victoria. Atkinson believes (pers. comm., 26 March 1994) that the gumleaf was the Aborigine's first instrument, followed by "sticks" and then the didjeridu. This belief was shaped by the fact that Moonie's grandfather, Aaron Atkinson, played the leaf; his father Ambrose Atkinson (*b.* 1908) was more talented at singing and playing the button accordion and pedal organ.

Leafist Roy Page (*b.* Beaudesert, southern Queensland) is a descendant of the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh (Bundjalung) tribe. His sons David, Russell and Stephen Page of the Bangarra Dance Theatre believe that the gumleaf is a traditional Aboriginal instrument, the mastery of which requires great effort:

> It wasn't until the '80s, when he went to study at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music, at Adelaide University, that David, one of the best nightclub dancers in Brisbane, according to Stephen, discovered traditional Aboriginal music. "That was when it was introduced to me - apart from Dad and his leaf! Dad used to blow gumleaves," he explains, laughing at the memory. "He tried to teach us, but we got put off when *Skippy* (the TV series) happened. We sat up with him one night and tried to practise and finally he said "Agh! Give up". It was hilarious." Since then, David Page has mastered clap sticks, didgeridoos, saxophones and synthesisers, if not the humble gum leaf (Wiles 1995: 14).

Three keen leafists in the Woodenbong district of northern NSW were Andy Williams,[17] Rory Page, and Fletcher Roberts. Roberts often played leaf in the church hall at Mooli

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[16]Gummow (1984: 38) remarked that Dennison's leaf techniques differed from those observed in Queensland by Kennedy (1933: 155).

[17]See photograph by M. Calley, AIATSIS Pictorial Archive; reproduced in Gummow 1992: 177.

Mooli (or Muli Muli).[18] In 1968 an Aboriginal man named Dick Donnelly claimed in Woodenbong that the gumleaf was a genuine Aboriginal instrument because "they used to play these in their own (corroboree) dances".[19] This and the above-cited incidental opinions concerning the use of leaf aerophones in ritual cannot be entirely dismissed, as I will show at the end of this chapter.

The late Aboriginal/Irish boxer, stockman and leafist Clarrie Grogan (1932-1993)[20] of Kuranda, Queensland adopted leaf playing at the age of five on the former Seventh Day Adventist Mission at Mona Mona (the main leaf playing centre in the East Cape Region). According to Grogan, "everyone" on the mission was able to play the leaf,[21] but manager of the Tjapukai Dance Theatre Lance Riley (pers. comm., 22 and 27 May 1995) had no memories of women leafists.[22] Grogan was obviously unaware of Donnelly's claim when he remarked to Bradley and Ellis: "Actually there's no real traditional song for the leaf, they're only for Western music".[23]

Taken together, the feedback of research consultants and secondary source information indicates a consistently possessive attitude to the gumleaf instrument as Aboriginal cultural property, with all (other than Grogan) deeply committed to the notion that gumleaf music is "traditional". The fact that no consultants could speak authoritatively concerning any

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[18] See, for example, Sullivan AIATSIS Pictorial Archive N4520.04.

[19] Gordon (Woodenbong NSW 1968) AIATSIS LA 1176B, transcript cited in Gummow (1992: 178).

[20] Grogan was a Golden Gloves boxing champion who spent six months at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Canberra. Roseina Boston first encountered him in 1980, and in 1982 they performed a lemon leaf duet at Grogan's Silver Wedding Anniversary.

[21] The leaf band played in parts, accompanied by mouth organ, button accordion, ukulele, banjo, mandolin, guitar, spoons and bones. Grogan learnt Irish songs from his father, and loved hymns. Although performances of Aboriginal songs were forbidden, Grogan spoke his own language at home and sang hymns in the lingo (Bradley and Ellis, Cairns Q'ld 1990, NLA TRC 2604).

[22] Lance Riley commented that since the mission closed the people are no longer "fair dinkum" about leaf music. However, when his nephew Irwin (aged in his late thirties) starts to play, the others join in by taking parts in harmony

[23] Bradley and Ellis (Cairns Q'ld 1990) NLA TRC 2604, first cited in Bradley (1995: 10).

possible connections of the gumleaf instrument to tribal teachings or mythology may reflect on the loss of corporate memory that accompanied their loss of cultural autonomy.

In line with the "experience-near" theory of Geertz (1983: 61), most seem to have used the word "tradition" liberally and reverently because they remembered playing or hearing gumleaf music in a relatively fixed form in the local circulation of a mission or fringe settlement. Naturally enough, this evocative ingredient of everyday life led to their conceptualisation of gumleaf music as a tangible aspect of their Aboriginal heritage.

The unusual case study of Patten validates a degree of continuity and consistency because his great-uncle played the leaf and Patten, in turn, has taught his grandson to play. This "sandwich model" borders five generations, even though it skips two in between. Tradition, despite such circumstances, functions as "the historically emergent framework of culturally grounded perception" (Coplan 1991: 40). The identity, meaning, and interpretations of a specific action or event are dependent upon a symbolically constituted past whose horizons extend into the present.

**2. Gumleaf playing was transmitted by the Elders, some of whom blew leaves during walkabout**

The second main response was first raised by Roseina Boston, who has played the gumleaf all her life since she was taught to play at seven or eight years of age by her uncles on Stuart Island. They were Walter Smith (born *c.* 1874), a traditional Aboriginal doctor and Elder of high repute, Milton Davis (son of Jack, brother of Possum Davis), Joe Davis (son of Possum) and Jim McGrath. Along with many other residents, these uncles always played leaves at the various meetings and gatherings held on the island. Michael Edwards of Lake Tyers, Victoria (pers. comm., 30 November 1996) was of the same opinion because his father Ron had been taught to play the gumleaf by his grandfather Connie Edwards (*c.* 1896-1971).

McDonald (1996: 122) notes that transmission in tradition is a matter of communication outside the realm of the merely imitative, which begets further transmission:

> Moreover, it is in the style in which such transmission operates that the relativity of culture or personality will play its part ... But the *idea* of transmission is essentially the same for all - that of a conscious giving-and-receiving relationship that celebrates, not only the continuity of the gift, but, perhaps more importantly, the continuity of the relationship that keeps such giving and taking alive.

James Goorie Dungay envisaged the Dainggatti Elders blowing leaves on walkabout, which in the detribalised sense denotes a period of wandering undertaken by those who feel the need to leave the place where they are in contact with Western society, and return for spiritual replenishment to their traditional way of life.[24] This insight was independently supported by Kurnai descendant Wayne Thorpe (Plate 6) of Gippsland and Melbourne (pers. comm., 2 December 1997). Thorpe's great-grandfather, Charlie Green (a member of the Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band), used to grab leaves during walkabout with the other Kurnai Elders, and play them in the relaxed atmosphere of the bush.

This use of natural products was not a matter of choice. Everything the Aborigines needed had to be found by simple means (Cribb and Cribb 1981: 11). Enculturated to his/her place in society, the indigenous person as an insider could see an integrated association between a plant's cultural value, mythical associations, physical properties, habitat, uses and management - whenever the plant was encountered in walking, thought or conversation.

### 3. Gumleaf playing is a predestined talent/symbol of identity

Gumleaf playing, according to the third response, is a predestined talent, a symbol of identity. Bert (Goonabahn) Marr was adamant that everyone is born with a particular ability or aptitude.[25] He was exceptionally skilled at dancing, and in catching three boomerangs at once. The talents of Goonabahn's father Bert and son Jason, however, were musical and lay with the fiddle and didjeridu respectively. On 13 January 1995 I visited the late

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[24]Ryan (Glen Iris Vic 1997) RRC T14.

[25]In a cunning way, Goonabahn challenged me as to whether I knew what my own talent was; he regarded this recognition as a measure of one's understanding of life and oneself.

Wiradjuri/Wadi Wadi Elder, bushcraft teacher and leafist Ambrose Golden-Brown[26] of Nowra, NSW, who kindly showed me around the bush and permitted me to make notes during his final illness. Golden-Brown was not taught to play the leaf. It just "happened" and he couldn't remember at what age, but all his childhood friends in the 1940s played native leaves because it was "just the natural thing to do".

Biripi descendant Fred Bugg, a "good gumleaf player" on the north coast of NSW, personally believed that he was born a leaf player, proof being a birthmark on his leg which had the form of a gumleaf (Holmer and Holmer 1969: 32). This is an interesting example of an Aboriginal person reading a specific meaning into his destiny, which was shaped by the way that his kinsmen used and experienced the products of their culture. This allusion to personal identity carries great emotional significance because each Aboriginal person needs to be recognised in his/her own right as a person of dignity. Dungay understands his vocation as a leafist because the leaf "speaks to his soul". He deliberately identified himself as a leafist in his song "Call Him Goorie":[27]

> *Call him Goorie, call him Goorie*
> *Call him Goorie, he's a legend in high-heeled boots!*
> *He plays the gumleaf, the legend in high-heeled boots*
> *He travels for miles around - so people can hear ...*
> *The gumleaf sound!*
> *He mixes with the Kelly gang, when they come to Kempsey town*
> *Oh see them on the street*
> *Get together, have a damn good time.*

The ability to discern gumleaf playing as a personal vocation has also enabled Patten and Boston to gain satisfaction through achievement, creative self-expression and teaching. In relation to the convergence of mind, body and musical instrument, it has been suggested that

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[26]Born at Bomaderry, NSW in 1939, Ambrose ("Uncle Ambie") was the son of Robert Joseph Golden-Brown, founder of the Nowra Aboriginal Cultural Centre. One of his grandmothers was the first wife of Jimmy Governor (called "Blacksmith" in the book and film). Queen Victoria awarded the "Golden" in his name to an Irish ancestor for services to the Crown ("Hot Time at Gumleaf Follies Ball", *The Age*, 12 September 1979: 18).

[27]Ryan (Glen Iris Vic 1997) RRC T14.

> Music is the projection of the complexity of a particular moment in the process of identity formation, the encounter between private and public history, between the subjective and the social, inscribed with fine nuances as personal as a signature. It is dense with specificity (Johnson 1997: 100).

My case study of Patten highlights the role of gumleaf music in upholding and reinforcing Aboriginal identity. Patten connects his "predestined" talent to the contingent of Lake Tyers servicemen/leafists who formed the guard-of-honour at his parents' wedding in Carnegie, Victoria on 21 September 1940 (see photograph in Jackomos and Fowell 1991: 97; 1993: 14).[28] The identity-shaping role of his talent has often found expression in purposeful action on behalf of his people (see Chapter 5). In these situations, it is important for Patten to feel confident that he is applying correct protocol concerning the perceived shared history and meaning of the gumleaf instrument as it stems from his culture's distinct self-image. I will now look at this shared image in more detail.

The perceptions and beliefs of Aboriginal people with respect to the evolution of gumleaf music are mostly shaped by their remaining knowledge of traditional lifestyles in their holistic cultural superstructure. Localised styles of art and music were deeply influenced by landscape features (the handiwork of ancestors from whom humans were descended), and the supply and variety of their soundmakers by the richness or harshness of the surrounding habitat. Since nature and culture were analogous systems, it is not surprising that the insights of Aboriginal advisers project gumleaf performance as having stemmed from sources reacting beyond the music system alone. Taken together, the habitat was conceptualised by Forde (1934: 464) as "the raw material" of their cultural elaboration, even though physical conditions were not entirely responsible for cultural changes that occurred within individual localities.

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[28]The leafists crossed boomerangs over the heads of the George and Susie Patten. This symbolic gesture has become the subject of research by various people seeking to establish its precedent as a symbol of blessing on the marriage. One clue as to its meaning in southeastern Australia may lie in the practice whereby branches were raised over the heads of women and children as a "gesture indicative of the All-father" (Howitt, cited in Maddock 1972: 176).

The most satisfactory evolutionary explanations for the so-called "traditional" practice of leaf blowing in the various Aboriginal societies lie with the prevailing holistic attitude to life lived exclusively out of doors. Is it surprising that indigenous people assign "traditional" status to gumleaf instruments, when eucalypts constituted such a long-standing, familiar part of their surroundings? In their worldview, trees helped to maintain order in the universe by occupying places allocated to them and - even in thought - would not be uprooted from their place. Leaves and other parts of trees were multi-functional in medicine or as implements,[29] *i.e.* there was ergonomic connection between leaves and the working environment from which they were selected.

## PART 2: THE ROOTS OF LEAF BLOWING IN TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL SOCIETIES: EIGHT HYPOTHETICAL SOLUTIONS

Coplan (1991: 45) remarks that ethnomusicologists working with the Aboriginal populations of Australia (and other performance cultures in which peoples have moved from nonliteracy to illiteracy and, along with ourselves, to postliteracy) must perpetually seek ways of overcoming the paucity of written documents relating to "pre-colonial" periods, as well as the scarcity of indigenous voices and the overabundant misrepresentation of foreign voices in the written record. He cites the need for historians to look at "the creations of the people themselves, the forms in which their own major concerns are expressed". Jimmy Barker, who experienced a traditional childhood with the Muruwari of northwestern NSW, had the following to say:

> When in the bush an Aboriginal has a particular way of thought which is difficult for anyone else to practise; it is associated with being surrounded by the bush and those things which are found in it, He has his own interpretation of plant growth and which animals can be expected to be close (Mathews 1977: 46).

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[29] To name but a few, the bark, twigs and leaves of eucalypts furnished huts and grave linings. Shields and canoes were carved from tree trunks; fishing lines, nets and baskets were constructed from stringybark. Spearheads were flaked to serrated edges and deliberately shaped to match a symmetrical *eucalyptus* leaf (Robinson and Baglin 1968: 34).

Together with literary sources, the opinions of research consultants variously support the following theories as to how and why Aborigines began to blow leaves, namely that (i) leaf soundmakers were used in hunting, (ii) leaf playing was inspired by the sounds of birds, (iii) leaf soundmakers were used for signalling, (iv) the leaf is a spiritual instrument and ghost-noise maker, (v) the leaf is a longstanding music toy, (vi) the leaf is blown for musical self-expression and recreation, (vii) the leaf was once used to produce melodic, rhythmic and timbral sound effects in localised clan ritual, and (viii) the practice of leaf blowing was disseminated via ancient trade routes. Naturally these seven hypothetical solutions are not confined to southeastern Australia; viewed individually or interconnectedly, they depict Aborigines blowing leaves in cultural, spiritual, recreational, economic and itinerant interaction with the environment.

Each theory is upheld by the essential character of a musical culture which for millennia was closely associated with bushcraft and the other arts, in accordance with ethnographic scholarship. Indeed, people in many nonliterate societies could recognise, name, and discuss in detail the properties of a multitude of plants and animals in their environment, even those that were useless to them (Kartomi 1990: 285, after Levi-Strauss 1966).[30] The extensive and intimate indigenous scientific knowledge of Aboriginal Australians has been drawn upon and appreciated by non-Aboriginal Australians since the early days of European occupation and settlement. Some of the earliest scientific publications on Australian botany drew heavily upon indigenous knowledge, *e.g.* Maiden (1889). This body of knowledge has, as a continuum, informed many modern studies - especially in the fields of pharmacology and bush survival techniques, such as are used by the Australian armed forces.

Since we do not have recordings of ancient sounds at our disposal, attempts at comparison between past and present might appear to be unprofitable. However, historical analogy

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[30]Kartomi (1990) analysed some indigenous classifications of instruments, stressing the exhaustive observation and systematic cataloguing and grouping of data carried out in nonliterate societies.

provides one small clue. Assuming that there is only a finite number of ways in which humans can elicit sound from leaf-reeds, then blown leaves (living sound sources) can surely be regarded as basic indicators of how ancient leaf-reeds might have sounded.

Additionally, leaf blowing is a particularly satisfying aural activity in areas where hill-and-vale topography allows for echoing of leaf sounds. Wiradjuri Elder Nancy Rooke of Albury, NSW (pers. comm., 7 February 1994) described a scene of simple rusticity: "everyone" could play the gumleaf during her childhood on the Narrandera Sandhills, so much so that the lively sounds of leaves could always be heard echoing and resounding down around the Murrumbidgee River.

**1. Leaf soundmakers were used in hunting**

The Aboriginal people, with their hunting and gathering societies, arrived in Australia at least 60,000 years ago. In adapting to the wide range of habitats that they encountered as they diffused throughout Australia, they employed particular hunting methods according to conditions prevailing in the local environment (the physiography of the hinterland, for instance, differed markedly from the reef-fringed coast of Cape York).

Folk music collector John Meredith (1995: 40) considers that the gumleaf instrument originated with the autochthonous people of Australia, and that it was used by the hunter to attract or distract game, and to communicate with a fellow hunter. For example, a 'coo-ee', meaning 'come here', softly blown on the leaf would be ignored by a kangaroo, when the same word called out would send the game flying. Since Meredith provided no primary sources for this information, I searched Bengt (1960) and many other references to Aboriginal hunting cries, such as Calvert (1892: 28) and Robinson and Baglin (1968: 28), but found no precise descriptions of a gumleaf decoy.

However, according to Lance Riley (pers. comm., 22 and 27 May 1995), it was "highly likely" that the East Cape clansmen of Queensland blew hunting leaf soundmakers because

they had formerly lived in huts constructed from rattan, palm and banana leaves, and grass. Further south in Kempsey, NSW, Goorie (pers. comm., 2 October 1997) and his late friend Peter Quinlan of Kempsey used to make whistling sounds on the leaves of flax (an unidentified species of the genus *Linum*) in order to catch birds.[31]

The Elder Ambrose Golden-Brown of Nowra (pers. comm., 13 January 1995) was also adamant that Aborigines used leaves as a matter of course during the hunt because it was a "perfectly natural pastime" for them to simulate all sorts of bush noises on native leaves whilst stalking. As a child he and his playmates produced "bush sounds" on gumleaves to communicate with each other and to allay fear in animals. Herbert Patten (pers. comm., 15 February 1997) suggested that Yuin hunters might have used leaf soundmakers to simulate birdcalls and animal sounds[32] during trapping. Hunters may even have played leaves on the trees themselves: they were a people of the forest and mountain as well as the seashore.

Evidence for leaf soundmakers in Aboriginal hunting comes from a later rather than earlier source. In the late 1960s, Victorian shearer Leo Doyle worked near Mingenew, south of Geraldton, Western Australia. Aboriginal shearers at the camp, who taught him to play tunes such as "Trumpy was a Ringer" on the gumleaf,[33] also produced sounds on leaves to lure their prey into a closer perimeter. Using shotguns, these men would reproduce an animal's own sound, or a sound that an animal would be interested in. For example, the sound of a parrot in trouble would soon coax a fox or dingo into the open, whereas a frightening noise would bring a kangaroo within firing range. Doyle likens the number and variety of sounds that they made on leaves to those that Aborigines make on didjeridus.[34]

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[31]Both had parents who still practised some tribal customs; Goorie learnt bush tucker catering from his mother, "Rambling Rose", and is presently reviving the Dainggatti language.

[32]Studies by CSIRO have identified some 17 native mammals on Mt Dromedary (Gulaga).

[33]Possibly the Flooded Gum (Aboriginal name *Moitch*; *E. rudis*) which grows along watercourses originally inhabited by the Amangu.

[34]Meredith and Bradley (Alexandra Vic 1994) NLA TRC 3000/82, and pers. comm. with Doyle on 6 September 1995.

**2. Leaf playing was first inspired by the sounds of birds**

Songbirds make up two thirds of the planet's birdlife,[35] and birds have exerted a widespread influence on human music and dance. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the considerable body of literature relating to the aural and visual effect of birds on human song, movement, costumes, and the manufacture of ritual objects in a number of music cultures. However Feld (1982) demonstrated that the relationship of human song and birdsong are a specific expression of a more general parallel between humans and birds drawn by the Kaluli of the Southern Highlands, Papua New Guinea. This, and Stone's *Let the Inside be Sweet* (1982) are two of the most important ethnomusicological ethnographies of the 1970s and 1980s. Alice Moyle noted the influence of birds on the character of Aboriginal music:

> According to one man in Broome, the "doctor man" (medicine-man) used to get his songs from the sound of birds. The sound "came small", but the doctor man built it up and made it "like his own language" (Moyle 1974: xi).

Many of the Aboriginal language names for birds are onomatopoeic (Bates 1938: 217), and many birds are perceived by Aboriginal people to be surrogate persons.[36] My case studies demonstrate the facility with which Aborigines imitate birds with the aid of part of a bird's own habitat - the leaf – as well as with the human voicebox. In some Australian wetlands where seasonal birdlife was prolific, Aboriginal people may have first blown leaves to imitate the cries and calls which constantly filled the air. Barry McDonald of Armidale, NSW (pers. comm., 19 November 1996) was told by Gumbainggir descendants Maisie Kelly and Hazel Vale[37] that their "old people got their music from the birds", but this did not necessarily mean leaf music only. "Later on the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people all played the leaf", Maisie said.

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[35] *The View* 1, 1995: 130. Notable Australian songbirds include butcherbirds (*Craticus* spp.), gerygones (*Gerygone* spp.), the Singing Bushlark (*Mirafra javanica*), and the White Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*).

[36] At Lake Tyers, Victoria, for instance, the *Guragalang* (Mail Bird) told of deaths (Mathews, Wreck Bay NSW 1967, AIATSIS 1179).

[37] Two of eight Archibald sisters of E. Armidale, born to Frank and Sarah. Hazel Vale was the eldest, followed by Ethel de Silva. Frank Archibald recorded songs in Dainggatti and Gumbainggir for John Gordon on 26 August 1968.

In many parts of Australia specific birds are associated with certain species of eucalypt, *e.g.* parrots often frequent the foliage of Marri (*E. calophylla*). With the cooperation of Patten and Boston, I identified some predominant native plants and birds and we recorded various birdcalls and other sounds which they and some of their forefathers produce(d) on leaves.

## 2.1 Herbert Patten's Leaf Birdcalls

Although Patten can imitate a dingo (Australian wild dog) howl on the leaf, he specialises in leaf birdcalls which are identifiably Australian. In his talks, Patten explains that tribal people possessed multi-layered levels of understanding in relation to habitat, wildlife, and totemism. For example, Elders with intimate knowledge of seasonal bird and animal food sources ascribed deep meanings to the sounds produced by totem birds and animals. Much of their lore has now disappeared, but Patten's own research indicates that owls, swans, king-parrots,[38] robins, magpies, cockatoos and curlews were culturally significant for his ancestors, the Brabuwooloong branch of the Kurnai of Gippsland.

For example, the calls of the Gippsland Black Swan (*Guniyaruk*) speak to the very core of Patten's being, forming a powerful, harmonious part of the way in which he understands his life within the Australian environment. Patten reflects on the timeless past when he re-interprets the *Guniyaruk*'s voice on Gippsland Mahogany (Kurnai name *Bangalay*, *E. botryoides*) leaves. The Eastern Whipbird (*Psophodes olivaceus*) is also a firm favourite in Patten's repertoire, since it inhabits both Gippsland, Victoria and Wallaga Lake, NSW. The female Whipbird's trill is easily copied by a human tongue roll or by a trill on a leaf. A selection of Patten's leaf birdcalls may be heard on his CD (1999); others - such as that of the White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) which frequents Mystery Bay near Narooma - on his self-recorded cassette (Patten, Thornbury 1998 RRC T4). Table 1 correlates Patten's current repertoire of one dozen leaf birdcalls with specific leaf instruments.

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[38]The Australian King Parrot (*Alisterus scapularis*) inhabits the Snowy River Flats near Patten's birthplace at Orbost.

| BIRD'S COMMON AND ABORIGINAL NAME | BIRD'S SCIENTIFIC NAME | CALL DESCRIPTION | SUITABLE LEAF |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 .Boobook Owl or Southern Boobook; *Barndagrin* (Kurnai) | *Ninox novaeseelandiae* | Atmospheric *morepok* inspired fear of the dark | Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) |
| 2. Gippsland Black Swan *Guniyaruk* (Kurnai) | *Cygnus atratus* | On-water: subdued *ooo* In-flight: guttural squawks Night-time: growl | Gippsland Mahogany (*Bangalay; E. botryoides*) |
| 3. Australian King Parrot | *Alisterus scapularis* | Shrill *crassak-crassak* in flight; piping bell-like notes while perched | Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) |
| 4. Red-capped Robin *Tutbring Bubiswrens* (Kurnai) | *Petroica goodenovii* | Whistle followed by 2 or 3 lower or higher notes; Male: insect-like trill | Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) |
| 5. Australian Magpie *Bleng-bun* (Kurnai) | *Gymnorhina tibicen* | Rich, mellow carolling; beautiful, balanced stereo turnaround; mimicry | Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) |
| 6. Sulphur-crested White Cockatoo *Bre-ek* (Kurnai) | *Cacatua galerita* | Raucous cocky talk; clear whistles; sharp squawks | Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) |
| 7. Eastern Curlew; *Dulligar* Bird (Kurnai) | *Numenius madagascariensis* | Ghostly, mournful wail inspires fear of death | Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) |
| 8. Eastern Whipbird *Brinjeri* (Kurnai) | *Psophodes olivaceus* | Female: whistle and trill Male: loud whipcrack | Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) |
| 9. White-bellied Sea Eagle | *Haliaeetus leucogaster* | Goose-like honks | Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) |
| 10. Spotted Turtledove (introduced from Asia) | *Streptopelia chinensis* | Subdued, musical warble with an abrupt ending | Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) |
| 11. Rainbow Lorikeet | *Trichoglossus haematodus* | Similar to a wolf whistle; musical rolling screech; raucous chatterings | Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) |
| 12. Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo; *Way-lar*, a rain-bringer | *Calyptorhynchus funereus* | High-pitched squeak *kee-ya kee-ya* (someone's coming!); wail (*way-lar*) | Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) |

**TABLE 1: HERBERT PATTEN'S LEAF BIRDCALL REPERTOIRE**

## 2.2 Roseina Boston's Leaf Birdcalls

In a most insightful way, Roseina Boston connects her gumleaf sounds with the beautiful natural environment of the Nambucca district, especially the birdlife with which she interacts on a personal totemic level. She claims in her talks to schoolchildren: "This is how we played the leaf, imitating birds, just as we imitated animals and birds with our dancing". More than anything else, Roseina enjoys playing her gumleaf to the birds; in fact they often gather around her as she plays in the bush at Kendall on the banks of the Nandock River, or in the beautiful forests, hills and mountains, where [illegible] are often heard imitating cockatoos. Roseina will often talk seriously to a bird (*biripi*) or to a tree (*bigwrr*), and birds talk back to her.[39] Bird, animal and plant totems were "bestowed" on the Gumbainggir people by ancestral spirits to strengthen self-identity. Storm birds, rain birds and screeching cockatoos were special totems of the Gumbainggir and Dainggatti descendants on Stuart Island.

Roseina's personal totem was revealed to her through dreams[40] and unusual events. The Laughing Kookaburra (Gumbainggir language name *Gaagum*; *Dacelo novaeguinae*) is unique to Australia with a wide natural distribution in the east and a large introduced population in other areas. Aboriginal people believe that the Kookaburra's morning chorus of laughter is a signal for the sky people to light the great fire that illuminates and warms the earth by day (Schodde and Tidemann 1993: 345).[41] Comprising six short calls varying from quiet "chuckles" to a pronounced *kooaa-aa-aa* of infectious "mirth", the chorus often ends *sotto voce*. Roseina produces these cacophonous sounds on a Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*) leaf,

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[39]The *Kooridooki* Talking Bird "speaks" to the Biripi people. One warned Roseina in the bush near Taree with the repeated clause "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry!" Roseina knew that she should not venture any further because dire troubles can affect Aboriginal women who step on to ground, which was long ago, designated for "men only".

[40]Roseina often dreams that she is flying over the mountains. Occasionally she dreams about sharks as well as birds; the Deep Water Shark is the tribal totem of her father's clan, the Biripi.

[41]Kookaburras are often the first birds to greet the day, setting up a half-hour long chorus to stake their territory.

using an invented technique which she calls "shivers". These enable her to express deep nostalgia for the spiritual culture of her ancestors (Tape Example 3).[42] Roseina tells many tales about her totem; for instance once when she was feeling sad a quintet of Kookaburras gathered around her in empathy.[43]

Roseina also allowed me to record her renditions of the Leatherhead - which was probably the Noisy Friar Bird (*Philemon corniculatus,* a honeyeater) rather than the Soldier Bird or Noisy Minor (*Manorina melanocephala*) mentioned on Tape Example 4. The twittering prattle of the Willie-Wagtail (Aboriginal name *Jingir-jingir*; *Rhipidura leucophrys*, Tape Example 5)[44] brings either good or bad news according to the interpretation of its behaviour, *e.g.* it may indicate the approach of visitors or foretell the death of someone close to the observer.

Roseina was once compelled to produce an "eagle" sound on a Spotted Gum (*E. maculata*) leaf.[45] Whilst camping at Coopalcurripa (Nandock River), she noticed some boys preparing to shoot birds and pleaded with them not to do so. Roseina knew that if the parrots heard a bird of prey they would scatter and take cover in the bush, so she instinctively plucked a leaf from the nearest Spotted Gum and simulated an "eagle's" tremulous, silvery-toned whistle (Tape Example 6).[46] We later identified this district's "eagle" (*garriirrl*) as the Square-tailed

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[42]Ryan (Glen Iris Vic 1996) RRC T11.

[43]On another occasion, a Kookaburra "Messenger Bird" prepared Roseina for the death of her cousin by jumping around a little grove on Nambucca Heads Beach, landing on a low-lying limb, and looking her straight in the eye. He then jumped around again and flew off towards the cemetery, much as to say "go and visit it". Roseina went and knelt at the graves of Uncles Walter Smith and Jim Davis. All of a sudden a whirlwind sprang up and blew leaves off a coral tree. As they landed above Jim's grave, Roseina knew that someone in her family had died. The next morning she found out it was Willy Davis, Sarah Archibald's husband (Ryan, Glen Iris Vic 1996, RRC T10).

[44]Ryan (Glen Iris Vic 1996) RRC T11. In the Clarence Valley, NSW, the distance between bird and observer indicates the closeness of relationship between observer and victim (Heron 1991: 48). Leafist Fred Bugg knew a Grey Wagtail (*Guri djugi*; *Motacilla cinerea*) "Mail Bird" which brought messages in Kattang language. *Guri djugi* warned of dangers, a bad person, a snake, etc. Bugg translated *Guri-djugi*'s sentences in Kattang to Reay (1949: 38).

[45]Norton (1907: 6) observed a precedent for the imitation of predator birdcalls between 1859-60. Aboriginal duck hunters whistled "like hawks" in their efforts to trick prey at Brewarrina, NSW.

[46]Ryan (Nambucca Heads NSW 1995) RRC T7.

Kite (*Lophoictinia isura*), which flies over woodland canopy in search of birds nestling. Table 2 correlates the birds, which Roseina imitates with preferred leaf species.

| BIRD'S COMMON & ABORIGINAL NAME | BIRD'S SCIENTIFIC NAME | CALL DESCRIPTION | SUITABLE LEAF |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Laughing Kookaburra *Gaagum* (Gumbainggir) | *Dacelo novaeguinae* | Laughter, chuckles and croaks | Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*) |
| 2. Leatherhead (Noisy Friarbird) | *Philemon corniculatus* | "look out!" (a strong distinct warning) | Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*) |
| 3. Willie-Wagtail *Jingir-jingir* | *Rhipidura leucophrys* | Twittering prattle, spirited and sweet; *rikka-tikka-tikka-tak* scolding | Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*) |
| 4. Square-tailed Kite | *Lophoictinia isursa* | silvery whistle; hoarse contralto yelp | Spotted Gum (*E. maculata*) |

**TABLE 2: ROSEINA BOSTON'S LEAF BIRDCALL REPERTOIRE (TAPE EXAMPLES 3-6)**

The attempts by Patten and Boston to articulate their inner cultural space therefore include the transformation of (perceived) pre-existing cultural traits into emblems of identity. Avifaunal leaf sounds form part of their evolutionary interpretation of leaf music, as well as reinforcing one possible solution for its roots. Of course the birdcalls themselves may be quite different to those once heard - even a deliberate "re-enchantment" of the environment. Patten often demonstrates birdcalls first by whistling and then by playing them on the leaf (the relationship between human whistling and leaf blowing is a close one; in both activities the tongue is used to deflect the angle of air to obtain different pitches). The evidence suggests that many other

Aboriginal leafists customarily imitate birds,[47] although taboos were undoubtedly once imposed on the imitation of the calls of any birds that were sacred tribal totems. Although we cannot ascertain when and where the "tradition" of leaf birdcalls was "invented", we can at least say that it has been "objectified", *i.e.* made into a heritage with imagined reference to the past but with its signs oriented towards the future (definition after Coplan 1991: 37).

In any case, Patten and Boston independently connect their leaf instruments with environmental parameters - choice of a certain leaf strengthens a sense of place, spiritual connection to the land, and reinforcement of clan affiliations.

**3. Leaf soundmakers were used for signalling**

The gumleaf's capacity for loudness, which will be explained in Chapter 5, makes it acoustically suitable as a signalling device. The data presented above raises a further possibility that leaf birdcalls served to differentiate identity between some individual Aboriginal societies, *i.e.* as an aid in recognising the country, and even possibly for supplying keep-out signals to non-clan members. In any case, many Aboriginal peoples still conceive of sounds in the environment as a source of individual, clan or regional identification.

The ceremonial rites of clans varied considerably.[48] In northern Queensland the Linngiti men of Weipa made traditional use of the Cape York signalling whistle (*ithati*) during the *Wintjinam* (*Wintjnum*) or second male initiation ceremony. Short signals were sounded by blowing across the upper opening of this short bamboo whistle (5" x ½") as one would on a panpipe. Two signals served to warn ritual leaders of the approach of unwanted persons

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[47]Natty Kina of Gympie, Queensland played the leaf "like a bird" and could "do anything on gum and lemon leaves" (pers. comm. from Kina's nephew Bill Brunette, 19 May 1995). Another leafist, Goonabahn (pers. comm., 9 July 1994), "wobbled" his tongue to make bird sounds. Some non-Aboriginal leafists also imitate birdcalls using the leaf, *e.g.* Virgil Reutens of Mt. Eliza, Victoria, and Wally McLaughlin of Drummoyne, NSW.

[48]In southeastern Australia, for example, boughs were held over boys' heads, forming a thick leaf canopy to shield them from falling coals during the initiation rite (Massola 1969: 28).

(including women); whilst three signals announced the arrival of novices (Moyle 1968-9: 13; 1974: 21; 1978: 24).[49]

Moyle believes it is feasible that "folded-leaf whistles" were blown, as compensatory behaviour, by some eastern Australian male teenagers after incisor tooth avulsion was practised on them during initiation[50] because, according to Roth (1902: 24), this initiatory practice physically discounted (*i.e.* prevented) the continuation of whistling *per se* in post-initiation years. Moyle (1974: 45) argues that the existence of gumleaf bands and individual leaf performances reported in southeastern parts of Australia in recent times may owe their origin to tooth avulsion, but adds that they are not in any way associated with it now. As an initiatory custom practised in some parts of WA, tooth avulsion could account for the hunting leaf blown at Mingenew.[51]

The Dainggatti and Gumbainggir, who lived between the Great Dividing Range and the Pacific Ocean, northern NSW, did not practice incisor tooth avulsion during the initiation of teenage males.[52] Hunters who ventured into the mountains in winter may have retained the activity of leaf blowing so natural to children, provided that their teeth were still intact. Taking into account Frank Archibald's belief that gumleaf playing was the traditional music of NSW, it is feasible that these hunters exchanged leaf signals with each other, or even with hunters from inland clans. So far, however, there is no evidence that leaf playing was

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[49]*Aboriginal Sound Instruments* (1994), recorded by Alice Moyle. The whistle is also briefly heard on *Songs from North Queensland* (1981). E.C. Butler's photograph of Sam Kilndan blowing the whistle at Weipa in 1967 may be found in Moyle (1974: 21).

[50]Pers. comm. from Alice Moyle on 20 September 1994 regarding comments made in her PhD thesis (1974: 45).

[51]Although a good set of teeth is a distinct advantage in gumleaf playing, a leafist can adapt to the loss of an incisor. Philip Elwood of Melbourne won the 1996 Golden Gumleaf Award, in spite of a missing tooth, and Herbert Patten has adapted his technique to accommodate false teeth.

[52]Initiation consisted only of shoulder incision, even though it was customary for two teeth to be knocked out during initiation rites on nearby islands (information supplied by a descendant of both clans, John Ivan Ballangarry of Bowraville NSW, on 27 April 1995).

traditional in the district prior to the establishment of the Bowraville Catholic Mission in 1923.

According to Golden-Brown, the "blacks" traditionally blew gumleaves as a method of communication in the bush and switched to melodies after the arrival of "the boat people of 1788".[53] It is customary for Aboriginal people in southeastern Australian cities and towns to alert one another to their presence in crowds or to disclose their clan identity with freemason-like whistles as well as the *coo-ee*.[54] Patten once played the Koori(e) Lone Whistle (Tape Example 7)[55] on a leaf as he noticed a Superb Lyrebird or Native Pheasant (*Menura novaehollandiae*) approaching him on Gulaga (Mt Dromedary). Renowned for its far-carrying mimicry of other birds and human-made sounds, the lyrebird immediately imitated the Koorie Lone Whistle. Patten hopes to teach the lyrebirds more sounds to pass on to their chicks.

It is feasible that the use of leaf instruments by Aboriginal drovers had its roots in Aboriginal forms of signalling. Lamond (1936: 22) explained the drover's interaction with cattle:

> His duty is to see that none stray from the mob and that no strangers enter it; and he is the sole person in charge for the time being. He must sing, recite, talk to himself, play the mouth-organ - anything at all to make a continuous and soothing noise. The cattle like it. Apart from that, the noise lets them know where the man is, and when and where to expect him.

Searle (1973: 61-62) also elaborated on the drovers' need to provide reassuring drones to their cattle. In his capacity as a drover and wool-classer, Albert Dennison of West Moree travelled all over northwestern NSW,[56] and in the same manner as his father before him,

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[53]"Hot time at Gumleaf Follies Ball", *The Age*, 12 September 1979: 18.

[54]Patten (Reservoir Vic 1992) RRCT3.

[55]Patten (Thornbury Vic 1998) RRC T4.

[56]National Aboriginal Conference Election 1977, Australian Electoral Office, Canberra (AIATSIS RBF A941.16/NI).

played the leaf around the cattle to "keep them quiet at night".[57] Stockman Clarrie Grogan of Kuranda also managed to quieten the cattle down by playing hymn tunes on leaves:

> Every time I had my turn I wouldn't have any trouble, and they'd say "What have you got that we haven't got?" (Grogan, recorded by Bradley and Ellis).[58]

Yami Lester,[59] the renowned spokesman of Central Desert Aboriginal people, learnt to play the leaf from a Queensland stockman (Bradley 1995: 6). For this reason Bradley argued that the travel associated with the vast stock routes could have contributed to an increase in the distribution of the leaf instrument, especially during the era when Aboriginal stockmen were employed from the late nineteenth-century until the advent of road trains.

In the 1970s, the characteristic introduction to Channel 7's original series of *Skippy* (the "Bush Kangaroo") featured a boy name Sonny running through the bush, plucking a leaf off a tree, and blowing a piercing note to summon Skippy. Goorie, who was motivated by this footage to begin practising the leaf in earnest, demonstrates the signal on Tape Example 2.

**4. The leaf is a spiritual instrument and ghost-sound maker**

My lack of knowledge of the many Aboriginal languages once spoken prevents me from supplying an adequate description of the peoples' rich, spiritual identification with plants, but eucalypt leaves are still used in their smoking ceremonies (once performed widely across Australia) to cleanse the domiciles of the newly deceased. (Aborigines believe that when they die both body and spirit go back to the earth).

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[57]Gordon (West Moree NSW 1968) AIATSIS LA1220B.

[58]Bradley and Ellis (Cairns Q'ld 1990) NLA TRC 2604.

[59]Lester was blinded by the British nuclear tests at Maralinga. He officiated at the historic reinstatement of Uluru (Ayers Rock) on behalf of his clan.

Stanner (1987: 228) noted that spirit-children were first placed in the leaves of trees, as well as in the waterholes and the winds. The *mingk-ka* spirit trees of the Channel Country (southwest Queensland) were "friends" to the Aborigines (Duncan-Kemp 1968: 139), who chanted: *Yammacoona, the Earth Mother, made the trees, we are the trees, the trees are us, our people* ... and ... *a tree shall receive our spirit form as it passes from the earth.* One *mingk-ka*, the Wild Almond (*Elborjeeta*), was a "gift of peace" from the people of an older Dreamtime race. Since taboos prevented game from being touched beneath this sanctuary (Duncan-Kemp 1952: 185), it is unlikely that musicians would have been permitted to pluck its leaves, likewise that men could pluck leaves from a "woman's tree" (p. 210). It was certainly taboo to go anywhere near certain *ingwiri*, spirit-inhabited trees (Duncan-Kemp 1968: 139), or the evil *kadaitcha* trees (Duncan-Kemp 1952: 30).[60]

Much evidence exists for the use of leaves in medicine,[61] whilst limited evidence also exists for leaf sorcery.[62] In Byrock NSW, old doctors attending to the dangerously ill held green leaves in front of their patients so that they would recover by capturing *warrungan*, the spirit of the leaf. Those failing to catch *warrungan* died (Mathews 1905: 146, cited in Gummow 1992: 135). Medicine men had the power to cause death and illness as well as to heal. "Pointing the leaf", a means of sorcery comparable with "pointing the bone",[63] is described in Gummow (1992: 137). It is possible that ancient Aboriginal peoples may have

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[60]Conflicts between good and evil permeate the Aboriginal belief system. The idea of a great beneficial deity (known variously as Baiame, Piame, Bunjil, Daramulun, Nurelli, etc.) is balanced by belief in an evil spirit or Bunyip (a water demon inhabiting rivers, lagoons and swamps), among many lesser evil spirits.

[61]Although leaves were generally not eaten (Low 1988: 54), chewed leaves were placed on bruises, wounds and sore eyes, whilst resinous gum (kino) was used to treat diarrhoea, dysentary, bleeding and throat infections. Cineol, the oil present in many eucalypt leaves, cleared coughs, colds and blocked noses.

[62]In Africa, by comparison, witchdoctors blew river reed whistles for both healing and sorcery (Kirby 1965).

[63]Bone pointing was practised in Central Australia and the regions to its south and east. A sharpened bone was pointed in the direction of the intended victim whilst the practitioner performed magic rituals.

blown leaves to exert influence over nature's mysterious forces, since leaves were part of the apparatus of some rainmakers.[64]

In northern Australia, an exceptionally large tube is played in *djungguwan* ceremonies,[65] where it represents represents the Rainbow Snake (Jones 1980: 565). A didjeridu's sound quality is named after a sacred ritual object or element:

> For example, one tree trunk was named after The Morning Star, Banumbirr, because its low pitch was appropriate for the pitch of the song. Another was said to be a Yirritja spirit, or mokuy, didjeridoo because of its high pitch - the sounds the spirits make in the bush. Didjeridoos which can produce sounds of the natural animal world are named after their ancestral counterparts. For example, one yidaki [didjeridoo] was called Wititj, the Olive Python, as the twisted trunk of the tree was said to resemble the snake's body and the deep pitch was likened to the deep and very powerful sound of the snake heard in the thunder (Magowan 1994: 241-242).

It is significant that the sounds the spirits make in the bush are perceived to be high-pitched, because leaf instruments are invariably high-pitched.[66] A range of spirits may have been connected with various species of leaves and the sounds that Aborigines produced on them. For example, at Cummeragunga on the Murray River the leaf (*waala or walou*) served as a medium for ghost[67] (*bekka* or *pekka*) noises in blood-curdling stories that Yorta Yorta Elders[68] told to children around open fires on the old tribal camping-grounds. This practice persisted up until the mid twentieth-century (pers. comm. from Ozzie Jackson of Albury, 9 February 1994).[69]

This practice undoubtedly stretched back in time, as did the Yorta Yorta children's' custom of tying strips of gumleaves ("shammy shoes") to their feet to cover up their tracks for fear

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[64]At Wallaga Lake, NSW, Granny Tangyeye used "white gum" (Manna Gum, *E. viminalis*) branches to make rain (Mathews, Wreck Bay NSW 1967 AIATSIS A1179; see also Morgan 1994).

[65]A succession of rituals including circumcision, performed by groups in Arnhem Land.

[66]It is difficult to reach more than a minor third below Middle C on most gumleaves.

[67]According to Aboriginal belief, a ghost (spirit) and a particular human body are united at conception for a short time, then later separated by death (based on Horton 1995: 412).

[68]These Elders included Aaron Cooper (*b.* about 1854), and William Cooper (Thorpe Clark 1965: 37).

[69]Jackson heard these ghost stories at Cummeragunga, as did Pastor Doug Nicholls (Thorpe Clark 1979: 27).

of the Hairy Bekka. This legendary bogey monster had long white hair, a strong odour resembling that of a herd of goats, and long bony arms and legs, which crackled when it walked. In one story some children were sitting around a fire. The Hairy Bekka chanted a particular rhyme (still taught today), as he picked out children to push into the fire (Bowe, Peeler and Atkinson 1997: 23, and pers. comm. from Heather Bowe, 25 January 1999).

The recognisable opening to a Hairy Bekka story was described by Herbert Patten's cousin Margaret Tucker (1977: 52-53) as "oo-oo-oo-oh" with a rising inflection. This is very similar to the *dulligar* or *gunj* (ghost) sound perpetuated during Patten's childhood in the 1940s and early 1950s (Tape Example 8).[70] At this time, whistling and gumleaf playing were forbidden after dark except at parties, for fear that the sounds would provoke the *dulligar*. The Kurnai associated the *dulligar* with curlews (Death Birds or Ghost Birds).[71] In fact, each time a curlew flew over the Newmerella pit, Patten and his playmates used to experience a "shudder up their spine".

Patten appropriated this spiritual reference point in November 1996 when he attended the "traditional" funeral of acclaimed artist Lin Onus. Towards the end of the Onus funeral, Patten felt a "surge within" which compelled him (in spite of a lump in his throat) to produce the curlew's descending call on a leaf. This ghostly sound had the effect of "spreading out solace" as he played "in the spirit" over Wayne Thorpe's comforting didjeridu drone.[72] Onus's widow thanked Patten after the service for having "put spirit into her crying". Patten felt "assertive" and "comfortable" with this "traditional breathing", as he describes it.

Roseina Boston heard the ABC broadcast of the funeral at her home in Nambucca Heads. She automatically interpreted the eerie gumleaf wail to be a "Ghost Curlew" singing sorrowfully

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[70]Patten (Thornbury Vic 1998) RRC T4.

[71]Australia has three main species of curlew. Those Patten heard as a child were probably the Eastern (or Australian) Curlew *(Numenius madagascariensis)* and the Bush Stone Curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*).

[72]"Tribute to Lin Onus", *Awaye* (November), ABC broadcast of funeral.

in the night, in fact it sent "shivers down her spine" (pers. comm., 25 November 1996). In the western regions of NSW, curlews are the most significant Death Birds, calling the news all over the district.[73] It is particularly distressing for people to hear the frightening wail if they have a relative in hospital at the time (Heron 1991: 48). Roseina's beliefs concerning the Ghost Curlew were similar to Patten's, even though they had been raised in distinctly different geographical locations.

In commenting to folklorist collector John Meredith that the leaf is a spiritual sound, a lonely sound, and the sound when someone dies and you feel the spirit there, leafist George Brown of Wreck Bay NSW also attempted to evoke something of the spirituality attached to the leaf instrument.[74] Brown's comment could hold the key to a deeper understanding of leaf blowing in view of the perceived connection between spirit and land (the Aborigines' birthing place or cradle), and the recognition of a fellow Aboriginal person a long way from home. Thus it can be seen that the leaf instrument still carries spiritual and symbolical meanings in southeastern Aboriginal Australia which surpass its mere equation with "sounds from the bush".

Patten has also used the leaf at countless Christian funerals, most notably that of Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls on 10 June 1988, when he boosted the graveside singing of "Amazing Grace" and "There's a Land that is Fairer". Resourcefully, he played these tunes on a gumleaf, which he plucked from one of the floral wreaths. On 12 March 1999, Patten played "The Old Rugged Cross" at the Melbourne General Cemetery graveside of the late Aboriginalist historian Alick Jackomos, who had witnessed many gumleaf bands in his time.

On North Stradbroke Island in Moreton Bay (southern Queensland) a gumleaf band played at the funeral of poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker, 1920-1993), an Elder of the

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[73]*New Dawn*, January 1972: 2.

[74]Meredith (Wreck Bay NSW 1991), recording held by the collector; first cited in Bradley (1995: 10).

Noonuccal tribe.[75] The leafists were probably from the island itself, since leaf playing used to be a popular activity at Moongalba, the old mission site (pers. comm. from Roseina Boston, 25 November 1996).

Leafist Clarrie Grogan travelled to the bedside of his revered friend, Dr Fred Hollows, who also died in 1993. A radio report mentioned that an Aboriginal man had ministered gumleaf music at Hollows' bedside in Sydney. This was probably Grogan, who grieved a lot between Hollow's death and his own later that year (pers. comm. from Roseina and Harry Boston, 5 October 1996).

**5. The leaf is a longstanding music toy**

Haagen (1994: 1) notes that toys are made to serve in an imaginary dimension where entry is gained only through play. She compiled evidence for an "improvisational bush symphonic" produced by the love that Aboriginal children have for unusual and penetrating sounds, their inventions made at the spur of a moment and put aside when play was finished:

> The idea of a 'bush toy' encompasses the idea of transformation, of taking an object from its original surrounding and giving it a new purpose, a new form, be it a blade of grass made to serve as a whistle or an abandoned rim of a motor car wheel given new life as a child's motor car Haagen (1994: 55).

Having been taught bushcraft of every kind, including bird and animal tracking, barefoot Aboriginal boys were finely tuned to the bush sounds around them during quiet-tread stalking. Their imitation of the calls and notes of birds and animals was part of the cultural tradition of the hunt, perfected through childhood experimentation. In contrast with the biblical concept that man is distinct from the animals, Aborigines perceived that they were united to the land and related to all its creatures.

Evidence abounds as to the resourcefulness of Aboriginal children in using leaves of varying textures, length, breadth, and shape in their games - see, for example, Idriess (1963: 28),

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[75]Information supplied by Herbert Patten after he spoke with Noonacul's son.

Haagen (1994), and Howie-Willis (1994d: 1096).[76] On sorties into the bush, almost everything that grows or moves is of interest to children, who are conditioned by religious beliefs closely tied to the environment. Leaves were used in costuming and stage props to enhance children's games (Kartomi 1973: 55, 57; Mountford 1973: 64). The blowing of leaves by children was more than likely discovered in their games, *i.e.* invented by accident, just as Lumholtz (1889: 57) suggested of the boomerang.

Roth (1898: 1; 1902: 24) was the first writer to mention the existence of an Australian rainforest leaf music toy. He recorded how at Atherton, North Queensland, he saw a young boy whistling most beautifully through a leaf blade which was gently folded along its mid-rib. The player held the free edges of the two halves between his protruded lips so that when air was drawn into the mouth a shrill whistling sound was produced.[77] In an account of his expedition to Queensland from 1912-14, Swedish naturalist Eric Mjöberg (1918: 513) mentioned seeing a "gum leaf whistle" in the Malanda Forest. Aboriginal children were seen to "occasionally blow into a twisted leaf to produce a whistling sound".[78]

On January 13, 1995 I watched Wahringa, an Aboriginal boy at Nowra, NSW, fold an exceptionally narrow leaf and produce sounds on it with ease.[79] This blowing of leaves by children appears to surface as a common craze or capricious tendency rather than a continuous tradition, *i.e.* in the past it was an activity which could have died out and then repeated itself at various stages in a disjunctive, recurrent fashion. We should not discount the

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[76]In the Central Australian Aranda oracle game *altjira* (ancestor), eucalypt leaves represent a married couple and their child, whilst other leaves become the womens' and boys' camps. The children tap the leaves to make them fall on top of one another; the way they fall is interpreted as a prediction of the future of the life of the player (Miller in Haagen 1994: 9).

[77]From 1896 Roth sent children to the Yarrabah Mission, where they presumedly ceased blowing rainforest leaves on learning to read music. "Healthy, well behaved, industrious, and progressing in all the common arts of civilised life" (*Australian Christian World*, 20 December 1902), the settlement boasted a travelling brass band (Gribble 1933: 45).

[78]Children at Arunkun, Queensland blew grass whistle toys, whilst those on Murray Island blew spiral wound coconut leaf trumpets (Haagen 1994: 141, 147). The gumleaf noisemaker used by children in Yuendumu, Northern Territory (*ibid.*: 132) could have been a blown instrument, or at least doubled as an aerophone.

[79]Wahringa is a grandson of the late Elder Ambrose Golden-Brown of Nowra, NSW.

possibility that some Aboriginal children blew spontaneously across entire leaves to reproduce some of the simpler clan melodies, which they heard adults singing around them.

**6. The leaf is blown for musical self-expression and recreation**

For ancient tribal people, the ability to separate the less significant background noises from sounds of prey was a question of survival which heightened their aural awareness until the reinforced sounds were eventually structured into abstract musical mediums. Reck (1977: 62, 182) offered the following insights:

> Once a sound has been created ... a number of things can be done. One thing is to do nothing further: to let the instrument remain basically as a one-sound, and perhaps one-note, music-maker ... The next step is to increase the instrument's potential, to make it capable of producing a number of different sounds and/or pitches.
>
> Whistles and caller gadgets made from bone or leaf reed serve not only as rudimentary musical instruments, but also, like bows and arrows, harpoons and guns, as functional tools for the hunt. At some point the bird and animal calls (vocal and mechanical) move from their purely functional purpose and begin to serve memory, description, and amusement; that is, they become aesthetic and are woven into more sophisticated musics.

Sachs (1962: 110f) visualised instrumental music as coming about through the elevation of noisemaking gadgets into musical artefacts through the coincidences of accidentally discovered acoustic phenomena and visual criteria used by humankind. The unusual acoustic properties of the leaves of two species of eucalypts which grow in western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory were probably first "discovered" in this way by the Mayali or members of their neighbouring clans.

Firstly, the Mayali produce music by blowing the membrane of the leathery Swamp Bloodwood (*E. ptychocarpa*, see Plate 7)[80] leaf (Smyth and von Sturmer 1981: 20; Brock 1988: 179). Likewise, at the end of the wet season, the characteristic "plastic skin" of the leathery *E. porrecta* (Mayali name *anngal*) leaf[81] is blown up like a balloon to produce

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[80]Chaloupka and Giuliani (1984: 152) cite its Mayali name as *anbamberre*, whilst Smyth and von Sturmer (1981: 20) provide the "Aboriginal" name *Mangolanglang*.

[81]*E. porrecta* is endemic to the Top End and does not have a common name (this is not unusual in northern Australia).

musical notes as the air escapes (Chaloupka and Giuliani 1984: 152). Brock (1988: 177) describes this as a "leaf-whistle" (see Plate 8).

Since no specific traditional signalling function was accredited to this pastime, we can assume that these two leaves were blown for self-expression or self-amusement, probably by children as well as adults. At Wugularr Aboriginal Community, situated 112 km southeast of Katherine at Beswick, Mayali Elder David Blanasi (pers. comm., 2 September 1994) has blown leaves for as long as he can remember. Blanasi thinks that his ancestors would have done the same thing, but can't be sure. He, his son, and other clanspeople play Western tunes on Yellow Box (or Scarlet Gum, *E. phoenicea*) leaves. The didjeridus that they fashion from the wavy-grained wood of the same tree are marketed internationally, thus overshadowing the peripheral activity of leaf playing.

**7. The leaf was once used to produce melodic, rhythmic and timbral sound effects in localised clan ritual**

Native leaf instruments did not necessarily first evolve in "green" Australia, *i.e.* that part of the country where *eucalyptus* was prominent. According to the four autobiographical novels by Alice Duncan-Kemp[82] (henceforth D-K 1933, 1952, 1961 and 1968 respectively), an Aboriginal ceremonial gumleaf music tradition was extant in the Channel Country[83] in far southwest Queensland during the first two decades of the twentieth-century. At this time neither the wireless station, nor the Australian Inland Mission (AIM), operated in this isolated "Dead Heart" of Australia; Christian institutions are markedly absent from Horton's mission map (1994: 706).

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[82]Duncan-Kemp was born in 1902 on Mooraberrie, a cattle station 138 miles west of Windorah, which her parents owned from the 1890s. Raised by an Aboriginal nurse, she was revered as a reincarnated Leaf Spirit in the body of a white girl-child. Sealed into the Emu-Kangaroo tribes beside a green leaf fire, she improvised leaf, wind and bird dances in a girdle of leaves (D-K 1968: 13, 28, 297, 307).

[83]A system of channels, creeks and claypans (believed to be relics of a great inland sea) dominated by Cooper Creek and the Diamantina, Georgina and Mulligan Rivers (D-K 1933: 48, 108, 160).

Duncan-Kemp's writings describe the lives of Aborigines as she observed them along Farrars Creek until her departure in 1918. The cross-referencing of all relevant passages provides a consistent description of a "gumleaf" instrument played in great pageants (*kondobee*)[84] performed by the united remnant members of surviving clans (messmates). One incorporated a "dance of the leaves",[85] a special invocation for rain and food (D-K 1952: 181).

Necessity may be the "mother of invention", but it is also the "father of makeshifts in the bush" (DK 1933: 42). The Channel Country Aborigines possessed a "primitive" music of their own drawn mostly from nature to express their sentiments and suit their mode of existence:

> The aborigines' technique is simple, but the themes obtained from a few bones tapping each other and the hollow sticks blown by the men to the accompaniment of mouthed gum leaves is well nigh incredible ... the orchestra[86] is not a slap-dash haphazard arrangement. On the contrary a musician has to work very hard to get the correct interpretation of both sound and rhythm. There are many separate compositions and each has to be memorised, and the necessary tone perfection is much more difficult to accomplish than is imagined by an outsider glancing at a few primitive instruments by means of which the camp musicians achieve their ends (D-K 1952: 180).

The "mouthed" gumleaves played along Farrars Creek functioned intermittently as an evocative supplement to a standard set of instruments which accompanied specific reenactments of *kondobee*. One explanation for this practice could lie with the profuse ornithological soundscape of the Channel Country.[87] In the quiet of the evening the calls of birds saturated the air with a "musical medley of sound" (D-K 1952: 77). Noises included rustlings, squeaks, squeals, warning calls, grunts and shrill cries of innumerable variety and timbre, all part of nature's scheme of protective mimicry (p. 127-8), *e.g.* two hoots of an owl

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[84] A *kondobee* included womens' songs and dances, flowering plant and maturing root dances, food dances, water rites, and spring-summer rites (D-K 1952: 178).

[85] A "leaf dance" is also included in the indigenous repertoire of the Latje Latje Dancers of Mildura, Victoria.

[86] The concept of an Aboriginal "orchestra" is misleading in view of the fact that there was no instrumental ensemble (or, for that matter, solo) tradition in its own right in Aboriginal society (Moyle 1974: viii). Sounds produced by means other than the human voice were used in accompaniment to singing and dancing. Moyle (p. 24) indicated that the bamboo Cape York signalling whistle was the only instrument sounded alone for ritual purposes.

[87] Over 150 species of birds and waterfowl frequent the Channel Country (D-K 1968: 165).

turned out to be a tribesman signalling (p. 81). As Duncan-Kemp listened to the "Aboriginal orchestra" she could hear them playing "the bird song of the morning star and the kingfisher, the dawn chimes of the bellbird, tits, wedgebill and magpie" (p. 181). The influence of birds on the native psyche was not only confined to their song, but included visual aspects of their movements (D-K 1961: 155; 163-164). Animals and reptiles were equally influential:

> A snake dance was held in four acts: the "curtain" rose on a row of blacks squatting round the fire circle. From out the tree shadows floated the thin reedy notes of "mouthed" leaves and the creepy droning of split-wood pipes. The life of a totemic snake was enacted, every detail being faithfully reproduced. From his hole in the rocky slopes crawled Cunmurra, the gigantic carpet snake, slithering his way over the spirit stones[88] to the camp of Wirral-lee; the fire represented her camp, and a canoe-shaped hollow was scooped to represent a waterhole (D-K 1933: 215; see also D-K (1952: 183-184).

The expression "mouthed gum leaves" used in these two quotations could denote a single leaf being pressed against the mouth, or alternatively, a large twig or small branch held in a dancer's mouth. Herbert Patten managed to produce thin, reedy sounds by holding two leaves of a small twig close together between his teeth and blowing between them (Tape Example 9), and even blew the hissing sound of a snake (Tape Example 10). As Patten plays the leaf in this manner, one can envisage the slithering movements executed by the dancers.

Another spectacle featuring gumleaves was the "weird" spear dance. The actors wore green leaves to show the spirits that the corroboree was "big fella playabout". They employed three extra musicians; one produced a "wheezing, whimpering obligato" as he held a leaf between his lips. Tape Example 11 features Patten simulating (i) a spear in flight and (ii) a succession of spears thrown in all directions, as he imaginatively re-enacts the climax to the spear dance:[89]

> A hundred spears rattled and quivered in a slow step dance; boomerangs thudded and the gins wailed a high minor refrain. The discordant shouts of the warriors mingled with the sobbing drums, and a desert war tune rose steadily and cut its way above all other sound. Higher and higher shrilled the wheezing leaf, and louder throbbed the drums (D-K 1952: 187).

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[88]Cylindrical stones, 12-15" long and pointed at one end, were used in fire and snake ceremonies (D-K 1968: 318).

[89]Tape Examples 9-11 may be found on Patten (Thornbury Vic 1998) RRC T4.

More than one of the eight members of the ensemble (comprising five men and three women squatting on the ground) appears to have been a leafist:

> The whimpering notes of the gum leaves, and the plaintive sounds of the didgerydoo and wooden flutes were fraught with tragedy. Here was a stark picture of misery and humiliation mingled with defiance; it was the story of the blackfellow fading before the advance of civilisation (D-K 1952: 183).

The only leafist actually named was the bearded rainmaker for the Emu-Kangaroo tribes, "old Macumbara", meaning the "Cloud Gatherer" (D-K 1933: 149; 1952: 154-55, 187). Macumbara also blew sounds on stones, which ranged in size from gravel beads to pigeons' eggs. Blowing on the stones at certain angles, he manipulated them between his long, nimble fingers to make the music (*penji*) of the half-fairy, half-goblin creatures that lived within the very old Coolabah (*E. microtheca*) trees standing nearby.[90] These groups of stones spoke to the Aborigines as an inner voice, a living entity - flesh of their flesh (D-K 1968: 24). The blowing of stones may have been integral to the shamanistic practices of the ancient Karuwali[91] and neighbouring tribes, but the references do not indicate that leaf blowing was used to this intent.

The prominence of the evergreen Coolabah along the waterways of the Channel Country points to the feasibility of a Coolabah-specific leaf music tradition. If Patten were to go to the old site of the snake ceremony, he could compare the sonic capabilities of the grey-green Coolabah foliage with the leaves of the many other plant species listed by Duncan-Kemp, thereby characterising analogous leaf sounds with those heard in the early twentieth-century.

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[90]Each individual "Old Man Coolabah" (or Coolibah) was named with deep respect (D-K 1961: 117; 1968: 139). One was the home of the gin-fish, leader of souls of departed fish and waterfowl (D-K 1952: 66), whilst another named *Maka-ma-Kardum* was believed to contain the history of the tribe since its inception (D-K 1933: 118; 1961: 117). Coolabahs are associated with the song "Waltzing Matilda" and Winton, a town to the distant northeast of Mooraberrie.

[91]The Karuwali occupied an area of 12,800 square miles located at Farrars Creek from near Connemara south to Beetoota, Haddon Corner and Morney Plains; west to Durrie and Monkira on Diamantina River; east to Beal Range (Tindale 1974: 175). Neighbours included the Birria (Marulta), Karangura, Maiawali, Mithaka, and Yarluyandi (Jeljendi).

**8. The practice of leaf blowing was disseminated via ancient trade routes**

Duncan-Kemp's writings portray unadulterated leaf performances, not only by Old Macumbara, but by members of an itinerant *Wannameeri* (Red Ochre Party) who played "mouthed gumleaves" in Thanksgiving rites held besides a huge Coolabah "spirit-tree", the base of which was ochred in red, white and yellow (D-K 1968: 298). Deemed sacred by reason of their spirit-sent office of teaching Aboriginal religion and law, these fully initiated men wore circlets of dried leaves around their ankles. They passed through the entire outback, taking years to traverse trade routes and Dreamtime paths known only to their leaders (D-K 1968: 298-299).

Led by Nurrenderi (the Great Teacher), the *Wannameeri* included a group of *Wurrimata* (sacred ritual dancers) who, together with their musical instruments, housed the departed souls who had owned these dances and chants on earth. These souls helped the living and drove out evil (D-K 1968: insert between pp. 300-301). The *Wurrimata* performed the *Joondijubba-ree*, an important section of the Thanksgiving rite, which Duncan-Kemp (1968: 297) recalled:

> Then I heard the fascinating counter rhythm of rattle sticks and light stone chatter, done in a subtle undercover way as only the highly-gifted aboriginal can achieve through thousands of years of communal knowledge, study and know-how - and much hard work. The effect of this curious, compelling rhythm was heightened by the subtle punctuation at intervals of a loud insect-like chirping of mouthed gum leaves.

Evidence for rhythmic use of the gumleaf was strengthened by the research of Holmer and Holmer (1969: 31). In their translations of Dainggatti and Kattang stories from northern NSW, they noted that gumleaves were "much used, for marking the rhythm, by the Aborigines when making music". Again, this implies corroboree contexts, since gumleaves were used to play tunes in detribalised or westernised contexts.

In the early 1900s journalist Daisy Bates[92] witnessed the performance of a so-called *Wanji-wanji* travel dance by male performers passing through Eucla, WA.[93] They had penetrated trade routes along the Fortescue, Gascoyne, Ashburton and Murchison Rivers, making their way eastwards from the goldfields, then southwards as they performed two great dramatic dances:

> The *Wanji-wanji* came down along the river-heads, and the *Molongo-go* travelled south from a point east or south-east of Darwin. These dances took one or two generations to traverse the continent. The *Wanji-wanji* was an ancient dream dance, a dramatic rendering of the arrival of the second horde into Australia. It had reached the Bibbulmun long before white settlement in the south-west, and was known there as the *wanna-wa* (Bates 1938: 142).

Although Bates left no details of the instruments used by the *Wanji-wanji*, her account parallels that of the *Wurrimata*, raising the possibility that they may have introduced ritual leaf blowing to the Karuwali and other clans along their route. Beckett (1978: 16, 27) noted that Aboriginal stockman George Dutton, who worked the droving routes from the Channel Country (including Windorah) across to the Darling River, knew the *Wanji-Wanji* corroboree. The practice of leaf blowing may also have proliferated via intertribal exchange, since Reay (1949: 110) mentioned how individual members of NSW tribes would travel to southwestern Queensland to participate in traditional ceremonies.

The information given above may account for the observations of station manager William Wilson, who managed Cultowa Station, Wangalara (more correctly Wongalara Lake) near the Darling River from 1909-1922. The last elected "king" of the Mulga[94] clan (part of the Barundji) was "Old Albert" of the Goanna totem. Wilson (1946: 33) recorded the following notes on Albert and his younger cousin Paddy:

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[92]From the age of 41 years, Bates spent 35 years among the Aborigines of WA and the Nullarbor Plain. On occasion she assisted at tribal ceremonies normally forbidden for women to view.

[93]Three performances of the *Wanji-wanji* were provided daily for about a fortnight. They demanded a large number of performers, and for lack of them, eventually petered out. Old Tharnduriri, who was over 70 years old, remembered parts of the dance, which he had seen at Ayers Rock. Bates (1938: 143) could sing the opening stanza, *Warri wan-gan-ye*. Significantly, "*Warri*" is similar to the "*Wurri*" in *Wurrimata*, the sacred ritual dancers viewed by Duncan-Kemp.

[94]Mulga (*Acacia aneura*) is a small spreading tree that covers great areas of inland Australia.

> Both of them were splendid stockmen. Paddy would pick a special leaf from a tree while riding through the bush, give it a twist, put it in his mouth and play music similar to that of the piccolo. Old Albert played the violin and would accompany Paddy. They were so good at this that my wife asked them to come up to the verandah at Cultowa one night and play while the owner, Mr Leahy, was there. After they had given a very good performance I said to Paddy: "Thanks very much. Paddy; the music was beautiful." To which he replied in a quiet way, "The average man passes a lot of music in the day in the bush without knowing it."

Leaf playing is not mentioned in the descriptions of Muruwari traditional music which Jimmy Barker (1900-1972) supplied to Janet Mathews (1977), yet the combined comments of the Aborigines Archibald and Dennison, and the researchers Reay and Holmer and Holmer, project the gumleaf as a traditional NSW instrument. For this reason we cannot entirely discount the possibility that an ancient leaf instrument was once played by the Barundji, Kamilaroi and some clans in the far northwest of NSW, as well as the Kattang and Dainggatti across to the coast.

At the same time, Dening (1988: 99, 117) reminds us that "histories are the texted past", that historians must make a "reading of readings", and that they must "read the systems and the poetics in the sources". Limitations and possible exaggerations in the four novels, written by Duncan-Kemp between 15-50 years after she left Mooraberrie Station in 1918, caution us against their use as categorical proof. For one thing, Duncan-Kemp was not trained in linguistics and classified clans according to their totem names in English. We do not know whether she accurately recorded the information in the 1910s, relied on memory reflection, or appropriated writer's license in an attempt to satisfy the tastes of the 1930s-1960s reading market and the vogue for recreating the noble savage[95] in his pristine environment. Bradley (1995: 11) remarks that there is no other evidence corroborating the use of leaves with didjeridu and wooden flutes in the Channel Country at the beginning of the twentieth-century.

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[95]Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographic images of Aboriginal people were often artificially staged, which created erroneous impressions; this tendency was also reflected in literature.

In defence of Duncan-Kemp, her four books are consistent in ethnographic description. Their details were, and still are, quoted by eminent writers such as the anthropologist Charles P. Mountford (D-K 1952: xiii), the museum archivist Claudia Haagen (1994: 57), the ethnobotanist Tim Low (1988: 56), and the AIATSIS archaeologist David Horton. In his introduction to the *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* (1994: XIII), Horton quotes Duncan-Kemp's documentation on Karuwali fish-traps and Birria flax nets. If, like Horton, we accept the validity of these aspects of local Channel Country clan culture, then why dismiss documentation (from the same source) on the musical use of gumleaves?

Duncan-Kemp connected various Aboriginal spirit links with natural history and portrayed colourful impressions of the various timbral effects wrought by the leafists. Her descriptions could signify that the practice of blowing gumleaves in rituals was once widespread (presumedly via the *Wurrimata*) but survived only in isolated pockets, *e.g.* the Channel Country. However as Nettl (1971: 162) points out, geographical isolation can signify separate musical development. According to such a conjecture, independent pre-contact roots may have cradled the gumleaf music practice attributed to the Channel Country. This would be consistent with the theory that the more isolated Aboriginal clans preserved the oldest instruments.

## CONCLUSION

Gumleaf playing can be read as a metaphor for a distinctive world of common meaning, namely a culture's own self-image. Although I cannot prove that Aborigines blew leaves prior to contact, I concur with Kartomi (1997: 224) that "historia" should be respected as a valid and important kind of knowledge, notwithstanding the fact that some of the interpretations of research consultants towards tradition may be based on limited tribal knowledge or conditioned by current cultural politics. In any case, Aboriginal performances of Western tunes on gumleaves over at least six generations up until the present time have come to be regarded as "traditional" in their own right.

Harrison (1973: 2) noted that the assessment of the value of music-information from whatever time or place, and assisted by whatever apparatus, is still ultimately an exercise in the assessment of individual perception and communication. Our rationalising impulses might require a satisfactory explanation of traditional customs, but too rational a critique of the term "tradition" can undermine remnants of the beliefs and musical practices that have survived from earlier times, making it all the more difficult to reproduce something of the atmosphere which surrounded them.

Drawing on accumulated circumstantial evidence from my conversations and readings, I explored eight solutions for the pre-contact roots of the activity. These are so interrelated that to isolate one as a sole creative force would be to convey an erroneous impression of the leaf instrument's origins, considering that the indigenously constructed prehistory of the leaf soundmaker does not withstand scientific verification. Taken singly, the beliefs of research participants do not define the origins of the modern Australian leaf instrument, but neither should they be cursorily dismissed as mythicisations.

Considered together, they emerge as a set of cultural clues: leaf playing is believed to have been inspired by the birds and some came to regard it as a predestined talent/symbol of identity; some hunters created identical sounds on leaves to "trick" animals and birds; children blew leaf music toys and some adults blew leaves recreationally, *e.g.* to produce echo effects; the leaf was employed as a ritualistic rhythmic marker and melodic/timbral "sound effect" device; and blown leaves personified spirit or ghost sounds which carried specific names.

Such clues suggest that the character of leaf sounds that might have been produced by the ancient Aboriginal peoples is far removed from the sounds of the Europeanised Aboriginal gumleaf bands of the twentieth-century. Furthermore, the extent to which women may have participated in whistling either by lips or with the aid of a gumleaf is unknown. As gatherers, women had easy access to leaves, but if leaf soundmakers were associated with the male initiatory custom of tooth avulsion it may have been taboo for women to blow them. In any

case, freedom in the picking and blowing of leaves may have been extensively restricted by specific folklore taboos.

As a symbol of the link between the land and Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal men and women alike are now appropriating native leaves as a "variation on a theme" - one resource for dealing with gaps in cultural knowledge. In the metaphorical representation of other realms of nature, each leaf has a voice of its own, *e.g.* as personified via birdcalls. Leaves thus become life and death reminders through which performers can redress cultural customs and express personal emotions.

As end products of the original forces, which shaped them, the first five clues suggest the existence of (peripheral) prehistoric leaf soundmakers, which evolved over an unknown period of time. As a means of fulfilling non-musical needs, their consumption may have waxed and waned in relation to regional clan diffusion and constraints imposed by natural environments. Although some tribes may not have blown leaves at all, others may have exploited them for specific ceremonial use, *i.e.* as melody carriers and/or rhythmic markers. The hypothetical transition from a pre-existent soundmaker to an artistic musical medium in socio-religious activity could have evolved, for example, via Elders experimenting with leaves during walkabout.

The most likely vehicles for dissemination of a ritualistic form of leaf playing in the Channel Country were itinerant groups. Without overstretching the description at hand, it is feasible that local, independently derived ceremonial leaf traditions existed in other remote areas where trees or shrubs grew along waterholes. If such traditions existed closer to towns and settlements, however, they were soon rapidly lost in the encroachment of Western melody, harmony, counterpoint and sectionalised form which is the focus of the following chapter.

# CHAPTER TWO

## THE ABORIGINE'S ADOPTION OF THE GUMLEAF AS A MEDIUM FOR PERFORMANCES OF WESTERN MUSIC

*The gum leaf was, and remains, a favourite instrument among Aborigines. It cost nothing, was always available and was identifiably Aboriginal*

(Jackomos and Fowell 1993: 14)

The association of gumleaf playing with the reinforcement and reconstruction of Aboriginal cultural identity continues to provide a unifying theme throughout the next two chapters. The story of the birth, growth and decline of mission-instigated gumleaf bands (prevalent in southeastern Australia from the late nineteenth-century until World War II) is presented in these chapters as a marginal cultural-artistic development in a period of foreign domination. It demonstrates the incumbent pattern of musical transculturation[1] in Australia and the response which indigenous peoples made to this process. The functions of the gumleaf in the wider context of the detribalised Aboriginal instrumentarium also receive ample attention.

This chapter is divided into two interconnected parts, which link the past and present practice of gumleaf playing in parts of SA, Victoria, NSW and southeast Queensland. In Part 1 I focus on history, untangling various influences on the performance of gumleaf music by dispossessed Aboriginal clan groups from the late nineteenth-century. My interpretations of the detribalised Aboriginal cultural heritage augment those of Ellis *et al* (1988) and Breen (1989), whilst providing an expanded history of the gumleaf band movement sketched in Jackomos (1971, 1993) and Bradley (1995). The major Aboriginal gumleaf bands (*i.e.* Wallaga Lake, Lake Tyers and Cummeragunga) will be the focus of Chapter 3.

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[1] A cover term for the complete cycle of musical processes set in motion by culture contact, including the influx of new culture elements and the loss or alteration of existing ones (based on Kartomi 1981: 233-234).

One noticeable result of Black/White culture contact revealed in this chapter concerns the process of musical absorption, *i.e.* the Aborigines' pace of adjustment to the musical tastes of their invaders. This was generally fast, for instance during the early "missionary music period" Aborigines were compelled to substitute Western hymn repertoires for traditional songs and dances. Later, at Lake Tyers, Victoria, leafists frequently played the "latest airs of the gramophone record" (Leason 1934: 5).

In more isolated ares, however, some Aborigines retained these adopted Western styles in time lags of up to one or two decades. This can be explained by:

1. their geographical insulation from the influence of new styles

2. the movements of some Aboriginal populations (*e.g.* to missions and later to cities) and the psychological adjustment necessitated by these moves

3. the casual, non-Western attitude which some Aborigines retain towards time,[2] and

4. a collision of value systems and musical expressions between the two cultures, whereby the Aboriginal performer remains in a steady state of creative liminality, *i.e.* balanced on the threshold of two systems.

Aboriginal musicians have not merely been the passive recipients of foreign culture; aspects of their own musical traditions have remained "built in" to their cultural make-up. In detribalised secular contexts in particular, they have been relatively free to select, reshape, and appropriate other musics into their own (often remnant) indigenous expressions. In many cases, Aborigines also developed new musical variants to meet ongoing cultural, social and economic needs. Touring gumleaf bands, for instance, needed to take into account the presence of non-Aboriginal audiences as they developed their repertoires.

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[2]See Ellis (1984) for a detailed study of the time-consciousness of Aboriginal performers.

Sullivan (1988: 66) claimed that gumleaf ensembles constituted the most significant instrumental tradition of southeastern Aboriginal Australia in the post-colonial period, their heyday having occurred in the 1920s and 1930s by which time there was literally one on every mission. Very large numbers of Aboriginal people played Western music on native leaves from the turn of the century through to the end of World War II. The teacher Anna Vroland (1951: 33) stated that there was a gumleaf band at almost any entertainment she attended in Aboriginal Victoria.

Throughout this chapter, then, the gumleaf band tradition emerges as firmly fixed "Aboriginal cultural property". Evidence, which I gathered on my northward-bound fieldtrips into Victoria and NSW, illuminates its functions as a lively outlet for detribalised people buffeted around by the various outworkings of government protectionist[3] and assimilationist[4] policies, and its important contribution to the success of the mission movement in the wake of some of its earlier failures to evangelise Aboriginal people. For one thing, I address the omission in the available literature to provide an account of the Salvation Army's extensive influence on Aboriginal music-making from the beginnings of their work on Australian soil in 1880.

It is my contention that a great deal of gumleaf playing occurred on remote mission stations and reserves which were rarely visited by non-Aboriginal people. Dispossessed of both their land and customs, Black Australians became increasingly dependent on the colonial

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[3]Authoritarian management of Aboriginal groups was first spelt out in recommendations made by a British parliamentary select committee on Aborigines to the House of Commons in 1837. From the 1860s nearly all the Australian colonies developed bureaucracies to administer Aborigines' lives (see Markus 1987; Haebich 1988). In NSW the Aborigines Protection Board was established in 1883, and from 1909-1963 it administered the Aborigines Protection Act 1909 with absolute authority. An attitude of paternalism arguably characterised the entire colonial period from the 1830s to Federation (1901), and well into the 1960s and 1970s in some states (Howie-Willis 1994: 903-904).

[4]Assimilation is the process by which a dominant cultural group absorbs a suppressed group into its society, with the ultimate effect of destroying the subjugated society, unlike integration, where societies evolve, diversify and benefit from interaction (Behrendt 1994: 68). From the 1940s, assimilation was designed to impose loss of membership of Aboriginal ethnic groups, even though its practice allowed some limited possibilities of entry into the dominant Anglo-Saxon group.

administration and society for their physical survival. From the beginnings of missionisation[5] in the 1840s, sacred music began to impinge on traditional musical repertoires, whilst secular forms of Western music seeped into the fringe settlements adjacent to some country towns. Accordingly, in Part 2 of this chapter, I map out a more widespread prevalence for gumleaf playing than the eleven locations (Map 1) collated by Alice Moyle in her PhD thesis (1974).

## PART 1: HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

Evidence abounds from the beginnings of colonisation in Australia that Aborigines performed Western tunes with flair.[6] The gumleaf instrument proved an attractive and inexpensive proposition for detribalised people who were the subjects of Christian evangelisation in the late nineteenth-century, whilst at the same time becoming a popular functional medium for Aboriginal stockmen in the bush. Once having captured their popular imagination, the medium provided a staple means of social and artistic expression from the high-colonial period through to the end of World War II, with the major leaf ensembles (see Chapter 3) becoming visible in southeastern Australia from the 1920s-1940s.

As Sullivan (1988: 64-65) so aptly pointed out, the Aboriginal traditions parallelled the non-Aboriginal traditions in many ways, but possessed their own creative thrust. A musical continuum has been manifest from pre-contact times until the present, providing cultural escapes from, and compensations for, the hardships endured by Aboriginal people, including the dissonance of their entry into the urban milieu.[7]

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[5]"Missionisation" is a loose umbrella description for the various institutional means of proselytising Australia's indigenous peoples. Some church bodies exercised full local administrative power on behalf of state governments. Elsewhere the churches and mission agencies conducted schools, hospitals, farms and/or commercial enterprises on government-run Aboriginal stations and reserves. In other places the church's influence was limited to religious or social functions (Howie-Willis 1994e: 1303).

[6]For example, in January 1788, during one of the first encounters between Aborigines and the British, Tench noted that when a British officer whistled the air of "Malbrooke" (an old French Song), the natives appeared highly charmed and imitated him with 'equal pleasure and readiness' (Tench 1789 [1996]: 43).

[7]Based on Sullivan (1988: 64-5) and Ryan (1992: 26).

As the various forms of lowbrow and highbrow secular musics were distributed throughout Australia, an ever-increasing direct and indirect pressure was placed upon Aborigines to model their music-making on that of the dominant culture,[8] and to adopt and adapt hymns, folk songs, bush ballads, music hall and blackface minstrel show songs into their own performance culture. In response to this pressure, many Aborigines quite skilfully incorporated European and Black American music into their own cultural worlds - well before non-Aboriginal Australians deployed aspects of Aboriginal culture as national icons in popular culture.

Ellis *et al* (1988: 169-170) noticed that remnants of tribal performances, *e.g.* additive rhythms and phrases and the use of some non-European intervals, carried over into indigenous variations of these genres. Some of their observations impinge on the character of gumleaf band performance (Chapter 3) and solo gumleaf performance (Chapter 5). A detailed examination of indigenous, Christian, and secular influences on leaf music performance is presented below.

## 1. Indigenous Musical Influences

The violinist Isabelle Moresby (1948: 12)[9] described gumleaf music as "the kind of Aboriginal music most frequently heard by Australia's White population", as she elegantly romanticised a "noble savage" case for its origins:

> In his use of the leaves of trees - Eucalyptus or Gum trees - for making music, the Australian Aborigine is probably unique [not true]. These he has, of course, in millions; an unending supply of fresh "instruments" daily ... It is astonishing what can be accomplished singly, or in groups, by these dusky gum-leaf players, from a plaintive and primitive melody, to the modern popular tunes, centuries removed. All that is needed is a gum leaf to the lips, and the skill to play it (Moresby 1948: 12).

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[8]Under the government policy of assimilation it was uncommon for Aboriginal artists to find acceptance in the dominant cultural group, and then only by adopting Western cultural forms. For instance, Albert Namatjira rose to fame after he had learnt to paint in a Western style, tenor Harold Blair after he had been acclaimed for his performances of Western classical music.

[9]Apart from Duncan-Kemp, Moresby is the only female author known to have raised the subject of gumleaf music before scholarly references emerged in the writings of Reay and Moyle in 1949 and 1966 respectively.

Moresby did not reference this gratifyingly picturesque scene, which would have been based on observations of gumleaf bands in touristic settings, or perhaps even a reading of Duncan-Kemp's *Our Sandhill Country* (1933). The extent to which detribalised people played traditional melodies on leaves is questionable, although there is evidence in the autobiography of the late Aboriginal soprano Margaret Tucker[10] (1977: 164) that gumleaves formed part of the instrumental accompaniment to (unnamed) Aboriginal songs sung in different dialects at mid twentieth-century gatherings in Melbourne. Some of these may have been recently constructed "tribal" songs about contact themes, or songs with a mixture of pidgin English and Aboriginal dialect.

Bradley (1995: 7) maintains that the only known recorded example of a traditional tune played on the gumleaf is "Gurrjinjanami", well known amongst the Aboriginal peoples of Queensland. It was performed at the home of Norris Blair in Maryborough, presumedly by Blair himself, but there is no record that the leaf used was a eucalypt. Recordist Nils Holmer was told that "Gurrjinjanami" was an "Islander song" (perhaps because it was accompanied by a ukulele); this was denied by the Torres Strait Islander people he questioned.[11]

Herbert Patten occasionally plays two traditional tunes on the leaf. The first is the welcome song "Yumi Yumi Yari", which the well-known Aboriginal musician Joe Geia introduced to Melbourne from North Queensland about 1982. The tune (Tape Example 12, Musical Example 1)[12] is characteristically tribal since it features repeated low notes at the ends of descending phrases. Sung by many eastern Australian Aboriginal people at festivals and dances, its general popularity justifies its inclusion in Patten's repertoire. He would,

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[10]Born at Moonacullah Mission, NSW in 1904, Margaret Tucker was decorated for her charity work in leading the Aboriginal Concert Party during World War II, amongst many other achievements. Herbert Patten played a gumleaf lament at her funeral at the Aborigines' Advancement League, Melbourne on 29 August 1996.

[11]Holmer (Maryborough Q'ld 1970) AIATSIS A4387. Bradley (1995: 7) incorrectly cited February-March 1964 as the date of the recording.

[12]Ryan (Glen Iris Vic 1995) RRC T9.

however, be more wary about including lesser-known items from distant Aboriginal cultures into his performances.

The second item, which Patten believes to be a love song, contains an unnamed Yorta Yorta melody from the Murray River (Tape Example 13, Musical Example 2).[13] Patten learnt it from Joyce Johnson, although he is unable - due to the loss of cultural knowledge - to relate its musical style to any specific ceremony. Since the tune does not bear any obvious characteristics of traditional Aboriginal music, it might be more correctly classified as an introduced traditional tune, *ie.* a European tune which acquired Aboriginal words, or a syncretic tune which acquired so-called traditional status.

As practised in the first half of the twentieth-century, gumleaf ensemble playing also fitted McDonald's formulation for the properties of "tradition" (see McDonald 1996: 116). It was a shared, repeatable activity activated by a certain spiritual/emotional power in the relationship network of those involved in its execution, a power which was produced by, and in its turn, actively generated a conscious desire for the activity and its relationship-network to persist. Sacred musical influences, which were fundamental to this new-found or invented tradition, therefore provide the second focal point of this exploration into detribalised gumleaf playing.

## 2. Christian Musical Influences

Christianity exerted a huge influence over some nineteenth-century Aboriginal societies (see Swain and Rose 1988). Many of the missionaries who arrived from the 1820s, to target tribes for conversion, exhibited paternalistic concern but no understanding of how the church in Australia could be indigenised within the linguistic and musical cultures of the Aboriginal people. For example, Aboriginal subjects indoctrinated under Lutheran care were usually

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[13]Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1996) RRC T10.

expected to sing in German.[14] Some missionaries unwittingly curtailed the use of Aboriginal languages, banned initiations, and discouraged the transmission of indigenous cultural heritage. Others were successful in helping Aboriginal people maintain their culture while acquiring skills valued by white society. Illustrations provided in this chapter show how "being Aboriginal" has become a priority for the indigenous church today, for instance many Aboriginal pastors now uphold Christ to be the fruition of the Dreaming.

Sullivan (1988), Anderson (1995) and Bradley (1995) did not mention the gumleaf's roots and distribution in SA, which according to the present investigation furnishes the first published account of regimented gumleaf playing in Aboriginal Australia.[15] Entitled *The "Eucalyptus Band": It Fetched the Crowd,* the following eye-witness account was reported by a gentleman with the *nom de plume* "Temora", at Bordertown, SA in July 1892:

> Well, I have travelled about a good deal, and seen a lot of your people and their work, but I never saw such a characteristic procession or heard such unusual music as I did here on Saturday night ... Of the twenty who were in the march, only five were white people; two of these played brass instruments, and three aboriginals, two of them juniors, played on gumleaves, and four others manipulated on the big drum, kettle-drum, bones and triangle. This characteristic procession, however, attracted a large crowd to our open airring [*sic*]. We had a collection and the people gave 10s. with but little begging, assisted by a solo from brother Wilkinson.[16]

It is highly likely that these Aborigines were members of the Potaruwutj (Bindjali), who according to Tindale (1972: 218), constantly shifted camps in the mallee district.[17] Religious itinerants undoubtedly observed and/or instigated gumleaf playing in remote localities. For this reason, I looked more closely into the connections between the Salvation Army and the adoption of gumleaf playing by Aboriginal Australians. (In Chapter 4, this is balanced by a discussion of the Army's influence on leaf playing amongst non-Aboriginal Australians).

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[14]Lutherans first established a "native school" on the Torrens River, Adelaide in 1839, which operated until 1948. They then established missions at Encounter Bay (1840-48), Port Lincoln (Poonindie 1840-75), Killalpaninna (1866-1917), Koonibba (1901-1963) and Yalata (1954-75). A Moravian mission was established at Point Pearce (1868-1915). In the 1950s, Pastor P. Scherer translated 140 hymns for the Dieri at Cooper's Creek, Killalpaninna.

[15]My gratitude is due to George Ellis for uncovering this valuable source.

[16]*The War Cry,* 30 July 1892: 7.

[17]The "gumleaves" mentioned were probably a species of mallee (a tough, shrub-like eucalypt; see Chapter 6).

The Salvation Army began operations in Australia in 1880, holding its first meeting around a gum tree in the Botanic Park,[18] and its members soon established many outposts for the evangelisation of Aboriginal people. According to Cleary (1997: 501), cornet player Thomas Sutherland established the pattern of musical combinations at every local corps (church) centre. In 1886 a contingent which travelled to a Congress in London included two Aborigines who may have performed on leaves during their visit, according to Salvation Army archivist George Ellis of Melbourne (pers. comm., 25 November 1994). [19]

Where financial support was forthcoming, brass bands or orchestras were established on missions, but in more deprived environments gumleaf bands were established. They mushroomed in the early twentieth-century due to inter-missionary activity between Aboriginal groups in adjacent regions. In some localities, pastors and missionaries from several different denominations, *e.g.* Anglican Bush Brothers or Methodist Sisters, would hold church services at the same venue during the week, each presenting their own versions of Christian doctrine and sacred music. A minister who played a guitar or an accordion would draw a good crowd. The same inmates attended every service and participated in the rites of each denomination (Keating 1994: 76-77); as a result, some Aboriginal people developed a broad understanding of the concept of ecumenicalism.

The type of sacred music to which Aboriginal people were exposed depended to a large extent on the missionaries' perceptions of the level of skill of Aboriginal performers (Ellis 1994a: 421). There were no hymnbooks produced specifically for Aboriginal people in the nineteenth-century; indeed it was not until 1974 that Pastor K. Mildon compiled the book *Gospel Favourites along the Murray*.[20] The collection comprises 334 hymns, carols and choruses, selected by the Aboriginal people among whom Mildon worked from his base at

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[18]*The War Cry*, 99/30, Saturday 26 July 1980: 2.

[19]In 1888 when another party of Aborigines was taken to London to participate in the first big international meet of the Salvation Army, music was essential to their agenda (pers. comm. from Mrs June Webb, 27 March 1995).

[20]Mission Publications of Australia, NSW (1974); a publication used by the AEF.

Murray Bridge. Some texts are provided "in the language", with standard English hymns not being well represented, apart from the favourite Christmas carols.

Many early missions failed because they could not bridge the enormous gap between the Western and non-Western cultures in question. Ellis *et al* (1988: 163, 165) note that Aboriginal people were comparatively receptive to sacred music because of its function as a formal ritual communication with the powers of creation, and the altered state of awareness that this can establish. As a means for expressing this communication, gumleaf playing was more acceptable to Aboriginal people than sophisticated European instrumental music-making; missionaries obviously capitalised on retaining this (perceived) "black bit" in Aboriginal people, *i.e.* their belief in the efficacy of their own lives - as well as the economic advantages of leaf playing - to further the evangelistic cause. We should not therefore discount some gentle missionary coercion in the formation of the first Aboriginal gumleaf ensemble, wherever that might have been.

Leaf playing spread to remote areas of Western Australia, *e.g.* the Mt Margaret Mission, Laverton, and the Kurrawang Mission, between Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. During his visit to Kurrawang on 29 March 1973, part-American Indian country and western singer Johnny Cash described the local leaf playing as "the most incredibly beautiful music I've ever heard".[21]

Australia's first known full-blood Aboriginal leafist to tour as a soloist/evangelist was born in Leonora, Western Australia. As a child, Peter Wandy (Illustration 1) was "removed" to the Eastern States, where he was so maltreated that he ran away to sleep in the Domain, Sydney.

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[21] "The Day That Johnny Cash Came to Town", *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Newsletter* 1/3, June 1973: 33.

A policeman guided him to La Perouse Reserve,[22] where he converted to Christianity (AIAS 1988: 29). Wandy later accompanied Rev. E. J. Telfer of the Australian Aborigines Mission (AAM, founded 1893) by bicycle in 1907 on preaching journeys to raise money, and in some outback places he may have introduced the activity of leaf playing for the first time. Wandy played the leaf at lantern lectures and concerts in Perth:[23]

> His presence at the meetings was a great attraction, and his musical items played upon the gum-leaf amazed those who had been accustomed to think of the Aborigines as a useless and degraded people. How vividly we recollect the great meeting held in the Queen's Hall, and how the audience listened in breathless silence and with evident emotion while Wandy played with tender expression that beautiful hymn.
>
> -"Saviour, Thy dying love Thou gavest me, Nor should I ought withhold, my Lord, from Thee; In love my soul would bow, my heart fulfil its vow, Some offering bring Thee now, something for Thee" (Telfer 1939: 110; see also Haebich 1988: 109).

Unless Wandy had blown leaves as a child when he wandered with his clan, he would have been introduced to the activity by stockmen in NSW, or other Aborigines at La Perouse. His story strengthens the case for a prevalent gumleaf tradition at the beginning of the twentieth-century, especially in NSW.

Another prominent church leafist at La Perouse was boomerang-maker Thomas Henry (Dark) Williams, a Burra-bidee from the Kamilaroi tribal region. Williams grew up at Coonabarabran, fought in Egypt from 1914-1918, and died in 1936 (AIAS 1988: 45-46; see photograph, p. 44). The artefacts industry which endured for a century at La Perouse provided men such as Williams with a transitional culture, as old skills associated with hunting and gathering were adapted to the new demands of the market (based on McKenzie and Stephan 1987: 179).

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[22]La Perouse was settled by Illawarra and south coast Aborigines around 1878. The reserve was given official status in 1892; residents received religious instruction from the Methodists (UAM) from 1894. About 80 Aborigines were living at La Perouse in 1900, south coast tribespeople who had come north for the fish. Some La Perouse missionaries who went to Bellbrook in 1903 and 1907 may have introduced leaf playing into the church services there.

[23]Salvation Army Captain Alf James, who conducted a military band from 1934 to the end of World War II, taught Western Australian Aboriginal people to play hymns on the gumleaf. Alf's son, Officer Raymond James (pers. comm., 8 December 1994), noticed one or two Aborigines busking with gumleaves on Perth streets in 1956.

## 2.1 Leaf Hymn Playing

The rendering of hymns on gumleaves was standard practice in Aboriginal communities in the first half of the twentieth-century. Leaf playing at Cowra NSW, for example, dates back to at least July 1924, when a missionary described a rendition of "Nearer, my God, to Thee" by young men on leaves with organ and violin accompaniment as one of the sweetest musical items he had ever heard.[24] In August of the same year, missionary Retta Long wrote:

> The musical talent of the Cowra Mission Station would be hard to excel. There are quite a number of organists and violinists and leaf players and we hear that often this orchestra is augmented by the guitar and harp.[25]

For historical reasons, some Christian hymns were eventually recognised by many Aboriginal people as their main expression of Aboriginality (based on Ellis 1994a: 421). The musical identification marks that differentiate these hymns from the same hymns sung by non-Aboriginal Australians reside partly in the slow tempo of the singing and the extensive and deliberate use of slides from one note to another (Ellis 1994c: 743).

## 2.2 "The Old Rugged Cross"

When the eminent ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl visited the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) at the University of Adelaide in 1977 and asked the urban Aboriginal people present to sing the song which they felt most reflected their Aboriginal identity, they chose "The Old Rugged Cross":[26]

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[24]"Cowra", *Our AIM*, July 23 1924: 8. At this time, five Aborigines at Cowra could play the organ by ear.

[25]"Frost, Rain - Love and Warmth at Cowra", *Our AIM*, August 23 1924: 10.

[26]Osbeck (1982: 255) describes "The Old Rugged Cross" as "the most popular of all twentieth-century hymns". In a radio poll taken in the USA about 20 years after it was written, it received over 6,000 more votes than "Nearer, my God, to Thee" (Avery 1961: 32).

> This, they explained, had been taught to them as children, and was sung by their parents and in their homes. Many similar songs followed this initial one. All were associated with the warmth of home and the close relationships of the people of the community. None were of tribal origin, but many showed unconscious influences of tribal musical structures. Although outsiders hear these songs as entirely non-Aboriginal, this music does in fact provide many clues about the means by which tribal and Western music may be bridged ... the particular style of performance and manipulation of structure are characteristically Aboriginal (Ellis 1979: 32-33; see also Ellis, Brunton and Barwick 1988: 165).

Ellis, Brunton and Barwick did not account for the likelihood that the Salvation Army first introduced "The Old Rugged Cross" to the Aboriginal people. The American George Bennard (1873-1958) composed its words and music in 1913 during his work in the Army, after which it was quickly disseminated throughout their outposts in Australia. Some other hymns which the Salvation Army popularised in Aboriginal Australia were "How Great Thou Art", "Pass Me Not, O Loving Saviour", and "Tell Me The Old, Old Story".

Taken collectively, the research of Ellis, Brunton and Barwick showed how the introduction of various instruments played a crucial role in introducing European intervals and concepts of metre in Aboriginal performance practice. This was illustrated in 1962 with a recording of gumleaf duo Annie Mason and Cyril Lindsay[27] of Gerard Mission, Swan Reach in the Upper Murray region, SA (administered by the UAM from 1925-61). Their renditions of "The Old Rugged Cross", "Whispering Hope" and "Out of my Bondage" were performed in parts.[28]

Musical Example 3 of "The Old Rugged Cross" (Tape Example 14) highlights slides (or glides) in thirds and sixths as the most prominent feature of the style, just as slides characterised the Aborigines' singing of hymns. Executed by manipulating the lips, this ghostly "sliding" form of harmony is germane to the physical limitations of the leaf instrument, but permits the smooth delivery of high notes which would be difficult to place in the case of wide intervals - thus allowing for greater technical facility. Along with the

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[27]Possibly of Pitjantjatjara descent (see Moyle 1966: 116), although Swan Reach was originally established for remnants of the Manunka clan (Telfer 1939: 171).

[28]Ellis (Swan Reach SA 1962) AIATSIS 3324.

pulsating vibrato[29] in the lower part, slides provided a characteristic outlet through which Aboriginal performers could stamp their own identity on an exclusively diatonic repertoire, as well as encapsulating the "soulful expression" which Brigadier F.G. Hawkes deemed appropriate to "The Old Rugged Cross" in its first year of publication:

> Naturally, soulful expression is called for, and it should not be sung too quickly. The melody will speedily be committed to memory.[30]

It is highly likely that Mason and Lindsay deliberately selected leaves of contrasting timbres and pitch ranges; in any case this was the custom with part playing of leaves on the southeastern seaboard.[31] Comparison with the original score (Musical Example 4) shows that they raised the pitch into a higher key and adapted the metre from 6/8 to an irregular 3/4. Theoretically speaking, this demonstrates how social change and minor variations in musical style may govern musical change (Blacking 1986: 9).

Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist and Uniting Church hymns are still used in Aboriginal churches. "The Old Rugged Cross" remains popular at meetings of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF), and in early 1996 three leafists played it at a funeral on the Murray (pers. comm. from Sharon Atkinson of Dharnya Cultural Centre, Barmah on 12 January 1996).

Leaf hymn playing was perpetuated by some Aboriginal pastors well into the 1970s. Schultz (in Breen 1989: 22) noted that the practice still happened spontaneously in Aboriginal churches, sometimes to the accompaniment of harmonium or piano. He cited the examples of three pastor-leafists, namely Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls,[32] Pastor Ben Mason MBE (*d.* 1993),[33] and Yami Lester of the Pitjantjatjara Council.[34] More information about pastor-

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[29]Pulsating leaf vibrato may owe its origins to the "shaky voice" technique of traditional singing, music played on the saw with a violin bow, or the "jungle" sounds peculiar to the "novelty jazz" of the 1920s.

[30]*The Musical Salvationist* 38, Part 5, May 1924.

[31]Information supplied by Goonabahn (Bert Marr) on 9 July 1994.

[32]The influence Nicholls exerted on gumleaf music is outlined in Chapter 3.

[33]A Western Desert Ngaanyatjarra descendant, see photograph in *EAA*, p. 437.

leafists is supplied in the second half of this chapter, but meantime equal attention should be given to the other socio-musical inspirations which influenced detribalised Aboriginal culture in the colonial period.

### 3. Secular Musical Influences

One great difficulty in determining the characteristics of early Aboriginal performances of European-derived music lies in the fact that whereas non-Aboriginal performance was often described in great detail in, for example, colonial reviews, virtually no such primary sources exist for Aboriginal performance other than the diaries and reports of missionaries. One researcher, Chris Sullivan, describes Aboriginal adoption and adaptation of settlers' music; but for whatever reason he does not reference his claims in his 1988 article on this topic. Yet this is undoubtedly a seminal work based on deep knowledge of the field via oral history research, and the following discussion must place some reliance on it.

#### 3.1 Dance Forms

Although not fully substantiated, strong competing influences on the early detribalised Aboriginal music repertoire probably included localised regional versions of pan-European dance forms,[35] followed by the corpus of late nineteenth-century British and American theatre songs which bush song-makers recycled to suit their own ends. Secular forces which specifically influenced the character of Aboriginal gumleaf bands were drum-and-fife bands, brass bands, German bands and pipe bands (*e.g.* Sullivan 1988: 67).

Claypan dances held on flats or riverbanks on the edges of towns, at whaling/fishing stations, or on outback properties were a dominant feature of Aboriginal social life from the mid-

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[34]Now chief custodian of Uluru (Ayers Rock), Lester (Introduced in Chapter 1) was once well known as a leafist in some of Adelaide's mainstream churches.

[35]Once early to mid nineteenth-century European dance forms such as the waltz, polka, schottische, mazurka and quadrilles reached the bush, the tunes played for them evolved over time into an entirely new music, in the same way that spoken Australian English differs from English used in any other country (Sullivan 1992: 6-7).

nineteenth-century to the early 1970s. In areas where access to dance halls and shearing sheds was barred, Aborigines selected claypans and lit fires to provide light. Twentieth-century musicians with button accordions would sit on oil drums to accompany complete social dance programmes (Meredith 1995: 68). Colonial dance musicians influenced the form and character of detribalised dance, although, as I will illustrate in Chapter 3, corroboree steps and antics were retained well into the twentieth-century.

Aborigines sometimes removed partitions from the old wooden houses to facilitate dancing, although many groups continued to prefer dancing in the open (Meredith 1995: 68; Morgan 1994: 64-65). Sullivan does not describe any gumleaf accompaniments to claypan dances in his 1988 article, but the leaf was presumedly a readily accessible substitute in communities where commercial instruments were unobtainable. Sullivan does state (again without supplying evidence) that the gumleaf had become widely established as a musical instrument in Victoria, NSW and southern Queensland by the last quarter of the nineteenth-century.

The hallmark of Aboriginal performers was their versatility. Individuals would entertain by playing the accordion and gumleaf (no hands), stepdancing[36] while playing the mouth organ and the spoons, playing the gumleaf while playing the mouth organ with the nose, etc. (Sullivan 1988: 65-66). In support of Sullivan's line of argument, evidence that gumleaf playing was used to accompany stepdancing in the early twentieth-century is supplied in Tucker's description of a typical Aboriginal wedding feast at Deniliquin (presumedly in the late 1910s, since Tucker was born in 1904 and forcibly removed from her family in 1917):

[36]The display of special steps executed by individual performers.

> After the feast was over, believe it or not, a violin and a concertina would come to light. One of the Coopers played the violin. The rollicking dance tunes from that little Aboriginal three-man band, and others playing gum leaves, was something to remember. Jack Brown[37] and Dinny Myers would do the step dance on one of the old doors laid flat on the ground. After every item the yells of delight would have lifted the roof if there had been a roof, but all this merriment and jollification took place under the stars. The highlight would be when a few would do the corroboree ... After seeing the old dances, sets, lancers we would be promenading up and down every chance we got for weeks after. Those Aboriginal musicians were asked to play for white men's socials and dances. You may think it is strange our Aboriginal people picking up the white people's instruments and playing their music, when their own singing and harmonising was natural (Tucker 1977: 86-87).

Sullivan (1988: 65) does not supply primary source material to account for his statement that the performance of European influenced/derived dance, music and song by Aboriginal people[38] dates from at least the 1850s and almost certainly earlier. However, he points to the early twentieth-century itinerant Aboriginal musicians who were renowned for their musical ability. For example, Hero Black (composer of "The Menindee Waltz") was employed to entertain on the boats plying the Murray and Darling Rivers.

The commercial music of touring British and American opera, operetta, music hall and blackface minstrel shows reached Aboriginal people indirectly, evidenced by some of the comic items performed on twentieth-century fringe settlements. These, and plantation ballads, were danced to at parties in a minstrel buck 'n wing style which featured a lot of foot kicking (Breen 1989: 22-24). Vaudeville - a music hall or variety show including comic acts performed in front of paying audiences - impinged on the performance culture of touring Aboriginal gumleaf bands in the 1920s and 1930s (Chapter 3).[39]

### 3.2 Blackface Minstrelsy and Coon Songs

Of all these secular influences, blackface minstrel shows in particular may turn out to be especially relevant to the understanding of the Aboriginal adoption and adaptation of

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[37]Brown was an expert stepdancer, accordion and concertina player (see photograph in Tucker 1977: opposite p. 129).

[38]This phenomenon apparently parallelled the adoption of European language, dress, work practices and a semi-sedentary lifestyle, according to Sullivan (1988: 65).

[39]Vaudeville remained popular with Australian families up until the arrival of television in 1956.

mainstream popular performance culture. One must ask, for example, how the nineteenth-century Aboriginal population responded to contact with a form of musical entertainment that often depicted extremely talented and popular entertainers made up to look like "black men".

Waterhouse (1990) and Covell (1967) have asked similar questions; and some Australian writers, namely Sullivan (1988) and Breen (1989), refer to some aspects of this influence. It is far beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to address this question. However, as the influence of blackface minstrelsy may have had a direct or indirect bearing on the performance characteristics of the Aboriginal gumleaf bands that emerged in the first half of this century, I shall at least survey this influence and what has been said about it. Here, it should also be recalled that minstrelsy was the forerunner of the even more influential genres of African-American inflected popular music which reached Australia, namely Tin Pan Alley-style ragtime, and jazz.

Blackface minstrel troupes began to penetrate Australia during the 1850s, and from the late 1870s they included authentic African-American minstrel shows (Waterhouse 1990: 64). Their presentation went though several phases,[40] which probably had considerable bearing on the ways in which Aboriginal people began at some (as yet undefined) date to parody blackface minstrel show material within their own social and performance contexts. The so-called "hot coon"[41] stereotype of the urban Negro,[42] which emerged after the American Civil War, reached Australia by the late 1890s, along with some associated racist rhetoric (based on Whiteoak 1993: 254). The colonial and early post-colonial response to the stereotyping of

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[40]Some of the earliest minstrel shows to perform in Australia (*e.g.* Howard's Ethiopian Serenaders, Geelong, 1850) claimed to be presenting the "correct presentation" of American slave plantation culture (Whiteoak 1993: 215), but the later nineteenth-century Christy-style minstrelsy favoured by British and colonial blackface minstrels largely abandoned the notion of imitating the perceived "primitive" or "grotesque" aspects of plantation culture (Waterhouse 1990: 40-43).

[41]"Coon", the racist American term for "black person", was adopted in Australia as a (resented) term for Aboriginal people, along with "black crow" and "piccaninny" (black baby). These terms generated the indigenous counterparts "Jacky Jacky" and "gin". Coon songs made fun of the fears of Aboriginal people, thus bringing many of their problems to light.

[42]The current term at the time, later replaced by "Black American" and "African-American".

African-Americans included an interest in the older type of plantation-style "coon song" which contained neutral titles such as "Ma Curly-Headed Baby" (Whiteoak 1999: 116-121).

Despite their disadvantaged status, early twentieth-century Aborigines succumbed to the influences of this prevailing culture, perhaps without being aware of the reasons why. They wholeheartedly adopted coon songs and other parodies of African-American dialect, music and dancing as a means of poking fun at themselves. In the mid-1960s, recordings of Aboriginal musicians living on the outskirts of country towns revealed that the coon song tradition was still vibrantly alive in southeastern Australia (based on Ellis 1994c: 744). Along the Murray, for instance, Aborigines adapted "Little Alabama Coon" into a lullaby "in the language" (Breen 1989: 26). Sometimes they would alter the name of a river, change the lyrics as a whole, and/or alter time signatures. Stephen Foster (1826-1864) wrote sentimental minstrel show songs, which were frequently adopted by Australian Aborigines because they could identify with the displaced people represented in the lyrics. Songs such as "Swanee River" or "Old Folks at Home" (1851, Tape Example 15),[43] "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" (1854), and "Old Black Joe" (1860) were very popular (Breen 1989: 24).

Minstrelsy pervaded detribalised Aboriginal music for many decades after its heyday in White Australia (1880s) had petered out. According to Gubbi Gubbi Elder Wambaya[44] Bill Brunette (pers. comm., 22 November 1994), bone castanets (one of the staple instruments of touring minstrel bands) were still commonly used in the 1940s to accompany spontaneous social jitterbugging and singing (a form of pan-Aboriginal corroboree).[45] Even as late as the mid-1960s, recordings of coon songs showed the widespread existence of a musical tradition maintained by Aboriginal people living on the outskirts of country towns.

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[43]Boston (Nambucca Heads NSW 1996) RRC T1.

[44]A clan and totem name, meaning "wedge-tailed eagle". Bill's paternal ancestors were raised at Brunette Downs, NT.

[45]Moyle did not generally promote bones as "traditional" Aboriginal instruments, but Duncan-Kemp (1952: 180) noticed that they were used as rhythm keepers in the Channel Country.

High-pitched gumleaves were eminently suitable for simulating the type of whistling common to minstrelsy.[46] Herbert Patten (pers. comm., 16 November 1996) recalls his Uncle Jimmy Kenny (*b.* 1936) performing minstrel-style whistling at a party in the Snowy River district in 1952, when Kenny deliberately attempted to drown out the gumleaf sounds produced by nine year-old Patten. At an "All Black" Concert in Cowra NSW in the same year, "Knocker" Williams (father of country-and-western star Harry Williams) parodied an old Christy Minstrel, assisted by several other talented artists from Erambie Mission.[47] Leafists Roy Carroll and Alec Grace resided at Cowra during this era (pers. comm. from Lucy Lyons of Narrandera, NSW, 7 February 1994), when according to Patten (pers. comm., 16 November 1996), "all" detribalised Aboriginal men aspired to be minstrels.

Williams and his sons used to sing "Jacky Jacky" - the most significant coon song/folk song of Australian Aboriginal vernacular literature. Many southeastern Australian Aborigines have also played the tune as a gumleaf solo, *e.g.* Jimmy Little Senior,[48] Percy Mumbulla, Aaron Briggs, Stan Mundy,[49] Bill Reid, and Herbert Patten (Tape Example 16).[50] Dating from at least the early 1930s, "Jacky Jacky" became the blueprint for the Aborigines' adoption of European/American genres through change in lyrics. The song highlights two pressing problems posed by Jacky Jacky's loss of land and the personal loss of a sweetheart to a white man. Its mix of English and ancestral vocabulary allows Aborigines to ridicule their invaders' culture without recrimination (Patten and Ryan, in press).

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[46]Minstrel whistling was executed with the aid of fingers in the mouth, and enhanced by choreographed hand gestures and facial expressions which featured white teeth (*e.g.* Al Jolson in the 1928 movie "The Singing Fool", and "Whistlin Pete", recorded by Rena Records *c.* 1906-1912).

[47]"All Black Concert", *Dawn* 1/5, May 1952: 7. My gratitude is due to Margaret Gummow, who alerted me to the *Dawn* and *New Dawn* publications. Volumes and numbers are not presented consistently in these magazines.

[48]Mathews (Yarragee NSW 1964), according to the CD-Rom *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia: Aboriginal and Torres St Islander History, Society and Culture* (AIATSIS 1994).

[49]Mathews (Wreck Bay NSW 1965) AIATSIS LA 5379; Mundy also performed a gumleaf duet with Bill Reid in *Lousy Little Sixpence* (1983).

[50]Patten sings and discusses the provenance of "Jacky Jacky" on Ryan (Glen Iris Vic 1997) RRC T12 and Haymes (Clayton Vic 1993) RRC T15. He also interprets the song on leaf on his CD (1999).

### 3.3 Makeshift and Commercial Music-Making

Reay (1949: 97) and Holmer and Holmer (1969: 31-32) both noted that music was played on gumleaves at communal entertainments in northern NSW. Without providing dates, Ellis *et al* (1988: 161) described the gumleaf as an improvised[51] instrument played in bands formed in some communities, along with popular instruments such as the harmonica, accordion and banjo[52] which did not require orthodox technical skill. The gumleaf was mainly used to accompany formal and informal group and solo singing and dancing, before acoustic and electric guitars came into vogue.

Unaccompanied singing, or singing to the accompaniment of makeshift bush instrumentation, was common practice among Aboriginal folk singers, whose amorphous instrumentarium included the gumleaf:

> Singers are accompanied by whatever is available: beating or tapping, guitars, mouth organ, concertina and gumleaf. Often they make their own instruments. There have been some really weird and wonderful ones, some very difficult technically to make and operate, taking years to practise (Brunton in Breen 1989: 22).

Harry Hunter Junior, for example, developed one bush bass from a kerosene tin with a single nylon fishing line string; it was played by plucking the string and varying the tension to alter the pitch (Ellis *et al* 1988: 161). Wiradjuri Elder Flo Grant of Canberra (pers. comm., 26 September 1995) described some of the makeshift instruments she had seen used in school "bush bands" and Christian circles, both Aboriginal and mixed. These included leaves, spoons, bones and the tea-chest bass, as well as instruments invented with broomsticks and ropes.

Although White Australia may not have afforded the leaf status as a musical instrument, it fulfilled the functions of the same in the social sense. In the confines of missions, leafists

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[51]This is to be distinguished from the use of the gumleaf in improvisation (described in Chapter 5).

[52]Both settlers and Aborigines constructed scratchy "bush banjos" from oil drums and kangaroo skin and leg sinews, or nylon fishing line (Mudie 1961: 125; Breen 1989: 34).

performed a staple repertoire of hymns (sometimes several times a day), and in fringe communities gumleaves provided entertainment at parties, campfires, sing-songs and sporting events. Open air dances were regularly held on Aboriginal settlements, in some cases up until the early 1970s (*e.g.* Sullivan 1988: 66); At these and Aboriginal weddings a gumleaf band was often sufficient to provide all the music required (Jackomos 1971: 34).

Secondly, in their hired interface with the non-Aboriginal community, leafists appeared at mainstream church services, formal balls, fancy dress balls, picnics and concerts. They also toured with travelling shows of all types. While there is no available evidence that gumleaves were played at magic lantern slide shows and rough riding circuits, Aboriginal entertainers were certainly in demand at these (Sullivan 1988: 66). Mark St Leon's fascinating history (1983) of the circus in Australia from around 1850 mentions Aboriginal participants, but not in relation to gumleaf playing.

Some fringe-dwellers probably received occasional exposure to composite forms of entertainment, such as outdoor cinema and combination dance/cinema,[53] before twentieth-century sound recording and radio broadcasting (directly or indirectly) influenced them.[54] In Victoria, Vroland (1951: 33) described gumleaf tunes as being "borrowed from non-Aboriginal sources, or from some record or radio performance".

In 1934 Cinesound released six minutes of black and white footage entitled "Highlights of the Week. Abo's (*sic*) play war cry on gum leaves before downing Scots team in football clash at Arncliffe, NSW".[55] The team of nine players follow their flagbearer around the oval in single file,[56] each blowing a leaf as they march along the white line.

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[53]Silent movies, which arrived in Australia around mid-1896, incorporated variety acts by vocalists and instrumentalists, soft-shoe shufflers, jugglers and acrobats. As yet there is no evidence that leafists were exploited in such contexts.

[54]Margaret Tucker, for one, traced her charity work with singing back to recordings she heard of Melba and Gallicurci when she worked as a maid in NSW (Vroland 1951: 3; Tucker 1977: 163).

[55]Cinesound Review 149, NFSA 7093.

[56]In traditional culture it was not unusual for men to enter the corroboree ground in single file.

The football team and the tune they played remain nameless, since the music and dialogue have been lost. If not from nearby La Perouse, where leaf playing had been practised from the early 1900s, this may have been a composite team from various rural settlements. The footballers do not conform to holding their leaves in a uniform manner (two players grip the leaf with their left hand, three with the right hand, and four use both hands, whilst the flagbearer manages to carry a ball and play a leaf as well). A third possibility is that this was the Wallaga Lake football team which, according to Parsons (in Chittick and Fox 1997: 51), was "taken up the coast" by Dougie Wurst from Nowra. Around 1933, team members included leafists Jimmy Chapman, Jimmy Little Senior, Willy Thomas, Ernie (Friday) Hoskins, Charlie Penrith, Albert Thomas, and Charlie Parsons.

Further evidence concerning leaf playing at sporting fixtures was supplied by Herbert Patten (pers. comm., 13 February 1996), who played the national anthem on a gumleaf at the opening of the boxing troupes "one year" during the 1960s. Along with a Wiradjuri band, he also played gumleaf at the opening of a national football carnival at York Park, Launceston, Tasmania, in the late 1970s. The Tasmanian people seemed "surprised" to see the gumleaf used as a musical instrument.

With these historical musical influences and functional uses of the gumleaf in mind, I will now augment previously published information concerning the geographical prevalence of gumleaf playing in Australia.

## PART 2: GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFUSION

### 1. The Murray River and Point McLeay, South Australia

Steam navigation began on the Murray in 1853; indigenous interest in the phenomenon was recorded in the words of a song that Aborigines sang about a steamer in 1865 (Mudie 1961: 17; 128). The "taut and trim" *Yammalite* (meaning "one" or "first" in an unnamed Aboriginal dialect) was especially set apart for Salvation Army work amongst the Warki and

Ramindjeri (Ngarrindjeri) peoples.[57] It periodically sailed Lake Alexandrina, the Coorong River, and as far up the Murray as Mannum, directly east of the town of Hahndorf - which becomes significant in Chapter 4. Evidence was supplied above for a leaf playing tradition at Swan Reach.

Commenting on the rare gift which Aborigines possessed for mimicry, George Ellis (pers. comm., 25 November 1994) speculated that some may have imitated the hymn tunes sung or played on the boat, perhaps by blowing the River Red Gum or box leaves which grew along the river. During his years of service in various outposts in SA, Ellis saw Aborigines (who had been taught to play Salvation Army band music) playing the leaf on several occasions, *e.g.* members of the Ngarrindjeri at Point McLeay. They always played native leaves, loosening or tightening them with their fingers to change from low to high pitch accordingly.

It is likely that European-style gumleaf playing was introduced to the Ngarrindjeri by the Salvation Army, when they followed on from the Methodist, Church of Christ and Congregational churches to assume sole responsibility for the spiritual work at Point McLeay until 1970. Major Colin and Mrs June Webb (pers. comm., 27 March 1995) encouraged the Aborigines to form duos, trios and quartets, and they often sang outside on frosty, starry nights.[58] One of the leafists of the Point McLeay area was Aunty Amy Mason (Rankine in Breen 1989: 34):

> After tea, at nightfall, it was very popular to build a campfire by the beach or lake, or sit outside a cottage and have a chat and a singalong. You'd find people with guitars, and harmonicas were popular too. Or maybe someone would come along who could play an old concertina or a gumleaf. I can remember my uncle and others playing with just gumleaf and guitar, items for concerts or dances. There were people who played the bones and some autoharps, but nobody played banjos (Rankine in Breen 1989: 32).

The Ngarrindjeri were renowned for "disciplined" choral singing in the 1890s (see Schultz in Breen 1989: 31), but there is no evidence that they played leaf hymns at this time. A

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[57]*The War Cry*, 30 July 1892: 7.

[58]June commented that the girls often "bashed away on the piano by ear" and had exceptional singing voices. The men's beautiful bass voices harmonised instantaneously.

photograph of a 21-strong Aboriginal school band published by the Aborigines' Friends Association (AFA)[59] in the 1920s features side-blown flutes, triangle and drum, but no gumleaf instruments.

**2. The Murray River Victorian/NSW Border**

In Mildura, Victoria, Pastor Brian Cavanagh plays lemon leaf at gatherings of the Aboriginal Full Gospel Church (pers. comm. from parishioner Ian Atkinson, 26 March 1994). In order to test inferences made by Moyle (1966 map) and Tunstill in Breen (1989: 7), that gumleaf playing was once traditional along the Murray,[60] I searched Curr (1883), Cato (1976), Buxton (1967), and Hibbins (1991), as well as the nineteenth-century newspapers *The Border Post* (from 1856) and *Albury Banner* (from 1883). I found no references to leaf playing, only to secular detribalised music-making with violins and saucepan lids at Albury in 1860 (Buxton 1967: 94; see also Hibbins 1991: 26), and the solid new sacred musical context which laid the foundation for the popularity of leaf hymn playing in the early twentieth-century.

Daniel Matthews founded the Maloga Mission Station (1874-1888) on an old corroboree ground, which was, part of the *Moira*, *i.e.* "beautiful country" or "place of many reeds". Matthews and his wife Janet were very musical and instilled a love of hymn singing upon their Yorta Yorta charges.[61] In November 1886 Matthews organised a camp meeting, with an open invitation for the countryside to join in:

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[59]The AFA began its work at Point McLeay in 1858 on the shores of Lake Alexandrina, where 300-400 Ngarrindjeri resided in *wurlies* (bark huts). Their pioneer missionary, Rev. George Taplin, encouraged musical tuition.

[60]It is feasible that the ancient river clansmen blew River Red Gum and box leaves to produce echo effects (based on the favourable comments of Aboriginal participants concerning leaves blown around rivers). Donald Pate's analysis of bones uncovered by flood at an Aboriginal campsite on the Murray in 1968 confirmed the richness of the human diet, an indicator of stability in clan movement (ABC News, 7 pm, 14 November, 1993; see also Pardoe 1988: 1-16).

[61]The Yorta Yorta have had a continuing presence in the area, with 250 living in Cummeragunga in 1993 and 3,000-4,000 others living in northern Victoria and southern NSW.

> It followed the pattern of religious revival meetings popular in the backwoods of America. It was a week of enthusiastic prayer-meetings, of witness, Sankey hymns and Negro spirituals, either under canvas or in the open air at the side of the steady-flowing river. The Aborigines were particularly interested in the spirituals, and always eager for stories of the dark people of America (Thorpe Clark 1965: 27).[62]

The Indian doctor Thomas Shadrach James (1859-1956), who built on the foundation laid by Matthews, was also very musical, the result being that the people of Barmah (on the Victorian side of the Murray) enjoyed, for nearly half a century, the swelling music of hymns and spirituals from the opposite bank of the river (Thorpe Clark 1965: 29). By 1883, when the Cummeragunga Reserve (henceforth Cummera') was set aside three miles upstream from Maloga by the APB, the Aboriginal children knew "upwards of forty tunes" and residents would sing around the fire for two hours without intermission (Sadleir 1883: 54). Thorpe Clark (1965: 38) describes the scene:

> Here, on the old corroboree site, here on the stage where ancestors had chanted and danced, they would sing songs that lifted out over the dark water and over the trees into the night, mostly hymns and spirituals. This was a new kind of corroboree, a new kind of communal gathering. Yet it is significant that those favourite hymns were those that told of a coming-home - a heaven-to-be, a promise, a caring-for.

The events leading up to the famous mass Walkout[63] on 4 February 1939 are portrayed in the film *Lousy Little Sixpence* (1983), which features Stan Mundy and Bill Reid playing "The Old Rugged Cross" and "Jacky Jacky" on gumleaves. Mrs Geraldine Briggs,[64] the last person left who can speak the Yorta Yorta language with extensive vocabulary, told Keith Gosman that she "no longer felt quite so alone when the leaves were being played and you are singing

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[62]Favourites amongst their repertoire of 74 hymns were "Shall We Gather at the River?", "Down by the Riverside", and "Time Like an Ever-rolling Stream". Spirituals were adopted from the repertoire of the Jubilee Singers under George L. White (Cato 1976: 111-113).

[63]The Walkout was the climax of years of organised protest over substandard conditions. Jack Patten (uncle of Herbert: also a leafist) was jailed for inciting the event and is now revered as a martyr by his people.

[64]Born in 1910 on Moonacullah Mission, Geraldine is a younger sister of the late Margaret Tucker, MBE.

in Yorta Yorta and it's happy".[65] This emphasises the importance of the gumleaf instrument as a means of reconnecting with Cummera's past heritage.

Leafist Aaron Briggs (*b*. September 14 1899, *d*. January 30 1971) spent most of his life in the Barmah Forest, where he was regarded as "part of that forest" (Tucker 1977: 48). He probably began to play the leaf seriously in the 1920s or 1930s when the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band visited Cummera' and turned it into a lively centre for gumleaf playing (Chapter 3). Briggs, whose voice and leaf playing were recorded at Cummera' in 1961,[66] boasted a repertoire of old favourites including "Home Sweet Home on the Murray", "On the Banks of the Murray", and "Sweet Little Log Cabin on the Murray".

In 1962, whilst traversing the country along the Murray River in search of people who might have remembered some of their old songs, Cath Ellis was alerted to a tradition of Westernized Aboriginal songs which had never been recorded:

> These were protest songs, folk songs long since forgotten in the white community, hymns, songs for gum-leaf bands, parodies of Music Hall songs, etc. In this phase of the recovery work I recorded very few traditional songs and a relatively small number of Aboriginal/Western songs (Ellis 1992: 155).

Ellis recorded the Aborigines' renditions of bawdy music hall songs along the Murray, including an early 1960s version of "Rooster's Love Song" which fringe-dweller Tom Lyons had learned from Jimmy Little Senior (Ellis 1964a; 1964b). This item probably featured in the repertoire of the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band, to which Little contributed as a prominent singer and leafist in the 1920s and 1930s (Chapter 3).

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[65]Yorta Yorta was a common language when Mrs Briggs was a girl, even though it had been thought to be extinct since the 1960s ("The Loneliness of the Last Speaker", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 5 March 1994: 4A).

[66]Leaf excerpt "Now is the Hour", more correctly "Maori Farewell" (O'Conner and Officer, Cummeragunga NSW 1961 NLA TRC 2539/032).

### 3. The Edward, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee, Darling and Gwydir Rivers

Evidence from the 1910s on indicates that gumleaf playing spread from mission to mission, as well as into the remote semi-tribal and detribalised government settlements along the river systems of the Murray, Murrumbidgee, Edward, Lachlan, Darling and Gwydir (the hinterland of far southwest and northwest of NSW).

#### 3.1 Moonacullah, Deniliquin and Moulamein

Residents of the Australian Inland Mission at Moonacullah 40 kms from Deniliquin played the Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) leaves along the Edward River. Some male leafists from Darlington Point, Cummera' and Moonacullah augmented the organ playing and singing at a missionary picnic of about forty people at Moulamein on the Edward River in late January 1939.[67] The practice of leaf playing was bound to have filtered into other Aboriginal mission stations on the lower and upper reaches of the Murray, *e.g.* Wahgunyah (1891-1937).

#### 3.2 Narrandera, Balranald and Condobolin

In Wiradjuri territory the gumleaf band usually functioned as a semi-formal ensemble, *i.e.* a group whose membership was selective. However older Aboriginal people, such as Elder Mrs Nancy Rooke of Albury (pers. comm., 7 February 1994) reported that "everyone" played the leaf during her childhood, not just down around the Murrumbidgee River, but also frequently in church. The best players on the Sandhills (Weir's Reserve, eight kilometres west of Narrandera),[68] before residents moved to "Hill 60" in 1940, were Nancy's Uncle Archie Williams and Stevie Carroll. The local gumleaf band often performed at Darlington Point in

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[67]"Along the Victorian Border", *Our AIM*, February 16 1939: 12.

[68]Wiradjuri people moved to the Sandhills or Darlington Point both before and after the APB closed the Warangesda Aboriginal Mission on 17 October 1924 (ABM Review, 1 April 1950: 59-63; see also Gammage 1986).

the 1930s; in 1932 the leafists were Len (Busch) Kirby, Clancy Kelly, Edgar Howe and Freddy Christian.[69]

Leaves were also played at Balranald on the Murrumbidgee River, where shearer and songwriter/storyteller Babs Vincent (*b.* Euabalong, via Condobolin in 1915) related the following yarn about his father playing gumleaf for a dance:

> Old man Vincent laid his leaf down while he rolled a smoke and somebody walked on it. "Hey!" yelled the old chap, "Get yer (*sic*) bloody number nines orf (*sic*) my instrument!" (Meredith 1995: 60).

Pastor Ces Grant (pers. comm., 6 February 1994) was born on 15 May 1934 at Willowland Aboriginal Reserve, Condobolin where he and his sister Flo were brought up in a kerosene tin humpy near the banks of the Lachlan River (Jones 1991: 24; "The Ces Grant Story" (Albury TAFE booklet). Aborigines at the reserve played gumleaves, lemon leaves and bones (usually two in each hand), and one also played a makeshift drum with wire strings across its skin. The Salvation Army field service unit active in Condobolin probably encouraged the local use of gumleaves in music-making. Grant now runs the Wiradjuri Christian Fellowship *Gawainbanna* ("Welcome") in North Albury, which includes a language school.[70]

### 3.3 Bourke, Brewarrina and Moree

The most renowned leafist on the Darling River, further north at Bourke, was undoubtedly the same Bill Reid who played in *Lousy Little Sixpence* (1983).[71] Reid was friendly with author Dr John Cawte, a retired specialist in cross-cultural psychiatry (the study of variations in psychiatric phenomena according to culture). Cawte conducted workshops on Aboriginal mental health, which incorporated the use of traditional healing methods.

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[69]Len (Busch) Kirby N3800 (AIATSIS Pictorial Collection), published in Ryan and Patten (1998: 135).

[70]The church is painted with Aboriginal designs, didjeridu and boomerang clapsticks are used to accompany hymns, and traditional dance is taught to a very high standard.

[71]A Kamilaroi born at Cuttabri Aboriginal Reserve, Wee Waa, Reid was widely known as "Pastor Bill" because of his community work on behalf of the UAM (Howie-Willis 1994c: 936). He variously resided at Brewarrina, Tamworth and Bourke. Before his death in late 1993, Reid played some gumleaf duos with Roseina Boston at Kempsey.

Herbert Patten played gumleaf at a workshop in which Cawte utilised the low sounds of the didjeridu and the high sounds of the gumleaf (the vibrations of which may be of some benefit to the deaf).

Cawte often drove Reid from Bourke to Sydney. When they stopped beside creeks for respite Reid would play popular tunes such as "Waltzing Matilda". Cawte (pers. comm., 19 September 1994) described Reid's style as "straight", *i.e.* without ornamentation. Johnny Marshall played the gumleaf in the neighbouring town of Brewarrina, but usually only for fun or demonstration (pers. comm. from Trevor Pearce, 25 October 1996).

Further west on the Gwydir River, ex-drover John Sweeney (*c.* 65 years) maintains the leaf music tradition at Moree. In 1968, when John Gordon recorded Albert Dennison playing "Roll Out the Barrel", "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and snippets of other tunes on a Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneum*) leaf, Dennison and some other people present acknowledged a Mr White (also known as Payne) who lived on the West Moree Common as "the best player they had heard in Australia".[72] Gordon (1968: 5), who had previously met Mr White, commented in his field report:

> I should have guessed from his interest in my project that he had something to offer. He must have thought I wanted songs only. Much later I was to learn he has a reputation as one of the best leaf-players in NSW, which he modestly did not mention. I enjoyed talking to this kindly chap. From our conversation I gather his father was an American.

## 4. The Northern NSW River System and Seaboard

### 4.1 Karuah, Singleton, Gulgong and Taree

The earliest documented leaf band in northern NSW operated at Karuah Mission (north of Newcastle) from at least 1919. Sydney Ridgeway[73] apologised in writing to mission leaders Mr and Mrs Long, for his absence from a Christian gathering on 26 November 1919:

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[72]Gordon (West Moree NSW 1968) AIATSIS LA1220B.

[73]Son of the "King of Karuah" William Ridgeway, who was converted to Christianity in 1905 and died in 1919.

> I am speaking on behalf of the leaf band also, who (*sic*) would have liked to have rung into your ears the sweet sounds of their inexpensive instruments - (gum leaves.-Ed.) -and of their voices in praises to God, but they will, I am sure, not cease to ring unto the Lord their earnest prayers on your behalf.[74]

Gumleaves, accordions and guitars provided music at Singleton Bible College, the headquarters of AIM; in fact gumleaves were the main instrumental means of maintaining hymn melody lines or adding harmony.[75] Students included Ben Mason from WA, and David Kirk, Ben Bird and Willy Bird from Cherbourg, Queensland. The much-travelled evangelist to Aborigines, Pastor Wes O'Brien of Melbourne (pers. comm., 4 October 1997), described Pastor Ben Mason of the AEF as "the best gumleaf player in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s". Mason used the gumleaf as a vehicle for worship for most of his life; as a small boy he was a member of the Mt Margaret Minstrel Band which operated from its UAM base 30 km southwest of Laverton, WA. In the 1940s and 1950s this minstrel (*i.e.* itinerant) band included banjos, ukuleles, accordions, gumleaves, tambourines, side drum and bass drum on their tours of Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney.[76]

Further inland, the town of Gulgong ("Deep Waterhole") developed a strong tradition of live performance during the nineteenth-century goldrush, when it teemed with 20,000 people. A "Gum Leaf Jazz Band" performed at the Pictoria Theatre in about 1930; in this context, "jazz" just meant "modern" or "popular" (pers. comm. from John Whiteoak, 15 February 1997). According to the playbill (Illustration 2), Item 2 was a "Duet on Gum Leaves"; Item 7 the "Gum Leaf Jazz Band" and Item 9 a "Gum Leaf Duet". Roma Wallis (1982: 74) imaginatively reconstructed the scene:

> What a scene our fertile minds can call up. The gay youngsters discharging vibrant energy with kicks and hops of the Charleston, The Gum Leaf Band emitting high-pitched tones as they swung into "Ain't She Sweet", whilst Billy Budd filled in with "the whirly bits" on the cornet and the group of shy brown velvet-eyed natives - the whites of their eyes rolling.

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[74] *Our AIM*, December 1919: 7, 9.

[75] The Flo Grant Collection at AIATSIS includes three photographs of Singleton Bible College leafists at Moree in 1957. Ellis (1994b: 437) includes Ben Mason, pictured third from left; see also Ellis (1994c: 742).

[76] Flo Grant N4654.34 (AIATSIS Pictorial Collection). Ben Mason is one of the leafists.

This was possibly an early 1930s line-up of Biripi[77] leafists from Taree, who, according to Bert (Goonabahn) Marr (pers. comm., 9 July 1994; Plate 4), were renowned for their jazz numbers. Goonabahn was a member of a leaf quartet in the 1950s, along with three of his (also now deceased) cousins, namely Les Marr, Ronnie Marr and Charlie Edwards.[78] They incorporated both sacred and secular items into their repertoire, playing a lot of jazz numbers and songs from the 1950s, as well as hymns such as "The Old Rugged Cross" and "How Great Thou Art". Les often made "didjeridu sounds" on the leaves as well. Goonabahn described himself as an "alto leaf [illegible]", because he loved playing the second or third part in the quartet. Ronnie played from [illegible] the lip, Goonabahn from the top. When I visited Goonabahn in 1994, he was still [illegible] the leaf privately in duo with Horrie Saunders.

Goonabahn described music-making in the Manning River District during his youth (1920s-1930s), when squeeze-box, fiddle and mandolin players accompanied choral concerts of a high standard. Goonabahn sang and played leaf regularly at the Purfleet Mission, and soon "picked up" guitar. Charlie Edwards held gumleaf classes, in which he coerced his pupils to blow until their lips were sore. Sometimes the Quinlans of Bellbrook (renowned fiddle players) and Katie Lobban (an excellent pianist) participated. The best female leafist in the Taree district was Madge Buchanen.

The Biripi held their last painted-up corroboree between the World Wars at the Old Bar beach, southeast of Taree.[79] Up until about 18 years ago they celebrated Christmas by dancing, shaking bones, playing spoons around a huge fire on the old ceremonial ground, and sleeping outside. Goonabahn and his wife Elsie both rued the fact that these gatherings were no longer held.

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[77]Biripi territory extended from the mouth of the Manning River at Taree, inland to near Gloucester, and also on the Forbes, Upper Hastings and Wilson Rivers (Tindale 1974: 192).

[78]In his youth, Edwards was nicknamed "The Actor" by teacher-manager Mr. J.R. Milne. When he appeared out of the dark as "The Devil" at a corroboree, women fainted and dogs attacked him (*Dawn*, October 1962: 2-3).

[79]According to Fred Bugg, another such gathering was held in 1961 (Holmer and Holmer 1969: 30).

### 4.2 Wauchope, Burnt Bridge, Bellbrook and Kempsey

Leaf playing was much practised by the Goorie people of the Northern Rivers district of NSW. Historian Billie Crawford supports the view of Elder Emily Walker, of the Gumbainggir Language and Culture Group at Sherwood (via Kempsey), that leaf playing was introduced to the Hastings and Macleay River districts by members of the Gumbainggir to the north. The traditional instruments of these districts comprised sticks, boomerang clapsticks and possum skins wrapped around hollow logs (drums).[80] However, it is equally possible that leaf playing was introduced, and undoubtedly encouraged, by religious leaders such as the Seventh Day Adventist or Anglican pastors who visited the Aboriginal settlement at Burnt Bridge (just out of Kempsey) and Bellbrook (on the Macleay River).

In any case, a western-style concert, including a "Leaf Band", was conducted by George (Possum) Davis in the Hastings River district in 1926. Born on the Upper Hastings in *c.* 1853, Possum was the son of Daiggatti George Davis from the Clarence River.[81] He worked on the Upper Macleay as a bushman, horseman and stockman, and served as captain of the district's Aboriginal cricket team. Possum's music-making may have come under the influence of the Salvation Army, since one of their captains officiated at his graveside in 1933 (Suters, n.d.: 6).[82] Jas Bain offered the following description of the concert:

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[80]Letter from Billie Crawford, 20 September 1994.

[81]George Davis Senior helped the Hon. A. Norton take cattle as far as old Fort Bourke in the late 1850s.

[82]An Aborigine Mission House also operated in Port Macquarie. At a concert held on 17 May 1903, the "coloured people" sang "Alexander's Glory Song" (*The Port Macquarie News & Hastings River Advocate*, May 1903).

> One of the historic events that took place in my memory and worthy of mention was an aboriginal concert held in Bailey's Hall in Wauchope. They had a chosen group and I know there are many still living who remember the concert. Concerts were one of our main entertainments in those days. The conductor was George Davis, who was better known as "Possum". He considered these animals a delicacy. Among his performers were the two Ryan sisters, Lizzie and Sarah. They were the daughters of Tommy Ryan who lived in a hut on my farm all his life, just over from the High School. They sang very well together. Katie Lobban was a good singer and played the piano well. Her husband, Tom Davis was a comic singer. One of his songs was "You are Getting More Like Your Dad Every Day, My Boy." The Leaf Band they had was one of the best I ever heard. A sad note at the finish was when Possum said "You go home to your warm beds, while we have to sleep by a fire in the bush" (Suters, n.d.: 6-7).[83]

The "Leaf Band" was better known as the Burnt Bridge Gumleaf Band and its members included Fred Bugg, according to Possum's great-niece Roseina Boston (pers. comm., 6 October 1995). Nils Holmer recorded Bugg's "gum tree leaf" rendition of "The Old Rugged Cross" at Greenhill Mission near Kempsey.[84] I tried to contact 86 year-old Fred Chapman of West Kempsey, who used to play tin whistle in Possum's band, but he was unable to speak since suffering from a stroke in 1996.

John Fields was another musically talented Aborigine who formed his own travelling concert band during the era when Bunyah Jimmy was "King of the Hastings River Blacks" (Suters, n.d.: 18). Suters was unable to provide details of the types of music performed or the instruments used by the group, although she did recall that many forms of music other than piano had been employed at district parties and get-togethers. It was also a district custom to use tin-kettling when a pair of newly-weds first entered a home.[85]

In 1965 Roseina Boston joined forces with three "fully instructed gumleaf players", the Quinlan brothers Johnny, Joe and Richie, to form a gumleaf band at the Bellbrook Seventh Day Adventist Church run by Pastor Rosendahl.[86] They usually played "Amazing Grace",

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[83]85 year-old Hazel Suters (pers. comm., 27 October 1996) attended this concert with her father, Jas Bain, as a child. Many non-Aboriginal men in the district also played gumleaves and lemon leaves in the 1920s.

[84]Holmer (Greenhill NSW 1964) AIATSIS 1760; see also N.M. and V.E. Holmer 6027, and Reay (1949: 32).

[85]Letter from Billie Crawford, 20 September 1994.

[86]Roseina holds photographs of the Quinlan brothers, taken at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Burnt Bridge, NSW.

"The Old Rugged Cross" and "How Great Thou Art" (Tape Example 17).[87] Roseina still plays other old hymn tunes such as "Trust and Obey", "Rock of Ages" and "Nearer, my God, to Thee", in addition to her impressive repertoire of secular dance tunes. Other Aboriginal leafists in the Kempsey district were Clarrie Button, Aunty Cinderella ("Cinda") Callaghan, commonly known as the "Black Princess", and James Goorie Dungay's pupil "Mad Mick" Brenton.

### 4.3 Bowraville, Armidale and Tingha

When I mentioned to the Goorie students at TAFE College, Bowraville on 27 April 1995 that I was searching for the provenance of the Bowraville Gumleaf Band, a mature-age student named John Ivan Ballangarry (*b.* 16 September 1938) enthusiastically volunteered information. Ballangarry's forebears along the Nambucca River had formed a gumleaf band around the time that the Bowraville Catholic Mission was established in 1923. Between the 1920s and 1940s the band busked in the Bowraville district, and at some stage in the 1920s or 1930s toured southern Queensland. In John Ivan's childhood days the Bowraville Gumleaf Band consisted of:

(i) his father, John Ivan Ballangarry Senior[88] (gumleaf and mouth organ), who "picked up" the gumleaf "naturally" because everyone played in those days

(ii) his uncle Fred (Goora) Kelly (voice and traditional dance) - John Ivan demonstrated Goora's footwork (this resembled the shake-a-leg dance because the feet were positioned far apart and the knees trembled; dancers in this leaf band were "painted up")

(iii) his uncle Laurie Kelly (violin)

(iv) his uncle Reg Kelly (gumleaf and voice), and

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[87] Boston (Nambucca Heads NSW 1996) RRC T1.

[88] Son of Dainggatti descendant "Old Dave" Ballangarry or Nutchee ("grandfather"), who died in the late 1940s.

(v) his uncle Edward (Ted),[89] who played the gumleaf with one hand whilst using the other to produce special effects.

John Ivan Junior did not know for certain whether Aboriginal gumleaf playing in the district had been mission-instigated, only that his forebears had been the first to leave their makeshift paddock dwelling to move into a home nearby on the Catholic Mission Station. John Ivan Senior used to perform gumleaf at the Bowraville Convent School's annual concert for Aboriginal children, whilst daughter Lily sang and John Ivan Junior or his brother Martin accompanied them on the piano. They used to they play and sing popular tunes of the day at gatherings and weddings, or play duets in the streets. They had to do this to survive, even though the police in that era were antagonistic.

Leaf playing was also common east of the Nambucca River in the Great Dividing Range at Armidale, even though inland leaves such as the Blackbutt (*E. pilularis*) are not as soft and pleasant to play as coastal eucalypt leaves. McDonald (in press) was told that past performances of local Aboriginal music, heard at a distance by the non-Aboriginal residents of Oban, resembled "a swarm of locusts drifting over from the direction of the black's camp". McDonald stressed the anecdotal nature of this description conveyed to him by Sylvester Ellis (*b.* 1886) of Ward's Mistake, and raised the possibility that Oban residents were hearing "bush-leaf playing", although it was more likely to have been the ceremonial sounds of the bullroarer. Nevertheless, the drone-like humming described by the residents strangely resembles Duncan-Kemp's account of the "insect-like chirping of mouthed gumleaves" by the *Wurrimata* sacred ritual dancers (quoted in Chapter 1). McDonald (pers. comm., 14 November 1996) found no memory of leafists in the Armidale district performing anything but European melodies. The late William ("Damper") Morris, for example, enjoyed playing dance tunes on the leaf.

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[89]John Ivan could not remember whether Ted was a Kelly or a Ballangarry.

A little further to the northeast, boys provided a leaf band for a sacred concert on Empire Day, 1935 at Tingha.[90] Three decades later, Vaughan Livermore (*b.* 1953) of Tingha performed gumleaf at the 1964 Elanora Summer Camp for Aboriginal children.[91]

### 4.4 Coraki, Cabbage Tree Island, Woodenbong and Tweed Heads

Various performances of leaf music by Aboriginal people in the Richmond River district were recorded by John Gordon and Chris Sullivan, and are housed at AIATSIS. Additionally, Margaret Gummow thoroughly documented the musical activities of Bundjalung[92] descendants, who from the beginning of the twentieth-century performed both Aboriginal and European songs and dances. In particular, they accompanied reels and barn dances on violins, piano accordions, mandolins, mouth organs and gumleaves at Coraki, Cabbage Tree Island and Woodenbong (summary of Gummow 1992: 176).

In July 1994, I interviewed 75 year-old Bundjalung Elder Mrs Eileen Morgan,[93] who was born under the large, spreading box tree which she views from her front verandah on the site of Box Ridge Mission, Coraki. Eileen's parents lived in a bark dwelling in the scrub surrounding the tree during her early childhood, when she first made musical sounds on a blade of grass. Eileen played box, lemon and native fig leaves, for several decades in duo with mouth-organist Mrs Grace Cowan.[94] Other performers at Box Ridge were Henry Smith (guitarist) and Wally Robertson (tap-dancer and jitterbugger). Eileen bestowed the tribal name Ginibi (Black Swan) on her niece Ruby Langford, who later dedicated her book *My*

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[90] *Our AIM*, June 17 1935: 6.

[91] "Back to School Again", *Dawn*, February 1964: 17.

[92] The "Bundjalung" include the Gidabal people of the Woodenbong area, continuing northeast to the mouth of the Logan River in southeast Queensland (Gummow 1994: 42). Their difficult engagement with European settlers included the notorious Myall Creek and Evans Head massacres in 1838 and 1842-3 respectively.

[93] Not to be confused with Mrs Eileen Morgan of Wallaga Lake (author of *The Calling of the Spirits*, 1995).

[94] The duo's favourite hymns were "The Old Rugged Cross" and "There's a Land that is Fairer than Thee".

*Bundjalung People* to Eileen. Langford (1994: 24) recalls her aunt's performance on gumleaves at the 1989 Anderson family reunion in the church hall at Cabbage Tree Island:

> I could still remember the music - the guitars strumming and the songs including some old hymns. They had called out to Aunty: "C'mon Mother Morgan, we got (*sic*) some gum leaves." So she played the gum leaves and Aunty Maude, my mother's sister, sang, and Gracie Williams played the mouth organ. I was surprised how religious the old ones were. They could still remember the religious songs they had learnt when they were young. Those missionaries had sure done a good job converting our people.

The religious fervour of the Bundjalung people became a reality to me when Eileen and I visited her son Keith, Pastor of the Aboriginal Pentecostal Church at Casino, on 10 July 1994. Leaf playing no longer features in these services, but Elder Mick Walker (the "keeper of the lingo") still sings the hymns in Bundjalung. Walker maintained that gumleaf playing was a less prevalent tradition at Coraki than at Cabbage Tree Island, and southwards down the coast at Coffs Harbour, Nambucca Heads and Kempsey.

Sullivan photographed Aborigines playing gumleaves at Cabbage Tree Island, along with instruments such as button accordion, harp, fiddle and slide guitar (see AIATSIS pictorial collection). Gummow (1992) observed similarities in the detribalised music-making of Cabbage Tree Island, Coraki and Woodenbong. A description by Charlotte Page and Leena King of dances held in the 1950s at Woodenbong highlights the use of the gumleaf (Riebe 1988: 11-12, cited in Gummow 1992: 176).

The following eyewitness report from southeast Queensland confirms the existence of a gumleaf band in the Tweed River district, NSW in the late 1930s:

> Last Saturday the natives of Beaudesert and district held a dance at the Technical Hall to assist the funds of the Ambulance Brigade. The function was a great success, and a credit to the organisers. A 'bus load of coloured folk from the Tweed district added to the numbers, and everyone present enjoyed the well conducted dance. Mr P. Paulson capably controlled the dancing and the Bing Boys Orchestra (Brisbane) supplied the music. ... During the evening items were rendered by Mr. A. Yettica (song), S. Boslem (song), and tap dancing by the coloured folk of Tweed and a member of the Bing Boy orchestra. The gum leaf band also rendered an item.[95]

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[95] "Native Benefit to Assist Ambulance Funds", *Beaudesert Times*, 8 October 1937.

It is possible that one member of the gumleaf band was Henry Bonner, eldest brother of Australia's first Aboriginal senator, Neville T. Bonner (*b.* 1922 in the mouth of the Tweed; *d.* 1999). Neville described Henry as a "master" gumleaf player (foreword to Harrison 1997).

By the mid-twentieth century, Tweed Heads had a six-member gumleaf band (pers. comm. from Rev. Graeme Paulson of Belmont, Queensland, 21 November 1993). In the 1960s, Paulson used to lead his Fingal Point congregation in leaf playing, directing all present to select leaves from outside the church. Their playing was influenced by island music, *i.e.* two or three-part harmonisations were preferred to four-part harmony.[96]

**5. Southeast Queensland**

Cherbourg[97] Mission (inland from Gympie) was a notable centre for leaf playing, as well as brass bands. Missionary R.G. Long wrote of the "indescribable joy" which was felt by the native workers and deacons after a tea-party at Cherbourg in 1935, when all gathered on the verandah for a sing-song:

> Everyone picked their favourite hymn and sang the first verse as a solo. Besides the organ we had a violin, an accordion, a mouth organ and several of the men played on the leaves. Quite an orchestra. And didn't we sing![98]

A Mouth Organ and Leaf Band was subsequently formed in 1937, after half a dozen "Boomerang" mouth organs were donated to the Cherbourg Mission.[99] Aboriginal author Jackie Huggins (pers. comm., 5 February 1994) told me that her mother Rita occasionally maintains the leaf playing habit that she adopted on the mission as a child. Pastor David Kirk, a former Principal of Bimbadeen Bible College, Cootamundra, originally hailed from

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[96]So-called "island style" music was introduced into Cape York through the Torres Strait Islands (Ellis 1994c: 741). Songs are usually accompanied by guitars, ukuleles, drums, seed rattles and handclapping. A peripheral artistic crossover which occurred between Aboriginal gumleaf bands and hula music and dance is broached in Ryan (1997: 106-109).

[97]Someone who had visited France renamed a station known as Barambah ("waterhole"), Cherbourg, in 1904. AIM, the Catholic Church and the Church of England variously administered the mission.

[98]*Our AIM*, February 15 1935: 6.

[99]*Our AIM*, July 11 1937: 6.

Cherbourg. In 1984 Kirk taught the leaf to student Eric (now James Goorie) Dungay, who practised for "hours on end" in the bush, and now uses the *yili* (gumleaf) in evangelistic outreach.

The Elder Wambaya Bill Brunette (pers. comm., 22 November 1994 and 19 May 1995) offered valuable information on the musical instruments used during his childhood at Gympie, where his parents settled after their marriage on Cherbourg Mission. Wambaya's father, Wambaya Harry Brunette, played accordion and concertina, steel guitar and harmonica. Young Wambaya used to play guitar and harmonica, but his brother Ronnie could play any instrument, even though he had never learnt to read music.

During the mid-1940s Wambaya's Gubbi Gubbi Uncles Arnold, Douglas, Horace and Nathaniel (Natty or Nat) Kina played both gum and lemon leaves. In Wambaya's opinion, they displayed rare musical energy, individuality and flair. Natty was the most talented because he could "do anything on gum and lemon leaves", even though Horace could perform the feat of playing the gumleaf "no hands" whilst playing the bones, and could also play the jew's harp. Uncle Horace taught young Wambaya to play the spoons, a skill which he passed on to many young people.

The leafists in the family took higher or lower parts, accompanied by the guitar and harmonica, with spoons, bones, and boomerang clapsticks providing a firm beat and rhythmic interest. Wambaya's uncles were all experts on the bullock bones. They held two 9" rib bones in each hand, clicking and rattling them together to produce an even more sonorous sound than the clapsticks; in fact, Wambaya said, they sounded just like tap dancers. When the family performed music at night-time football matches, they lit up their boomerangs in a kerosene tin and threw them into the sky, and threw a five-foot long bull's spear into a large circle that they had drawn on the ground.

## CONCLUSION

Taken together, the cameos provided above establish the gumleaf as a staple musical instrument, which (with the European band as a musical model) functioned as a bonding device between detribalised Aboriginal communities across a wide area of southeastern Australia, and further afield, for approximately half a century. The underlying catalyst for the emergence of gumleaf bands lay in the process of adaptation, a gradual (and sometimes unconscious) modification of individual and social activity in adjustment to changed cultural surroundings and new musical styles. In this respect, gumleaf bands represented a most important part of the move back towards a fuller musical life for detribalised people.

My earliest reference indicates that Bordertown, SA was a late nineteenth-century provenance point for Europeanised Aboriginal gumleaf music in Australia. Missionisation was the main means of motivation for the spread of the activity along the watercourse of the Murray River and its associated waterways in southeastern Australia. The river systems themselves (see Map 2) furnished pathways along which itinerants introduced leaf playing to adjacent towns, often well into the hinterland.

Indigenous music-making was gradually subjected to the constraints and conventions of Western musical culture. The influence of culture change was evident in the exclusively diatonic repertoire performed on leaves at Aboriginal church services, with the pitch range of items falling comfortably within the natural range of most gumleaves. Yet although the activity perpetuated Western musical genres, leaf playing was perceived to be an identifiably Aboriginal cultural activity because it was most prominently in vogue on mission stations. In any case, Aboriginal leafists can be seen to have incorporated European and Black American music into their own cultural worlds. The influences of indigenous, sacred, and secular styles of music on their performance behaviour created a mixed musical marriage, thus adding variety to the detribalised musical repertoire.

Apart from hymns and spirituals, some Maori songs, music-hall ballads and coon songs were also performed on missions; in some areas musical missionaries controlled combined groups of singers, dancers and musicians (including leafists), who were identified as Aboriginal Concert Parties. In unifying the joint activities of people from diverse clans, these musical outfits became a valuable source of cultural capital for both the missionaries and the performers themselves.

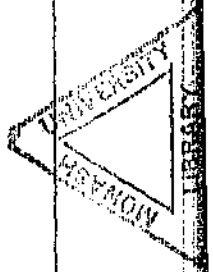
Mainstream acceptance of gumleaf playing in the 1920s was partly due to the passing fad for "noise" sound elements in jazz. This facilitated its heyday of popularity, for even though the more exuberant forms of jazz experienced a decline in mainstream popularity in the 1930s, their associated aesthetic remained current in Aboriginal society for some time longer. This reflects the segregationist attitudes prevalent in Australian society in the pre-1967 Referendum era. For economic reasons the gumleaf remained a much sought-after instrument during the 1930s Depression, when it was used in play by a lot of children (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), who were otherwise deprived of instruments.

In the twentieth-century, the activity of leaf playing amongst Aborigines in eastern SA, Victoria, NSW and southern Queensland circulated within a far broader geographical front than previously assumed. In these regions, bush and rainforest leaf instruments were used to supplement other instruments, thus contributing to the survival of a transformed, yet living, spiritual culture. Suffice it to say that leaf playing was an indisputably widespread pastime along the southeastern fringe of Australia and further inland wherever Aboriginal people were gathered together, not just in the few spots highlighted by Moyle on Map 1.

Apart from Roseina Boston (Nambucca Heads) and Eileen Morgan (Coraki), I did not locate any other female Aboriginal leafists during fieldwork. Annie Mason (SA) was recorded by Ellis in 1962, whilst some other non-touring female leafists were recorded in NSW by

Sullivan in 1987 and 1990 respectively (collection closed to public). They were Maisie Kelly and Hazel Vale of Armidale,[100] Mary Mosley of Burnt Bridge,[101] and Mrs Marr of Taree.[102]

This particular survey is by no means exhaustive; further recovery work could be undertaken in other areas of SA, WA, the NT, and northern Queensland. Both Moyle and Ellis underestimated the geographical prevalence of a native leaf instrument, which extended from its populous base in coastal NSW, inland into the wet and dry areas of Queensland, Victoria and SA. Yet although gumleaf bands slotted neatly into Aboriginal society as a compensatory expressive medium, their historical heyday occurred too prematurely for them to contribute a pivotal role in the struggle for a just and fair new society for indigenous people. Aspects of their vulnerability to abuse by non-Aboriginal society are exposed in the following chapter.



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[100]Sullivan (Armidale NSW 1990) NLA TRC 2750/556.

[101]Sullivan (Kempsey NSW 1987) AIATSIS CSC456.

[102]Sullivan (Taree NSW 1987) AIATSIS CSC449. These three recordings were cited in Bradley (1995: 11-13).

# CHAPTER THREE

## THE WALLAGA LAKE AND LAKE TYERS GUMLEAF BANDS: PROVENANCE, TOURS AND POLITICAL OVERTONES

*And we marched to the tune of the Gum Leaf Band ...*
*I think they were only brought in as a publicity stunt*

(ex-serviceman George Birkett in Jackomos and Fowell 1993: 25)

Having introduced the gumleaf in its wider role as a performance medium for various - sometimes competing - sacred and secular contexts within the detribalised musical field, I now present two case studies which draw us into territory close to the heart of the Aboriginal gumleaf band movement.

On the southern coast of NSW, the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band (henceforth WLGB) and its splinter groups represented an integral link between a localised form of traditional Aboriginal musical practice and its Westernised counterparts over a period of nine decades (1900-1980s). A relatively autonomous group of indigenous leafists operated in the 1920s and especially the 1930s, by which time their popularity had extended far beyond their own community in a way that is comparable with that afforded to the otherwise socially outcast travelling gypsy orchestras in central Europe.

The Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band (henceforth LTGB) of Gippsland, Victoria, was also widely known beyond its own community. It was characterised chiefly by its mobilisation and reception in tourism and its role in stirring up a martial spirit among troops departing for World War II. The band's eventual fragmentation, including the dispersal of many of its members to Melbourne, saw the rise of splinter groups such as gumleaf trios, and lone street buskers.

Some uninhibited modes of gumleaf performance behaviour developed despite missionary influence, but most markedly in areas where there was none. Because the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Station was not physically attached to a church mission, a relatively free and more creative use was made there of remnant traits of Aboriginal performance practice than at the more regimented Lake Tyers Station. Both bands were highly vulnerable to cultural and financial exploitation, as will be demonstrated in the analysis of various filmic icons that connect this discussion to the wider resonances of cultural contact.

The Aboriginal gumleaf ensembles which emerged as a popular movement in the early twentieth-century sometimes constituted casually-grouped quartets, trios and duos, rather than formal bands. However, their portrayals by non-Aboriginal writers, photographers and film-makers show that they were socially removed from their non-Aboriginal audiences - unlike the Channel Country "Aboriginal orchestra" in which little distinction could be made between performers and non-performers in the context of culturally pre-determined ritual functions.

In any case, Australia's unique model of part-playing on gumleaves has no internationally documented counterpart, except perhaps for the cherry leaf bands of the Ecuadorian highlands (see Casagrande and Stigberg 1986), the Chinese "tree leaf" ensembles described by Shui-Cheng Cheng (1997: 5),[1] the bucolic music of German shepherds who played leaves in two or more parts (Sarosi 1986: 124), and the Mayan leaf ensemble which Karl Neuenfeldt saw perform at a concert on the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico.[2]

I shall now introduce the two gumleaf bands in question, tracing their respective roots, membership, performance behaviour, collaborations, and socio-significance in bridging the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. Anecdotes and original quotations provide a sense of

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[1]Players of the "tree leaf" accompany some popular songs of the Yi ethnic of the Guizhou Province in two or three parts.

[2]In 1985 Neuenfeldt saw indigenes blow tunes on leaves until they were unusable (correspondence, January 1994).

the immediate social milieu of these bands, thus conveying the tone - rather than the mere content - of the evidence.

## PART 1: PROVENANCE, PERSONNEL AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

### 1. The Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band (WLGB)

Based on my field trips to Wallaga Lake in July 1994 and Mt Dromedary in January 1995, the following account details the tribal/environmental provenance of the WLGB, its membership, and characteristic performance behaviour. (Comments on the bandsmen's' idiosyncratic leaf instrument selection in relation to topographical features and ancient flora will be given in Chapter 6). Apart from bibliographic sources, the Elders Anne Thomas[3] of Koori Village, Wallaga Lake, and Guboo (also known as Ted) Thomas (of Sydney and Bega, Plate 3) informed my narrative. Since Anne and Guboo Ted share the same surname I will refer to each by their given name. Herbert Patten, whose stepfather George had tribal affiliations to the area, also contributed to this section.

Most of the people now living on the shores of Wallaga Lake are descendants of the Yuin,[4] "Coast Murring", or *umbarra* ("the peace-loving people of the black duck"). The most prominent feature of their idyllic landscape, Mt Dromedary,[5] was the first Australian landmark which Lieutenant James Cook sighted and named whilst he was sailing northwards along the southeastern Australian coast on 21 April 1770. From Cook's perspective, the mountain's shape looked like two humps of a dromedary camel, but for thousands of years the Yuin had revered the landmark as the sleeping, pregnant woman (*Gulaga*) closely

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[3]Anne holds Dreaming Camps on Gulaga, for women to establish a spiritual relationship with the earth.

[4]Yuin means "very clever man". Their territory extended from about Jervis Bay to Twofold Bay (Horton 1994c: 1235).

[5]The highest peak on the southeastern Australian seaboard unattached to the Great Dividing Range, Mt Dromedary was originally a volcano formed 95 million years ago. With its neighbour Little Dromedary (Nadjinuga, east of the mount), it once extended out as far as Barunguba (Montague Island). A legend which Yuin Elders taught initiates on the mountain reflects their folk-memory of rising seawaters at the end of the Ice Age 10-15,000 years ago.

associated with the pains of creation.[6] Anne maintained that sacred ceremonies for women were held on Gulaga before the European invasion, Guboo that tribal Elders met there at a sacred site to consider matters of importance to their people along the coast. This mysterious, archaic place reinforced the spiritual powers of the Elders, who could read the movements of the wind, water, stars and trees (for example, the direction which leaves face provided them with a natural compass).

Other sites, including the bare Serpent Rock face, were used for initiation ceremonies and associated with other beliefs and legends about Gulaga.[7] The misty, forest-clad mountain still holds spiritual and emotional significance for the remaining clan descendants, who believe that Gulaga continues to "draw them back" long after they have left the community (see Byrne 1984). As evidenced by Patten, the unusual whip-crack song of the male Eastern Whipbird, often followed by a couple of notes from the female, has become one of the main links between gumleaf music and the natural sounds heard in the area.

The Yuin's lifestyle underwent stringent restrictions from 1891, when a reserve was established on their land. It is therefore through the eyes of a non-Aboriginal journalist that we are given out first impression of leaf music performance in the district. This account does not enlighten us as to how the participants viewed themselves and their traditions. Stuart Cameron (who researched the responses of the indigenous inhabitants of the far south coast of NSW to colonisation in the nineteenth-century) remarks that they had "learned to exploit elements of their cultural heritage as an entertainment for Whites" (1987: 79), and "displayed ingenuity in turning traditional skills to account within the cash-based economy established by the settlers (1987: 80).

A "corroboree", performed by the Wallaga Lake Aborigines on the Bermagui athletic club ground in April 1900, raised five pounds for the Bermagui Patriotic Fund. Although only a

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[6]Pregnant Yuin women would lie naked with their heads against a tree to imbibe extra oxygen before childbirth.

[7]The last initiation took place about 1910.

small crowd witnessed the Saturday afternoon display of boomerang and spear throwing, a big crowd gathered round the campfires to watch the evening spectacle which commenced at 7 pm:

> The darkies, forming in a single file, advanced into the firelit circle, to the accompanient (*sic*) of a droning chant by the gins and old men and boys. Rude instruments, made from reeds and leaves of trees, and a concertina, formed the orchestra, and an old darkie acted as conductor keeping time by beating a possum rug. Bally Rocken was in charge of the line of dancers, and when they had faced the audience, the leg show was amazing. Slowly warming up to the dance, there commenced the most fantastic shiverings and twitchings of the lower limbs, in perfect time; while now and again a more daring spirit would come to the front and cut the most grotesque capers. The dancing would continue for some time, and than (*sic*) at a signal from the master of ceremonies, the company circled rapidly and brought their bare feet on the ground with a thud which vibrated for yards, and the first act was over. This performance was repeated several times, and a number of tumblers next came on. A couple of darkies showed extraordinary activity, and one or two items in close immitation (*sic*) of circus acrobats were given. Of course, the blacks were not dressed in native costumes, but all had quaint figures and stripes painted on their bare limbs; and the show gave one a fair idea of what a corroboree of the old tribal days would be like.[8]

To what extent the steps and music of this spectacle resembled those executed in the great corroborees and ceremonies which hundreds of local tribespeople used to attend on nearby Mumbulla Mountain (Horton 1994c: 1235), or at Fishy Flats via Eden in the 1850s,[9] is questionable. The choreographic description suggests the retention of authentic traits more than the instrumentation. The concertina, an introduced instrument, seems out of character with corroboree movements; crude reeds and leaves far less so, in view of other descriptions of leaf playing in corroboree contexts, *e.g.* Duncan-Kemp (1933: 215; 1952: 180, 183, 187; 1968: 297) and McDonald (1996: 113).

Since it was delivered under the charge of superintendent Hockey, the Bermagui corroboree cannot be analysed without reference to the process of European settlement; Cameron (1987: 87) noted that the far south coast Aborigines may have been outnumbered in their own territories as early as 1840. This is no available evidence that leaves were played at the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal School established by Henry Jefferson Bate in 1887. The first record of "gumleaves" being played in the district at an indoor event dates to a 1903 concert.

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[8]*The Cobargo Chronicle*, 20 April 1900; cited in Cameron (1987: 79-80).

[9]The grandparents of Dhurga tribesman Aden Thomas (born *c.* 1862) attended these corroborees (Mathews Wreck Bay 1964 AIATSIS A1013).

The leafists were accompanied by a violin and a concertina at the Lyceum Hall, Quaama, where about five pounds was raised for the performers themselves.[10]

Since the 80 or so Aborigines living at La Perouse, Sydney in 1900 were south coast people, it is possible that some Wallaga Lake men first popularised leaf playing on this urban reserve. The earliest available photograph (variously dated to 1920 and 1922) of the bandsmen holding their leaves was taken at Tilba Tilba Showground via Gulaga (NLA Pictorial Collection).

Wallaga Lake leafists were descendants of the Yuin, Ngarigo or Thurga, and most retained some knowledge of their language and lore. In the late 1920s the Thomas family furnished seven members:

1. the Ngarigo/Yuin Elder Bill or Willy (Whaler Billy),[11] son of tribesman Peter Thomas and a full-blood Aboriginal woman named Nyaadi. His wife Gwendoline Linno Mary Ahoy was the part-Chinese/part-French daughter of James Ahoy (a market gardener in the Mt. Dromedary goldrush days) and Helen Demestre

2. his brothers Max and Cecil, and his sons, namely

3. Arthur, who only went on tour as far as Eden (Morgan 1994: 71)

4. Ronald

5. Cecil, a talented exponent of Jimmy Rodgers songs which earnt him the nickname "Jimmy", and

6. Ted (Guboo), born under a bush at Jembaicumbene, via Braidwood NSW on 27 January 1909. Singled out to become a future Elder at seven years, Guboo was sent at about

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[10]*Bega Standard*, 10 February 1903; cited in Cameron (1987: 80).

[11]Whaling expeditions from Sydney began in the 1790s, with a whaling station later being established at Twofold Bay (Yuin territory) in 1828 (Horton 1994c: 1235).

twelve years to live with "Uncle" Percy Davis and some tribal people "up north". The Elders taught him the lore of Gulaga, and since then he has faithfully read the time according to the position of the sun. For at least two decades Guboo camped out; at 18 years he spent six months walking to La Perouse, spearing fish and cooking them on hot coals. During the 1970s, Guboo led a successful six-month Moratorium[12] to prevent the logging of many Yuin sacred sites on Mumbulla Mountain. Although his main artistic talent was tap dancing (see Ryan 1997a), he toured as a leafist with the WLGB during the late 1920s.

From the 1920s on some other prominent bandsmen were (in alphabetical order):

1. John (Jacko) Campbell (Illustration 5a), a fisherman and drummer who later lived at Wreck Bay for more than fifty years, and his son Edward

2. Percy (Square) Davis, initiated about 1910; recorded by Mathews in 1964 and 1965. Davis spoke Dhurga language and performed some traditional Dhurga songs (AIATSIS 1014, 1015, 1019 and 1020)

3. Ernie (Friday) and Ned Hoskins (Ned later made boomerangs at La Perouse)

4. Jimmy Little Senior (Conkers) and his brothers Jackie and Eddie. Little's father (*b.* Charleville, Queensland) was a Black Tracker from Captain's Flat; his mother Eliza Penrith (a stepsister of King Mumbulla) was born at Wallaga Lake. Little (Illustration 5c) resided at Wallaga Lake, Cummeragunga and Nowra, and raised five children, including the renowned country-and-western recording star Jimmy Little Junior. Vocal and gumleaf recordings of Jimmy Little Senior are held at AIATSIS.

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[12]The Moratorium's success was attributed to the ingenuous way in which Guboo blessed Premier Neville Wran as his "blood brother". Having emerged as a restorer of the sacredness of sites (Howie-Willis 1994a: 430-31), Guboo left activism to become an internationally renowned Aboriginal guru. He made three speaking tours to America, spoke at the United Nations, and met the Dalai Lama. Guboo presently lives in Eden, NSW.

5. Percy (Bing) Mumbulla (also spelt Mumbler; *c.* 1905-7, *d.* 17 June 1991), son of King Mumbulla (Jack, tribal name Biamanga) and Rosie, grandson of Mrs Tangyeye, the district's last "good doctor". A highly respected Elder and expert leafist, Percy Mumbulla had a "sixth sense" which "linked together all the Aboriginal people along the coast"; everyone "sort of bubbled to see him" (Chittick and Fox 1997: 84-85). Mumbulla would "clap the sticks" as he climbed Gulaga, to let the "Spirit" know that he was coming; this was how he was "welcomed" (Chittick and Fox 1997: 43). Mumbulla sang traditional songs, recorded by poet Roland Robinson during the early 1950s and Janet Mathews in 1964-65. He was known as "Bing" because of his absolutely mesmeric voice (Chittick and Fox 1997: 64, 79); he sometimes sang "Danny Boy" in the language (p. 101-102) and "The Old Rugged Cross" around the house (p. 32)

6. Frank Mumbulla (Percy's brother) also played the leaf. He was revered as "a true saint", a songman and guitarist who became involved with the mission movement (Chittick and Fox 1997: 56, 186)

7. Charlie (Cronjy or Sonno-boy), Clem, and Costin (Costie) Parsons. Bob Parsons, a whaler of Dhurga descent, arrived at Wallaga Lake in 1914, and

8. Albert (Pharlap) Thomas, a Dhurga tribesman of Wreck Bay, who recalled the leaf bands that used to play in the "old days".[13]

Other bandsmen, about whom less is known, were Andy (Digger) Bond, Jimmy Chapman, Max Harrison, Alfie Penrith; Harold (Dessy) Pikalla, and Alec Walker.

Women appear to have been excluded from membership of the various Wallaga Lake gumleaf ensembles, even though they were active as singers in the Aboriginal Concert Parties. Guboo remembered no obvious taboo on female leafists amongst the Yuin and

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[13]Mathews (Wreck Bay NSW 1964) AIATSIS A1013.

neighbouring clans; in fact during their daily round of collecting berries, fruits, edible roots and tubers, women were surrounded by leaves which they could easily have blown to signal each other. The reason for their absence from touring bands was probably the practical bearing and raising children.

Before Aborigines were exposed to the multicultural entertainment industry, their unsophisticated leaf tradition flourished in an uninhibited manner. Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Station was not formally attached to a church mission;[14] therefore creative traits of Aboriginal performance practice were particularly strong in the leaf band's presentations. For example, dramatic routines incorporating step-dancing, tap-dancing, singing, accordion and fiddle music supplemented their gumleaf solos and band items, along with musical burlesque and clowning. The roots of this clowning were probably indigenous but spurred on by the blackface minstrel show influences of the previous few decades and the fashionability of vaudeville before the 1930s.

The gumleaf, violin, accordion and guitar were played at the football dances every Saturday night at Wallaga Lake. The main performers were Jim Chapman and Percy Davis, who particularly loved the barn-dance, waltz, one-step and "Pride of Erin". To facilitate these dances, residents pulled down a wall between the kitchen and bathroom of one of the station houses. In the "good old days" (probably the 1920s and 1930s), other Aborigines would come from as far as Bega and Bateman's Bay to attend (Morgan 1994: 64-65). The WLGB also played on the back of trucks at gymkhanas, sports picnics on the beach, and church functions. Mary Deroux relates the following anecdote in Chittick and Fox (1997: 165):

> I remember a church service in this barn at Nerrigundah. It was really nice, one guy on the spoons and a couple of guys on the gumleaves and Ernie Hoskins on the mouth organ. And they were singing these beautiful hymns, and all the pigs snorting underneath because it was built over the pigsty. Well, I thought, how holy can you get? I mean, above the snorting of the pigs, this beautiful harmony of the singing. It was just marvellous. And that old fella, Uncle Percy [Mumbulla], I never heard a person play the gumleaf like he did. And Uncle Percy Davis, he was fantastic on the fiddle. His favourite was "Danny Boy".

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[14]The only mission on the southeast coast was at Bomaderry.

Some of the leafists were multi-skilled and performed a whole stock of idiosyncratic acts. The lead leafist and natural conductor of the touring group was John Campbell, who used to count the ensemble in with a "1-2-3", even when the items were not in triple time.[15] Apart from delivering brilliant leaf solos, Campbell played the drum and presented a well-received comedy act in which he imitated the spearing of the fish on stage to music.

The main clown of the band, however, was Jimmy Little Senior, who used to dress up in tribal paint to play clapsticks. In one of their acts when they sang "I came to the river and I couldn't get across", Jimmy would spring suddenly on to the stage. As a leafist, Percy Mumbulla "had that bit of power, he could send the sound out" (Chittick and Fox 1997: 64); and his renditions of one very sad song always made the older women cry. The best dancer on stage was Percy Davis, but Guboo's own dancing talent was also appreciated (see Ryan 1997: 106-109). Percy also played the fiddle like a ukulele;[16] his favourite piece was "Danny Boy".

Edward Campbell and Ernie Hoskins both played the kangaroo-skin drum more often than the leaf. Whether or not kangaroo-skin drums were deliberately used in gumleaf bands to underline their indigenous character is still unclear, but this particular drum was constructed in Central Tilba and carried by hand by Ernie from Wallaga Lake to Melbourne. Although there was normally no set number of leafists in institutionalised gumleaf bands, it is safe to assume from pictorial sources that there was only one kangaroo-skin drum per group (an observation first made by Crotty 1990: 2). Musically speaking, one double-headed drum would also have been quite adequate for establishing the beat. The practice of including a European-style drum probably originated from the influence of the German bands or brass bands (Sullivan 1988: 67), which played on civic occasions in Australian towns, or even from

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[15]Another full-blood Aboriginal conductor, Allison Obah, was said to be "quite original and effective" in his methods of training the Palm Island Aboriginal Band, Queensland in the late 1920s (*Australasian Band and Orchestra News*, 26 April 1928: 21).

[16]Mathews (Bateman's Bay NSW 1965, AIATSIS A1014) recorded Davis performing two fishing songs to strummed fiddle accompaniment.

the sound and appearance of the standard dance band. An unnamed brother of Albert Thomas had also been a "kangaroo-skin drummer in a leaf band" at "one stage" (probably the WLGB).[17]

In the words of Guboo, the leafists were positioned behind the singers in the group and together they made a "beautiful sound". Their favourite repertoire included old blackface minstrel standards, such as "Swanee River" ("Old Folks at Home") and "Old Black Joe", although Guboo's personal favourite was the patriotic war song "Boys in Blue are Fighting". The drum and leaves were sometimes played (loudly, in parts) to simulate the shots and shells of the battlefield in the more tear-jerking acts.

In spite of gimmicks such as these, the WLGB exhibited the general features of Western European instrumental tradition, which was evident in small minstrel shows, British street music, and German bands. In a sense they also represented the Australian equivalent of a Central European gypsy orchestra, especially since they too occupied the bottom rung in society's ladder. Usually consisting of 12-14 members, gypsy orchestras reached their height of popularity in the mid nineteenth-century and were renowned for harmonising in an extempore manner, effortlessly adapting items to suit different circumstances.[18] The music of the WLGB was also alive and wandering, carefree yet polished. Moreover, their performance behaviour influenced the traditions of at least three other gumleaf bands, including the Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band in Victoria, to which I will now devote equal attention.

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[17]Mathews (Wreck Bay NSW 1964) AIATSIS A1013.

[18]Based on Sarosi (1986: 150).

## 2. The Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band (LTGB)

The history of the formation of the LTGB has been subjected to various interpretations, which I will now attempt to unravel. In 1840, when the white settlers arrived, probably 2-3,000 members of the Kurnai (Ganai) [19] tribe were living in Gippsland. The Krauatungalung[20] branch of the Kurnai originally called Lake Tyers "Bungyarnda". Although occupied by only a small number of people, Bungyarnda served as a gathering place for many more clans came from as far away as Maneroo (the Monaro plains), because it was rich in fish, game and plant foods.

In addition to the detailed ethnographic writings of Smyth (1878) and Howitt (1904 [1996]), Watson (1984: 75) highlighted the Kurnai's culture of "wood, stone and bone"; Massola (1968: 106) the singing of their female rain-makers; and Leason (1934: 6) the behaviour of the "Messenger Bird" which advised the Lakes people of the approach of Aborigines from NSW. By 1860, practically no more corroborees were performed, and Kurnai oral culture was eroded as the people were introduced to a new religion and morality. Gradually those who remained lived in a shadow world in which both the traditional and white culture were alien (Adams 1981: 62).

The Church of England Mission at Lake Tyers was founded in 1861 by John Bulmer (1833-1913),[21] for various tribal groups such as the Kurnai and Bidwell. In spite of tension resulting from the enforced relocation of other groups (*e.g.* the northeastern river tribes in 1939), a vigorous community life developed around the Lake Tyers church and school. This included sports, picnics and concerts, in which gumleaf bands were prominent.

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[19] People of the southeast region between Cape Everard and Corner Inlet (Horton 1994a: 567).

[20] Those living in the lowland area between Lakes Entrance and Sydenham Inlet.

[21] Bulmer arrived in Victoria in 1849 to work on the goldfields. From 1855-1860 he helped to set up Yelta Mission, then founded the Lake Tyers Mission where he spent the next 50 years. Bulmer was ordained a priest in 1904.

In 1934 the *Bulletin* cartoonist Percy Leason set out to paint portraits of Victoria's 46 remaining full-bloods, but completed only 31. In *The Last of the Victorian Aborigines* (1934: 5), he commented that "nearly all of the Gippsland males make uncanny use of the gumleaf as a musical instrument, but they use it to play our tunes".

In the opinion of historian Jack Whadcoat[22] of Lakes Entrance (pers. comm., January 15 1995), the gumleaf instrument was introduced to the Kurnai at Lake Tyers by another Gippsland tribe. Whadcoat suggested that gumleaf bands operated at Lake Tyers from about the 1890s, as bandmasters and schoolteachers took over the teaching of music at the mission. They were responsible for developing the activity into a "cultured" art form.

To pursue this theory, I examined the Visitors Book from Lake Tyers Aborigine's Mission Station 1878-1909 (SLV). Several visitors described the Aboriginal choir as "sweet", "cheerful" and "delightful", but none mentioned a gumleaf band. Likewise a black and white silent French film made at Lake Tyers in 1912[23] features men making and using boomerangs and performing a war dance, women weaving baskets, and a white woman teaching Aboriginal children at an outdoor school, but no gumleaf band.

Beside Bulmer, the explorer and public servant Alfred W. Howitt (1830-1908)[24] made the most detailed study of nineteenth-century Aboriginal culture in the area. He knew the Aborigines of Gippsland "better than any man has ever known them" and the eucalypts "almost as well as he knew the Aborigines" (Frith and Sawer 1974: 94). Howitt is considered by modern researchers to have been an excellent and careful recorder whose work, by and large, concurs with other independent sources. He divided the Aboriginal

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[22]A nephew of Hamilton Hendrie, a former Church of England lay preacher who photographed Lake Tyers leafists.

[23]*Derniers Indigenes Australiens: État de Victoria, 1912* (NFSA: 9216).

[24]Howitt made major contributions to geological and botanical science, and produced 60 publications on Aboriginal society. His anthropological research began when he employed some Kurnai to pick his hops in 1872. In 1874 he pioneered the use of the questionnaire as a tool for social anthropology (Wesson 1994: 17).

songs of southeastern Australia into categories and documented indigenous instruments in ceremony, but did not ascribe any blown musical use to native leaves.

If such an activity existed on the mission in late 1885 it would also have attracted the attention of "the Vagabond" (a *nom de plume* for journalist Julian Thomas), who drew public attention to its beautiful, still dark waters of Lake Tyers. He noted that daily visitors were becoming a nuisance at the mission station because they interfered with the progress of the schoolchildren. Thomas described the hymn singing and Bessie Cameron's harmonium playing, but made no references to gumleaf playing.[25]

A nineteenth-century history of the mission by Attwood (1989) supplies no evidence that Bulmer introduced gumleaf playing to Lake Tyers, nor that Nathanial Pepper[26] (born *c.* 1840s) instigated such a practice after his arrival at Lake Tyers from Ebenezer Mission near Antwerp, eastern Victoria.[27] It has been suggested that Bruce Ferguson, who managed the station from November 1917, brought gumleaf playing to the southern coast of Victoria (Anderson 1995: 27). Anderson does not say who made the suggestion, which he believes to be "wrong". Yet on p. 30 he contradicts this:

> Although there certainly were individual leaf players there for years, it is possible that the first leaf band at Lake Tyers was raised in 1917 and run by the Stewart brothers who may have come from New South Wales with the new manager, Ferguson.

Anderson obtained this information from the writings of Kurnai descendant Phillip Pepper (1980: 103), which firmly stated that the first travelling gumleaf band reached Lake Tyers from NSW in 1917 and stayed around the district for years. Anderson supplies no evidence for his statement that "individual leaf players" lived at Lake Tyers before 1917.[28] Since Whadcoat did not supply any primary sources either, I will build on Pepper's explanation,

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[25]"Picturesque Victoria: Lake Tyers" series (1886), *The Argus*, 20 March: 4; 27 March: 4; see also 29 March.

[26]The first full-blood Aboriginal person to be baptised in Victoria.

[27]The Moravian Brethren ran Ebenezer Mission from 1858.

[28]Michael Edwards (Chapter 1) could only verify one generation of transmission of gumleaf playing via the Elders.

assuming that Ferguson nurtured gumleaf playing at Lake Tyers because he loved music and trained Aboriginal choirs at both Cummera' and Lake Tyers.

Herbert Patten, whose stepfather George (Julip) Stewart of Wallaga Lake was a nephew of Christopher (Baker)[29] Stewart, confirmed the longstanding association of the Stewart family with Wallaga Lake. The Stewart brothers (Plate 9) came from Muckin's Point, named after their father Harry - better known as Muckin (meaning "Old Blue Gum"; Patten raised the possibility that blue gum leaves may have been played there). For some time, the Stewarts lived in bark huts around the foreshores of the lake (Morgan 1995: 11), where many artefacts have been uncovered.

The band that the Stewart brothers operated in the 1910s was rooted in the leaf performance tradition evidenced at Wallaga Lake from 1900, which may have involved their father Muckin.[30] However, no members by the name of Stewart appear to have been associated with the various regroupings of the WLGB, probably because they remained at Lake Tyers. As a brother-in-law of Baker Stewart, Lindsay Thomas (the first leafist ever observed by Patten) would have been influenced by the Stewart's leaf playing styles. Thomas was a brother to Patten's great-aunt, Mrs Percy Pepper, who in 1970 wrote:

> Ethel Thomas (Mrs Percy Pepper), Granny's sixth daughter, was a very good pianist. Ethel's brothers accompanied her on gumleaf which was a unique art her brothers and relations had learnt from the neighbouring mission station at Lake Tyers. To hear this music floating thru' the air on a still evening was a real joy (recorded in Gilbert 1972: 69-70).

Pepper (1985: 242-243) described Lake Tyers (1917-1926) as "a concentration camp under the concentration plan". He cited 1918 as the year in which a gumleaf band began to entertain tourists. It is conceivable that its ensuing popularity was associated with the flood of nationalism that came around 1917 (reflected, for instance, in the popular tunes and

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[29]Baker married Adeline (Dolly) Thomas of Lake Tyers.

[30]A photograph of four Stewart girls in hula skirts in the Wallaga Lake Concert Group (Morgan 1995: 98) confirms the continuing presence of the Stewart family in the area in 1958.

entertainment of that time). Research confirms, however, that tourism was the major factor behind the institutionalisation of the gumleaf band at Lake Tyers.

This commercial means of transmitting and preserving specific Kurnai cultural practices underwent its peak surge in the 1920s and 1930s. As the favourite feature of concerts (M. Jackomos 1971: 6), leaf band performances represented a newly fabricated cultural practice at Lake Tyers, but gullible tourists[31] viewed them as quaint enactments of Aboriginal culture - if the following independent reports are any indication:

> The gum-leaf band became a noted attraction at the station, and at Lakes Entrance and elsewhere, and played for tourists on visitors' days each Wednesday and Saturday. On these days Aborigines vied with each other showing their powers at throwing boomerangs and selling objects they had made. The ladies did well with the sale of knitted goods. There were concerts, dances, musical evenings and billiards, as well as a sports club which cost members 12s/6d a year, and a fine sporting oval (Adams 1981: 306).

> During the holidays boatloads of tourists visited the station between 10 am and 7 pm every day. They were entertained by the Gum Leaf Band, the Boomerang Throwers and the Fire Makers. Concerts were given by the children for the war effort. The Aborigines earned more money from selling the "curios" they had made than they could working on the station. Ferguson complained that they neglected their work to look after their tourists, so visiting was reduced to two hours on weekdays, four hours on Saturday, and all day on public holidays. On Boxing Day 1925 there were five hundred tourists on the reserve. The Aborigines made money during the Christmas season through acting as guides, selling artifacts and playing the leaf (Pepper 1985: 243, 248).

> Awards for 'fancy work' and flower arrangements were won at the Bairnsdale Show, and the Lake Tyers people boasted a Gumleaf Band that became a great local attraction. Perhaps of greater significance, a sense of community took root, and community leadership began to develop (excerpt from *'My Heart is Breaking'*, Australian Archives and the Public Record Office of Victoria, 1993: 70).

According to Jackomos (1971: 33-34), visitors arrived by launch to visit the church, viewed demonstrations of boomerang-throwing on the oval, then purchased baskets made by the ladies, shellwork, and other objects of Aboriginal craftsmanship. Then they proceeded to the dilapidated hall to be entertained by the concert party. Before community parties, the people used to decorate the hall with tree fern fronds and gumleaves (pers. comm. from Michael Edwards, 30 November 1996). Gwenda Finlayson (pers. comm., 25 November 1996), [32]

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[31]Tourists were unaware that the Kurnai called them *laket, loons* or *lohans* amongst themselves (Leason 1934: 5; Pepper 1980: 9).

[32]Finlayson attended the Lake Tyers Mission School, where she heard many concerts by the gumleaf band.

whose mother (Mrs Cruse) managed Lake Tyers House in 1928, recalled the bandsmen playing leaves in harmony or unison and performing variety acts.

In the words of Mrs Joyce Whiteoak (pers. comm., 19 February 1997), who visited Lake Tyers in the mid-1930s, the gumleaf band was "used as a showpiece". It consisted of 8-12 men dressed in "castaway" shirts and trousers, who would enter the hall one at a time. The lead leafist stood in front of the others, but offered no verbal communication with the audience. They performed for about half an hour on a small wooden stage, producing shrill, piercingly clear and rhythmical sounds on large leaves held with one hand. Their "tuneful" repertoire included "Swanee River" ("Old Folks at Home") and "Road to Gundagai".

Community worker Cora Gilsenan-Waters[33] of Metung (pers. comm., 22 July 1994) described the LTGB as "a group of a dozen or so performers who had their set routine down to a fine art". Accompanied by one kangaroo-skin bass drum, their performances always began with precision; the leafists were natural harmonists who sounded "absolutely magical". To this, Michael Edwards (pers. comm., 30 November 1996) added that Joe Wandin and Foster Moffatt often played "The Old Rugged Cross" in parts. These two were very skilled leafists and spoonists.

Plate 10 pictures a fifteen-member gumleaf band at Lake Tyers in the early 1930s.[34] Prominent leafists featured in the photo were:

1. William (Willie) Johnson, also known as "Grandfather Johnson". Willie, who could still speak his language, worked for the Gilsenans in the 1940s, and was renowned for making canoes and boomerangs (Pepper 1980: 101). His brother Bobby was also a leafist.

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[33]Gilsenan-Waters helped to organise the first Aboriginal Debutante Ball in Melbourne. She was later awarded the MBE for her many services to the Aboriginal people of Gippsland.

[34]Jackomos N3739.27a (AIATSIS Pictorial Collection).

2. Charlie Green (*b.* Lake Tyers, 5 February 1884; *d.* 1955). His father Lewis Green, who lived in a *gunyah* when Bulmer set up the mission, was a talented violinist and left his family to sing Sankey hymns in the streets of Sydney. As a child, Charlie wandered about with his great-grandfather Lamby, an old Lakes medicine man whose name struck terror into the hearts of youngsters (Leason 1934: 11-12). Charlie became a famous runner, hurdler and swimmer, winning hurdling events at the Stawell Gift (Pepper 1980: 70-72).

3. Julian (Dingo) Hood, the eldest of four brothers, whose mother played the organ at St Johns, Lake Tyers Mission, and "sang like a nightingale" (Pepper 1980: 99); and

4. Gordon O'Rourke, son of Ned and Eliza O'Rourke.

The other bandsmen pictured at this time were Tom Foster, Alec Harrison, Fred and Campbell Johnson, William Logan, Gordon and Frank Marks, Syd McCrae, Alan McDougal, and Alec Moffatt. At a later date, Carl Turner had a "couple of goes" at playing leaf in the band, but opted to act as their "caretaker" by collecting money from the tourists.[35]

From all reports there were no female leafists at Lake Tyers. However at mid-century socials, Norma Harrison played accordion and Dolly Pepper played honky-tonk piano. Dolly was possibly the pianist in the concert party who could "play anything by ear" (Goding 1990: 66). Blind fiddler Sam Rankin also played the gumleaf, David Bull the mouth organ and spoons (pers. comm. from Michael Edwards, 30 November 1996). The band developed a staple repertoire of hymns and minstrel tunes, both as a complete act, and as an accompaniment to the concert party. Remnant corroboree dances, which had been quashed by early authorities, were also performed at concerts and for tourists (Pepper 1985: 253, see photograph of William Johnson, Campbell Johnson, Laurie Moffatt and Charlie Green in costume).

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[35]Meredith and Bradley (Lake Tyers Vic 1994) NLA TRC 3000/85.

For many years the gumleaf band played every Saturday night at Gordon Gilsenan's farm on Bancroft Bay. Virtuosic technical feats were performed by boxer Joe Wandin,[36] who could make the leaf sound "like a solo violin", alternately like "a whole orchestra" (pers. comm. from Gordon's daughter Cora, 22 July 1994). Gilsenan provided afternoon teas for boating tourists, whilst the Aborigines contributed songs and boomerang throwing displays (Pepper 1980: 101). The respected Elder James (Jamesie or Jimmy) Scott was the "star of the show", leading the hymns with his beautiful singing voice and lighting a fire with sticks (Landon and Tonkin 1999: 182). According to Vroland (1951: 27):

> Thousands of tourists have heard the dark men's choir in the open air on the shores of Bancroft Bay; the Harrison brothers, the Moffatts, Lance McDougall, Bob Andy, Ted Mullett and the inimitable Jimmy Scott; and many must recall the pleading "Please remember me" from the Maori's Farewell with which they often end their programme.

Tourists visiting Lake Tyers made moonlight trips in a hired launch, whilst Leslie Kruse and his brothers took members of the gumleaf band out in one or two small rowing boats. The launch would sail round and round, giving the impression of travelling much further, while the Aborigines played. The best place to hear them was over the water; they were too shrill in a hall (Kruse, recorded in Goding 1990: 66). At one memorable religious service and bonfire above the cliffs on the Lake Tyers House property, the Aborigines stood up in a boat and moved slowly across the water, standing perfectly still:

> It was a tremendous night because they were playing the hymns on gum leaves. Their idea of playing the hymns was to sort of jazz them and it came out beautiful (Charles Lucas, recorded in Goding 1990: 66).

The gumleaf band was still a popular entertainment in the hall when hundreds of tourists visited the station just before the outbreak of World War II. When the Duke of Gloucester visited the area he immediately expressed a desire to hear the gumleaf band. Efforts were hurriedly made to round up the musicians, but to the Duke's disappointment they had left earlier for the mission station (Pepper 1980: 102-103).

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[36]Wandin was the smallest man enlisted in the AIF draft from Sale in June 1940 ("Aborigines in AIF", *The Argus*, Tuesday 16 July, 1940: 5).

Leaf bands obviously projected connotations of simplicity, which fulfilled the tourist expectations fed by contemporary images of Aborigines in popular culture. Aspects of the fascinating history of mobility and exchange between the major Aboriginal gumleaf bands in the 1920s and 1930s are recorded below.

## PART 2: TOURS AND COLLABORATIONS

### 1. The Wallaga Lake bandsmen tour Lake Tyers, Melbourne and Cummeragunga

The following account is informed by Guboo Ted Thomas (who could not supply firm dates), and supplemented by the writings of Jackomos, Morgan, and Chittick and Fox.

In the mid-to-late 1920s[37] 14 members of the WLGB walked all the way to Melbourne via the coast, often sleeping under the cover of bushes and spearing fish which they cooked on hot coals. The band performed corroborees (in these instances traditional dances with sticks and spears) and vaudeville acts en route, hiring a hall at each town in which they stayed the night. This provided enough money for them to travel to the next town, where they would hold another concert. Sometimes they took on casual work, *e.g.* as farmhands, to earn their keep. Guboo sent his mother a photo that pictured him working at the Yallourn coalmines, Victoria (Morgan 1994: 71). The band presented a special Christmas show for the Yallourn children, many of whom managed to blow sounds on leaves.

The Black Police escorted the Wallaga Lake contingent into the Lake Tyers Station. After delivering their own concert they joined forces with the local gumleaf band, who, in Guboo's estimation, "only sounded like a bunch of mosquitoes in harmony" (pers. comm., 8 July 1994). Since the Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band also commanded attention in its day, and Kruse, for one, described them as "shrill", Guboo's comment suggests that some friendly rivalry

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[37]Bradley (1995: 4) cited "1920", but Guboo was born in 1909 and was just under 20 years of age when he left with the band for Melbourne.

existed between the two bands. There were certainly differences in the habitats and traditional modes of living of the Yuin of the southeast coast and the Kurnai of Gippsland. It is also possible that the bottled "bone leaves", which the Wallaga Lake bandsmen picked on Gulaga and transported around the coast by hand (see Chapter 6), produced superior sounds to those emitted on the fresh stringybark and mahogany leaves used by the Lake Tyers bandsmen.[38]

As far as pitch was concerned, the Wallaga Lake bandsmen had been thoroughly drilled in the sol-fa system by their schoolteachers, but this was assumedly also the case with the more closely supervised Lake Tyers bandsmen, who received constant exposure to missionary influence.

When the band reached Melbourne, the men all stayed in Fitzroy with the Clarke family from Cummera'. Their major performance assignment was a large ball at the Palais Royal, where a dance band was also employed for the evening. Dressed in suits, the WLGB played waltzes, including the "Cuckoo Waltz", and numbers for the barn dance (the band was paid five pounds for each tune). Guboo could not remember which leaves the bandsmen used at the ball; they were playing some (unidentified) eucalypt leaves by this stage of their tour.

Following the ball, the leafists participated in a gathering of brass bands at Bendigo. On this occasion Ernie Friday borrowed a kettledrum, possibly because officials deemed it superior to the old kangaroo-skin drum. On their return to Melbourne, they performed items at a "corroboree" in Dandenong, marched down Swanston Street blowing leaves in the Labor Day march, and attended a Labor Party picnic on the banks of the Yarra River. According to Sullivan's recorded interview with Guboo in 1987 (cited in Bradley 1995: 5), the WLGB then travelled across southwest Victoria to SA. Guboo did not mention this to me, instead he gave the impression that they headed northwards to Cummera' on a round trip back to Wallaga Lake.

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[38]Dried leaf instruments survive considerable periods of time (detailed information supplied in Chapter 6). In Guboo's system of aesthetics, "superior" means "louder" and "sharper" (Chapter 5).

In the late 1930s, the WLGB purchased a two-ton Ford truck and drove as far as Darlington Point NSW, where leaf playing was a pre-established cultural activity. This was possibly the tour in which they travelled with a Mr Reid "right up around the western districts" (Cyril Parsons in Chittick and Fox 1997: 51).

The group also drove to Cummera', then returned to Wallaga Lake, but soon drove back to Cummera' for an extended sojourn. Prominent members at the time were Jimmy Little Senior and Cecil, Max and Willy Thomas. It is possible that these particular leafists played in the Aboriginal street procession held at the Cummera' settlement to mark the coronation of King George VI on 12 May 1937. According to Ken Briggs of Mooroopna (pers. comm., 12 January 1996), the gumleaf band led the procession of decorated floats, and foot and bicycle races were held. A huge turnout of Echuca residents came to watch the spectacle.

From the late 1930s through into the early 1940s, the Wallaga Lake contingent joined forces with the resident Cummera' concert group to tour the Goulburn Valley and Riverina area. Along with the choir, the gumleaf band entertained in halls and streets to raise money for local hospitals and wartime charities (Jackomos and Fowell 1991: 170). Merle Jackomos recalls Cummera' as "an amazing place for entertainment":

> We had a dance hall where we held concerts and dances for every occasion. At the drop of a hat people would put on a concert. Everyone would participate.

Yorta Yorta descendant and Church of Christ pastor Eddie Atkinson[39] had an old 1929 Chevrolet, to which he attached a trailer with seats covered by a canopy. This transported the organ and drum used by the gumleaf band as well as the members of the group (Jackomos 1971: 33). Pastor Eddie also tap-danced regularly with leafist Cecil Thomas to Shirley Temple songs and the popular "Rainbow on the River". They were in demand at the regattas (a tradition on the Murray from at least the 1860s), and fancy dress balls, which were held frequently all around the district. Apart from playing mouth organ, spoons, and bottles with

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[39] An uncle of Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls, Pastor Eddie died in 1951 at Mooroopna.

water in them, Pastor Eddie produced wonderful sounds on his own original instrument - irons were either bent like a hoop to hold 12 two-foot strips of hide, or hung from a book. When shaken, they sounded like bells (pers. comm. from Ken Briggs, 12 January 1996).

The Wallaga Lake contingent remained in Cummera' for many years before returning home, possibly because their truck was bogged in a ditch. Even when it was roadworthy again, the dejected Cummera' girls filled the petrol tank with sugar in a concerted attempt to prevent the men from leaving (anecdote relayed by film archivist Michael Leigh of AIATSIS, 7 February 1994; Leigh sometimes accompanied Chris Sullivan on field trips).

Following the heyday of the gumleaf band in the 1930s, guitars, violins and pianos were increasingly used in Cummera'. This contributed to a decline in the popularity of leaf instruments, which in many places had already been supplanted by the hardier tin whistle, concertina and harmonica.

In the early 1930s, Jimmy Little Senior and his brother Jackie travelled with an Aboriginal vaudeville show entitled "The Leaf Band", to which they contributed "corroborees" and songs. Tom Butler of Ulladulla was the proprietor of this troupe's tour throughout NSW. Thomas, Bill, Elizabeth and Bernice Campbell, Micky Williams and Jackie Mumbulla of Moruya (southeast coast) were the staple members of the group. They used leaves, jews-harps, harmonicas and violins to create a "fair razz-a-ma-tazz" (this best describes the style of 1920s jazz which incorporated "noise" sound elements; it persisted amongst Aborigines long after its 1920s mainstream heyday). The band's programme, which also included hula dances by Butler's daughters May and Marjy, was typical of the entertainment of the day:

> The audience would be whipped up to excitement pitch during the show. Then the sessions would close with the song "The Battlefields of Europe". The chorus line "Tell mother not to wait for me, for I'm not coming home" would always make the audience crumble [*i.e.* into tears]. That is why the cast made it a practice to pass out paper handkerchiefs to the audience as they went into the hall.[40]

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[40] "Down Memory Lane", *New Dawn*, December 1971: 12.

## 2. Tours of the Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band

In about 1930, a number of Lake Tyers Aborigines were inspired by the station's highly respected manager, Captain Newman,[41] to form a minstrel troupe of leafists, dancers and singers. They performed at Bairnsdale, and travelled into NSW to raise money for the Bairnsdale X-ray fund (Adams 1981: 302; Pepper 1980: 85). It is likely that the itinerant Wallaga Lake bandsmen who visited Lake Tyers in the late 1920s had influenced their jazzed-up versions of hymns.

Non-Aboriginal residents of the Lakes District usually had little or no contact with the Lake Tyers Aborigines. Bradley recorded how, on one New Year's Eve in the 1930s, Harold Newman heard the LTGB playing popular and minstrel tunes on the back of a truck and played along with them (Bradley 1995: 3).

By 1938 the LTGB had toured the whole state of Victoria (pers. comm. from Jack Whadcoat, 15 January 1995), and undoubtedly sparked off some leaf playing activity in other country towns. At Framlingham Reserve in western Victoria, for example, many transient leafists from Lake Tyers were known to the prominent Elder, "Uncle" Banjo Clarke (pers. comm. from ABC journalist Kristina Nehm, 17 June 1996). Residents Alice Clarke ("Aunty Mickey", now 89 years old), Edna Brown (now 84), and Lionel Harradine adopted leaf playing as an interest, but no obvious gumleaf band tradition existed on the reserve. In the town of Heywood (via Lake Condah Mission), shearer Angus (Hank) Williams (born *c.* 1932) played guitar and gumleaf to entertain himself and the shearing team (Breen 1989: 88).

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[41]Manager of Lake Tyers from 1929-1931, Captain Newman was a naval doctor/herbalist (Pepper 1980: 83-86), who wrote songs for the Aborigines to sing (pers. comm. from Cora Gilsenan, 22 July 1994).

Veteran runner Charlie Green trained Albert (Choppy) Hayes[42] to run at the 63rd Stawell Gift, a prestigious athletic event held each Easter. In 1938, leafists James Scott, Chook Mullett, Sam Rankin and others travelled from Lake Tyers to the western side of Victoria with Choppy, to perform at a concert coinciding with the event (Jackomos 1971: 33-340 and Adams 1981: 305). The "Grand Open Air Entertainments" and Grand Palais de Dance socials usually featured brass bands, dance bands, vaudeville and novelty acts.[43] However, since no mention of gumleaf items exists in the Stawell Gift Hall of Fame archives pertaining to the period 1937-1941, the concert mentioned by Jackomos and Adams may have been privately organised. Official programmes do not confirm the participation of an A. Hayes in 1938, but rather that of a D. Hayes, both in 1939 and 1940.

With this background history in view, I will now use documentary and audiovisual evidence to establish the political history of these major gumleaf bands.

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## PART 3: NON-ABORIGINAL APPROPRIATION AND EXPLOITATION OF ABORIGINAL GUMLEAF BANDS IN THE 1930s AND 1940s

During the 1930s and 1940s, the Australian government exerted an authoritative, monocultural hold over race relations. Yet when deemed appropriate, they tapped the talents of Aboriginal people in order to showcase the various "traditional" aspects that remained mingled in their contemporary culture. As part of the picturesque mode which operated to whitewash the continuing forms of Aboriginal dispossession, film entrepreneurs used the gumleaf band as a money-making ploy in the 1930s, whilst in the early 1940s leafist-servicemen delivered promotional stunts on behalf of the military.

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[42]See photograph of Hayes in the Jackomos Collection (AIATSIS N379-N3784). Full-blood tribesman Harry Hayes (*b.* 1892) was the son of Gobiam, a Bidwell tribesman given the European name Billy Hayes.

[43]These included Amateur Hour artists, trapeze acts, fireworks displays, pyrotechnic floral displays, community singing, hillbilly duos and a melodeon band.

## 1. The Opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge

A party of Aborigines, including several Wallaga Lake leafists, were "specially selected and instructed" to march from north to south at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Harbour Bridge on 20 March 1932.[44] Mr J.R. Milne was chosen by the Aborigines Protection Board to take charge of the Aboriginal contingent in the celebrations:

> He chose a party of full-bloods, including seven women, to march over the bridge. The warriors, who wore warpaint and kangaroo skins and carried boomerangs and spears in the pageant, were drawn from Wallaga Lake, Brewarrina, Menindie and La Perouse.[45]

The Aborigines were scheduled to march in the first of eight large groups. They appeared at the rear of three other bands, a host of children and the 100 workmen who took part in the building of the bridge.[46] The press described this large-scale urban event as follows:

> From every window, every balcony, every other vantage point, there came bursts of echoing cheers, as the youngsters marched past, and there came into view, amid the crash of triumphal music, bridge workers, who were accorded a magnificent ovation, aborigines, and then, in a riot of colour, the historical, rural, floral, and other parts of the pageant.[47]

It can be seen from Plate 11 (under magnification) that approximately 12 of the men played leaves,[48] accompanied by a double-headed drum. Those in tribal garb were barefooted, whilst a few men at the rear wore jackets and trousers and some also wore hats. Less than half a

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[44]This "symphony in steel" (title of a 1932 Cinesound documentary) was the largest arch body in the world at the time, and the unrivalled icon of urban Australia until superseded by the Sydney Opera House in 1973.

[45]"Retired Station Manager hopes gifts will found Welfare Board collection", *Dawn*, October 1962: 2.

[46]The Aboriginal group walked in the wake of nine year-old Lennie Gwyther, who had ridden his pony from Leongatha, Victoria simply to watch the ceremony (*Sydney Morning Herald*, Monday 21 March 1932: 12).

[47]*Ibid.*

[48]Percy Mumbulla was one of the Wallaga Lake leafists whom Eileen Pittman recalled seeing in the march (Chittick and Fox 1997: 54).

minute of relevant *Movietone News* footage of the pageant is preceded by a glimpse of the Captain Cook float, which featured an Aboriginal warrior brandishing a spear.[49]

According to participant Guboo Ted Thomas (pers. comm., 7 July 1994), the government paid the gumleaf band to march from the north to the south of the bridge. The contingent also staged a boomerang-throwing exhibition at Vaucluse House, where they camped in the grounds in *gunyahs* (bark dwellings) for a day or two during the celebrations.

Milne proudly described the performance of the gumleaf band as "the greatest hit of the Aboriginal entertainment for Sydney-siders", and "a symphony orchestra among gumleaf bands".[50] Although this compliment demeans the validity of the gumleaf band as a musical and social organisation in its own right, it warrants interpretation within the context of the assimilationist policy of the day. Guboo, for one, accepted the compliment in the spirit in which it was delivered (pers. comm., 7 July 1994).

The paternalistic infrastructure of the early 1930s is evidenced by the recruitment of some Aboriginal teenage girls in white domestic uniform to the parade. Although in hindsight their inclusion - and that of the leafists - might be interpreted as a superficial token intended to distract attention away from the statelessness of Aborigines in their own homeland, it was probably viewed in a more positive light at the time. The Aborigines may even have been pleased and proud to participate and achieve some fleeting recognition. In the soundtrack of the moving image described above, the crowd's enthusiastic "hoo-rah" can be heard, along with a few gumleaf sounds (unfortunately, not enough to distinguish the exact tune played).

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[49] "Opening of Sydney Harbour Bridge", NFSA A0012; C1159. The Aboriginal contingent is not featured in either of the two silent reel-to-reel films of the celebrations held at the NFSA, namely ABY000052 and ABA2345.

[50] "Retired Station Manager hopes gifts will found Welfare Board collection", *Dawn*, October 1962: 2.

## 2. Gumleaf Bands in Australian Cinema

A strong, nationalistic sentiment characterised Australian films of the 1930s, as it did Australian society at large. An inclination existed on the part of film directors for appropriating Aboriginal gumleaf bands in a gimmicky, formulaic manner, which appealed to British and American audiences. A fundamental philosophical tenet in European society in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century was that of the superiority of Western culture, whereby some non-Western cultures were perceived to be savage or primitive. By the 1930s, the European construction of the "noble savage" still persisted in projecting a low life/high life approximation. The following two examples, viewed at the NFSA, magnify the images of gumleaf bands diffused throughout early twentieth-century documentaries, photos and magazine articles, whereby Aborigines were represented in an ahistoric context as a biological rather than a cultural phenomenon.

(i) Ken Hall's 1933 feature film, "The Squatter's Daughter" (the story of twin sheep stations Waratah and Enderby), was shot at Wallacia near Penrith and on a station at Tamworth, NSW. It was a new interpretation of the version filmed by Bert Bailey and George Cross in 1910, which focussed on the attempts of father-and-son villains to cheat their way into ownership of a wealthy grazing property. Premiered on 29 September 1933 at the Civic Theatre, Haymarket (Sydney), it grossed over £25,000 and was released through MGM in the United Kingdom under the title "Down Under".

Throughout *The Squatter's Daughter,* the importance of Australia's wool clip is exploited with wide-eyed wonder (Shirley and Adams 1983: 118-119). This nationalistic tone begins with a eulogy to Australia's "health, optimism and progress" by Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, then backs its opening titles with a flock of sheep and a rousing rendition of Elgar's "Land of Hope and Glory" behind the titles. Hall was "aware that Australian audiences had actually heard little of their country in local features" (p. 117), so integrated in his films "the elements he knew would appeal to his audience" (p. 159). These include a traditionally

garbed Aboriginal gumleaf band, which an elderly grazier hires to perform at a party on his country station for novelty value. He patronisingly introduces this self-contained unit of musical theatre as "a surprise in the form of a real live gumleaf band" (here, an analogy could be drawn with how a hired gypsy orchestra would have been introduced to an aristocratic European audience).

The gumleaf band's representation as a mock-savage novelty is implicitly contrasted with the sophisticated society dance band that precedes and follows it. One suspects, judging by their inert stance, that the eight leafists were "flower-arranged" before the shoot of the party scene at Cinesound's Bondi Studio. They look so ill at ease about representing a supposedly vanishing race that the camera zooms onto the rhythmical tapping of someone's big toe. Johnson (1997: 990) alludes to this scene as a pleasing reminder that the natives were, within the limits of their picturesque innocence and tendencies to waywardness, achieving a gratifyingly decorous approximation of "The Right Thing".

(ii) The opening scene of the celebrated Australian Western *Rangle River* (1936) features a gumleaf band in a more Arcadian setting. Filmed near Gloucester (west of Taree), and in the Burragorang Valley southwest of Sydney, *Rangle River* was released at Hoyts Plaza Theatre, Sydney by Columbia Pictures in December 1936. Critics applauded it as "decidedly the best film that has been produced in Australia so far" (Pike and Cooper 1980: 232). It opened in the UK early in 1937, and was issued in the USA under the title *Men with Whips* in 1939. The press found the film "full of interest and picturesque romance", commenting that "The scenery alone should persuade American producers that this country offers them something new in the way of backgrounds".[51]

The concept of the 'typical" Aborigine - that one Aborigine stands for all Aborigines - is used as a conventional stereotype which crosses over into caricature. Framed by a canopy of trees,

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[51] *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 21 December 1936. 5.

four elderly Aboriginal men and one youth play European folk tunes on large leaves from riverside suckers. (This scene predated the notorious 1947 Commonwealth Government publication which described the "true Australian landscape" as "a juxtaposition of flora, fauna, and the Aborigines"). Each leafist holds a branch, and some switch to new leaves during the shoot. Suddenly, they all scatter as the property overseer Dick Drake cracks his whip at them in a threatening manner. Added to the final draft as a "local" touch (Shirley and Adams 1983: 138), this depiction of noble savage-leafists in Western clothing was probably included to evoke a certain ambience rather than to promote White suprematism.

Since both films in question were shot on location in NSW, the leafists probably comprised members of the WLGB who had participated in the 1932 Harbour Bridge celebrations. The most sought-after leaf band in NSW at the time, they remain nameless in the credits, reinforcing the concept that Aborigines were a product of the landscape. Neither do sources detail their remuneration.[52] Shirley and Adams (1983: 155) do mention, however, that Badger made the film under the tight control of a production committee.

In some ways, the entrepreneurial dealings evident in the use of gumleaf bands in "talkies" paved the way for their exploitative recruitment at the beginning of the Second World War.

### 3. The Second World War

The Aboriginal servicemen who served in the AIF faced the contempt of political and legal systems that did not recognise them as citizens and an indifferent society that branded them outcasts (Jackomos and Fowell 1993: back cover). All of the Lake Tyers men (ranging from ages 19-39), who volunteered for the army in the mid-1940s could play the gumleaf. Those who passed the medical test received a few weeks' regimental training at the Caulfield Racecourse depot, where the bagpipes sometimes accompanied their gumleaves, and "Roll

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[52]Later, during the 1950s, the camera was a "big white banana", with non-Aboriginal actors receiving up to 67 times as much as Aboriginal actors filmed in Australia (Schlunke 1994: unpublished paper).

out the Barrel" was the top number.[53] Brass bands, military bands and pipe bands were all used in the recruiting drives of 1940-42 in a dramatic attempt to expand the defence forces as a result of the Japanese entering the war (pers. comm. from Major Bob Hall of the Australian Defence Force Academy, 21 March 1996). The group was soon utilised as a conspicuous drawcard at military camps and recruitment rallies.[54] As Pepper wrote,

> When the war started, about thirty-seven men volunteered from Tyers and twenty-six passed the medical examination and they were right.[55] They had a coupla (*sic*) weeks training in drill before they went off. They had a leaf band amongst themselves and they used to play at the AIF recruiting centres. There'd be a lotta (*sic*) white blokes in the army remember our boys playin' (*sic*) the leaf in camp (Pepper 1980: 103).

Positioned on the tray of a military truck, they performed almost every Friday outside the recruiting office in the Melbourne Town Hall (Jackomos and Fowell 1993: 14) and outside Flinders St Station (pers. comm. from Major Bob Hall, 21 March 1996).

The eight Lake Tyers men who joined the 4th Training Battalion stationed at Bonegilla (via Albury, a little over 200 kms north of Lake Tyers) were mostly in their late thirties, some even in their late forties. They remained there for almost a year, entertaining as a gumleaf band at functions in the area,[56] marching through Albury, Ararat and Ballarat, and generally boosting military morale.

Since non-Aboriginal musicians were also employed for recruiting drives, the use of the gumleaf band cannot be viewed solely as "exploitation". However, Wayne Thorpe (great-grandson of leafist Charlie Green) emphasised that the Lake Tyers servicemen were "only used to play the leaf and were not sent to war" (pers. comm., 23 December 1995). In proving

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[53]*Australia Remembers the Black Diggers 1939-1945*, Bendigo KLFM broadcast, commemorating "Victory in the Pacific" (50 Years of Peace) on 15 August 1995.

[54]By contrast, the corroborees performed in northern Australia during the war were merely a diversion for servicemen.

[55]Reports vary considerably concerning the actual number of Lake Tyers men recruited. In 1940, the number mentioned in *The Argus* alone varies from between 15 (16 July: 5) to 14 (28 June: 5) and 17 (27 June: 5). A photograph of 14 men waiting at Caulfield to be issued with uniforms was featured on 28 June.

[56]Information derived from Huggonson N4390.15a (AIATSIS Pictorial Collection).

their capability and worthiness as a regimented band, the group suffered from their own sense of subservience to Western military power. Although they wanted to fight rather than be treated as curiosities or novelties, they were not posted to units, but discharged and returned to the Lake Tyers settlement in a "sullen and uncooperative, even hostile mood" (Hall 1989: 20-21). Ineligible for the financial benefits which non-Aboriginal returned servicemen received, some remarked "We have no King now and no country". Aboriginal ex-serviceman George Birkett aired the following opinion:

> Now when the 4th Training Battalion was formed into the 2nd 23rd Battalion all those Aborigines got the flick pass, the whole lot of them because some of them were too old. In my opinion, they were just bloody used up at this particular time. The army could have given them jobs in base ordnance depots or as cooks or something and released fit men, but they didn't. They were used up as a promotion because we used to go out on route marches and the army had a Gum Leaf Band and they were bloody terrific. I think they were only brought in as a publicity stunt (Jackomos and Fowell 1993: 25).

On April 23 1993, the book from which this quote is taken, namely *Forgotten Heroes: Aborigines at War from the Somme to Vietnam*, was launched in Canberra. The televised report featured Herbert Patten playing "The Last Post" on a gumleaf, and replayed a 1941 newsreel entitled "Aborigines are True Soldiers of the King".[57] This shows the only full Aboriginal AIF squad training and relaxing at Wangaratta Camp, Victoria in 1941, and highlights "the regimental march, gumleaf style". The leaf-pipers of the 4th Training Battalion play, in spirited parts, a snippet from the second section of "Capriccio Italien", Opus 45 by Tchaikovsky.[58]

According to Anderson (1995: 31), the Lake Tyers Military Gumleaf Band included Laurie Moffatt, Oliver Jackson, Bob Nelson, Dicky Harrison, Frank Wandin, Noel Hood, and Otto Logan. Anderson's source for this statement is obviously the photo on the back cover of Jackomos and Fowell (1993). However, further research revealed that Oliver (Bert) Jackson

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[57]ABC 7.30 Report: 23 April 1993, featuring Cinesound Review 488 (1941), held at NFSA and AIATSIS.

[58]This pot-pourri of Italian folk tunes was composed in Rome in 1880. Tchaikovsky's hotel room faced the barracks of the Royal Cuirassiers whence he heard trumpet signals. Little did Tchaikovsky imagine that Australian Aboriginal leafists would render "Capriccio Italien" to stir men to war 60 years later.

of Albury only "posed" for the photo,[59] although he did serve in the same unit as the gumleaf band and made a habit of playing the leaf in various pubs along the Murray after the war. Apart from his "theme" song "My Old Man's a Dustman", Jackson played "Irene Goodnight", "Pub with no Beer" and "I love to have a Beer with Duncan".[60] The last member of the band apparently passed away at the end of 1993 (pers. comm. from Kevin Bradley, 10 January 1995).

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## PART 4: POST-WAR DISSEMINATION OF GUMLEAF BAND PERSONNEL

The urban drift of Aboriginal people to Sydney, Melbourne and larger regional centres combined with the growing popularity of the guitar to diminish the larger-scale groupings of the WLGB and LTGB and their influence on other regions such as Cummera'. For example, research participant Moonie Atkinson (pers. comm., 26 March 1994), who grew up in Cummera' in the 1950s and 1960s, recalled much singing and playing of banjos, button accordions, fiddles, guitars and pedal organs at home, school, church, and around campfires at Cummera' - but no leaf playing.

In commenting on the "decline in popularity" of the gumleaf in the post-war period, Bradley (1995: 7) remarked that the playing of the leaf was linked with a cultural stereotype of simple-minded Aboriginal people, thus undermining the leaf as a positive symbol of Aboriginality:

> By the time of the 1967 Referendum, the leaf had become associated with the assimilationist policies of that earlier period in the minds of many people. A younger and more radical generation used other symbols of Aboriginal identity.

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[59]The caption ("Members of the Gum Leaf Band in uniform, 1940") beneath the same photograph in Jackomos and Fowell (1991: 35) is also misleading.

[60]Born in 1918 at Corawa NSW, Jackson joined the army in 1940 and fought with the 2/2 Pioneers at Tobruk. It was his habit to enjoy a few beers after chopping wood in the Barmah Forest. He was an "old stager" at the game of "two-up" ("Head 'em up, digger!", *The Border Mail*, 26 April 1989: 2).

In spite of this comment there is considerable anecdotal evidence of a remnant gumleaf band movement persisting throughout the post-war period.

### 1. The Wallaga Lake Remnant Ensembles

The first of several anecdotes derived from *Dawn* magazine describes the visit of the Tasmanian Governor's wife to Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Station in 1952. As Lady Cross was about to enter her car to continue her journey to Melbourne, the WLGB began playing "Maori Farewell". Lady Cross was so interested in this unique method of producing music that she stayed another ten minutes talking to the members of the band and watching how they played.[61] In November of the same year a boxing tournament was held at the station, with good fighters brought from Cobargo, Bermagui and Tilba to match the Aboriginal boys:

> In between bouts, musical entertainment was provided by some of the residents of Wallaga Lake. Jim Little sang a few comedy hits, the Wallaga Lake Leaf Band played several tunes, Wally Mongta played the guitar and sang exceptionally well, and Ted Mullett, the Station tenor, sang "Danny Boy" in his own inimitable style. At the close of the evening a member of the local Police remarked it was one of the most entertaining evenings the District had ever seen.[62]

In 1953, men from the station rendered items at a boxing tournament in Central Tilba Hall.[63] In 1954, the children presented a splendid musical programme including a gumleaf band composed of Costin (Costy) Parsons, Max Harrison and Jim Chapman.[64] Shortly afterwards, Mr and Mrs Norton, the station manager and matron, organised a dance at Central Tilba Hall on behalf of the Bega District Ambulance Fund. The WLGB played tunes as a special feature, and received much applause.[65] By 1958, the Wallaga Lake Concert Group still included leafists Arthur and Cecil Thomas, as well as Ned Hoskins (see photo in Morgan 1994: 98). In

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[61] "Governor's Lady at Wallaga Lake", *Dawn* 1/6, June 1952: 15.

[62] "Boxing at Wallaga Lake", *Dawn* 1/12, December 1952: 15.

[63] "Sizzling Bouts at Tiba", *Dawn* 2/1, October 1953: 7.

[64] "Presentation of School Library: Wallaga Lake Function", *Dawn* 3/5, May 1954: 8.

[65] "Dance Organised by Wallaga Lake Recreation Club", *Dawn* 3/6, June 1954: 3.

1961 gumleaf duo Jimmy Little Senior and A. McLeod (first name uncited) of Nowra were photographed at the NADOC (now NAIDOC) ceremony in Martin Place, Sydney.[66]

During her visit to Wallaga Lake in the third week of August 1982, Marylouise Brunton witnessed Alec Walker and Clem Parsons playing leaves in "real counterpoint" (in this instance, popular tunes played as rounds). The most remarkable thing about this performance was that Walker and Parsons also danced and foot-tapped simultaneously with vigorous kicking and jumping movements. Although they played "gumleaf" (Breen 1989: 22), Walker and Parsons may just as well have been playing lemon leaves, since these were also popular amongst Aboriginal musicians (pers. comm. from Marylouise Brunton, 20 July 1995; information on citrus leaf instruments is included in Chapter 6).

Before and after the war, the regular traffic of Aborigines between Wallaga Lake and La Perouse secured the spread of leaf playing in the settlements they visited en route. Around 1951/52, for instance, a band of Wreck Bay/Nowra Aborigines played leaves at an Amateur Hour (Harrison 1997: 4); and Stan Mundy of Wreck Bay performed "Jacky Jacky", "Two Up" and "The Old Rugged Cross" in 1965.[67]. To coincide with the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972, Guboo Ted and Anne Thomas organised a Dreamtime Festival at Wallaga Lake. Proclaiming Percy Mumbulla "King of the Illawarra Tribe of the South Coast, from Bulli Pass in the north to the Victorian border in the south", Guboo joined Percy in a gumleaf concert in the community hall. In the words of Terry Fox,

> They played for quite a while but the only tune I remember is "Swanee River". Some of the Kooris tried to teach us *gabas* [whites] how to play the gumleaf but I failed miserably! A bit later, out came the guitars and banjos and there was soon a good dance going (Chittick and Fox 1997: 176).

John Meredith recorded Percy's brother Frank Mumbulla of Bomaderry (a former mission) playing the leaf in 1990,[68] and George Brown of Wreck Bay in 1991 (tape held by the

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[66]"National Aborigines' Day Ceremony in Sydney", *Dawn* 10/7, July 1961: 3-4.

[67]Mathews (Wreck Bay NSW 1965) AIATSIS A1013. These items were transcribed by John Gordon (AIATSIS L5379).

[68]Meredith (Bomaderry NSW 1990) NLA TRC 2222/393.

collector). Following in the footsteps of Jimmy Little Senior, Ambrose Golden-Brown (1939-1995) became the most renowned leafist in the Nowra district. In 1978 he delivered third place in the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship (described in Chapter 5).

During his residence in the Wallaga Lake/Narooma district in 1994 and 1998-1999, Herbert Patten has partly filled the silence accompanying the absence of an established gumleaf band. Most notably, his win in the 1994 South Coast Talent Quest and his May 1999 publicity tour for Currency Press provided a much needed boost for the leaf tradition on the southeast coast, which by the 1970s and 1980s had degenerated into a mere shadow of its past status. Time Chart 1 summarises the activity of the WLGB in each decade of the twentieth-century:

| DECADE | DOCUMENTED ACTIVITY |
|---|---|
| 1900s | Leaves played in a detribalised corroboree (1900) and concert (1903) |
| 1910s | The Stewart brothers' touring gumleaf band visits Victoria (1917) |
| 1920s | Touring gumleaf band |
| 1930s | Touring gumleaf band; opening of Sydney Harbour Bridge (1932) |
| 1940s | WWII |
| 1950s | Small gumleaf bands and trios |
| 1960s | Gumleaf duos and solos |
| 1970s | Gumleaf concert held at the Dreamtime Festival, Wallaga Lake (1972) |
| 1980s | Gumleaf duo plays in parts whilst stepdancing |
| 1990s | Solo leaf playing revived in the district by Herbert Patten |

**TIME CHART 1: THE WALLAGA LAKE GUMLEAF BAND HISTORY**

## 2. The Lake Tyers Duos and Trios

Alex Innes (possibly a non-Aboriginal pastor or station manager) and his gumleaf band of eleven men, including Lindsay Thomas and some Lake Tyers leafists, performed at the "Back to Bruthen" post-war celebrations in 1948 (Plate 12).[69] Tourists still entered Lake Tyers during the 1950s (pers. comm. from Ken Brunton, 20 July 1995), by which time the gumleaf band had splintered into various duos and trios. In a similar manner to the Lindsay/Mason gumleaf duo from Gerard Mission, SA, and the Parsons/Walker gumleaf duo from Wallaga Lake, NSW, Foster Moffatt (*b.* 1906) and Wally Carter from Lake Tyers performed as a popular gumleaf duo. In 1953, John Paton recorded their rendition of "The Road to Gundagai".[70]

Likewise, gumleaf trios made imaginative use of harmony - epitomised in the 1930s by Laurie Moffatt[71] (*b.* 1900), Chook Mullett and Campbell Johnson (Plate 13).[72] By 1969, a Lake Tyers Gumleaf Trio was still operating with the line-up of Foster Moffatt, Watty Pepper, and the same Choppy Hayes who had run at the Stawell Gift in the late 1930s.[73] Another gumleaf trio featured Ron Edwards, Charlie Carter and John Terrick.[74] As the southern focus of the Aboriginal urban drift, Melbourne soon became a nexus for ex-gumleaf bandsmen and their descendants. Perhaps here, more than anywhere else, the activity was culturally and musically accommodated in new and satisfying ways.

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[69]"Back to Bruthen", *The Weekly Times*, Wednesday 7 April, 1948: 21.

[70]Paton (place n/a 1953) NLA TRC 2539/076 (part of the Norm O'Connor Collection).

[71]Laurie was a brother of Foster and both were sons of Edward Moffatt of Delegate (Pepper 1980: 99).

[72]One source, *Gippsland Heritage Journal* 13, December 1992: 20, dates this trio to the 1920s.

[73]Jackomos 3739.27a (AIATSIS Pictorial Collection).

[74]Jackomos 3755.25 (AIATSIS Pictorial Collection).

### 3. Melbourne

The musical traditions of the Aboriginal groups that drifted into Melbourne from the Cummera', Lake Tyers and Framlingham settlements before and after WWII included leaf playing. This activity persisted, in spite of an important change in its nature. The intimate totemic connection between the people and the ambient vegetation of their respective tribal locations had been severed by their physical relocation. Not only that, the polluting processes of urbanisation had begun to diminish the native flora in their new urban surroundings. For the purposes of music-making, the eucalypt leaves of inner city Melbourne lacked the quality and freshness of those found at Cummera' and Lake Tyers.

The mid-century Aboriginal Football Team of Melbourne[75] comprised many fine leafists from Lake Tyers and Cummera'. These musicians were in demand at Aboriginal weddings and dances where a gumleaf band and a piano were sufficient to provide all the music required (Jackomos 1971: 34). Their presence promoted an awareness of a (perceived) form of Aboriginal cultural heritage amongst urban Aboriginal youth dominated by a non-Aboriginal cultural system.

The best-known Aboriginal leafist in Melbourne at this time was undoubtedly Pastor (later Sir) Douglas Nicholls (1906-1988). Nicholls became a gumleaf devotee during his youth in Cummera'. The following anecdotes furnish evidence that Nicholls played gumleaf whilst worked for Steve Betson on the Willowgrove irrigation channels in 1925:

> There were three musicians in the channel construction camp and they often visited Alan Pearse's family for an evening of music. One man played the fiddle, another the button accordion, and of course Doug Nicholls the gum leaf. Anyone knowing Alan Pearse when he was young would have remembered the large gap between his front teeth. Alan maintained it was Doug Nicholls trying to teach him to play the gum leaf that blew his front teeth apart (Nicholson 1990: 99).

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[75]See photograph taken in 1945 (Jackomos 1991: 37).

> When Steve went visiting two Echuca sisters, who had their caps and gowns for piano and violin, Doug was taken along, too - and persuaded to accompany the pianist on his gumleaf (Thorpe Clark 1965: 47).

Nicholl's life was a paradigm of how an Aboriginal person could overcome cultural adaptation and social dissonance. Once he had established a reputation as a footballer in Melbourne, some local girls kept scrapbooks of his doings and loved to sing with him around a piano while he played the leaf. Recruited to the 29th Battalion from the Fitzroy Depot in January 1941, Nicholls entertained the other men in the tent at night with hit tunes.[76] He was "equipped with a supply of leaves in his pocket" and "his mouth never tired" (Thorpe Clark 1979: 94, 120). Nicholls also gained a reputation as a "pied" leaf-piper, by teaching numerous Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children to play the gumleaf on the football oval where he worked as a groundsman:

> "Come to my studio," he would say grandly when he came across a group roaming the streets; "I'll teach you how to play the leaf." "Where's your studio, mister?" "At the football ground. I'll be there to let you in". One summer evening scores of kids turned up for the gum-leaf lesson. He had told them to bring their own leaves, gum leaves not being plentiful amongst the factories. Doug noticed that one boy kept his hand behind his back. "Come on mate", Doug said, "what kind of leaf you got there?" The boy at length produced a large lily leaf. "My old man said I'd better take a big leaf ... cos you've got such a whopping big mouth (Thorpe Clark 1979: 126-127).

The diatonic repertoire of Sankey hymns and war-time songs performed on leaves during church services and socials at the Gore St Mission, Fitzroy emphasised a particular historical moment in the process of musical change as it was manifest in the lives of newly urbanised Aboriginal people. Affectionately known as "Pastor Doug", Nicholls played the leaf in church whenever he returned to Cummera', mainly at Christmas. Other outstanding leafists at the Mission were Cecil Thomas (one of the old bandsmen from Wallaga Lake); Connie Edwards, Jack Connelly and Foster Moffatt (from Lake Tyers); and Aaron and Eddie Briggs, Cyril Cooper and Kevin Walker from Cummera'.[77] They participated in the all-Aboriginal

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[76]These included songs from "Mayfair" and "The Student Prince", "When the Lights of London Shine Again" and "I've Got Sixpence" (Thorpe Clark 1979: 120).

[77]See photograph opposite p. 73 (Thorpe Clark 1965); leafists kindly identified by Mrs Nancy Briggs of Mooroopna.

cabaret entertainments which fundraiser Edna Brown organised at Collingwood Town Hall (Jackomos and Fowell 1991: 86).

Beginning in 1951, Aboriginal people met to share their various artistic talents at the Melbourne Aboriginal Moombas.[78] At social gatherings in homes people performed grand old hymns and Aboriginal songs which they learned from each other and sang in different dialects, accompanied by piano, guitar, ukulele, mandolin, banjo, piano accordion and gumleaf (Tucker 1977: 171).

In the late 1940s and 1950s, tourist entertainments held at a Belgrave art shop in the Dandenong Ranges featured singing, piano accordion, guitars, ukuleles and gumleaves. The core leafists were Bill Onus (who ran the shop), his brother Eric,[79] and Aboriginal people from Lake Tyers (Tucker 1977: 171). Bill's *coup d'état*, however, was the 1949 "Corroboree" Season at Wirth's Olympia, which commenced on Easter Saturday, 16 April 1949.

The gumleaf band occupied item 7 of the first half and the opening slot of the second half. The programme, kindly supplied by Alick Jackomos, features photos of leafists Chook Mullett (tribal name Narung) and Tom Foster. Cinesound Review newsreel 0942 (NFSA), entitled "Native Talent in Aboriginal Corroboree - 1949 Style", highlights Ted ("Chook") Mullett's Gumleaf Band; George Hill (a blind Aboriginal instrumentalist); and Bill Bargo (a whipcracker and yodelling guitarist). Dressed in Western clothing, the gumleaf band poses in front of a canopy of palm branches. To the accompaniment of a Chinese woodblock, six men and one boy[80] stand behind four seated women and perform "Roll Out the Barrel", a "number" which, quips the commentator, is "only moderately ancient". According to Herbert Patten (pers. comm., 10 January 1999), none of the women (three of whom he identified as

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[78]Concerts pioneered by Pastor Doug and others, which were later converted to camps.

[79]According to Eric's nephew Herbert Patten (pers. comm., 16 November 1996), the Onus brothers sang and played Al Jolsen songs such as "Mammy" and "I'm Sitting on Top of the World" on leaves.

[80]Herbert Patten identified five of the men as Bruce McGuinness, Chook Mullett, Albert Mullett, Eric Onus and Clem Briggs, and the boy as Jimmy Moyle. The sixth man was probably Tom Foster.

Joyce Johnson, Winnie Onus and Hillis Briggs) could actually play the leaf. They were co-opted to "fake" while the men carried the sound - faking having been a common procedure in vaudeville, circuses, etc.).

How, then, was this rare mid-twentieth-century Aboriginal performance[81] advertised, sponsored and received? Firstly, it was described as "novel, wild and wonderful" - in press space donated by Carlton and United Breweries (Illustration 3) - a tongue-in-the-cheek implication that the moral overtones of mission life had somehow dissipated. The traditional Aboriginal imagery projected in this illustration is misleading, since Eric Onus and James Scott channelled their theatrical flair into portraying Jacky and Jemmy, the "Brown Boys of Mirth and Melody" (Black minstrelsy and vaudeville remained entrenched in Aboriginal performance contexts well after their heyday had waned in the mainstream).

Secondly, the foreword to the programme addressed the social accommodation of fringe music. In an attempt to cross cultural barriers and misconceptions, the aim in presenting an all-Aboriginal entertainment was to show Australians that, given an opportunity, the Aborigine is "quite capable of development along cultural lines". *The Age* critic found this clear enough, but ignoring the inevitable realities of assimilation, wrote:

> ... somehow or other those who take part in it are not, by and large, true to type. The true aborigine (*sic*) is a lean, alert fellow. Too many of the men on Saturday looked as if their hunting had been confined to the comparatively easy civilisation of the cities.

The review concluded with the quip that Ted Mullett had a better grip on his gum-leaf band than the producer had on the whole production.[82] *The Argus* reviewer, on the other hand, found the all-Aboriginal pageant to be:

> an interesting mixture of vaudeville and native ritual ... a unique production, notable for the enjoyment and enthusiasm displayed by the participants.[83]

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[81] It was not until 1955 that the first 78-rpm disc of Aboriginal performers was commercially released. It featured Olive McGuinness and Eva Bell harmonising the songs *Old Rugged Hills* and *Rhythm of Corroboree* (tape kindly supplied by Peter Dunbar-Hall).

[82] "Corroboree is Uneven", *The Age*, 18 April 1949: 3.

During the winter following the 1949 Corroboree season, Gordon Gilsenan and his family were visited every night at a suburban home in Melbourne by the Aboriginal friends who had known them in Gippsland, including some leafists (probably members of Chook Mullett's Band). Anna Vroland (1951: 33-34) was present one evening when someone rang a local composer, to say:

> "Edward, could you possibly come over for a while this evening?" "Perhaps. Why?" "Do you hear music?" "Yes." "What instruments can you detect?" "It's not the wireless? You mean you have someone playing in the house?" "Yes. Just tell me what instruments you hear." He listened for a minute or two. "Oh, violin, trumpet ... what else? There is something else I don't recognise. Who is there?" "Some aboriginal people. But can you come over?" "Yes, thank you. I'd like to. I'll be there in a few minutes." And so the young Australian composer, Edward Brown, first heard the harmonies of this gumleaf band.

## 4. Gumleaf Buskers and Soloists

During the 1930s Depression and the years that followed, it was common to see one or two Aboriginal men busking in cities and country towns, often lone "minstrel" (*i.e.* nomadic) figures who wandered around the towns and settlements and fringe dwellings of their kin. They were often seen on verandahs, or sitting against trees, or on a riverbank, playing and singing for anyone who would listen (based on Schultz in Breen 1989: 30).

In Melbourne several Aborigines used to play leaves on the corners of Brunswick and Gertrude Streets, Fitzroy - a far cry from the Palais Royal, as Bradley (1995: 7) remarked. According to Salvation Army Officer Raymond James (pers. comm., 8 December 1994), the "down 'n' outs" would always stick to the same corners, and police turned a blind eye for as long as they could.

According to Pepper (1980: 98-99), Hector Bull (*b.* 1884 at Lake Tyers, one of Victoria's last full-blood Aboriginal men)[84] played the leaf outside Young and Jackson's Hotel in

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[83]"Bright 'Abo' (*sic*) Show", *The Argus*, 18 April 1949: 2.

[84]Bill was the eldest son of William (Billy) the Bull of Cunningham, and Emily Clark of Ramahyuck, and brother to Bill and Clara (Leason 1934: 10). Smyth (1878: 247) described him as "a stout black of Lake Tyers and perhaps the strongest blackfellow here"; see photograph of Bull outside his *gunyah* (bark hut) in Massola (1969: 137).

Melbourne for years, standing there with his hat turned down for anyone to throw "two bob" in:

> Toby Nixon saw Hector there one time when he called into Young and Jackson's. He asked him how he was goin' (*sic*) and give him two bob, and Toby met some blokes he knew in the pub and started talking about the gum-leaf music and he told them, "That fella outside can damn near make that leaf talk". Someone said, "No one can play the leaf these days." "O.K.," says Toby, "if you want to make a bet I'll stake the wager and give it all to that fella out there." So out they all went and Hector told them to pick what they wanted him to play. And he did, he played everything they asked for. The most popular song was "Tipperary".

Hector's younger brother Bill Bull (*b.* 24 April 1891), was another leaf busker whose [illegible] emphasises the material poverty of detribalised Aboriginal culture. In February [illegible], Bill was arrested and sentenced to six months gaol for "soliciting alms" as he played gumleaf hymns barefooted on Princes Bridge in Melbourne. Eventually barrister [illegible] Galvosky lodged an appeal and Bull's sentence was revoked.

However, Bull couldn't give up alcohol or the gumleaf; he died in custody in a Fitzroy police cell in June 1954. As his coffin was lowered under a big gum at Fawkner Cemetery, three members of Pastor Nicholl's congregation (Sam Rankin, James Scott and Foster Moffatt) played "Abide With Me" (Bull's favourite hymn) on leaf instruments and a young Aboriginal girl dropped gumleaves onto the coffin.[85] Bull's long encounter with the law has been cited as a prime example in the history of the injustices experienced by Aboriginal Australians which revealed a growing awareness of such injustices by other Australians (Broome 1996: 54-55). The story was researched by Anderson (1995), and immortalised in many poems. Len Fox, for example, wrote "The Gum-Leaf Musician", which was set to a tune by Joy Durst for the musical "Lord Franklin" (Illustration 4). [86]

The Aboriginal tradition of gumleaf busking is perpetuated today by James Goorie Dungay, who operates in the Kempsey district, NSW. Contemporary Kurnai songwriter Wayne

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[85]Summarised from Thorpe Clark (1965: 126) and Anderson (1995, see photograph p. 25). The funeral photograph is held in the AIATSIS Pictorial Collection (Jackomos N3739-N3784).

[86]See Anderson (1995: 29-30) for a lament to Bill Bull by Jim Mann.

Thorpe represents the gumleaf playing tradition which emanated from Gippsland by playing the leaf in some of his original songs, for example as an inter-verse "fill" for his father and uncle's fishing song "Bunjil Noorook".[87] A member of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust,[88] Thorpe taught his daughter Pirili to play the leaf (see photograph in Jackomos and Fowell 1991: 50), in an effort to preserve a part of his cultural heritage.

## CONCLUSION

The gumleaf band cultural system fostered a network of large and small ensemble formats throughout southeastern Australia. A leaf playing tradition at Wallaga Lake is presently confirmed from 1900, but performances on leaves presumedly took place in partly detribalised corroboree contexts from at least the 1890s. The present study provides culture-specific evidence of the invention (or re-invention, subject to further research) of a musical tradition - the gumleaf band - by an exploited indigenous group. At the same time, it illuminates the status of the WLGB within its own enclave society; the broad scope and contribution of its tours and collaborations in bridging two distinct cultures; some instances of appropriation; and lively traits of its repertoire and performance practice which defy stereotypical perceptions. Contrasted with the wide exposure of the WLGB and the LTGB, most of the leaf band music attached to other missions and settlements went unnoticed by the rest of the Australian population.

Although dubbed a "symphony orchestra among gumleaf bands", many of the social and musical characteristics of the WLGB were analogous with those of the European gypsy band. Their repertoire may have been almost exclusively Western and mostly secular in nature, but some aspects of their gumleaf performance practice reflected social, musical and environmental traits of Aboriginal culture, and not just those that had been adopted and

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[87] An Aborigine named Bunjil Noorook was mentioned in correspondence between Bulmer and Howitt in 1880.

[88] After the "Save Lake Tyers" movement culminated in the passing of the Aboriginal Lands Act 1970, full control of the land was eventually returned to the residents.

adapted from European models. The bandsmen still retained some of their traditional tribal steps and used clapsticks, thus imbuing their performances with an indigenous flavour. The survival of gumleaf playing at Wallaga Lake over a period of eight decades is testimony to the successful processes of musical repetition, replication and transmission.

The LTGB manifested a new vernacular model for Aboriginal musical culture on the isolated peninsula of east Gippsland. Since the gumleaf band tradition had been introduced to Lake Tyers from Wallaga Lake NSW, and was mediated by missionary, government and army officials, the bandsmen's performances reflected influences of the missionary and popular musics performed in the district at the time rather than remnant Kurnai cultural or musical characteristics. Nevertheless, they succeeded in fulfilling the tourist expectations of Aboriginal performances moulded by popular culture. Australian military officials at the start of WW II made some nationalistic exploitation of their acts.

The institutionalisation of the gumleaf band would hardly have evolved without the alteration or disturbance that took place in the total social structure of Aboriginal society. The gumleaf band represented an important tool in the process of cultural integration, emerging as it did via the rigidities of colonialism, and the exploitations of post-colonialism. Its repertoire, for one thing, was a strong indicator of musical change. The gumleaf band accommodated Aboriginal talent in a guise which linked detribalised people somewhat comfortably to their history and environment, creating a bridge between familiar and alien realms of experience; at the same time it reflected on the economically deprived conditions of outback missions and Aboriginal settlements.

This was amply demonstrated in the nationalistic filmic icons that appeared in the 1930s, portraying technical cleverness as the property of Europeans and simplicity and stasis as the property of Australian Aborigines. As indigenous subjects, leaf bandsmen were susceptible to paternalistic treatment, and their wares were appropriated by film directors for national and international profit. These and other brief media pastiches of gumleaf bands did not

contribute to the development of a genuine understanding of indigenous people on the part of their invaders.

In the "post-war dissemination period", the gradual demise of Aboriginal gumleaf bands was caused by (i) the closure of many mission stations during the period of urban drift (ii) the arrival of rock 'n roll and television in Australia in the late 1950s, which projected the guitar as a most desirable portable instrument for use by a younger and more radical generation, and (iii) the linkage of leaf playing with a cultural stereotype of simple-minded Aboriginal people, effectively undermining the value of the activity as a positive symbol of Aboriginality.

As the grass roots musical production of the first half of the twentieth-century gave ground to passive pop consumption, the resilience of musical traditions such as gumleaf playing were sapped and absorbed. Yet the Aboriginal arm of this tradition in southeastern Australia endured the vicissitudes of time via representational change; the leaf was not only the corporate medium of bands, but also the personal survival kit of the Aboriginal busker.

The medium of the Aboriginal gumleaf band was characterised by inward projection during its heyday, since Aboriginal music had not yet been steered towards the requirements of an industrial/technological society. Minority and mainstream culture represented two contrasting worlds whose boundaries only began to blur when the perception of White Australia gave way to multiculturalism in 1973.

In the second half of the twentieth-century, Aboriginal fringe music has been increasingly permeated by the politics of opposition and liberation. The pre-technological, contentious gumleaf band could not exert the overt political influence which live and televised performances of Aboriginal popular music wield today as they enrich Australia, indeed the world, with the force of another history and another imagination.

# PART 2

# CROSS-CULTURAL AND

# BOTANICAL PERSPECTIVES

| ABORIGINAL TRADITION | PLACE | DATE | PLACE | NON-ABORIGINAL TRADITION |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-Contact extramusical use of leaves; musical use unverifiable | | **Pre-1788** | | |
| **Missionary Music Period** begins; leaves used extramusically | | **1840s** | SA | From *c.* 1939 Lutheran settlers play gumleaves in Hahndorf |
| Hymn repertoire begins to replace traditional music repertoire | | **1850s** | Vic | Goldrush begins; immigrants may have blown gumleaves (no firm evidence) |
| Salvation Army "Eucalyptus Band"; leaf music toy, Cape York | SA<br>Q'ld | **1890s** | | Leaf music unacceptable to 19th C colonial taste; eccentric leafists only |
| Corroborce leaf at Wallaga Lake and Mooraberrie; evangelistic tour of leafist Peter Wandy | NSW<br>Q'ld<br>WA | **1900s** | NSW<br>Vic<br>Tas | Salvation Army officer Tom (Mudgee) Robertson popularises the gumleaf instrument through evangelism |
| **Touring Gumleaf Band Period**: Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band (1917) | Vic | **1910s** | | No written record of non-Aboriginal leafists |
| Touring gumleaf jazz bands from Bowraville, Burnt Bridge, Ulladulla and Wallaga Lake | NSW | **1920s** | | Leaf sounds popularised as "novelty noise" during 1920s jazz era |
| Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band tours/Sydney Harbour Bridge; 2 films feature gumleaf bands | NSW<br>Vic | **1930s** | Vic | French brothers perform on stage & radio; children & buskers play leaves during the Depression |
| Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band stirs troops; Chook Mullett's band | Vic | **1940s** | NSW | Leaf played in harmonica/dance bands; Happy Harry Smith plays at fairground |
| **Post-war Dissemination Period**: Busker Bill Bull (death in custody) | Vic | **1950s** | NSW<br>Vic | Amateur Hours/competitions; leaf toy persists |
| Duos, trios, quartets; hunting leaf used at shearing camp | Vic<br>WA | **1960s** | NSW<br>Vic | Bush bands: gumleaf used sparingly |
| **Gumleaf Competition Period**: Soloists A. Golden-Brown, G. Edwards and H. Patten | Vic<br>NSW | **1970s** | Vic, SA<br>Q'ld<br>NSW | Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship (1977-1997); W. McLaughlin busks at Circular Quay |
| Leaves blown at end of wet season at Oenpelli; **Nativistic Revival Period** from *c.* 1988 | NT<br>Vic<br>NSW | **1980s** | Vic | W. Eva performs in Melbourne Concert Hall; K. Graetz: first commercial recording of gumleaf |
| Leaf birdcalls in political and educational contexts; Patten plays in Hong Kong; CD/booklet (1999) | Vic<br>NSW<br>Asia | **1990s** | WA<br>Vic<br>Asia | Golden Leaf Award in Perth; V. Reutens plays TV commmercial and tours parts of Malaysia |

**TIME CHART 2: CROSS-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS IN GUMLEAF MUSIC**

## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE NON-ABORIGINAL PRACTICE OF GUMLEAF PLAYING: ROOTS, CONTEXTS AND COMMERCIALISATION

*Non-Aboriginal players mostly believe that Aboriginal players are the masters and originators of gum leaf playing*

(Bradley 1995: 10)

Arguably, the Aboriginal gumleaf playing tradition described in Part 1 of this thesis represents a recontextualised form of leaf blowing on the part of indigenous people, yet it is impossible to incorporate its history within a single discourse. Therefore, to avoid an over-essentialistic inscription of the label "Aboriginal" to the activity, Part 2 probes the shared meaning of leaf playing amongst Australians at large.

Strangely enough, the original motivation for the Aborigines' adoption of European-style gumleaf playing along the Murray and its associated waterways may lie with a Central European (rather than British) cultural and spiritual force - which began when Lutheran immigrants arrived from Prussia in the mid nineteenth-century. In describing some typical contexts in which non-Aboriginal leafists of the twentieth-century performed, I showcase significant performers and disclose how, why, and when gumleaf music was first accessed by the corporate world due to its perceived inclusion in the ranks of Australian icons.

According to Jenny Rich (1986: xii), in her book *Gumleaf and Cow Hide*, the gumleaf is a symbol of Australia and of all that was new to the pioneers. Whereas the blowing of leaves in Aboriginal Australia is connected to a number of cultural, spiritual and environmental parameters (Chapter 1),[1] leaf playing amongst the dominant cultural group begs the

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[1]Aborigines possess a knowledge and understanding of allusion and symbol, having formerly associated a number of complex totemic beliefs with living things such as animals and trees.

construction of an Australian identity. Apart from inspiring iconic forms of artistic representation, the sound, in addition to the sight, smell, and taste of gumleaves, has often evoked nostalgic emotion. During World War I, for instance, gumleaves were mailed to soldiers overseas, who made small fires of them to remind themselves of home and family.

It is conceivable that the poet Ethel Phillips Fox noticed the Lake Tyers Military Gumleaf Band playing outside the Melbourne Town Hall or Flinders St Station *c.* 1939, because she patriotically penned "The Song of the Gumleaf" which Florence M. Donaldson-Ewart (1864-1949) set to a quick march tune for the officers and men of the RAAF.[2] Verse 1 and the chorus speak of "a leaf that is tough and true" and an "emblem of those who are fighting" (Illustration 5).

An Australia-wide gumleaf competition established in the 1970s perpetuated this symbolism, but further confused the issue of the traditional ownership of gumleaf playing (see Chapter 5). I will therefore balance my exploration of the origins and contexts of the independent non-Aboriginal tradition of leaf playing with proof for considerable Black-to-White transmission of the activity from the 1920s jazz era through to the 1960s. Obviously Aborigines and non-Aborigines did not share the same world-view and cultural heritage, yet through a narrow point of engagement some male Aboriginal leafists transmitted their specialised technical knowledge to non-Aboriginal men who responded creatively to a (perceived) form of Aboriginal music. Theoretically speaking, this particular process of musical exchange exemplified how

> The sharing of ideas and feelings is the basis not only of the process of becoming human (which does not happen automatically), but also of the invention, transmission, and change of cultural systems (Blacking 1986: 6).

This first part of this chapter describes the roots of non-Aboriginal gumleaf playing in colonial South Australia, allowing for the possibility that similar developments occurred

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[2]Fox probably wrote the poem at the start of WWII when RAAF members were being sent off to fight under the Empire Training Scheme (the first contingent left for the UK on 28 November 1939 and fought in the Middle East in the early 1940s). Ewart also concerned herself with social issues in the wider stratas of society (information kindly supplied by her biographer Faye Patton). The gumleaf symbol was appropriated by many other songwriters, *e.g.* de Burgh and Solomon wrote "Gum-Trees: Seven Australian Songs" (Allen & Co., undated).

amongst settlers in Victoria, NSW, and along the Queensland stock routes during this period. The possibility that European and/or Asian leaf music traditions were transplanted to Australia is explored. Whatever the case, I argue that the carriers and catalysts of the tradition were mostly economically deprived fringe performers, who were not concerned to conform to the predominant colonial musical aesthetic. The strong influence of the Salvation Army on leaf playing re-emerges, and I provide reasons for the absence of written references to the gumleaf as an entertainment instrument in non-Aboriginal Australia *c.* 1890-1920.

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## PART 1: THE ROOTS OF EUROPEAN-STYLE GUMLEAF PLAYING

In my search for the provenance of gumleaf music, I was unexpectedly alerted to the fact that South Australia's first wave of poverty-stricken Lutheran immigrants performed sacred music on gumleaves. At some stage between 1839-1850, they accommodated leaf playing into the musical tradition that they transplanted to the picturesque valley of Hahndorf, near Adelaide.[3]

### 1. Hahndorf, South Australia: A Case Study

Having fled from towns in Prussia[4] (Illustration 7a) in an effort to be free to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience, the devout flock of Pastor August Kavel (*b.* 1798) [5] landed in South Australia on November 20 1838 when Adelaide was barely two years old. Music was destined to play a major role in their new community.

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[3]I am grateful to Aline Scott-Maxwell for alerting me to Laubenthal (1988: 322), and Pastor Treva Gerschwitz of St Michael's, Hahndorf for locating two other references on Lutheran gumleaf playing.

[4]Some immigrants were from towns in the area now known as Poland, *e.g.* Klemzig in the province of Brandenburg, Grünberg in the province of Silesia, and Tirschtiegel in the province of Posen (Fox 1979: 8).

[5]Kavel ministered at Hahndorf from 1839-1846.

The congregation first met for worship under a large hollow gum tree[6] on the banks of a native swimming hole (*bukartilla*) in the Hahndorf Creek, on 3 March 1839, the first Sunday after their arrival. Their religious obligations and musical predicaments were closely tied to the mud-walled church, which they built in 1840 and replaced in 1858 with stone and brick (Illustration 7b). One English visitor underlined the centrality of worship in the lives of these hard-working settlers:

> In the centre of the village is the kirk or church in which divine service is held much more frequently than in any of ours. Scarcely a day passes but some of the people repair to their place of worship, either early in the morning or in the evening after their work, for the purpose of returning thanksgiving to the Supreme Ruler and Protector in this foreign land, a truly excellent custom and in which lies one of the elements of their prosperity (Fox 1979: 11).

During their early years of settlement, the congregation mostly sang unaccompanied hymns with simplicity and plaintiveness (Laubenthal 1899: 321-322), but also used portable instruments, including gumleaves:

> Since the old church was dimly lit by home-made tallow candles, making it rather difficult to read, it was customary for the pastor or lector to recite one or two lines at a time, which would then be sung by the congregation. In the absence of the pastor, before the advent of suitable musical instruments, the hymn starter filled an important office in divine service. If the officials or self-appointed starter made an error, someone else, usually one of the women would sing the correct tune at the beginning of the second verse. Some of the early settlers supplied music by placing a leaf of a gumtree on the tongue, making a sound similar to a clarinet (Fox 1979: 10-11, 26).

This reference to a gumleaf instrument was derived from the 1938 centenary edition of the Australian Lutheran Almanac, and re-quoted by Laubenthal (1988: 322). As it refers to an activity which took place approximately a century earlier, Pastor A. Brauer of St Michaels (1901-1922) either based his report on an earlier (as yet unknown) written source, or oral history:

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[6]The stump of this tree is still visible behind the grocery store in Main Street, Hahndorf.

> Singing the songs of Zion was a joy and a delight to these old pioneers.[7] Some of the early settlers also possessed the art of producing music with the leaf of a gum tree placed on the tongue, the tone produced resembling to some extent the music of the clarinet. Quite naturally, a number of the young people, particularly boys and girls attending school, practised patiently until they also had acquired the art, though only a few really attained to real proficiency (Brauer 1938: 73).

In the face of their initial poverty, the notion of musically resorting to "gum tree leaves"[8] could have been the original idea of one resourceful settler, perhaps even a child. Alternatively, one of two possible motives might have influenced the practice, or even a combination of both:

(i) Since the early Hahndorf settlers established a rapport with the local Aborigines by supplying them with sugar and tobacco (Fox 1979: 8) and were never molested by them (Brauer 1938: 58, 65), they were well situated to see, hear, and adopt an indigenous form of gumleaf blowing. There is no available evidence that the Kaurna clanspeople possessed a leaf blowing tradition, but taking into account the hypothetical roots and functions of leaf soundmakers outlined in Chapter 1, I concur with Anderson (1995: 33) that the dearth of evidence to prove that gumleaf playing had been "traditional" in some Aboriginal societies before contact could reflect the paucity of documentation rather than reality.

(ii) Some members of Hahndorf's 52 founding families may have been leafists, or at least people who were familiar with the concept, since leaf playing was traditional amongst herdsmen and itinerant folk musicians in Central Europe. A "leaf whistle", with the advantages of being simple to manufacture, transport or replace, was important wherever many shepherds were found (Sarosi 1986: 124-125). It was noted above that the leaves in the

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[7]Mrs Linda Liebelt (85) posted me eight carols and hymns, including "Herbei, o ihr glaübigen" ("O Come All Ye Faithful", composed in 1751), "Stille nacht, heilige nacht" ("Silent Night", composed in 1818), and "Näher, mein Gott, zu dir" ("Nearer, my God, to Thee", tune composed in 1859 to words written in 1841). These tunes, which fall comfortably within the range of most leaf instruments, were sung in Hahndorf well before Linda's time. Some eighteenth-century Lutheran tunes handed down in isorhythmic versions and some nineteenth-century melodies were sanctioned in SA for several decades longer than in Germany (Laubenthal: 323).

[8]White Gum or Scribbly Gum (*E. rossii*), and unidentified species of blue gum, red gum and stringybark trees grew in the area (based on Brauer 1938: 57-58, and a letter from Pastor Gerschwitz, 20 June 1996).

primeval bush around Hahndorf made "a sound similar to a clarinet" (presumably rich, mellow timbre); this hardly resembled the type of shrill, high-pitched sound which Sarosi equated with a "whistle".

Although he was apparently unaware that early German settlers played leaves in Hahndorf, Anderson (1995: 34) raised the possibility that European shepherds in the Australian bush may have substituted the gumleaf for the usual thin piece of birch or cherry-tree bark they used in Europe, and that the gumleaf instrument was then taken up by Aborigines. This raises the possibility that Lutheran missionaries organised Aboriginal people into leaf ensembles at some stage after they established their "native school" on the Torrens River, Adelaide in 1839, *i.e.* well before the Salvation Army formed their "eucalyptus band" in 1892.

Cath Ellis (1985: 8) lent support to the notion that leaf music became "Australian" by adoption, *i.e.* importation. Born in 1935 of Scottish parentage, Ellis spent her childhood in the Victorian countryside where her first, very strong musical associations, were as follows:

> The musical life of white Australian country people at this time centred on the weekly community singing (often led by Welsh, Irish, or Scottish people who themselves sought to reproduce the folk music of their homeland). Instrumental music for weekend dances was provided by the local pianists, of whom there were many, and button accordionists, concertina players, mouth organ players and the occasional gumleaf player. (All these folk-type performances began to disappear in my teens.) Little of this folk music filtered into the schools, and none of it was Australian in origin, although it had become Australian by adoption. Aboriginal music was totally unknown.

Taking both possibilities (i) and (ii) into account, it follows that even if the settlers first learnt the skill of leaf playing from the indigenes, the same indigenes soon learnt their tunes from the settlers. It is therefore safe to assume that the gumleaf was introduced (and in some cases re-introduced) to some Aboriginal people as an "instrument" on which singable European tunes could be played. As born mimics, Aboriginal people embraced the challenge enthusiastically, especially those who could already elicit sounds from leaves with ease.

It can be inferred from Laubenthal (1988: 322-323) that "unforeseen colonial obstacles" induced idiosyncratic musical use of gumleaves, *i.e.* Lutheran pioneers were forced to experiment with congregational music, and to tolerate more inventiveness than the solemn

moral system of religious education for which it was a vehicle.[9] A characteristic pattern of cultural transplantation appeared, evident in bell-ringing, outdoor singing, uses of instruments, bands, and so on. This pattern derived from the specific diversity of local traditions emanating from the homeland's religious patchwork. Even outdated local idiosyncrasies continued for much longer than in other (non-religious) areas of life, where more vital demands required quicker adjustments.

Brauer (1938: 73) related an amusing incident that happened at an open-air mission rally at or near Rosedale in the Barossa Valley 58 km northeast of Adelaide, presumably in the late nineteenth-century:

> A brass band, consisting of young men belonging to that parish, accompanied the singing, as was the custom in those days. For some reason or other, the leading cornet refused duty, the singing in consequence becoming unsteady and hesitant, when a relative of the pastor of the parish quickly picked a leaf from a nearby tree and held the tune until the incapacitated cornet set in again.

Gumleaf playing was probably introduced to neighbouring towns where the Hahndorf pastors ministered, such as Lobethal ("Valley of Praise") and Mt Barker, but it is unlikely that subsequent congregations resorted to gumleaf instruments once they were prosperous enough to afford conventional instruments.[10]

## 2. Mudgee Robertson Popularises Gumleaf Playing

Apart from remaining an attractive and inexpensive proposition for Aboriginal people who were the subjects of Lutheran and other traditions of evangelisation in the late nineteenth-century, gumleaf playing was, as noted in Part 1, appropriated by the Salvation Army approximately twelve years (and possibly sooner) after they began operations in Australia in 1880.

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[9]Pastor Fritzsche of St Michael's, Hahndorf formed a choir at Lobethal, composed original hymn-settings, and played the grand piano which his cultured wife Dorette had brought out from Germany (Laubenthal 1988: 321-322).

[10]According to Fox (1979: 11), brass instruments later accompanied the Hahndorf congregation.

Between *c.* 1890-1909, Salvation Army musicians played the role of entertainers to attract street crowds. Drawing on the indoor atmosphere of the music hall and the noisy exuberance of the military parade (Cleary 1997: 501), they used innovative tricks such as magic lantern shows to attract public attention. Gumleaves (Temora 1892: 7), tin whistles, fifes, tambourines, banjos and fiddles (Bolton 1980: 62, 66) supplemented brass bands.

The eccentric Salvation Army Captain Tom Robertson (*b.* Mudgee NSW, "promoted to glory" in 1927) achieved public notoriety for his bizarre musical feats. "Mudgee" performed extraordinary acts with a gumleaf, broom handle and frying pan, and gave marvellous imitations of parrots, magpies, barking dogs, and roaring bulls. These stunts earnt him the nicknames "Tom the Terror" and "The King of Freak Musicians", but he was usually dubbed "The Mad Captain" for his rare feat of playing two cornets at once, or a cornet in his right hand whilst beating a drum with his left hand and carrying a kerosene torch through his shoulder strap (Illustration 8).

Converted whilst serving a sentence in Bathurst Gaol, Mudgee spent 32 years on active service in 40 corps, mixing with people at all levels of society and conducting both outdoor and indoor meetings, *e.g.* at timber mills or country pubs where he would get the men singing. He was even coaxed into singing for General William Booth when he visited Australia (Rusher 1980: 2). Mudgee was in his element when addressing a crowd of teamsters, drovers or shearers in the bush vernacular (Dale 1956: 3). His gumleaf playing may not have been as virtuosic as his cornet playing or as charismatic as his fiery sermons, but his musical skills impacted on others as he travelled about:

> Appointed to Tasmania[11] in the days when rugged mail-coach drivers ruled the mud and metal highways, Mudgee moved through the country conducting his "musical blizzards", telling the story of his wild, wasted years and winning people for Christ. There were not many - including coach-drivers - who missed seeing and hearing the Army's bush evangelist ... his name was a household word for holy aggression and fearlessness of what men might think or say (Rusher 1980: 2).

Mudgee may have taught Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal people to play the leaf when he was stationed at the Salvation Army outpost in Echuca (near Cummeragunga); perhaps an Aboriginal leafist in this district had even taught him. The other likelihood is that some of Mudgee's nineteenth-century seniors played gumleaves, and he was merely transmitting a custom that had surfaced in Central Victoria during the mid-nineteenth century goldrush.

### 3. In Search of a Goldfield Gumleaf Music Tradition

A few weeks before the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship was established in 1977 (see details in next chapter), veterans were encouraged via local advertisements to come out of hiding to teach youngsters the skill. All who volunteered were non-Aboriginal men, most of whom, including Maryborough Mayor Brian O'Halloran (who originally learnt to play leaf at Swan Hill on the Murray River) and octogenarian Wally (Wattie) French[12] of Avoca, hailed from Central Victoria.

Map 3 indicates that many subsequent competitors also hailed from Central Victoria, where in 1977 the Bendigo and Ballarat press claimed that the gumleaf had been widely played by Aborigines, and that goldminers had used it as a form of entertainment. Moreover, Wally French and his brother Bert had learnt to play the gumleaf in 1900 when Wally was six years old.[13] It is possible that this cursory explanation of the gumleaf's history originally derived

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[11] It is possible that Mudgee popularised leaf playing in Tasmania at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although there is no available evidence that any Aboriginal gumleaf ensembles operated in Tasmania, it is unimaginable that Tasmanian children did not attempt to blow leaves in line with their mainland counterparts. The non-Aboriginal leafist Gordon Mahnken of Launceston "picked up" the skill from a workmate in the 1920s (Harrison 1997: 6).

[12] Wally French was the oldest veteran leafist to compete in 1977.

[13] "Mayor Making Comeback as Gum-leaf Player", *The Courier*, Ballarat, 13 June 1977: 7; "Gum-leaf for Tuneful Revival", *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 25 June 1977: 7; "Wattle Festival", *Weekly Times*, 24 August 1977: 44.

from the French brothers' gumleaf teacher, Mudgee Robertson. Alternatively, the comment may have reached the press through Robert Deason of Maryborough, whose grandfather found the Welcome Stranger nugget; Deason was photographed playing the leaf with a group of three others a couple of months before the inaugural competition.[14]

In pursuit of this lead, I found no hard evidence that leaves were played by pre-goldrush Victorian squatters in the 1840s, although it is feasible that their shepherds (often ex-convicts) could have blown leaves during their watch. From 1851, most of the diggers lived in small tents on the banks of creeks or the slopes of gullies in box, ironbark and stringybark forests. According to Cannon (1982: 62), prospectors were convinced that the presence of majestic ironbark trees indicated gold-bearing strata. Their habit of setting up camps in ironbark forests, *e.g.* Iron Bark Gully, Bendigo in 1852-3, raises the possibility that the ironbark leaf instrument's popularity with veteran Central Victorian competitors at the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship (1977-1997) reflected some transmission of a mid nineteenth-century practice.

The astounding growth of music on the goldfields between 1851-61[15] included rough-and-ready entertainments in temporary tents and theatres. Howitt (1855 [1972]: 246) noticed that the accordion was the diggers' favourite instrument, with the occasional flute, fiddle and bagpipe representing different nationalities, even fortunes. A cruder form of instrumentation used in campfire entertainments comprised dish-bottom drums, bones and homespun triangles (Keesing 1967: 159, 164). Since none of these are melody instruments, it is feasible that the ironbark leaf originally provided a high-pitched supplement to singing in the absence of flutes and fiddles.

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[14]"By Gum, They're Keen to Win", *Bendigo Advertiser*, 7 June 1977: 5.

[15]From 1851 the goldrush transformed entertainment throughout Victoria as thousands of people poured in from other parts of Australia and overseas.

### 3.1 The Irish Leaf Playing Tradition

In the words of Bradley (1993: 239), it is "reputed" that "a leaf dipped in Guinness was used to play tunes in Ireland". The penniless Irish enclave constituted a high percentage of the multicultural goldfields population (Cusack 1973: 55). How prevalent, then, was Irish ivy leaf playing in the form described below?

> The practice of lilting dance tunes [mouth music], of course, cost nothing and was probably widespread, while some amateurs played on the home-made flute, trump [jew's harp] and ivy leaf (blown as a reed held between the thumbs). However, simple economics suggests that amateur music making for dancing was limited in frequency and compass (Hall 1994).[16]

In Hall's estimation (pers. comm., 30 September 1995), ivy leaf playing in the British Isles was a rare novelty. He had seen a musician whistling through a privet leaf in the 1950s, and heard a leaf played on a recording, but this was not enough to substantiate the existence of an archaic tradition of leaf playing. It is therefore unlikely that the Irish strongly influenced the formation of the Australian gumleaf playing tradition, although it is not uncommon for Australians to perform Irish tunes on the leaf.[17]

### 3.2 The Chinese Leaf Playing Tradition

If leaf playing on the goldfields was manifest as a hidden form of grass-roots music, it is more likely to have been the domain of economically deprived Chinese diggers, since the *Muye*, a "piece of tree leaf" has been a popular instrument among the minorities of southern

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[16] I am grateful to Graeme Smith for introducing me to English musicologist Reginald Hall of the University of Sussex. Smith suggested that the title of the dance "Ivy Leaf Reel" might refer to a musical subject or idea such as leaf playing, but Hall dismissed the title as "typical romantic twaddle" from an earlier form of Irish literature

[17] For example, Tom O'Brien (*b.* 1903) of Aberdeen NSW learnt most of his leaf tunes from a father of Irish descent. He also plays Irish tunes on fiddle, accordion, mouth organ, jew's harp and tenor banjo (Meredith 1995: 30). Wendy Eva of Tatura, Victoria played an ivy leaf for me, by request, on 10 August 1995.

China for at least a thousand years.[18] Ethnomusicologist Shui-Cheng Cheng (1997: 2) located some prose and poems of the Tang Dynasty (608-907) which substantiate musical use of a "tree leaf" among the Han people:

> For example, in the General History (Dongdian) of Dou You, we read "Someone blows a tree leaf picked up in the street, the vibrato sounds produced by it is pure, the tone quality of the leaf of an orange tree is better"; in the Book of Barbarians (Manshu) of Pan Chuo, "At nightfall, young men walk in the alley, they play the *lusheng* (mouth organ) or tree leaves and express the love sentiment with this instrumental music suitably interpreted"; in some verses of a poem of Bai Ju-Yi "The little girl of the family Su has been famous since longtime [*sic*]... She blows a tree leaf for imitating the timbre of a jade flute". In the relief of the tomb of Wang Jian of the Five Dynasties (907-960), there are women musicians playing the tree leaf.

Cheng (1997: 5) describes the social functions of the tree leaf as follows:

> Generally, a tree leaf may be played by anyone alone or as [*sic*] taking part of an ensemble, it is sometimes used by children as a toy. Among the minorities of southern China, one uses [*sic*] to play a tree leaf alone for amusing oneself or during the popular or seasonal feasts, in the course of walking, in particular, boys of the Miao, the Zhuang, the Buyi and the Yi, etc. made the love declaration. In times past, people communicated between them [*sic*] in the high mountains as a "speaking instrument".

Immigrants from eastern China may also have been familiar with leaf blowing. At the Dragon Boat Festival in Shanghai, for example, it is not uncommon for participants to play tunes and make bird sounds on very stiff long leaves (pers. comm. from expatriate resident Frank Chen, 14 September 1997). Whether or not Chinese diggers in Central Victoria blew leaves within earshot of Aborigines or other diggers we may never know because the Chinese were generally segregated from the other groups (see Cronin 1982).

Likewise, I found no evidence that mid-nineteenth-century Victorian gold-diggers saw Aborigines playing leaves. Ebenezer Mission (1858-1904) operated in the Wimmera District to the west of the goldfield, but gumleaf ensembles were not in vogue in this area at that time.

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[18]These minorities include the Yi, Bai, Tujia, Dong, Zhuang, Miao, Yao, Buyi, Hani, Tai, Lisu, etc. covering six provinces: Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, Hunan, Hubei and Guangxi (Shui-Cheng Cheng 1997: 2). According to Cronin (1982: 17), the overwhelming majority of arrivals on the Victorian goldfields originated from Canton in the area surrounding the Pearl River delta, the See Yap and the Sam Yap.

Anderson (1955: 38) described how groups of diggers could be found in every flat and gully, gathered around their fires singing songs of their homeland. Yet nowhere in his extensive research into the musical folk-idiom of Bendigo and Ballarat did he uncover information concerning a goldfield gumleaf instrument (pers. comm. from Anderson, 14 May 1996). I examined numerous other descriptions of goldrush entertainment, including the items housed in a special collection at the Bendigo Regional Library.[19] Meanwhile, until precise evidence is uncovered, Central Victorian journalistic sources should be treated with caution.

### 4. The Gumleaf and Colonial Musical Taste

In 1977, leafist Wally French commented of turn-of-the-century gumleaf music: "At that time there were few playing and now there are even less."[20] According to John Whiteoak (pers. comm., 10 December 1996), it is unlikely that many early twentieth-century leafists (other than Mudgee's pupils) adopted leaf playing before the jazz craze of the 1920s.

To explain the gumleaf instrument's absence from colonial accounts of music-making, Whiteoak directed me to primary source evidence of European colonial taste upholding the classic aesthetic of plain, unambiguous music as "beautiful", "unadorned" and "tuneful". In 1854, for example, a colonial reviewer noted admiringly that touring violinist Miska Hauser "gave no variations to this beautiful melody ["The Last Rose of Summer"], but played it in the simplest and truest style in three octaves".[21] Colonial reservations regarding the appropriateness of improvisatory embellishment were due, first of all, to the physical separation between Europe and Australia. Colonial society lagged well behind the romantic

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[19]Typical sources include Cannon 1982), Cusack (1973), Howitt (1855 [1972]), Keesing (1967), and Potts (1974). Comic poet Charles Thatcher (1831-1878) produced numerous songbooks with lyrics describing life on the goldfields, but did not mention gumleaf playing.

[20]"Gum-leaf for Tuneful Revival", *Bendigo Advertiser*, 25 June 1977: 7.

[21]Concert review, *The Age*, 24 November 1854: 6.

musical craze that was sweeping Europe at the time. Secondly, there was a general lack of musical training available to members of the colonial population.

Mid-nineteenth-century audiences often suffered excruciatingly at the hands of local musicians (see, for example, Roderick and Anderson 1988), even without having to endure the gumleaf. The crude, high-pitched squeaks and squawks produced by a novice or mediocre leafist naturally defied their cultural expectations. Gumleaf performance was therefore oppositional to the popular aesthetic, unacceptable in the main to nineteenth-century taste, and relegated to a conceptual "tip" on the outskirts of European colonial musical consciousness. As noted above, the South Australian practice of gumleaf playing declined once Lutheran immigrants were prosperous enough to afford conventional instruments.

This general rejection of the activity on the part of the settlers left a vacuum or space in which Aborigines on these social/cultural outskirts could develop their own syntheses of gumleaf playing in the unrestrained way evidenced by the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band.

In 1959, non-Aboriginal leafist W.G. Richards of Grafton (first name not supplied) published an article in which he argued, from "many enquiries made in many fields", that the origin and development of gumleaf playing appeared to lie with the Australian Aborigine who developed it to "quite a fair standard":

> At one time many aboriginal groups on the fringe of some of our country towns had their gum leaf bands. In fact, at one stage a leaf band toured the northern rivers of N.S.W. and a good deal of Southern Queensland. They were accepted with high applause wherever they appeared.[22]

Richards was probably referring to the Bowraville Gumleaf Band, because it was active from the 1920s-1940s and toured Queensland. In any case, he had probably noticed Aborigines playing leaves in the Clarence River district, or at least observed one of the itinerant

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[22]"Sydney's Reaction to the Leaf", *Dawn* (February 1959): 5.

gumleaf bands.[23] Their visibility during these three decades, along with that of spin-off duos and trios in the 1950s and 1960s, led to some cross-cultural transmission of gumleaf skills which reflected a positive minority response towards Aboriginal musical creativity.

## PART 2: BLACK-TO-WHITE TRANSMISSION OF LEAF PLAYING SKILLS

The John Meredith Collection (NLA) contains oral historical evidence that several elderly and deceased non-Aboriginal leafists received instruction from Aborigines during the first half of the twentieth-century. Harold Newman, for instance, was taught by a Lake Tyers man "around the 1930s" (Bradley 1995: 3); and Arthur Foster (*b.* 1909 in Tumbarumba NSW) was first shown how beautiful a gumleaf could sound by a "black" at Wagga Wagga.[24] Foster's father (an old goldminer turned farmer) used to say, "Aborigines were the boys" when it came to leaf playing. Additionally, it came to my notice that 65 year-old pig farmer Alan Kesby of Kempsey, NSW learnt to play from a pupil of Aboriginal leafist Stan Murray in 1942, when he was ten years old.[25]

Leaf playing represented a tangible source of creative renewal whereby non-Aboriginal, predominantly working-class men could adopt, and in some cases appropriate into other contexts, a (perceived) aspect of Aboriginal culture. A comparison between Map 2 and Map 3 reveals a degree of geographical overlap between some of the established localities for the Aboriginal gumleaf playing activity and the home towns of some of the non-Aboriginal leafists who competed in the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship (1977-1997).

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[23]Various performances by the Aboriginal leafists of this district were recorded by John Gordon (housed at AIATSIS) and Chris Sullivan (housed at AIATSIS and NLA). See also Gummow (1992: 176).

[24]Foster later heard the leaf played at one of his father's campfire entertainments. A "white" fellow, a "little chap", then taught him how to hold the leaf, and he persevered for two years until he could play well. He learnt most his tunes at dances in Tumbarumba (Meredith, Killarney Vale NSW 1984, NLA TRC 2222/49).

[25]Keeby plays the lemon leaf with his own Uniting Church band at Milbank. His favourite tune is "May Your Anchor Hold" (information supplied by Harry Boston of Nambucca Heads, 2 November 1996).

Evidence that at least a dozen non-Aboriginal contestants learnt to play the gumleaf from Aborigines is provided below in chronological sequence:

**Walter McLaughlin** (*b.* 1909 at Bowraville, NSW, pers. comm., 25 April 1995) believes that the origins of gumleaf playing are indigenous and unique to Australia. Around 1922, a leaf band consisting of six or seven Aborigines (mainly from the Kelly family, described in Chapter 2) came to give a concert of popular Western music at his father's farm on the Nambucca River. One of these players showed Walter how to play a soft lemon leaf (the "quickest way to learn") over a three-day period. This made a big impression on Walter; he practised hard for two weeks until he made a good sound, and never looked back.

**Sydney Comb** (dates unknown, of Chelsea, Victoria) was taught by two Aborigines in 1930 (Harrison 1997: 9).

**Les Hawthorne** (dates unknown, a truck driver from the Gold Coast, Queensland) was taught at nine years (about 1937) by an Aborigine in Tenterfield, northern NSW.[26]

**Dudley Carter** (*b.* 1925 at Narrandera, NSW; *d.* 1992 at Narromine, NSW) was taught by an Aboriginal leafist at Narrandera in the 1930s (information supplied to John Meredith by Carter's widow). This discounts Anderson's publication (1995: 35) that seven year-old Carter first played a leaf in imitation of "a young European" named Mickey Stewart, whilst carting branches for a bonfire night.[27] Gumleaf playing was a popular pastime amongst the Wiradjuri population of Narrandera (Chapter 1), where Carter was descended from an Aboriginal grandmother - a fact not publicised until after his death (pers. comm. from Kevin Bradley, 12 January 1995).

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[26]"Les leafs well enough alone", *The Age*, 29 August 1977: 2; and "Hot Time at Gumleaf Follies Ball", *The Age*, 12 September 1979: 2. Hawthorne also played mouth organ and button accordion.

[27]Probably derived from Meredith (Narromine NSW 1984) NLA TRC 2222/30.

**Fred Roberts** (1926-1992, of Tatura, Victoria) was taught by part-Aboriginal league footballer Shadrach (Shady) James[28] at Wagga Wagga, NSW when he was a teenager, *i.e.* the late 1930s or early 1940s (pers. comm. from Wendy Eva, 10 August 1995).

**Keith Graetz** (*b.* 1928, of Stuart Mill, Victoria, pers. comm., 2 August 1996) was first exposed to leaf playing in 1942. Six Aboriginal men (aged from about 25-40) played popular tunes such as "Now is the Hour"[29] on stringybark leaves at a Saturday night dance in the Springton army logging camp, Barossa region, SA. When the gumleaf band offered a ten shilling prize for the first person to blow a sound on a gumleaf, Graetz picked a Red Flowering Gum (*E. ficifolia*) leaf from the main street, and won this small prize. From then on he continued to play leaves, a pastime which led to him win the Australian title in 1988 and 1995.

**Neil Seymour** (dates unknown, of Warrenwood, Victoria) learnt from a member of the LTGB whilst attending one of their performances at the Bancroft Bay (Metung) home of Gordon Gilsenan in the 1940s (Bradley 1995: 3).

**Geoff McGuire** (dates unknown, of Cooma, NSW), learnt around 1951/52, whilst attending secondary school. He was inspired when the Wreck Bay/Nowra Aborigines played leaves at an Amateur Hour (Harrison 1997: 4). McGuire became an expert at leaf swan calls and dog sounds.

**Ray (Guggles) Clifford** (dates unknown, of Echuca, Victoria) learnt from some Aborigines in Barmah, Victoria when he was about five (Harrison 1997: 6).

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[28]Son of Indian teacher Thomas Shadrach James (1891-1956) and his Yorta Yorta wife, Ada Cooper.

[29]Graetz had no knowledge of whether these bandsmen hailed from SA or Victoria. Since they played "Now is the Hour" (more correctly "Maori Farewell"), it is possible that they were from the Upper Murray, where Aaron Briggs played the same tune (O'Connor and Officer, Cummeragunga NSW 1961, NLA TRC 2539/032).

**Robert Haley** (dates unknown, of Melbourne) learnt as a child from a family friend, an Aboriginal leafist who came to Melbourne each year for the Show.[30]

**Leo Doyle** (birthdate unknown, of Alexandra, Victoria) was taught by Aboriginal shearers at Mingenew, WA in the 1960s (details supplied in Chapter 1).[31]

**Harry Boston** (*b.* 1944, of Nambucca Heads, NSW) was taught by his Aboriginal wife, Roseina, in the mid-1990s.

Together these examples illustrate an enthusiastic non-Aboriginal adoption of a perceived Aboriginal leaf instrument in three states of Australia - perhaps because, in their quest to identify themselves with the land, these men lacked a "Dreaming" of their own in a century demarcated by two world wars (after McKie 1988). Their positive responses to Aboriginality may provide ramifications for twentieth-century cultural studies, but they are not necessarily a reliable indicator of leaf playing transmission trends prior to the early 1920s. The evidence was markedly overstretched by Bradley (1993: 239), when he presumed that "all present references to a non-Aboriginal learning the leaf in Australia eventually trace back to an Aboriginal source".

Meredith (1995: 40) also rather simplistically assumed that a historical analogy between the twentieth- and nineteenth-centuries automatically ensued from such data, in his broad statement:

> Peculiarly Australian, gumleaf blowing originated with the autochthonous people of this country, the Aborigines.

Daniel Connell reaffirmed this statement by describing gumleaf playing as "a traditional Aboriginal art that has been adapted to produce European tunes with spectacular results" (introduction to Meredith 1995: xii). Although my Chapter 1 exposition lends some

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[30] "Taking a leaf from Bach", *The Age*, 24 September 1983: 2.

[31] Doyle also plays music on discarded snakeskin (Meredith and Bradley, Alexandra Vic 1994, NLA TRC 3000/82).

(qualified) support to this and similar views expressed, for example, by Moresby (1948: 12), it is safer to assume - until further evidence is uncovered - that nineteenth-century gumleaf playing operated under a different set of historical circumstances from that of the 1920s-1990s.

Meredith and Bradley did not balance the numerical incidence of non-Aboriginal Australian leafists taught by Aborigines with those who were self-taught (*e.g.* Lockwood); those who were taught by other non-Aboriginal leafists (*e.g.* Brian Norris, Phillip Elwood, George Calder, Wendy and John Eva, Fred Roberts Jnr, Nita Ackland, Mike Berris, and Jeffrey Wilmott); and those who adopted leaf playing abroad (*e.g.* Virgil Reutens in Malaysia and Keith Lethbridge in the Philippines).[32] Curiously, neither did Meredith nor Bradley refer to the Salvation Army's role in motivating the practice of leaf music at the beginning of the twentieth-century; *i.e.* two decades before McLaughlin learnt to play the leaf from Aborigines in 1922.

Given the popularity of Aboriginal gumleaf playing in the 1920s and 1930s, detailed research into the non-Aboriginal use of the leaf in this era could reveal much activity. Six suggested contexts and leads for future study are listed below.

## PART 3: VENUES AND CONTEXTS FOR LEAF PERFORMANCE

### 1. "Jazzing" and Juvenile Amusement

By the 1920s, the term "jazzing" was equated with fun in the context of light-hearted entertainment, *e.g.* post-war balls or "frivols" in which noise-making "jazz toys" were given

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[32]As a child in Penang during the 1950s, Reutens (pers. comm., 3 October 1993) coaxed sounds from Frangipani and Chinese Firebrush leaves after watching an older boy with expertise. The Frangipani did not produce a clear tone, its major veins protruded, and a gluey substance ran down Reuten's chin. Lethbridge (pers. comm., 7 October 1995) first saw "single leaves" being blown by his wife's uncle, Laurie Peraw of Mindaneo. Though Peraw had several favourite leaves, especially guava, he could play anything, which was supple and suitably textured. Lethbridge considers leaf playing to be rare in the Philippines.

to patrons to enhance their enjoyment. As a medium into which people could also hum, the gumleaf proved just as useful as the kazoo (mirliton or Tommy-talker) and its variant, the comb-and-paper. The acceptability of "novelty noise"[33] as an entertainment virtue thus enabled experienced Aboriginal leafists to beguile their non-Aboriginal audiences, who readily perceived them to be owners of the tradition.

As a music toy, the leaf commanded popularity with non-Aboriginal boys and girls throughout the twentieth-century, and doubtless well before that. Once popularised as novelty noise in the 1920s, the gumleaf, kazoo and comb-and-paper were a particular source of amusement during the 1930s Depression. In Melbourne, for example, Mrs Isobel Parkes of Balwyn (pers. comm., 8 August 1993) and her playmates loved to pick leaves so that they could find a "regular" note around which to "wobble".

According to Salvation Army archivist George Ellis (pers. comm., 25 November 1994), the officers taught many children the leaf to indoctrinate them with the hymn repertoire. Leaves furnished an expedient, economical way to form scratch bands. As previously noted, non-Aboriginal children were taught the leaf by Captain Mudgee Robertson at the beginning of the twentieth-century, and Pastor Doug Nicholls in the mid-twentieth century.

## 2. Stage Shows, Amateur Hours and Competitions

The French brothers "performed on stage" (probably gumleaf jazz in the 1920s) and over central Victorian radio stations 3BA and 3VC in the late 1930s. They subsequently appeared in many amateur hours and competitions, with Wally even claiming that they toured "the whole state of Victoria" in the mid twentieth-century with travelling entertainments.[34] It is

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[33]A term used during the 1920s. Although it implies a value judgement, "novelty noise" is generally understood as any new sound of a decorative or aesthetically worthless nature, such as those prescribed in Haydn's "Toy Symphony". The Tramways Kazoo Band was called a "jazz band", *i.e.* a fun noise band.

[34]Press release by Margaret Harrison, 1977. See also "Mayor Making Comeback as Gum-leaf Player", *The Courier*, Ballarat, 13 June 1977: 7; and "Gum-leaf for Tuneful Revival", *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 25 June 1977: 7.

possible that their choice of leaves (Chapter 6), method of playing (Appendix 1), and performance behaviour, reflected on those of their teacher, Mudgee Robertson. Wally himself gave many leaf lessons in schools.

The dull Depression years were brightened by the outstanding talents of the Jewish comedian, Roy Rene (1892-1954), a former vaudevillian popularly known as "Mo". A master of the direct, local vernacular, Rene played the gumleaf to "take off" a typical busker. Many of these performances took place in the highly colourful extravaganza revues at the Tivoli Theatre, Sydney (pers. comm. from Frank Stringer, 20 May 1997).

In the 1940s and 1950s the gumleaf featured in amateur musical competitions; *e.g. The Terry Dear Show* and the *Minstrel Half-Hour*. Aboriginal leafists also went to air, with popular compere Harry Dearth auditioning leafists from both cultural groups in country towns (pers. comm. from Ken Brunton, 20 July 1997). Inaugural Australian champion Les Hawthorne appeared on many television talent quests in Brisbane and Sydney,[35] having started his career as a leafist in 1942 when he won the Australian Amateur Hour. Whilst visiting Sydney in 1958, W.G. Richards played the leaf twice on Amateur Hour programmes.[36]

### 3. Dance Bands/Clubs and Harmonica Bands

My interview with the late banjoist Jim Fury (*b.* Marrar NSW, 1908; *d.* Wagga Wagga NSW, 1997) on 7 March 1997 indicated the potential fruitfulness of more thoroughgoing research into the role of gumleaf playing in dance bands and dance clubs.[37] Fury belonged to the *Jazz Fiends*, a dance band whose core members played piano, violin, banjo, mouth organ, clarinet/saxophone and drums. Drummer Ted Powell and bone rattlers Les Rapley and Jim Lyneham (the local barber) played box and lemon leaves as an optional extra.

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[35]"Crowds flock to Wattle Festival", *Bendigo Advertiser*, 29 August 1977: 3.

[36]"Sydney's Reaction to the Leaf", *Dawn*, February 1959: 6.

[37]A Gum Leaf Club existed in Brisbane in the 1910s. John Whiteoak (pers. comm., 9 May 1997) suggested that this was a dance club rather than a gumleaf music club.

Using popular recordings, the *Jazz Fiends* established a repertoire by ear, which they performed in wool barns and public dance halls in towns surrounding Marrar (directly north of Wagga Wagga, between Junee and Coolamon). They transported their instruments, including a piano, on a truck. In the early 1930s, they fooled a crowd at the Ambulance Fair by applying greasepaint to disguise themselves as "nigger (*sic*) minstrels".

In the 1930s small groups of Aboriginal leafists from Brungle Station, Tumut used to pass through Marrar on their walkabout route, usually two or three, and sometimes even six of them at a time. They often busked in the larger towns west of the Great Dividing Range. Although they did not usually collaborate with non-Aboriginal musicians, they once shared a music-making session with the *Jazz Fiends*, and offered general help. They showed Powell, Rapley and Lyneham how to hold the leaf with two fingers of one hand, or even two hands, and these musicians followed suit in their performances. Fury described the Aboriginal leafists as "self-taught", and able to perform "real" rhythms and tunes (by this, he presumably meant recognisable Western tunes). Although Fury could not remember their names, they left him with a strong impression that gumleaf playing was "their music".

The Wagga District Annual Carnival held from 9-11 February, 1933 was a typical country event, which featured contests in gumleaf whistling, song, mouth organ and humorous recitation, as well as non-musical events such as bun eating, pillow fighting and yo-yo penny polishing. The *Jazz Fiends*, renamed the "Marrar Mouth Organ and Gumleaf Band" for the event, "stole the show" with a performance by a pianist, a piano accordionist, two gumleaf players, a bone rattler and two mouth organists (Grieve 1996: 59; augmented by Jim Fury).[38]

Different combinations of musicians were used over the years, including three women who could read music, and sometimes the men operated as a barbershop quartet. The band

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[38]Grieve obtained his information from an issue of *The Wagga Advertiser*, February 1933.

operated until the beginning of WWII, after which a new line-up became known as the Marrar Orchestra (pers. comm. with Jim and Monica Fury, 7 March 1997).

**4. Fairs, Shows and Circuses**

Fairgrounds and showgrounds could provide another interesting locus for case studies of leafists. One notable story involves Ray Grieve's legendary uncle "Happy Harry" Smith (*d.* 1960s), who kept show equipment (including a merry-go-round, Punch and Judy Show, trick dogs and ponies) on his three-acre property at Dulwich Hill, Sydney. For many years Smith played the gumleaf in his permanent spot with the merry-go-round at Gunnamatta Park near Cronulla (letter from Ray Grieve, 9 March 1997). Smith is also remembered for the lively role he played in the AIF Concert Party,[39] his unique gumleaf act having been recorded in *The Changi Diary*:

> He could only play one tune, "Twelfth Street Rag". God knows where he got the leaf. It was probably latex. He used to launch himself onto the stage and announce solemnly, "I shall now endeavour to play for you any tune you wish to request." The boys would yell out any old thing and Harry would play "Twelfth Street Rag" and get a standing ovation (Braddon and Pigot 1995: 57).

Multi-talented circus performer John Brady has toured 33 countries, with solo acts ranging from whips and ropes to boomerang throwing. Often employed by Silvers Circus, he is also accomplished at playing "Australian rhythms" on the didjeridu and the "eucalyptus gum leaves".[40]

**5. Railway/Road Workers, Farmers, Drovers, Shearers and Bullockies**

Urban leafists such as Smith and Rene were conspicuous; rural leafists far less so. In the early twentieth-century, non-Aboriginal gumleaf playing probably surfaced in some districts as an

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[39]Smith is immortalised in Murray Griffin's oil portrait *Harry Smith Strikes a Light* (1943), reproduced in Braddon and Pigot (1995: 57).

[40]"Presenting Mr John Brady", *Pro-Circus: The Voice of Australian Circus* 10, September 15 1996: 4.

obscurity or mostly camouflaged bush activity, characterised by the freedom and naturalness of open-air life, and not necessarily as markedly shaped by the Aboriginal tradition as Bradley (1993: 239) suggested. Anderson (1955: 118) noted how bush life encouraged a certain manly independence and ability to "make do".

> The bushman, a worker in the bush, had to be a person of initiative, able to improvise with whatever materials were at hand ... Quite early in the history of Australian settlement those who dwelt inland were known as "stringybarks" from the multitude of uses to which this timber could be put; as a kind of symbol of the outback and the ability of such men and women to adopt themselves to all conditions.

Many semi-migratory bushmen spent all their days in remote townships or virgin bush, where they were compelled to create their own personal entertainment. For such loners, the gumleaf was an ideal bush-rooted/bush-grown disposable instrument for self-expression. Arthur Foster exemplified a road contractor playing a gumleaf around a campfire in about 1924.[41]

Railway worker and veteran leafist Will Lockwood (88) of Toolamba, Victoria (pers. comm., 2 October 1993) stumbled across the activity as a welcome diversion in the 1940s. In a happy-go-lucky manner, he taught himself to blow leaves to beguile away his "smoko" breaks. "I gradually got the sound and gradually was able to play a tune - they were simple tunes".[42] Apart from competing annually in the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship, Lockwood often performs at the local Toolamba Pumpkin Festival. In NSW, Alan Kesby of Kempsey is a leaf-playing pig farmer, and the late Brian Norris of Murwillumbah was taught leaf by potato digger Clive Smith of Dorrigo (Harrison 1997: insert between pp. 8-9)

I have already mentioned how some Aboriginal stockmen used the gumleaf instrument to call their cattle to attention. This custom probably infiltrated the non-Aboriginal droving and shearing circuit as a particular work feature, since some social mixing between Aboriginal and European men occurred in shearing sheds (Ellis *et al* 1988: 165). Many songs, narrative

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[41] Meredith (Killarney Vale NSW 1984) NLA TRC 2222/49.

[42] "Blowing his way to a championship", *News*, 30 September 1993: 4.

ballads and yarns circulated in a type of folk undercurrent, which satisfied the drovers' need to sing or provide some reassuring drone to cattle at night.

This is the most likely explanation for Len Boneham's assertion in 1977 that western Queensland was "the home of gumleaf playing", so much so that he could bring "a whole contingent" down to the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship at Maryborough, Victoria.[43] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt connections between the leaf instrument's use by non-Aboriginal men in western Queensland and its reported appearance amongst Aborigines in far southwest Queensland at the beginning of the twentieth-century. However, it is clear from the historical novels of Duncan-Kemp (1933, 1952, 1961, 1968) that non-Aboriginal stockmen worked at and visited Mooraberrie Station. Here, some may have observed and emulated the leaf playing of Old Macumbara.

In spite of the valuable clue offered by Ellis *et al*, it was generally rare for early twentieth-century Aborigines to share the same social, artistic and musical environments as other Australians. When cross-cultural interaction did occur on mission and cattle stations, it was usually a musical "one-way street". Aborigines who showed non-Aborigines how to blow the gumleaf mostly knew only Western hymns and popular tunes based on the tonal *sol-fa* system that they had learnt from missionaries.

### 6. Bush Bands and School Bands

Some individual leafists have interacted with bush bands to impart novelty value, even though the leaf can easily assume the role of a melody carrier. Its piercing timbre enhances the soundfield of an ensemble with intermittent colour and a visual evocation of bush ambience. The creation of a certain aura is one of the essential ingredients of public folk music (see Smith 1992). In this respect the gumleaf is positively distinguished from the

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[43]"Pushbikes, poetry - and gumleaf title", *Bendigo Advertiser*, 27 August 1997: 2.

comb-and-paper - another non-essential aerophone used in bush bands along with idiophones such as bones, spoons, and lagerphones. [44]

The rural connotations attached to the gumleaf undoubtedly contributed to a perceived trivialisation of the instrument in the minds of sophisticated urban musicians. Nevertheless, when Johnson (1997: 96-97) ran an informal poll to discover which instrument people most often associated with Australia, those questioned nominated the gumleaf, comb-and-paper, and lagerphone, in addition to the didjeridu. Johnson's investigation has yet to be validated by a thoroughly documented survey.

Twentieth-century rural people sometimes formed scratch bands with homespun instruments. For example, the family of the late Australian gumleaf champion Fred Roberts[45] formed a homely bush band in the 1970s. The group comprised Fred Senior, Fred Junior, daughter Wendy, and her husband John Eva. Each contributed skill on the gumleaf at various Victorian markets, festivals and shows, most frequently the Rushworth Bushmarket. John and Wendy also appeared as a lagerphone/gumleaf duo at the Hilton Hotel and the Melbourne Show.

Since March 1991, leaf playing has been a feature of the annual Bangtail Muster held in Armadale, WA. Run by bush poet Keith Lethbridge in the Bicentennial Shed on his property "Ups n' Downs", this square dance party is backed by a bush band consisting of "whoever turns up on the night". The evening is designed for people to "let loose" with whatever talent they may have hidden away, *e.g.* recitals of rhymes, skits, saw playing and spoon playing. A barber clips a lock of hair from those attending their first muster (letters from Keith Lethbridge, 7 February and 7 March 1996).

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[44]Also known as the Murrumbidgee River Rattler, the lagerphone is a rattle stick with beer bottle tops attached, an Australianised instrument descended from the Jingling Johnnies (a metal rod instrument covered with jingles from tambourines used by ex-members of the British Army). It was revived by the (original) Bushwhackers in the 1950s, and transformed into a versatile rhythmic instrument by Dobe Newton (Smith 1994: 196).

[45]Roberts also played mouth organ and accordion, and loved to recite verse.

The contemporary bush band typified by the Roberts and Lethbridge families was indirectly influenced by the "bush band" revival phenomenon, which emerged, along with a widespread interest in Australian folk music, in the 1950s.[46] In Sydney, the original Bushwhackers Band[47] accommodated the bush bass (tea-chest bass) and lagerphone, casting the bush band into an urban genre. This embraced the popular "folk boom" of the mid-1960s and persisted throughout the '70s and '80s. As a form of public folk music relying on recontextualisation, the bush band has taken on acoustic and electric forms. Items of repertoire retain a strong Irish inflection, actively defining the genre as oppositional to industrially mediated popular music.[48]

In 1958, W.G. Richards of Grafton spent two weeks in Sydney gauging "a general trend of public feeling towards leaf playing", simply because he believed that it was a pastime worth fostering and developing. Leaf playing rendered good, true musical melody, with a range of two octaves and a "sweetness" all of its own. In the hope that leaf playing could take a place in the musical field purely from a musical point of view, Richards interviewed Professor Peart in the Department of Music at the University of Sydney. Peart felt that the leaf instrument could possibly be used in school orchestras and recommended that Richards contact John Antill, Editor of Music for the ABC. Antill referred Richards to Mr. Appleton, who asked him to prepare a series of short scripts interspersed with items on the leaf for use over the Children's Session.[49]

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[46]This was motivated firstly by the Australian tour of the American entertainer Burl Ives, and secondly by Dick Diamond's musical play *Reedy River* and left-wing attempts to foster a type of nationalism sympathetic to its cause. Wherever *Reedy River* was performed, bush bands were formed to take part in its production (Sullivan 1992: 6).

[47]Formed in 1952 by John Meredith, Brian Loughlin and Jack Barrie, the Bushwhackers' aim was to sing Australian songs accompanied by traditional instruments (Meredith 1995: viii).

[48]An authoritative discussion of this phenomenon is expounded in Smith (1994). In 1935 the composer Alfred Hill described the mouth organ as Australia's national instrument.

[49]"Sydney's Reaction to the Leaf", *Dawn*, February 1959: 5-6.

## PART 4: THE COMMERCIALISATION AND CONSUMPTION OF LEAF MUSIC

In the following section, my discourse on gumleaf playing is framed by economic considerations. A focus on non-Aboriginal buskers and the media promotion of gumleaf music leads to a case study of its appropriation by one particular company wishing to project a unique form of "Australianness". Both technology and capitalism have impinged on this minor, ostensibly bucolic fringe music tradition.

Gumleaf playing has often been used as a means for attracting gifts of money, beginning with the "Eucalyptus Band" procession at Bordertown, SA in 1892 and the musical feats that preceded Mudgee Robertson's evangelistic appeal. In Melbourne, the WLGB were paid five pounds per tune to play at the *Palais Royal* the late 1920s, and Ted (Chook) Mullett's Gumleaf Band performed in the paid "Corroboree" season at Wirth's Olympia in 1949. During the 1930s Depression and the years that followed, Aboriginal fringe-dwellers in the streets of cities and country towns delivered impromptu public performances on gumleaves simply as a means of survival.

### 1. Non-Aboriginal Leaf Buskers (*Money Does Grow on Trees ...*)

As busking of any form is rarely discussed in Australian sources, it is difficult to comment on non-Aboriginal gumleaf busking as a broad tradition and the date of its emergence remains unknown. However, evidence that people always busked regardless of regulations dates back to the goldrush (pers. comm. from John Whiteoak; 16 March 1996) and as a means of remuneration leaf busking persists up until the present day. Whilst visiting Sydney in 1958, W.G. Richards played the leaf in quite a few hotels, where the instrument was accepted well by that section of the public:

> On one occasion an aborigine came in and after standing silently for a few moments, asked if I had any leaves to spare - I handed him a couple and we played quite a presentable duet which literally brought the house down![50]

On another occasion Richards entered into partnership with a blind piano-accordionist in the Central Station subway. Their business boomed, although Richards received "curious side glances as to where the leaf music was coming from".[51]

The legendary non-Aboriginal leaf busker Walter McLaughlin (Plates 6a and b); pers. comm.; 19 February and 25 April 1995) still busks at Circular Quay, Sydney each Saturday from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. and on special holidays. In contrast to the story of gaoled Aboriginal busker Bill Bull, McLaughlin can bank on earning approximately $200 each Saturday and up to $400 on special holidays when his wife counts the takings on their kitchen table.

McLaughlin also busks on the saw, using a violin bow.[52] His experience shows that "Amazing Grace" brings in more money on the saw, whereas "How Great Thou Art" is more of a winner on the leaf. On 30 November 1988, the Municipality of Drummoyne awarded McLaughlin a "Certificate of Recognition" for "Excellence with Unusual Musical Instruments". Having played leaves ever since he was taught by the Bowraville Aboriginal leafists (*i.e.* the Kellys) in 1922, McLaughlin believes, with all modesty, that he has perfected the art of leaf playing: "I have a natural gift for music. It is something that God has given me. It keeps me alive. If they took my saw and leaf from me it would be a terrible punishment. It would be worse than going to jail".

Philip Elwood (*b.* 1970 in Hamilton, Victoria; pers. comm., 31 October 1994) is to Melbourne what Wally McLaughlin is to Sydney, for he also enjoys "making a quick buck" from gumleaf busking. The son of a Salvation Army bandmaster from NZ, Elwood has some

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[50] *Ibid.*: 7.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] McLaughlin has played the saw since he was 16, having learnt the method by correspondence (three pounds for three lessons). A former Silver Saw Champion, he won a "Red Faces" TV talent contest in 1995.

background in piano and trumpet. As a child he enjoyed imitating the sounds of kookaburras, and at 13 years attended the Golden Wattle Festival in Maryborough, Victoria to compete in the National Birdcall Championship.[53] Whilst there he watched the gumleaf competition, and felt led to try his hand at this "different" and "unusual" musical skill. Elwood took about four lessons from seasoned leafist Brian Norris of Murwillumbah NSW, and eventually produced a fine sound. He won the Junior Gumleaf Playing Championship in 1985 and the open competition in 1996.

Employed by *Free Entertainment in Public Places* (FEIPP) to busk in key areas of the city, Elwood positions himself in strategic spots such as the Bourke St Mall, Little Bourke St between Myers, and the Victoria Market. He is likely to be seen climbing the Red Ironbarks in the Bourke St Mall, only to produce amazingly sweet tunes on their polluted leaves. With his small daughter Bianca on a second leaf, the money can even be doubled.[54]

**2. Iconic Media Promotion in the 1990s (*Golden Gumleaves turn to Golden Dollars ...*)**

Since the introduction of television into Australia in the late 1950s, leafists have featured in talent quests, variety shows, news items and as already noted, the original 1970s series of *Skippy*. Five leading exponents have made numerous television and radio appearances since 1989.

In particular, Philip Elwood and Virgil Reutens were screened on the *Bert Newton Show*, and competed in *Red Faces*. Reutens appeared on *Hey, Hey, Its Saturday*, *The Steve Vizard Show*, *Melbourne Extra* and *Perth Extra*, and was given airplay on Radio National's *Breakfast Show*, BBC Radio and *Late Night Live* with Philip Adams. After his 1995 win, Keith Graetz appeared on many radio shows, and in 1996 he appeared on *The Ernie Sigley Show* and *The*

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[53]Elwood won the birdcall contest in 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1995 and 1997 respectively.

[54]Elwood also performs regularly in pubs, and at Emu Bottom homestead, Sunbury, where he plays on the actual garden foliage. He has also performed as a guest artist with the band *Codiacs* at the *Lion's Fringe*, a large venue for bands in Adelaide.

*Midday Show*. Channel 7 co-opted Elwood to play for their production of *The Magic Gumleaf*[55] in 1989 and *The Funniest People* in 1995. Shortly before he won the championship in 1996, Elwood performed on *The Midday Show* (Channel 9), partly as the national birdcall champion.

Since 1989, gumleaf music has also been appropriated in advertising. Elwood played "The First Nowell" on the balcony of Myers as a commercial stunt for *Just Jeans* in November 1994. Although he received remuneration of $250, the segment did not go to air as planned because of a dispute over the copyright of Christmas carols.

On October 3 1994, creative designer Maurice Dowd of Clemenger Melbourne heard Reutens play on radio 3LO's *Breakfast Show*, after his sixth consecutive win at Maryborough. Dowd immediately registered the idea of using gumleaf music as a commercial gimmick because it was musically unique, distinctly Australian, and portrayed something "wholesome". As a direct result of market research which revealed that few other products had higher child consumption than Muesli Bars, Uncle Tobys[56] created a new product called Fruit Breaks and employed Clemenger to create a short commercial which would have immediate appeal to adults.[57]

Dowd's idea of resourcing gumleaf music resonated with the assignment because Uncle Tobys is a partner to Landcare Australia. The commercial was shot in December 1994, then put to one side. The new stocks of Fruit Breaks fetched strong sales; thus Uncle Tobys bided their time until sales started to flag. Then Clemenger released the commercial to television stations so that it could go to air from Easter Sunday 1995, to ensure a further sales boost.

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[55]The plot of *The Magic Gumleaf* centres on some children, on whom a spell is cast. When they play music on a particular gumleaf, their ears and noses grow longer.

[56]The Australian-owned company Uncle Tobys Co. Ltd. operates from Wahgunyah on the Murray River and offices in Richmond, Victoria. Their advertising budget is modest compared to that of the US-owned company Kellogg.

[57]I am grateful to Ms Penny Burke, Uncle Toby's representative at Clemenger Melbourne, for this information, given by telephone on 12 May 1995.

The general manager of Uncle Tobys, delighted with the success of their first foray into the adult market, wrote a personal letter of appreciation to Reutens, who was paid handsomely for appearing as a leafist in the commercial.

Clad in a sash like a prize bull, the gumleaf champion lies prostrate on a satin pillow, ingeniously performing a medley. A logic of expectancy is set up as he discards each gumleaf in disgust, then tosses their icon status to the wind by chewing his cud on a Fruit Break - only to elicit a "dinki-di" tune from its paper wrapper. This smart quirk in the promotion of adult consumerism merged the "creative" and "commercial" together in a smooth interactive process, rather than in a binary oppositional manner - to allude to a theoretical framework put forward by Keith Negus (1995: 317-318).

Arguably the extra-musical concepts of place and space are encoded in this commercial through Dowd's selection of those folk icons supreme - "Kookaburra Sits in an Old Gum Tree", "Click Go the Shears", "Advance Australia Fair", and "Waltzing Matilda". Reutens was instructed to play these themes because all were "recognisable" aural inscriptions that distinguished Australian culture from that of other countries. Various possible directions had emerged during the shooting of the commercial, with Reutens (who in real life prefers to perform gumleaf jazz) co-opted to play about ten different Australian tunes. The process of communicating popular music was then reduced to decisions as to which "sound effects" were the best common mediators to project a nationalistic flavour, even though it is doubtful that these sounds reflect the realities of contemporary Australian society.[58]

Clemenger Melbourne did not have to pay copyright on any musical items apart from Marion Sinclair's "Kookaburra Sits", for which they paid a very substantial amount. After all, an English folk tune played on an Aussie gumleaf would have imbued the ad with far less

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[58]In much the same way, the song "Waltzing Matilda" was initially used to advertise a brand of tea. Once accepted by the gullible it established the "swaggie" as a symbol of outback Australia, even though his mythical appeal did not reflect the lifestyle of most Australians at the time.

convincing connotations - hardly a blueprint method in the *fin de siècle* climate of the embattled republican debate. Although the conjunction of "Aussie" frameworks with contemporary public concerns may indirectly account for the images selected, audience response to commercials is bound to vary, since it is shaped by personal perceptions.

As Willis (1978: 193) argued in his book *Profane Culture*, objects, artefacts and institutions do not, as it were, have a single valency. It is the act of social engagement with a cultural item that activates and brings out particular meanings. Whereas one adult viewer might unconsciously adopt the image of gumleaf music for reading ideological meanings (such as the redressing of constitutional boundaries) into the commercial, another might merely switch off, or at the other extreme, register a conditioned response. Whether the gumleaf sound in the commercial actually functions as a referent, which induces some viewers to buy Fruit Breaks, is a subject beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is safe to say that different consumers attach different connotations to musical advertisements.

Generally speaking, this droll recontextualisation of gumleaf music probably convinced a wide audience both of the Australianness and durability of the leaf as a cultural artefact, although it left some misleading impressions of its functions and representative repertoire. The tunes used in the Fruit Break commercial did not reflect the eclecticism of the gumleaf champion's own musical taste. Neither did the commercial allude to the indigenous origins, functions or meanings of gumleaf playing in detribalised Aboriginal society, in spite of the overwhelming evidence that gumleaf bands constituted the prominent Aboriginal instrumental tradition of southeastern Australia in the post-colonial period.

Interest in the iconic potential of gumleaf music continued, and by 21 November 1997 Reutens had been co-opted to perform at the Crown Casino, Melbourne. Whereas the media portrays non-Aboriginal leafists primarily for their skill and the iconic novelty value of their instruments, denser layers of cultural connotations - such as the roots of gumleaf playing - are broached in the media appearances of Aboriginal leafists. Patten and Boston usually include their leaf birdcalls, and mention the predominance of leafists on mission stations and fringe

settlements. For example, Patten performed and spoke on Radio National's *Arts Today with David Marr* on 26 June 1995, and mimicked birds in an ABC Classic FM programme entitled *Transpoes*, which went to air on 14 October 1996.[59] More recently, as part of a week-long promotional tour, Patten was interviewed about his CD/booklet on *Today* (Channel 9) on 11 May 1999. Apart from having featured many times on Radio National's *Australia All Over*, Boston played leaf in the garden setting of a 1996 episode of *Burke's Backyard* (Channel 9).

## CONCLUSION

In drawing together the available threads of evidence as to who "owns" gumleaf music, a mysterious confusion remains as to whether or not Aborigines first taught settlers to blow leaves at some stage during the (largely undocumented) process of musical culture contact, or vice versa. The solution to this mystery rests on the outcome of future research, for as Laubenthal (1988: 323) emphasised, the colonial situation threw many uprooted traditions closely together, thus producing considerable and long-lasting confusion. Some confusion in the directions of influence on the development of gumleaf music is reflected in the Time Chart preceding this chapter.

Groups of Aborigines played European tunes on gumleaves from at least 1892, and they dominated this musical tradition in southeastern Australia in the first half of the twentieth-century. Nevertheless, written sources presently suggest that the non-Aboriginal gumleaf music tradition predated the formation of the first known Aboriginal gumleaf band. Hahndorf (an economically deprived centre for Lutheran-style worship in the 1840s and 1850s) and Bordertown (evangelised by the Salvation Army in the early 1890s) were provenance points for this European style of gumleaf playing in Australia. Lutheran settlers may have transplanted the leaf playing grip and techniques of central European shepherds onto

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[59]Produced in Sydney by sound sculpture artist Sherre Delys.

Australian soil. Once financially established, however, they opted to purchase and play conventional instruments.

Considering that the main research exercise for the present thesis has been the Aboriginal gumleaf tradition, the lack of evidence for the existence of a non-Aboriginal goldrush gumleaf instrument should not be regarded as conclusive. A systematic search through colonial newspaper accounts and settlers' diaries could reveal a previously unimagined field of musical activity with ironbark and box leaves. It is also possible that some Chinese gold-diggers originated from provinces where the Chinese leaf music tradition was prominent, and that they experimented with blowing gumleaves.

Documentation highlights the musical expertise of Salvation Army Captain Mudgee Robertson, who taught gumleaf playing around 1900. The leaf instrument's barely researched functions amongst the settlers of pre-industrial Australian society ranged from worship and evangelism to self-amusement and public entertainment. Future research could uncover a more diverse range of functions, including peripheral use of leaf instruments in droving, circuses, and informal variety acts. Overblowing and perceived out-of-tuneness probably had limited appeal to colonial audiences because they were directly oppositional to pre-ragtime sensibilities. From the 1920s on, a Black-to-White transmission of leaf playing skills reflected a positive response to a perceived Aboriginal cultural activity on the part of interested male pupils. Further to this, most contemporary non-Aboriginal leafists still believe that the gumleaf is an Aboriginal instrument.

The non-Aboriginal leaf busking tradition perpetuated by McLaughlin and Elwood probably emerged in the 1930s Depression, if not earlier (no pre-1980s recordings of non-Aboriginal leafists are listed in the John Meredith Collection, NLA). Popular venues for amateur leaf music acts in non-Aboriginal twentieth-century Australia also included country festivals, fairs and markets, local competitions and reunions, and radio and television shows.

Even though some women dedicated time to gumleaf playing, recordings of their work did not appear until the 1960s. It can be safely assumed that the traditions of both cultural groups developed amongst adults as a predominantly male activity because late nineteenth and early twentieth-century women were mainly preoccupied with childbearing and home duties.

By October 1994, companies who were seeking novel resources for advertising had independently approached both Elwood and Reutens. Skilled leafists have become a means of persuasion through which companies can cash in on the perceived Australianness of their products. Their human marketability is due largely to the two decade-long Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship, which allowed for new heights of virtuosic expression to be honed from the leaf instrument.

Just to play the gumleaf is to celebrate its emblematic nature; the Fruit Break venture was a pure proclamation of consumption that cleverly exploited the quest for a national identity. However, it would be a pity if the future of gumleaf music were to be determined solely by market forces, since these project a contrived rather than "authentic" articulation of its cultural field. This view is further contested in the following chapter, which provides a detailed study of the performance behaviour of Aborigines competing in gumleaf contests organised by the dominant cultural group.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE PERFORMANCE BEHAVIOUR OF ABORIGINAL LEAFISTS COMPETING IN WESTERN-ORIENTED CONTESTS: A CASE STUDY

*The comforting idea that people who have been steeped from birth in one cultural heritage can compete equally in another will be severely tested in the 1980s*

(Maddock 1972: 12)

This chapter centres on competition performances by Aboriginal leafists, drawing some comparisons with relevant non-Aboriginal leafists. The first Australia-wide leaf music competition, the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship, was held at the Maryborough Golden Wattle Festival, Victoria in 1977, marking the beginning of the ongoing "gumleaf competition period". For 21 years following its inception, the Golden Gumleaf Award became a focus for enthusiastic Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists from around the country. A trophy was awarded annually to the winner by media personalities who, for lack of knowledge of the instrument's acoustic and botanical qualities and performance techniques, drew on the criteria of musical showmanship and, in more recent years, on the musical tenets normally applied at band or solo instrumental competitions.

A handful of Aboriginal musicians patronised the competition. Herbert Patten and Roseina Boston, for instance, made it known that they were very proud of the association of leaf playing with Aboriginal culture. They perform the leaf on a daily basis in their educational, entertainment, environmental and political work, and most importantly, for personal expression. Leading non-Aboriginal leafists, such as Virgil Reutens and Philip Elwood, also play for personal expression and to earn their keep. Whilst the competition operated they enjoyed far more media exposure than the Aboriginal leafists.

I did not set out to represent the institution of the gumleaf competition as a contradictory cultural site. However, as my investigation progressed I became sensitised to the social, political and economic differences between the two groups of leafists. From the outset of the competition, gumleaf music was projected by the non-Aboriginal majority of participants in the eccentric, laid-back, nationalistic Australian bush performance tradition - as witnessed by the titles of almost all of the "compulsory" tunes selected by the organising committee. In contrast, the Aboriginal leafists' performances were based on their holistic attitude to, and respect for, the ecological system of which they are part, as well as the ritual practices of their local communities and other cultural meanings which Aborigines ascribe to the leaf instrument. Most importantly, they do not consider the leaf as a passive object, since they view plants and humans as co-dependent. Ellis (1984: 154) noted that Aboriginal performance may function as "a present-time exhibition of a never-ending source". In short, performance behaviour rests on the relationship between life and art, particular sets of circumstances arising from cultural antecedents, and the bond which grows between the artist and his/her audience.

At the competitions these two opposing cultural and aesthetic systems contrasted with each other in most audible ways, as was made abundantly clear from stage to unbiased observers. In order to discover why leafists from each group behave differently, a concept was needed which could serve as a tool for thinking about their behavioural differences. I identified a critical aspect, namely that culture is manifest in customs that are patterned according to shared ideas. Performance behaviour and leaf instruments are not "culture" themselves, but the reflections of ethnic pride and the conditioned products of (perceived) common heritage. Gumleaf competitions therefore provide a culture-specific example of a universal process described by Coplan (1991: 37) as "the reification of cultural patterns as invariant group identifiers for political purposes", as well as a site for colliding cultures (terminology used by Kartomi in Kartomi and Blum (1994: xi-xvii).

The Aboriginal competitors are influenced by their daily contact with non-Aboriginal society, and perform items in their own individual, syncretic musical styles. In an introspective, nostalgic mode of discovery, Patten and Boston both choose to engage with their past heritage and the social and cultural meanings which accompanied it, *i.e.* their performances retain some elements which can be traced back to the gumleaf ensemble tradition. The leaf birdcalls, which they include in most of their musical performances, also reflect an aspect of their daily interaction with the natural environment. In the intensely political climate in which Aboriginal music is created and criticised today, their performances are projected in quite different ways from those of non-Aboriginal leafists.

In this chapter I distinguish features of performance that are germane to leaf playing from those that are formally considered by adjudicators; the former include grip, stance and gesture, and the latter, tone, pitch, timing, dynamics and "creativity". These features are displayed in my recordings and videos of items played by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists at the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship from 1993-1997. Naturally all competitors, of whatever background, are constrained in the development of their performance technique by the limitations of leaf material (see Chapter 6).

In the previous chapter I discussed commercial and media leaf performances by Reutens and Elwood. I shall now investigate Patten's and Boston's use of leaf instruments in their local, national and international contexts as used in education and for corporate, conservational promotion and political purposes. This will increase our understanding of the representation of Aboriginal gumleaf music in Australia today, and the compromises which Patten, Boston and other Aboriginal musicians have had to make upon entering gumleaf competitions.

# PART 1: LEAF PLAYING IN NATIVISTIC REVIVAL

## 1. The Functions of Herbert Patten's Leaf Performances

"Performances" have been characterised as "situated behaviour, situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts" (Bauman 1975: 35).[1] "Context" is defined by the combination of a number of factors of time, place, performers, audience and intention (Seeger 1980: 11). Patten's performances may be categorised according to their functions, namely transmission, transaction and transmutation. In addition to these terms and categories, which I defined in the introductory chapter, Patten sometimes uses the gumleaf as a vehicle for counter-hegemonic appropriation.

### 1.1 Transmission

Apart from playing to entertain, Patten plays a crucial role in the educational transmission of the art of gumleaf playing to younger Aborigines and other schoolchildren. In 1994 he taught gumleaf playing at Koori Culture Camps for children and Olympic 2000 workshops for Aboriginal teenagers on the south coast of NSW. He also featured in Golden West Television's *Milbindi Series* as *The Gumleaf Maestro*, whilst engaged to perform gumleaf at a major Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Conference in Broome, WA.

In his capacity as a Cultural Officer for the Aborigines' Advancement League (AAL) from June 1995 until December 1996, Patten demonstrated gumleaf music at countless kindergartens, primary schools, secondary colleges and tertiary institutes. From 5-6 July 1997 he showed over 200 schoolchildren how to play the leaf at the Koori Kulture Klub for Kids held in the Melbourne Town Hall.

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[1]Quoted in Seeger (1980: 11).

### 1.2 Transaction

"Gumleaf music transactions" (performances that Aborigines are commissioned to produce for formal occasions) involve a degree of negotiation. Patten is faced with the usual conflicts of culture contact described by social anthropologists. Whilst engaged in inter-ethnic contact he is bound to either adopt or reject certain elements of the host society. Patten opts for "integration", *i.e.* the maintenance of aspects of both cultures synchronously, rather than "separation", *i.e.* the rejection of identification with the host culture.

For example, in 1995 Patten played gumleaf as members of the Wurundjeri led the opening of the annual Moomba Parade on 11 March; and as the Koori History Trail was launched on the steps of Parliament House on 2 April. On 8 November 1997 he played "God Save the Queen", "Waltzing Matilda" and "Advance Australia Fair" in a nationalistic projection of the gumleaf at an Australian Naturalisation Ceremony attended by about 400 people and several politicians.[2] On 2 December 1993 Patten also performed "Danny Boy" and "Jacky Jacky" on the gumleaf for Governor Davis McCaughey and his wife when they visited the Aboriginal Caring Place for Aged Elders (ACES) in Northcote

In these vice-regal contexts gumleaf music represents a specific aspect of the cultural record of Aboriginal society. On Anzac Day 1993 Patten also played "The Last Post" as a leaf salute for the televised launching of the book *Forgotten Heroes. Aborigines at War from the Somme to Vietnam*, which mentions how the enlisted men of Lake Tyers had formed a gumleaf band to boost army recruiting drives.

### 1.3 Transmutation

Thirdly, some of Patten's appearances are characterised by transmutation, *ie.* change from one form to another by substituting foreign leaves for gumleaves in overseas performances,

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[2]Patten has varied links with the migrant population of Melbourne. He has played, for instance, at a Jewish wedding, taught leaf at the Japanese School, and appeared at the Boîte World Music Café, Fitzroy.

or substituting the gumleaf for a more conventional instrument. In October 1994 he was flown to Hong Kong to play background music at an Australian Food and Wine Expo.[3] Due to a dearth of eucalypts, Patten resorted to using a vine leaf from the Hong Kong Botanical Gardens that was equivalent in size and flexibility to the gumleaves that he plays in Australia.

Many of Patten's appearances as a guest artist with Aboriginal rock bands have involved the economic substitution of the gumleaf for a synthesiser. In this contextual shift, or instrumental exchange, the leaf functions as an additional layer in sliding countermelodic support to the melody, rhythm and harmony instruments.[4] As an offshoot of the indigenous tradition of leaf playing this is one of the few genuinely unique aspects of the Australianisation of popular rock music. However due to the marked decrease in the number of Aboriginal leafists, it has not been exploited to the same extent as the didjeridu and clapsticks. Its biggest drawback is the physical limitation of leaf (as vibrating apparatus) in the execution of fast-paced rock 'n' roll songs. As a last resort, Patten once "faked" on an industrial plastic "leaf" in order not to lag behind the strong beat. In doing so, he ran the risk that audiences would perceive the plastic leaf to be un-Aboriginal (a term used by Patten). For this reason he carried the original source - a gumleaf - in his pocket.

### 1.4 Counter-hegemonic Appropriation

Finally, Patten's talent has sometimes found expression in purposeful action on behalf of his people as his gumleaf becomes the site of counter-hegemonic appropriation. The preview of the Aboriginal musical *Bran Nue Dae* at the Victorian State Theatre Playhouse during

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[3]Organised by Koori Alan Hudson of the Dja Dja Wrung Aboriginal Coop., Ballarat, the Expo included six cabaret-style performances per day.

[4]I witnessed Patten collaborating with the band *Mercury Blues* at the Aboriginal Affairs Victoria staff party in Melbourne, NAIDOC week, 7 July 1992. In 1994 he appeared with the Aboriginal rock band *Pearl Shells* in Broome, WA, and in 1997 with the all-Aboriginal band *Riverbank* at the Narooma Golf Club, NSW.

National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week on 2 July 1993[5] provided an illustration.

In his capacity as a Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Officer, Patten performed a *wominjeka* (welcoming piece) to greet the interstate performers. In this instance Patten was operating on behalf of a particular group of Aboriginal people, namely the Wurundjeri descendants who claim ancestral ties to the land on which the present-day city of Melbourne stands. By contrast, many of Patten's public contributions are tantamount to his speaking on behalf of all, especially when he represents cultural aspects of gumleaf music in the context of civic functions and national or international conferences.[6]

Patten's leaf music style is pervaded by his attachment to the birds of Gippsland, Victoria, and the Wallaga Lake district, NSW. Their sounds still influences the quality of his performances as he communicates something of the culture which, in his view, brought gumleaf playing into being. In both these districts trees provided not only leaves, but also contextual ambience for traditions of blowing them. Without some degree of knowledge and feel for the culture in which it was conceived, his idiosyncratic use of leaf instruments would hardly create its distinctive atmosphere. On 14 November 1991, for instance, Patten contributed "black leaf music" at a Sound and Light Show in which the Melbourne Town Hall was transformed into a giant rainforest. He thereby enhanced the attempts of musicians, naturalists, businessmen and teachers to promote Victoria during a period of economic recession.[7]

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[5]During the same week Patten also provided background gumleaf music for the Exhibition on Indigenous Women at the Victorian Museum.

[6]I observed such an occasion on 6 May 1992, when Patten performed leaf birdcalls and two pieces for the Cytologists' International Congress in the World Trade Centre, Melbourne.

[7]"The seed grows for sound and light show", *Sunday Herald-Sun*, 10 November 1991: 96.

## 2. Some Contexts for Roseina Boston's Leaf Performances

Roseina Boston visits many primary schools and kindergartens on the north coast of NSW, in order to present cultural talks and play the gumleaf. A photograph of her visit to Bayldon Primary School, NSW on 29 March 1996 was published on the front page of the *Coffs Harbour Advocate* on 4 July 1996 above the following caption:

> Mrs Boston, or Aunty Rose as she prefers to be called, entertained the students with a repertoire of popular songs, leaving many fascinated at the technique used to create such music on a humble gum leaf.

Roseina is also much in demand as a performer in the Nambucca River district. In 1992 she was featured playing gumleaf tunes in the "traditional" segment of the "Where are the Aboriginal Aged?" Conference.[8] Shortly afterwards, she was accompanied by well-known country-and-western guitarist Shorty Ranger at an Elders' monthly dinner in Kempsey. During the week of 17 May 1995, Roseina competed in an Amateur Hour (TAFE Aboriginal Fun Day), sharing the prize with an Aboriginal poet.

On 22 December 1995 Roseina was personally introduced to the Governor of NSW before he viewed her performance of "Silent Night" and "Koori Rose" at Ian (Macca) McNamara's Christmas Concert in Sydney. In January 1996 she busked at the Tamworth Country-and-western Festival, and she has also performed at several Country Jamborees in Nambucca Heads. Although Roseina is famed for her leaf impersonations of birds, she views the leaf as belonging equally to the human realm as to the realm of nature. She loves to quote an old saying that "music is not measured in pounds, shillings and pence, but in the amount of enjoyment you can give to other people with a gift that God has given to you".

In all of these representations Patten and Boston manifest nativistic revival, because the sounds they create in the present conjure up images of the past. Seeger (1991: 34) noted how indigenous people create both the past and the present and project themselves into a future of their own construction, even in situations of domination and apparent powerlessness:

> In these cases music not only makes history but constructs the future, helping to unite the present with both past and future in an intelligible way.

Patten, for one, sees the gumleaf instrument as a powerful and meaningful symbol of the personal, social, cultural and spiritual components of his identity. Yet in my attempts to attach specific cultural meanings to Patten's performances, I came to the conclusion that he is an individual enmeshed in a complex social web which is prone to the problems associated with representation and the connections between music, identity, politics and power relations.

Whenever Patten and Boston competed in the annual Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship, the particular beliefs, capacities and strengths associated with what they were trying to convey as Aboriginal persons – more frequently seen to be operating in the varied social settings described above - came into conflict with a deforming space, because all competitors were required to operate under the same eurocentric criteria. In this altered context, a natural display of public ethnicity on the part of Patten, Boston and other Aboriginal entrants normally threw the musical and sociopolitical differences between the two groups of leafists into tangible relief.

## PART 2: THE AUSTRALIAN GUMLEAF PLAYING CHAMPIONSHIP

In 1977 Councillor Fred Treble of Maryborough, Victoria founded the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship because he realised that gumleaf playing was a unique form of Australian heritage with enormous potential for enhancing the Golden Wattle Festival. His brainchild was based on the "use it or lose it" philosophy (pers. comm., October 2, 1993).

With the number of entrants varying between 6-14 over the two-decade duration of the contest, it constituted the major competition of its type. Others are the smaller-scale local "Golden Leaf Awards" held at the annual Bangtail Muster in Armadale, WA since 1991,[9] and

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[8]Organised by *Booroongen Djugun* ("Sleeping on Home Ground") Aboriginal Corporation at Kempsey from 9-10 March. A photograph of Roseina and her gumleaf appeared in *The Koori Mail*, 25 March 1992: 12.

[9]This competition is not restricted to gumleaves and participants may only win once, after which they contribute "demos". Winners since its inception have been Phyllis Beckett, Lorraine Taylor, Loyce Oma, Chayne Burrows, Clancy Lethbridge and Jamie Gillett (letter from Keith Lethbridge, 7 March 1996).

an annual state competition initiated in Karoonda, SA on 5 September 1997 by Jeanette Wormald in conjunction with a pre-contest workshop conducted by 1986 Australian Gumleaf Champion Cliff Dobbins. It is also not unusual for gumleaf playing to be included in coo-ee calling competitions.

The Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship relied heavily on financial prizes for its preservation, with entrants (5-14) on an annual basis) vying for the Golden Gumleaf Award trophy. Sponsorship peaked at $2,000, an incentive that steered the leafists towards higher and higher degrees of virtuosic application. Prize money was variously donated by Ampol Petroleum, local radio stations, motels, hotels, shops, restaurants, and travel agents, the Maryborough Chamber of Commerce and the Golden Wattle Festival Committee. The Victorian Government Tourist Bureau promoted the event, and contests were reported nationally on radio and television

Following the initial promotion of the event 22 inquiries were received from Victoria, NSW, SA and Queensland respectively. One tongue-in-cheek inquiry recently appeared in a self-published history of the contest by its dedicated organiser Margaret Harrison (1997: 2). Written on July 10 1977, it read:

> I heard that white-man WALLY FRENCH play a gum leaf other [*sic*] night on T.V. Chan. 2 Sydney - Me, blackfellow Australian gum leaf player - I think I leave him for dead. Please send me application form for competition. Cedric Barnes.

The event was "open to players of any background", a philosophy which attracted the participation of five indigenous adults (and one child), namely, Ambrose Golden-Brown, Gordon Edwards, Herbert Patten, Roseina Boston, James Goorie Dungay, and five-times Junior Champion Jarrod Atkinson.[10] In conceding that the instrument "originally belonged to the Australian Aboriginal", all press releases overlooked the influence which tourism had once played in showcasing Aboriginal gumleaf bands, and leafist Wally French dismissed

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[10]Son of Aboriginal broadcaster Joel Wright, and step-grandson of Patten.

their existence altogether with an unfounded quip that the gumleaf is "only a solo instrument".[11]

Notwithstanding the fact that at least twelve of the non-Aboriginal competitors learnt to play the leaf from Aborigines, the gumleaf competition was always organised, sponsored and adjudicated by non-Aboriginal officials and only ever produced non-Aboriginal champions.[12] This arguably reflects on the broad, long-term consequences of colonisation.

As is the case with European orchestral instruments, the performance protocol attached to the contest was bound by the language of established consensual aesthetics and codified standards of excellence. The Aboriginal entrants faced a whole new "ball game" as they competed in a transplanted aesthetic, which allowed little scope for their own particular cultural beliefs, capacities and strengths to achieve recognition. The design and annual result of the event remained under the control of a "superior" sensibility. Adjudicators consistently allocated prizes in accordance with society's dominant ideology and displayed no qualms in justifying their own cognitions of fairness.

Notwithstanding the fact that competition leaf performance is a highly specialised act of communication which engenders a bond between the artist and his/her audience, my baseline for observation of competitors rested on the physical and technical realities which all faced. The production of solo music on a leaf is not a mere gimmick, as some people suppose. As with other instruments, leaf playing results from the deflection of personal motor impulse into a special technique that determines the realisation of preconceptualised musical ideas.[13] I will begin this study of leaf performance behaviour by viewing gumleaf grip, stance and gesture.

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[11]"Gum-leaf for Tuneful Revival", *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 25 June 1977: 7.

[12]Champions were Les Hawthorne, Dudley Carter, Wendy Eva, Cliff Dobbins, Fred Roberts, Keith Graetz, Virgil Reutens, Philip Elwood and Jeffrey Wilmott, with five of these having won the prize on more than one occasion.

[13]Physiologically speaking, the quality of leaf instrument sounds is related to the player's own unique physiognomy, which includes the total embouchure structure, the thickness of the lips, the shape of the oral cavity in relation to teeth, tongue position and throat opening, the efficiency of the sinus and chest cavities, and the general structure of the upper torso.

## 1. Essential Features of Gumleaf Performance

### 1.1 Gumleaf Grip

Table 3 should be read in conjunction with Appendix 1 (typology of leaf playing methods) and those plates in Appendix 4 which feature gumleaf grip. Interestingly enough, the three oldest players in these photographs, namely Guboo, Goonabahn and non-Aborigine Walter McLaughlin (taught by Aborigines in 1922), all grip the leaf with the one hand and two fingers (the index and middle) only. Herbert Patten and others call this the "traditional method" (*i.e.* traditional leaf grip), although so far its documentation amongst Aboriginal leafists can only be traced back to the NLA-held photograph of the Wallaga Lake bandsmen taken in *c.* 1920-1922.[14]

Most of these men folded their leaves and secured them against the upper lip, although Guboo, who joined them in the same decade, simply blew over the top of the leaf without folding it at all (Plate 3). Although it would be far-fetched to suggest historical linkages, the one-handed leaf grip of German shepherds who played in two or more parts (simply pressing the leaf to their lips with index and middle fingers and vibrating the 'plate' from the air streaming out; Sarosi 1986: 124) strangely resembled the grip demonstrated by Guboo.

The eight Aboriginal leafists (possibly from Wallaga Lake) who posed for the film *The Squatter's Daughter* in 1933 all used the traditional method. Likewise in close-up shots from *Rangle River* (1936), all Aborigines play the leaf with one hand only; two men may be seen gripping it with the whole hand, the other two with index and middle finger only.

Most Lake Tyers leafists used the one-handed traditional method, securing the leaf either with the index finger and the middle finger, or the thumb and index finger (pers. comm. from Michael Edwards, 30 November 1996). However, four of the fifteen (*c.* 1930) bandsmen in

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[14]It is also likely that Lutheran immigrants to SA used a one-handed leaf grip, based on Sarosi (1986: 124).

Plate 10 posed with a two-handed leaf grip, as did the 1930s trio featured in Plate 13. This was obviously the preferred leaf grip in the Lakes district (Plate 12) and Melbourne (nine of the eleven members of Chook Mullett's Gumleaf Band used two hands)[15] by the late 1940s. These examples could also indicate that the two-handed leaf grip was popularised in Victoria more than NSW.

Today the tendency of practitioners from both groups is to hold the leaf with two hands. According to the sampling taken, Aborigines rest the leaf on either the upper or lower lip, whereas non-Aborigines consistently rest it against the lower lip. A notable exception was Dudley Carter, who, as previously noted, had an Aboriginal grandmother. Carter held the leaf on the upper lip with one hand, whilst fluttering the other hand and his tongue to create trills, turns and tremolo effects (based on Meredith, Narromine NSW 1984, NLA TRC 2539/076; and Meredith 1995: 40).

Veteran player Wally French commented that learning the leaf could be clumsy and difficult in the early stages; a leaf player "must be gifted and must have a good set of teeth"[16] and a "good lip"[17], although a "good" lip was not defined. Leafists such as Patten do cope with false teeth in spite of the risk that they might shift around.

In some cases, gumleaf grip may be determined by whether one's musical background lies with a vocal or instrumental tradition. Whereas Patten is an experienced singer, Philip Elwood's background lies chiefly in trumpet playing and he purports to place his lips against the leaf in the same manner as he does the trumpet.[18] Salvation Army officer Mike Berris has a background in French horn that may have influenced both his embouchure and concept of

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[15]Cinesound Review 0942, NFSA.

[16]"Gum-leaf for Tuneful Revival", *Bendigo Advertiser*, 25 June 1977: 7.

[17]"A Place in the Sun", *The Sun*, 1 June 1977: 9.

[18]Sunderland (Clayton Vic 1994) RRC T16.

tone, whereas his background in violin is more likely to have contributed to his fine sense of phrasing.

Even though some men learnt to play the gumleaf from indigenous people, they developed their own characteristic manner of playing. The late Fred Roberts passed on the skill to his sister Nita Ackland, his son Fred Junior, and his daughter Wendy Eva. Eva was the only woman to hold the Australian gumleaf music title,[19] even though five women entered the contest.[20] Fred perfected the art of playing the leaf "no hands" whilst accompanying himself on accordion (see method in Appendix 1), whilst Wendy played a dried leaf to her own "mimed" flute fingerwork. Duos such as "Finnegan's Wake", played by Eva on dried leaf and Roberts on mouth organ, are highlights of the John Meredith Collection (NLA).[21] In a slightly different manner, Eva's pupil Jeffrey Wilmott clasps his hands one above the other, over the nose.

Whilst performing in clubs Virgil Reutens plays the leaf "no hands" while accompanying himself on guitar and pedal drum in jazz-blues tradition. Some early twentieth-century Aboriginal leafists were equally versatile; playing leaf "no hands" was common amongst stockmen and the one-man band acts of vaudeville performers. It was still a performance trait at Wallaga Lake in the 1980s (*e.g.* the duo who stepdanced whilst playing leaves). To enhance the visual effect of their gumleaf grip, some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists also clutch a whole sprig or small branch of leaves against their bodies as they play.

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[19]National champion in 1982 and 1985, Eva is also the only person ever to have played a gumleaf solo in the Melbourne Concert Hall. This she did by invitation for the National Salvation Army Week Concert in 1973, playing "Bound for South Australia", "Lime Juice Tub" and "Scotland the Brave" (programme notes).

[20]Namely Rose Ralston, Nita Ackland, Wendy Eva, Roseina Boston and Gaynor Tabe. Ackland undertook to compete in 1984 but was too nervous to appear on stage.

[21]Meredith and Willis (Tatura Vic 1990) NLA TRC 2222/402.

## 2. Stance and Gesture

Following on from gumleaf grip, I observed the non-prescriptive performance parameters of stance and gesture. Varying degrees of human expressivity characterise the musical behaviour of leafists through their body communication (how the physical language complements the aural in the act of music-making) and rhythm-in-performance (*e.g.* the way a rhythm is actually approached or departed from, including accentuation, lengthening and shortening).

Very few clues regarding leaf performance behaviour were hinted at in the accounts of Mudgee Robertson, although it is safe to assume that the exhibitionism of his cornet playing carried over into his gumleaf performance. It is possible that the performances of his pupils, including Bert and Wally French, may have reflected on those of Mudgee. During contests, non-Aboriginal leafists (*e.g.* Berris, Elwood, Graetz and Wilmott) didn't usually jump around a lot whilst focussing on a tune, but a common habit of almost all performers was that of tapping time with their feet.

The most animated non-Aboriginal champion leafist is undoubtedly Virgil Reutens, whom Ian ("Macca") McNamara of Radio National calls the "Larry Adler of the Gumleaf". When performing in his "gumleaf blues" style, Reutens lifts his head up high and sways his body backwards or from side to side as he taps one foot. This rhythm-in-performance demeanour bears striking resemblance to the antics of Klezmer musicians.[22]

In their own communities, Aboriginal leafists performed standing, walking, dancing, seated - even up a tree or reclining on the ground - whilst Aboriginal stockman played leaves on horseback. The most noticeable characteristic of Aboriginal musical behaviour is relaxed gesture, although depending on personality the demeanour of some leafists will always be

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[22]See, for example, Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1993) RRC V1. Klezmer is an ancient tradition of Eastern European Jewish folk entertainment, which is characterised by expressive body language. Reutens also capitalises on other Klezmer effects such as downward slides, trills and wa-was.

more restrained than that of others. The body language of the old gumleaf bandsmen was more subdued when subjected to White control, as demonstrated in *The Squatter's Daughter* and *Rangle River*.

Roseina Boston's body language during competition is comparatively restrained. Instead, she goes to great lengths to dress the part of the Aboriginal country-and-western artist (see Plate 2).[23] Roseina's body communication is, however, far less inhibited when she plays leaves to the birds in a bush setting or in the context of folklore storytelling.

The degree of body movement demonstrated by Patten has its roots in the Aboriginal performing arts conceptualisation of music and dance as closely woven, transmutable entities. Recalling the steps and antics which he saw used at community dances and parties from the 1950s on, Patten often breaks into a spontaneous dance sequence whilst playing the leaf. According to Wayne Thorpe (pers. comm., 2 December 1997), Patten can move freely in accordance with his cultural makeup because he has his leaf technique "down pat". Thorpe experiences the urge to "bop to the beat" when he plays leaf, but restrains himself because his technique is not very advanced.

Verbalisation is characteristically common to Aboriginal culture and so, as active tradition-bearers, Boston, Patten and Dungay appreciate the freedom of being able to talk on stage. In summary, grip, stance and gesture are non-prescriptive features that, by and large, remain discrete to individuals rather than specific musical traditions (see Table 3).

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[23]See also Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1995) RRC V3.

## TABLE 3: VARIATIONS IN GUMLEAF PERFORMANCE BEHAVIOUR (i)

**LEGEND: HAND GRIP:** 2/h = 2 hands; 1/h = 1 hand; 1-2h = 1-2 hands; n/h = no hands; 2/f = 2 fingers; 2/f/t = 2 fingers & thumb; c/f = cupped fingers; s/f = spread fingers **MOUTH GRIP:** b/l = bottom lip; t/l = top lip **STANCE:** s/s = standing steady; s/m = alternating between steady & mobile stance; s-s: moves from side to side; l/f = leans forward; s/w = standing/walking; s/t = sitting; d = dancing; t/f = taps foot; h/b = on horseback. The Aborigines viewed during competition are marked with an asterisk.

| ABORIGINES | GRIP | STANCE | GESTURE |
|---|---|---|---|
| ATKINSON, J * | 2/h, t/l | s/m | natural body language |
| BALLANGARRY, J.I. | 2/h | s/m | corroboree steps |
| BOSTON, R * | 2/h, t/l | s/s, t/f | tells stories with leaf |
| BULL, W. (Bill) | 1/h, 2/f/t, b/l | n/a | n/a; arrested for busking |
| DUNGAY, J. * (Goorie) | 2/h, b/l | s/w | cheerful busking antics |
| GOLDEN-BROWN, A * | 2/h, t/l | s/w | s/m or s/t; laid-back |
| GROGAN, C. | n/h, 2/f, b/l, c/f | h/b, s/m | played leaf to cattle |
| MARR, B. (Goonabahn) | 1/h (2/f) | s/m | animated quartet player |
| PATTEN, H. * | 2/h (cf/sf); t/l | s/w; d | Pronounced corroboree steps |
| THOMAS. T. (Guboo) | 1/h or 2/h | m/d | Jitterbugging |
| THORPE, W. | 2/h (c/f); t/l | s/w | extroverted only if sound is good |

| NON-ABORIGINES | GRIP | STANCE | GESTURE |
|---|---|---|---|
| BERRIS, M. | 1/h or 2/h (c/f) | s/s | plays on a potted tree |
| BOSTON, H. | 2/h, t/l, n/h | s/s | plays "no hands" |
| CARTER, D. | 2/h (c/f); t/l | n/a | copied mouth organ gestures |
| ELWOOD, P. | 2/h (c/f), b/l | s/m, t/f, l/f | embraces leaf, climbs tree |
| EVA, W. | 2/h, b/l | s/s | mimes flute fingerwork |
| GRAETZ, K. | 2/h (c/f) | s/s | no particular gimmicks |
| LOCKWOOD, W. | 1/h or 2/h (c/f) | s/s | jumps from tune to tune |
| McLAUGHLIN, W. | 1/h, 2/f, b/l | s/s | no particular gimmicks |
| REUTENS, V. | 2/h (s/f)/n/h | s/m, t/f, b/l | Klezmer-like antics artistic fingerwork |
| ROBERTS, F | b/l (c/f), n/h | s/m, s-s, l/f, t/f | microphone effect with hands |
| WILMOTT, J. | 2/h (c/f) | bends knees, t/f | hands over nose, thumb up |

## 2. Gumleaf Competition Criteria

Most of the adjudicators invited to Maryborough were media personalities who regarded showmanship and originality in presentation as a virtue, although in the last few years of the competition conservatorium-trained musicians were invited to judge. Whereas some adjudicators believed in the creative principle of improvisation and applauded ways in which leafists added flesh to the bare bones of melodies, others favoured the unadulterated performance of tunes.

In 1984, the adjudicator took into account each contestant's ear for music, control of the leaf, choice of personal number, and the rendering of the compulsory tune, whilst in 1985, judgement was based on audience reaction, showmanship, the actual playing of the leaf, and the choice of number. In 1989, by contrast, criteria focussed on the player's presentation, musical ability, tunefulness, and personal appearance (Harrison 1997: 12-13, 17).

By 1994, leafists were judged solely on musicianship, namely on pitch, timing, on whether they produced enough air to support phrasing and on their uniqueness in portraying an item. In 1995, a new adjudicator stressed pitch, timing, individual creativity and musical definition; in 1996, clearness of tone (*i.e.* a "violin-like quality"), musicality and improvisational ability; and in 1997, pitch, timing, dynamic contrast, a "violin-like quality", overall musicality, and ability to meld phrases together. I will now examine some of these concepts and criteria in detail.

### 2.1. Leaf Pitch and Tessitura

The present use of tuning systems for leaf music emerged through the pressures associated with competition. Wendy Eva checks the highest and lowest tone on a leaf prior to performance, then chooses a key or pitch before beginning a piece. For example, a thick, green leaf will go into a much lower key because it vibrates slowly, and it will usually produce a trumpety timbre.

Virgil Reutens uses a pitch pipe for solo competitive purposes, but otherwise tunes the leaf to his guitar. He is fastidious about sticking to certain keys for particular tunes, and so he tests each leaf for its most comfortable highest and lowest note and compares these to the required pitch ranges of selected repertoire. Due to his background in guitar, Patten always conceptualises playing the leaf in sharp keys.

Contestants were bound to play items that fell comfortably within the pitch range of their leaves. In 1997, when the Maryborough finalists combined to form the annual "scratch band" at the close of the contest (Plate 15; Tape Example 19 of "The Drover's Dream"), Patten had to play an octave below the others because he had selected a somewhat low-pitched Yellow Box leaf.[24] Patten can also reach the G below tuning fork A on a Turpentine leaf. Elwood's most comfortable lowest note on most leaves is tuning fork A, whilst his most comfortable top note is the equivalent of the highest E (E''') on the piano.[25]

## 2.2 Gumleaf Tone

Champion leafists often speak of their "gumleaf tone", the intensity of which they modulate to express fuller sentiment or emotion in their instrumental renditions of songs. My understanding is that performers use the word "tone"[26] with reference to the timbre[27],

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[24]Ryan (Maryborough, Vic 1997) RRC T13.

[25]In a preliminary experiment I arranged for Elwood to test the pitch range of six leaves. A Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) leaf registered a three-octave range from E to E'''; a Red Ironbark (*E. sideroxylon*) leaf ranged from tuning fork A to E'''; an unidentified ornamental Mallee leaf ranged from B' to E'''; a Yellow Mallee (*E. incrassata*) from G below tuning fork A to F#'''; and a Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) leaf from tuning fork A to E'''. Although the pitch range of eucalypt leaves is species-dependent, this experiment was also dependent on the technique and embouchure of the leafist. When a beginner attempted to play the same leaf (wiped clean with a damp tissue), he actually managed to extend the lower range a minor third lower than the experienced leafist - who excelled at extending the high tessitura of the same leaf. The pitch range of dried eucalypt leaves surpasses that of fresh eucalypt leaves, although the sixth leaf tested - the non-native cumquat (*Fortunella sp.*) - registered the highest-pitched range, namely C' to A'''' (the top note on a standard piano). This approximated the range of a piccolo, moreover the timbre of the cumquat leaf actually sounded like a piccolo.

[26]The meaning of "tone" with respect to the building material of a note of music is quite different from its intervallic meaning, *i.e.* a major second or whole tone as distinct from a semitone.

pitch (highness or lowness) and strength (loudness) of a gumleaf note in the same way that we ascribe "tone" to the human voice.

Tone may appeal to the performer both aesthetically and emotionally, but there is a physiological factor involved. In building concepts about gumleaf tone, we may need to relate a player's experience of the physical sensation of "good" tone with his actual hearing of it. A leafist may not hear himself/herself as others do because he/she hears via bone conduction through teeth, jaw and inner ear as well as through the air from outside. This may make the tone of a note sound marginally different from how another hears it, although the ear learns to detect change by minute adjustments of embouchure and breath control. Personal perception of the quality of a gumleaf tone is therefore obtained by proportional physical and mental concentration on the tone itself.

What, then, is considered "good" tone amongst expert leafists? In actual fact, such a concept varies markedly according to the cultural value judgements of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists, with cultural background, artistic knowledge of music, and previous performance experience contributing to an individual's appreciation of gumleaf tone.[28]

Musicians consciously or unconsciously select and incorporate those qualities of tone that they like into the natural tone of the various eucalypt leaves that they select, via natural discrimination. For a general performance tonal concept peculiar to the eucalypts be theoretically established, a scale of normal resonance would have to be set up in terms of the most commonly used leaf instruments - a project beyond the scope of the present study.

Since there is no such thing as "right" or "wrong" gumleaf tone, it is unfortunate when competition officials unwaryingly set precedents for what is to be regarded as the most

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[27]The timbre (tone colour) of a leaf instrument is the identifying "colour" of its sound, *i.e.* that property which distinguishes it from another leaf sound (or, for that matter, any musical sound) of the same pitch or loudness.

[28]Gaboo Ted Thomas, for instance, likened the composite tone of the LTGB to "a bunch of mosquitoes" because he was accustomed to the WLGB's high-pitched "bone leaf" (Chapter 3).

appropriate tone, for example that the gumleaf should be sounded (and phrased) like a violin.[29] This automatically discounts Will Lockwood (the loudest non-Aboriginal competitor), who sometimes cups one hand over the other, lifting the top hand off to produce effects which have been likened to the "warble of a magpie".[30] Likewise the shrill whistling sounds which Lockwood elicits from Red Box leaves can be likened to the blackface minstrel form of whistling.[31]

In my view, a leaf should be free to sound like the species of leaf that it is rather than like a weak imitation of a conventional instrument. Nevertheless our common human tendency is to resort to comparative descriptions and in this case there are no textbooks on gumleaf playing to use as a precedent. Adjudicators should note, however, that the gumleaf has on various occasions[32] been mistaken for clarinet, trumpet, flute, ocarina, human whistling and the female voice in addition to the violin.

Arguably, any instrument could be mistaken to sound like another (*e.g.* a guitar might sound like a banjo), thus competitors have a range of pre-conceptualised gumleaf sounds in mind. Whereas one might prefer the sound of a tin whistle or piccolo, another conceptualises the sound of a saxophone. I believe that preferences are often conditioned by the timbre of the particular species to which a leafist has adjusted, *e.g.* Roseina Boston selects leaves with timbres suitable to mimicking the calls of birds such as her kookaburra totem. For this reason the wide-ranging species of both native and non-native leaf instruments is typologised in Chapter 6. In 1982, the adjudicator observed that every contestant in the finals played a different type of "gumleaf" (Harrison 1997: 10).

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[29]Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1996) RRC T10.

[30]Letter from Will Lockwood, 28 April 1994. See also "Blowing his way to a championship", *News* (Shepparton, Victoria), Thursday, 30 September 1993: 4.

[31]Heard, for example, on "Whistlin' Pete", Rena Records, *c.* 1906-1912.

[32]Based on anecdotal evidence collected by the author.

## 2.3 Gumleaf Timbre

Gumleaf timbre is dependent on leaf physiology. The natural resonance pattern of a leaf is relative to its shape, size and organic material (see Chapter 6) as determined by the number of harmonics[33] present in its sound and their relative strengths to each other. This in turn depends on the player's vocal tract,[34] the leaf's sound excitation by means of breath pressure, the amount of breath used, and the angle of the direction of breath used in the leaf's sound excitation. The aggregate individual reactions of the harmonics constitute the lifeblood of a rich leaf timbre, the characteristics of which can be more closely examined through a power spectrum. It is possible that the variety of sounds which can be produced on countless species of leaves may approximate the huge variety of sounds made by the human voice (a person's fingerprint).

Timbre may bring a certain personality or "colour" to bear on the interpretation of a musical theme or the imagined words of an excerpt. Elwood usually describes the timbre of the Yellow Box leaf as "mellow", and that of the Red Ironbark (*E. sideroxylon*) leaf as "trumpety". He chooses a Yellow Box leaf for romantic pieces and a Red Ironbark leaf for bright, sparkling major key tunes such as marches.

As with trying to describe a new colour, explanations of timbre involving words only are inadequate. This is why leafists and adjudicators sometimes resort to dichotomous descriptions drawn from their visual, aural, tactile and taste bud senses - for example, rough or smooth, sweet or sour, liquid or dry, thick or thin, clear or muddy, dirty or clean, sharp or

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[33] I avoid the term "overtone" because the concept of the first overtone being equivalent to the second harmonic is cumbersome. The term "second harmonic" will always refer to a partial whose frequency is precisely twice that of the fundamental. However, for sounds (*e.g.* bells) in which the upper partials are not harmonics, it is better to use the term "upper partial" (advice given by Neville Fletcher, 12 January 1995).

[34] The most marked differences in tonal production will show up via gender comparison rather than the parameters of a leafist's age or size, because the female vocal tract is shorter than the male vocal tract (insight offered by acoustician Sinisa Djordjevic, 31 October 1994).

flat. Other dichotomous descriptions could be established in a discriminatory study of gumleaf timbre.

Furthermore, the timbre of a single leaf may be altered by a change in the player's technique. In his interpretations of jazz, for instance, Patten may deliberately produce the "muddy", "thick" or "dirty" timbre appropriate to a "blue" note by humming into a leaf rather then merely blowing it. As evidenced in the "Birth of the Blues" (Patten 1999: CD 3), he had a brassy sound in mind rather than a thin flute sound. The hum can be clearly heard, thus distorting the type of sound produced. In a preliminary experiment relating to Patten's "blue" note, we analysed its production by (a) voice only and (b) voice and leaf blown simultaneously. It is essential that the voice be held at one pitch only, *e.g.* an octave lower, with the voice doing most of the work.

Since their playing stems from an alfresco tradition, most Aborigines tend to play full, resonant sounds on leaves. For instance, Percy Mumbulla produced a powerful gumleaf sound (Chittick and Fox 1997: 64), and Patten's Great-uncle Lindsay Thomas produced deep, strong notes on gumleaves in the bush (Chapter 1). Patten still emulates this type of leaf playing; his leaf can be heard at a distance of 500 metres through thick mountain scrub.[35] Virgil Reutens, on the other hand, does not play with as much volume or strength of tone; his strength as a performer lies in facility and reliability - indeed he is hardly ever seen to change leaf from side to side.

In view of the notion presented in Chapter 1 that the gumleaf is a spiritual instrument, some of the invisible, intangible timbres of individual leaves may have carried symbolic meanings aligned to the cosmology of some language groups. In northern Australia, sounds which "spirits" made in the bush were perceived to be high-pitched, and on the Upper Murray River blown leaves personified a spirit sound which carried a specific name. The

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[35]Measurement assessed with the help of Aline Scott-Maxwell, 15 February 1997.

significance (including the power) of an instrument appears to have been determined by its "voice" more than its physical properties.

## 2.4 Gumleaf Loudness

Loudness depends on (i) the blowing pressure used (by far the most important determinant), (ii) the thickness and width of the leaf, *i.e.* the thicker the actual leaf the greater the degree of tension which a player must apply to it with his mouth, and (iii) the playing method. Physiological experiments comparing the resonating chambers of two leaf players could well prove that the person with the largest vocal cavity will produce the deepest sound when playing the leaf, since volume depends on the amount of air being pushed through the tract. A large throat would set up a different set of harmonics to a small throat, and is thus capable of producing louder sounds. Whilst recording players I noticed the degree to which they exerted their neck muscles whilst playing the leaf.

Gumleaf sound output could be tested by ascertaining the amount of tension each player must exert on the same species of leaf in order to produce a full, sonorous tone. Patten's high-pitched gumleaf once took over an upper range tune from a tenor saxophonist who was experiencing difficulties, without apparent loss in the continued loudness of the melody. The intensity of a loud gumleaf usually drowns vocal parts, and invariably provokes dogs to bark.

My observation that Aborigines generally play the leaf more loudly than other competitors (excepting Lockwood) may be due to one or more of the following factors:

(i) their familiarity with the leaf instrument after long adaptation to a tradition of open-air music. When teaching the gumleaf to younger Aborigines, Patten and Boston encourage loudness as a virtue, dismissing soft sounds as "weak", "anaemic", or "like a tinny whistle".

(ii) their desire to achieve echo effects, especially across rivers or in mountainous terrain. Obviously the more blowing pressure exerted, the further away a sound will be heard.

(ii) their tendency to play the leaf more on the inside of the mouth than the outside. Patten, for example, cups his top lip over the leaf. Unlike Elwood, he copes well with *eucalyptus* nausea.

(iii) differences in gumleaf embouchure. According to leading non-Aboriginal didgeriduist Charlie McMahon (workshop, 24 September 1994), the thick lip mass of some Aboriginal didjeriduists is a relevant factor in comparing their techniques with those of non-Aboriginal didjeriduists. Aborigines couple to the didjeridu at the front of the mouth, whereas (because of thinner lip disposal) McMahon personally needs to position the instrument at the side of his mouth so that his lips move independently of his cheeks (air reservoirs).

The problem with McMahon's idea of comparing the embouchures of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal musicians is that they do not all have thick lips (Patten included), and, indeed, some non-Aboriginal players have "cupid lips". It would be very difficult to apply McMahon's lip mass theory to leaf playing by testing it experimentally. In any case, gumleaf embouchure may differ between the high and low notes. Patten uses "taut" lips for high notes; "less taut" lips for low notes.

Patten's determination to stretch the sonic capabilities of the gumleaf to the full - and the impact of this on others - was noticeable when he performed in the Tall Trees Project at the Wool Shed, North Melbourne in 1993. A saxophonist from the band Batchelors of Prague commented how, after observing Patten's technique on the leaf, he had suddenly found a "new sensation" on the reed that enabled him to hold the note more comfortably.[36]

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[36]During the same year a soprano performing in a function at L'Arundel, Bundoora, remarked that after working with Patten she was equipped to hit the notes more precisely and with exhilaration, as her concepts of instrumental and voice technique had been extended.

## 2.5 Tempo and Timing

The efforts of Patten and Boston to produce full, resonant sounds on the leaf can sometimes lead them to dwell *ad lib* on a sound with long pauses between notes and phrases. This results in lengthening or shortening of notes or unexpected breaks between notes.

With less experience in reading music than their non-Aboriginal equivalents, and little background in conducted ensemble performance, Aboriginal leafists generally adopt a lenient, relaxed attitude to performance - a freedom based both on the oral tradition and the alfresco tradition.[37] This approach does not impress conservatorium-trained adjudicators: slackening of tempo, irregularity of metre, and pitch aberrations are not readily tolerated in Western performance practice.

During the competitions, most leafists who altered the metre unexpectedly did so from exigencies of breath, or to suit the words and their dominating accents. By far the most common reason for missed beats was the tearing or splitting of a leaf, in which case contestants swapped to its underside or snatched a new leaf.

This was a common feature of the playing of Lockwood, who at 88 years played long phrases, often without any recognisable tune or metre. Just as an elderly person reminisces in rambling speech, he reminisced on the leaf by meandering back and forth from tune to tune and key to key as his memory permitted.

## 2.6 Leaf Improvisation and Showmanship

Anyone can toy with a gumleaf, but its mastery as a musical instrument is the property of specialists such as these, who rarely play a tune "straight" (even though it may have taken

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[37]It is also usual for Aboriginal performers to operate with a more relaxed attitude to the time of the day.

them years of practice to attain basic fluidity before they could synchronise ornamental effects in smoothly). For the purpose of this thesis, the term "improvisation" relates to exploratory musical performance on leaves which results in the acquisition of varying degrees of skill and proficiency in individual players, including the memorised assembly of musical clichés. In approaching the improvisational grammar of gumleaf performance I asked the questions: how do players consciously or unconsciously alter well-known tunes to suit the leaf medium? Do they need to do anything special when transmitting a song from voice to leaf to make it sound acceptable to their audience? And how do they embroider successive verses of a song and fill musical space over sustained notes and final notes?

Firstly, I discovered that the imagined words of a song can modify performance considerably, especially through change of accent. A seasoned singer, Patten enunciates the syllables of words carefully in his mind as he plays the leaf, whereas other leafists sometimes divorce tunes from their texts and perform them for the sake of their melodic/rhythmic content only.

Some leafists have their own stock of characteristic devices for "dressing up" vocal music during spontaneous performance. These are not always the individual inventions that some players claim them to be, but rather the outcome of collective creative development. In fact little spontaneous innovation actually occurs as those players experienced enough to enter contests have usually forged their own conscious or unconscious strategies within the possibilities established by the limitations of leaf material as a sound producer and standardised notions of style. If we take the stance put forward by Sachs (1943: 46) that "an organist improvises in another style than a flutist (*sic*) or a violinist; every instrument creates its own style", then it follows that the gumleaf improvisational tradition should remain a most individualistic one. Two basic categories of gumleaf "improvisation" may be defined as follows:

### 2.6.1 Melodic/rhythmic/dynamic variation techniques

In the transmission of a tune from voice to leaf, there are a number of musical solutions that competitors employ to reshape phrases. Their slight intervallic changes to tunes might even be based on regional or other variants. For example, Les Hawthorne included a surprise twist by finishing "The Irish Washerwoman" with an upward stroke.[38] Change from a major to a minor key is a standard form of variation, used for example in 1993 by Mike Berris as he followed his opening stanza of "The Ash Grove" with an altered minor version.[39] Leafists do not normally include dynamic variation within an individual song; rhythmic variation and rhythmic paraphrase are more common. In the German love song "Bei Mir Bist du Schön", Reutens doubles the speed then returns to the original slow tempo.[40] In Patten's performances these features sometimes occur through the interrelation of music and movement.

### 2.6.2 Surface Embellishments

All contestants feel as though they are balanced on an artistic knife-edge with respect to musical proportion. As demonstrated in Patten's rendition of "Petite Fleur" (Tape Example 18),[41] they need to strike a delicate balance between improvising whilst at the same time applying "good taste" and restraint in avoiding excessive use of breaks, fills, sliding and vibrato,[42] or an excess production of "classical" trills and "wobbles". The wobbles that Wendy Eva produces in her rendition of "Greensleeves" are achieved by vibrating the fingers back and forth and slightly altering the position of the lips.[43] In Harrison's opinion (pers.

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[38]Grieve (Palm Beach Q'ld 1980), tape kindly supplied from the recordist's private collection.

[39]Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1993) RRC T5; V1.

[40]*Ibid.*

[41]Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1996) RRC T10; V4.

[42]Patten (1999 CD: Track 36); vibrato is movement slightly above or below the basic pitch. Acceptable vibrato does not normally exceed 200 cents.

[43]Ryan (Tatura Vic 1995) RRC T8; see also Patten (1995 CD: Track 37).

comm., 2 October 1993) Dudley Carter's performances were "altogether different", the most beautiful she ever heard at the competition. His smooth, vibrant tone was characterised by warmth and emotion and his clear-cut ornaments executed with innate musical sense.

Reutens often slurs into a long note with a rapidly ascending or descending slide by manipulating his lips. Slides are a characteristically Aboriginal musical device even though they also derive from the jazz idiom. All beginners slide (or "glide") between notes as they attempt to master the limitations of the leaf instrument (Patten 1999 CD: Track 35). Patten's wa-was are produced by placing the leaf on the lower lip so that his hands are free (see Plates 1a and b). Hands may also be cupped in front of the mouth to achieve a muted effect (Patten 1999 CD: Track 38), or spread like a cone to aid dispersal of the sound according to the megaphone principle. Leafists also may produce harmonics or multiphonics, either deliberately or by default.

Roseina Boston's characteristic technique of shivering (*e.g.* to imitate a kookaburra) may have already emerged as the result of Aboriginal creative endeavour in the 1920s. Classical trills, jazz "blue" notes and wa-was were definitely of introduced origin, but it is not yet possible to say whether the techniques of wobbling and playing the leaf "no hands" emerged indigenously or by introduction. Likewise pulsating leaf vibrato resembles both the "shaky voice" technique of traditional singing as well as music played on the saw and the characteristic "jungle" sound of "noisy jazz". It is achieved through trembling lip and tongue movement or by hand movement.

Since all tunes chosen for the contest were well-known songs, each underwent creative transmission from voice to leaf medium - thus rendering interpretations of varying degrees of acceptability to both audience and adjudicator. The selection of an instrumental piece, on the other hand, may have required altered criteria. Since by far the larger number of contestants are non-Aboriginal, I have applied extra data from my fieldtrips to construct the following table. Aboriginal competitors are marked with an asterisk.

## TABLE 4: VARIATIONS IN GUMLEAF PERFORMANCE BEHAVIOUR (ii)

| ABORIGINES | TECHNIQUES | LOUDNESS | TONE/TIMBRE |
|---|---|---|---|
| ATKINSON, J. * | Slides | average | average to full clear and bright |
| BALLANGARRY, J.I. | Slides | average | shrill |
| BULL, W. (Bill) | Slides | full | shrill and sweet |
| BOSTON, R. * | slides/shivers/vibrato | full | shrill and piercing |
| DUNGAY, J. (Goorie)* | bird tape backing | average to full | trumpet-like, clear and bright |
| GOLDEN-BROWN, A.* | Slides | average to full | clear and bright |
| GROGAN, C. | Slides | full | clear and bright |
| MARR, B. (Goonabahn) | Slides | average to full | different timbres used in Taree gumleaf quartet |
| PATTEN, H. * | blue notes/vibrato slides/harmonics | full, resonant, vibrant | saxophone-like, "muddy", "dirty" or "rough" jazz |
| THOMAS. T. (Guboo) | slides/vibrato | full | sharp and piercing |
| THORPE, W. | slides/vibrato | depends on character of tune | sharp and piercing |

| NON-ABORIGINES | TECHNIQUES | LOUDNESS | TONE/TIMBRE |
|---|---|---|---|
| BERRIS, M. | classical trills | thin (soft) | whistle-like, clear |
| BOSTON, H. | Slides | average to full | trumpet-like, clear |
| CARTER, D. | wobbles/slides/ vibrato | average | sweet or silvery/liquid and clear |
| ELWOOD, P. | slides/wobbles | thin/medium | thin, sweet/clear/smooth |
| EVA, W. | wobbles/wa-was, trills | average | silvery/flute-like, liquid |
| GRAETZ, K. | Slides | thin/medium | whistle-like/thin |
| LOCKWOOD, W. | "minstrel" whistling/bird trills | full | shrill/birdlike |
| McLAUGHLIN, W. | "straight" tunes | average | trumpet-like, bright |
| REUTENS, V. | wobbles/wa-was | thin/medium | smooth, clear and clean |
| ROBERTS, F. | tongue trills | average/full | saxophone-like, bright |
| WILMOTT, J | classical trills | average | ocarina-like/clear/liquid |

## 3. Gumleaf Repertoire

### 3.1 The Compulsory Tune

Each year from 1993-1997, I recorded the annual compulsory items selected by the organising committee - with a view to comparing the interpretation and performance behaviour of the two cultural groups. These cliché Australian tunes included "Botany Bay", "Waltzing Matilda", "Road to Gundagai", "Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport", "Click go the Shears", "Wild Colonial Boy", and "Home Among the Gum Trees". Throughout the 1990s the media and the competition officials projected gumleaf playing primarily as a non-Aboriginal bush performance tradition. The tunes became symbols of other issues, even a resource for propaganda. In June 1993 Reutens appeared in Channel 7's *Steve Vizard Show* debate on the Australian Republic, playing "Advance Australia Fair" and "God Bless Australia"[44] on a gumleaf. In October of the same year, the organising committee at Maryborough selected the same song for their compulsory item, and the adjudicator awarded the prize to Reutens.

All five non-Aboriginal competitors played "God Bless Australia" in reasonably strict time (allowing for some switching of leaves due to splits) and with average loudness.[45] Salvation Army Officer Mike Berris, who toured the USA, Canada and Europe in the early 1990s performing gumleaf and didjeridu, played leaves still attached to his potted eucalypt sucker "George Bush", to enhance his "environmentally responsible" presentation of "God Bless Australia". This projected leaf music as a form of Aussie humour.

Patten, who was awarded second prize, confidently exhibited his own set of cultural values as to what constituted "good" gumleaf music. He channelled his pride in Aboriginal culture into

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[44]Words by Jack O'Hagan to the tune of "Waltzing Matilda" (arranged by Marie Cowan and published by Allans Music Australia Pty. Ltd.).

[45]Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1993) RRC T5; RRC V1.

his performance by using a louder tone than the other players, made striking use of gesture by turning sideways, and added extra rests or pauses between notes and phrases. Known as augmentation (the lengthening of beats within a bar), this device is commonly practised by Boston, Dungay and Patten. It may reflect the shift in their lifestyle from margin to mainstream; something experienced deep in the psychic and physical subjectivity. Blacking (1973: 99) noted how music functions to reinforce or relate people more closely to certain experiences that have come to have meaning in their social life. Augmentation may be indicative of an expanded awareness; the result of an incorporative move from a tribal to a western cultural framework (see also Brunton 1987).

In 1996 ten entrants played "Pub with No Beer" with a great deal of variation in tempo, style and timbre.[46] Roseina Boston played with great flair in the consistent Slim Dusty style, whereas Reutens added tinges of jazz to his rendition. Wendy Eva and Jeff Wilmott played dried leaves that they had pressed between the pages of books. The inaugural champion Les Hawthorne had introduced the practice of dried leaf playing to the contest. He claimed attachment to the same cured leaf, which had the resilience of a playing card, for approximately forty years. Hawthorne kept this leaf pressed between the pages of his bible, only to carry it on stage in a velvet-lined mouth organ case.[47]

I noted, however, that all three contestants chosen for the 1996 finals used fresh Yellow Box leaves. This in itself is a general testimony to the reliability and superiority of *E. melliodora* as vibrating material (see Chapter 6 for experimental results). The expertise of the three players taken into account, it is possible that the adjudicator rated the natural timbre of Yellow Box above that of Candlebark (*E. rubida*) and other species used.

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[46]Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1996) RRC T10; V4.

[47]Comment made by former adjudicator Terry McDermott, 5 October 1997.

## 3.2 Free Choice Repertoire

Before the establishment of the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship in 1977, gumleaf repertoire consisted chiefly of country-and-western - according to Margaret Harrison's press release - although it is probably more accurate to say that leafists opted for the mainstream musical style of each decade. Yet in spite of this observation, contemporary popular music has barely been used in comparison to hymn tunes, blues and folk songs. All "free choice" items performed from 1977-1997 are variously listed in Harrison (1997). These reflect catholicity of taste, as contemporary performers have all styles of music at their disposal.

### 3.2.1 Genres Selected by Aboriginal Leafists

Although early twentieth-century gumleaf bands were identifiably Aboriginal, their musical repertoires were predominantly Western. Nevertheless, the existing features of Western tunes were sometimes blended with Aboriginal features, *e.g.* augmentation (additive phrases) and irregular metre, or accompanied by introduced and/or Aboriginal instruments and corroboree dance movements. The style menu of the Aboriginal leafist includes the following:

1. Gumleaf Hymn Syncretism: 1892 to 1970s, including Aboriginal carols; island influence discernible.[48]
2. Gumleaf Folk/Coon Song Syncretism: 1910s to the present.
3. Patriotic Songs on Leaf: 1910s to the present.
4. Gumleaf Jazz Syncretism: 1920s to the present.
5. Country-and-Western/Hillbilly Songs on Leaf: 1930s to the present.
6. War Songs on Leaf: 1939-45, but still perpetuated today in strict rhythm.
7. Gumleaf Pop/Rock Songs: 1950s to the present; leaf now substitutes for synthesiser.

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[48]Further research might establish an earlier date for leaf hymn performances during or after the mid-nineteenth century establishment of missions.

8. Aboriginal Traditional Tunes: from an unknown date; now appropriated across clans
9. Birdcalls on Leaf: from an unknown date; re-adopted from *c.* 1988 as part of the Nativistic Revival Period.

Only one so-called "traditional" melody, namely the untitled Yorta Yorta Love Song (Tape Example 13; Musical Example 2), was ever performed at the competition; Patten used this as a warm-up tune to the 1996 compulsory tune. "Danny Boy" is one of his favourite tunes (Patten 1999 CD: Track 9); likewise its popularity with the late Ambrose Golden-Brown (pers. comm., 13 January 1995) reflected the taste of the leafist's Irish grandmother. James Goorie Dungay's favourite tune is "Waltzing Matilda"; Roseina Boston shares this choice, along with "Amazing Grace" and "Koori Rose".

### 3.2.2 Genres Selected by Non-Aboriginal Leafists

On the whole, non-Aboriginal leafists performed a more diverse range of genres than the Aboriginal leafists did. Keith Graetz, for instance, performs leaf and piano regularly at socials and clubs in the Stuart Mill district, Central Victoria. He especially likes German dance tunes[49] and drinking songs, Australian ballads and folk songs, and several hit tunes from the 1960s.[50] Leo Doyle, by contrast, prefers country music and dance hall music (Harrison 1997: 6). The contestants whom I noticed delivering instrumental tunes were multi-instrumentalists Jeff Wilmott and Mike Berris, who are familiar with a lot of band marches, light classical melodies and old-time dance music. Few others appear to consider playing tunes composed specifically for instruments; they slavishly deliver gumleaf renditions of well-known songs.[51] Elwood's current repertoire of about fifty songs includes several Beatles numbers, Australian folk songs and ballads, and songs of the British Isles, although

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[49]Graetz played "Edelweiss" over the BBC in October 1995.

[50]After winning the Championship in 1988, Graetz recorded *Whistling Gumleaves*, the first commercial recording of gumleaf music.

[51]At the inaugural 1977 contest, for example, all verses of "Jerusalem" were rendered by one leafist without any thought as to variation (information kindly supplied by Dr Kay Dreyfus, who attended with her husband George).

he does include the popular ragtime instrumental "The Entertainer". The most obvious difference in samples of popular repertoire selected by the two cultural groups was the high percentage of hymns and war songs selected by Aboriginal performers, although this reflects cultural conditioning as much as discrete personal taste.

The differing free choice repertoires of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists were not manifest side by side without exerting an influence one on the other. Some audience members complained that the "gumleaf jazz" style had assimilated other styles by shaping them to its own image (players sometimes "jazzed up" the second verse of a folk song). Table 5 summarises the genres favoured by Aboriginal contestants in the context of all genres used at the competition (the examples cited under each genre are not inclusive, in fact they sometimes overlap genre). Non-Aboriginal contestants also chose genres from part (a) of this table, with the exception of the small body of exclusively Aboriginal repertoire.

## TABLE 5: COMPETITIVE GUMLEAF REPERTOIRE

### (a) GENRES PREFERRED BY ABORIGINES

| |
|---|
| **HYMNS** (*Amazing Grace, The Old Rugged Cross, How Great Thou Art, Blessed Assurance, Oh God our Help, Abide With Me, Trust and Obey, I Need Thee Ev'ry Hour, Nearer, my God, to Thee, God Be With You Till We Meet Again*) |
| **CAROLS** (*O Come All Ye Faithful, Silent Night, Jingle Bells, Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer*) |
| **WAR SONGS** (*Pack up your Troubles, It's a Long Way to Tipperary, Roll Out the Barrel, Back to the Yarrawonga, Wish Me Luck*) |
| **PATRIOTIC SONGS** (*Waltzing Matilda, Advance Australia Fair, God Bless Australia, I Still Call Australia Home*) |
| **ABORIGINAL FOLK/COUNTRY-AND-WESTERN SONGS** (*Jacky Jacky, Koori(e) Rose, Me Home-made Didgeridoo, Streets of Old Fitzroy*) |
| **ABORIGINAL TRADITIONAL SONG** (*Yorta Yorta Love Song*) |
| **AMERICAN FOLK SONGS** (*Shenandoah, Home on the Range, Oh Susanna, My Old Kentucky Home, Springtime in the Rockies, Jimmy Crack Corn, Polly Wolly Doodle, She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain, Swanee River (Old Folks at Home), Old Black Joe, Bye Bye Blackbird, Red River Valley, Put Another Log on the Fire*) |
| **JAZZ** (*Birth of the Blues, St. Louis Blues, O When the Saints, Summertime, Georgia on my Mind, Bill Bailey, Alexander's Rag Time Band, Blueberry Hill, Mac the Knife, Sonny, Petite Fleur*) |

## TABLE 5: COMPETITIVE GUMLEAF REPERTOIRE (continued)

### (b) OTHER GENRES USED COMPETITIVELY

| |
|---|
| **AUSTRALIAN SONGS** (*The Road to Gundagai, Bound for South Australia, Pub with no Beer, Home Among the Gum Trees, Botany Bay, Wild Colonial Boy, Up There Cazaly*)) |
| **SACRED SONGS** (*Classical: The Holy City, Ave Maria, Jerusalem; Popular: Royal Telephone*) |
| **ENGLISH/IRISH/SCOTTISH SONGS** (*Greensleeves, The Ash Grove, Danny Boy, Finnegan's Wake, When Irish Eyes are Smiling, Galway Bay, Maggie, Peggy O'Neill, The Mountains of Morn, Auld Lang Syne, Scotland the Brave, Sailor's Hornpipe, My Bonny, Scarborough Fair, Road to the Isles, Skye Boat Song*) |
| **MUSIC HALL** (*Daisy, Two Little Girls in Blue, Red Red Robin, If You Knew Susie, You are my Sunshine*) |
| **OLD-TIME DANCE MUSIC** (*The Cuckoo Waltz, The Swedish Polka, Mockingbird Hill, The Skater's Waltz, Red Roses for a Blue Lady, Boston Two Step, Besseme Mucho*) |
| **LIGHT CLASSICAL** (*La Paloma, The Toreador Song, Humoresque, William Tell Overture, Trumpet Voluntary*) |
| **BAND MARCHES** (*Star-Spangled Banner, When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again, Colonel Bogey*) |
| **FILM MUSIC** (*Some Enchanted Evening, A Town like Alice, Lara's Theme, theme from "Bridge on the River Kwai"*) |
| **BEATLES SONGS** (*Hey Jude, Yellow Submarine, Oobla-di, Oobla-dah, etc.*) |
| **OTHER POPULAR SONGS FROM THE '50s - '80s** (*Red Sails in the Sunset, Baby Face, Ramona, The Rose, Annie's Song, Sailing, Are You Lonesome Tonight? Rock Around the Clock, Heartbreak Hotel, House of the Rising Sun*) |
| **ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS** (*Concerto for One Gumleaf*) |

The only known item composed for the leaf[52] was Neil Seymour's "Concerto for One Gumleaf", which he performed at the 1983 contest. If competition officials had deliberately solicited original compositions, the level of creativity and technical expertise may well have burgeoned. This area might also prove advantageous in showing how a tune might carry something of the character of the instrument itself.

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[52] I notice, incidentally, that at least three songs have been written about the gumleaf.

Since it was impossible to study the performance behaviour of all known contestants, I have only been able to make a small statistical statement about their mutual and differential attitudes towards the competitive rubric, and the manner in which individuals defer to the culture-general and culture-specific components of their performance. Allowing for individual divergences, those aspects of performance behaviour that most readily distinguish the two traditions observed in this investigation are summarised below. Leaf preference is dealt with separately in Chapter 6.

| FEATURE | ABORIGINAL LEAFISTS | NON-ABORIGINAL LEAFISTS |
|---|---|---|
| GRIP | leaf on top or bottom lip; whole sprig of leaves often held against body | leaf on bottom lip; whole sprig of leaves often held against body |
| STANCE | standing, sitting, walking reclining, dancing, on horseback, in treetops | Standing |
| GESTURE | men: extrovert<br>women: sedate | less pronounced (excepting Reutens) |
| TONE/TIMBRE | shrill, brass-like | whistle-like (mainly) |
| LOUDNESS | full, resonant | Average |
| TEMPO | *ad lib*, some time-lag between phrases | fairly strict doubling the speed |
| SPECIAL TECHNIQUES | slides, shivers, "blue notes", wobbles | wobbles, wa-was |

**TABLE 6: CROSS-CULTURAL MODEL FOR VARIATION IN GUMLEAF PERFORMANCE BEHAVIOUR**

(number of cultural groups: 2; Sampling: 11 Aboriginal leafists; 11 non-Aboriginal leafists)

## 4. Perspectives on Adjudication

All competitors were required to operate under a single set of criteria that were clearly eurocentric. It was perhaps only because Aboriginal leafists love to engage with their audiences, that they were able to cope with the constraints that undermined the individuality and spontaneity of their oral tradition. For much the same reasons that Aborigines compete in sporting events, they entered the Maryborough competition to pursue personal ambition and represent Aboriginal Australia. The opportunity for all contestants to showcase their other talents (in this case birdcalls, singing and storytelling) was a commendable feature of the Gumleaf Follies Dance, an annual public function at which heats were played off before the finals. Unfortunately, the goodwill expressed by the Aboriginal cultural activists did not alert the organisers and adjudicators to re-think their strategies for selecting and measuring competitive criteria with a view to gumleaf music's folk orientation and indigenous forms of musicianship. It is my view that renditions of compulsory tunes such as "Pub with No Beer" trivialise the beauty of leaf playing and restrict the epithet "Australian". It seems pointless to appropriate the gumleaf instrument to perpetuate a maudlin Aussie identity, an outworn type of nationalism that is not really appropriate as the turn of the century draws near

With respect to the actual capabilities of the gumleaf as a sound generator, the adjudicators' comments between 1993-1997 were based on their individual, preconceived notions of a "traditional" Australian gumleaf sound – notions that appeared to have been conditioned by the sounds of conventional Western instruments. When the composer George Dreyfus was invited to judge the 1977 inaugural competition he declined because, unlike media personalities who readily accepted the job, he did not want to impose his ideas on other people's music (Harrison 1997: 2).

It is essential for the preservation of gumleaf music as a genuine folk tradition that adjudicators of future events ascertain the unique musical capabilities of the gumleaf, and judge leafists according to criteria based on these capabilities. Resorting to conservative, clinical precedents of what other instruments (such as the violin) already sound like, or

judging leafists according to the sound (*e.g.* of a penny whistle) of previous winners, stifles personal creativity and takes no account of the differing sonic characteristics of the wide spectrum of eucalypt species.

With regard to the opposing world-views of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists, those traits of performance practice which are distinctly Aboriginal deserve to be recognised and respected as such, even though Aboriginal leafists are influenced by Western performance practices as well. Their use of country-and-western dress, for instance, serves to reinforce their pride in the indigenous country-and-western idiom that compensates for their lack of access to the land that provided the basis for their traditional culture. Maddock (1972: 12) emphasised how people born into one cultural heritage are not necessarily able to compete equally in another culture. Unresolved land rights issues only serve to emphasise such difficulties today.

**5. Looking to the Future**

Although gumleaf music in Australia has revolved around a highly structured contest over the last two decades, alternatives are gradually being found for its incorporation into new contexts. For instance, the activity has largely untapped potential in cultural tourist or "eco-tourist" activities, such as those that have been established in the rainforests of the Great Dividing Range:

> Culture no longer means a yawning pilgrimage to a solemn edifice ... Cultural tourism has an exciting new meaning and a much broader audience. The psychology of giving some unpretentious entertainment before you begin the instruction, the putting of theatre out into the foyer and the bringing of backroom researchers out into the public rooms of museums have all created a totally different sense of cultural and human interaction and community.[53]

Such an initiative was pioneered by the late leafist Clarrie Grogan, director of the multi-million dollar Woorama Aboriginal Cultural Centre which opened in Cairns, Queensland

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[53]*The View*, Issue 1, 1995: 7.

in 1990. Before his death, Grogan proudly introduced gumleaf playing into the entertainments which supplemented the cultural exhibits and bush tucker food.[54]

In the hands of market forces, however, a contrived articulation of gumleaf music's cultural field can be conveyed. In an attack on the growing commercialisation of the arts, Dorson (1976) introduced the concept of "fakelore" - a synthetic product claiming to be an authentic oral tradition, but actually tailored for mass edification. In 1998, for example, a display of "colonial technology" at the historic Como Mansion in Melbourne touted gumleaf blowing, boomerang throwing and Aboriginal dancing as "demonstrations of lifestyles that were much more common in Melbourne last century".[55]

Another solution would be to promote and extend cross-cultural participation via an annual scratch band similar to that which united all competitors at the close of each Maryborough Golden Wattle Festival (Plate 15). Various members of the Australian Gumleaf Players' Association could meet on other occasions during the year to practice together as a team.

Since oral transmission often leads to changes over time, there is much potential for gumleaf playing to experience new evolution and growth. Patten's CD/booklet (1999) represents his first step towards the establishment of a Gumleaf Music School. With respect to the basic tenets of gumleaf playing, he would explore circular breathing as a means for achieving greater breath control, *i.e.* for assigning full value to very long notes. Along with other Aboriginal experts such as Atkinson, Boston and Dungay, Patten's pupils could eventually form a touring leaf band, backed by Aboriginal community support.

A new concept worthy of exploration is that of a Gumleaf Music Festival, a celebration held along the lines of an Old-time Fiddle Festival. Enhanced by a carefully selected venue, such an event might encourage hands-on musical experiences which break down

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[54]*New 10 News*, 25 May 1990 (NFSA 53770-01).

[55]"The past comes back to delight modern tourists", *Southern Cross*, Wednesday 18 March 1998: 23.

performer/audience boundaries, *e.g.* instruction for beginners and the opportunity for original items to emerge with the gumleaf medium specifically in mind.

A section catering for folkloristic application of the gumleaf could highlight indigenous styles of artistry. Both Patten and Boston are accustomed to including birdcalls in their presentations, and Boston also uses the leaf to enhance her vivid narrative powers. Dungay usually performs the *yili* (gumleaf) over taped bird music, incorporating information about the *yili* as it relates to Dainggatti culture.

Finally, international leaf music exchange between Australia and China might be considered at some future stage. This could involve a visit by Chinese leaf virtuoso Mr Lo Wen-Jun of Guizhou, who can manage a range of three octaves and a third and is an expert in "bird's singing", the "fall", staccato and glissando (Cheng 1997: 5). The future of gumleaf music in Australia is comparable to that of the "tree leaf" in China, which Cheng (p. 30) suggests could be used in many kinds of music in the late twentieth-century and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

Essentially, the status of the respective leaf performance traditions is relative to who claims them, under which conditions, and for what purpose within the dynamics of internal and external relations of social power, an observation that is based on a theory of Coplan (1991: 36). Since the competition officials did not consult any Aborigines on Aboriginal musical priorities in leaf playing, a cultural clash naturally occurred between the two impinging traditions.

No one cultural group is inherently "better" at leaf playing than the other, but Aboriginal experts who perform the leaf on a daily basis in their educational, entertainment, environmental and political work would have much to offer if consulted about their own musical values and priorities. For them, the physiological, emotional, aesthetic and cosmological aspects of leaf playing all contribute to the necessity for them to continue performing and enjoying their tradition. Patten's performances variously engender the

transmission, transaction and transmutation of gumleaf music. Such shifts in emphasis typify the strong attitudes about musical professionalism expressed by contemporary Aboriginal performers, but not necessarily understood by non-Aboriginal people.

A comparative model, based on a sampling of 11 leafists from each cultural group, indicated some divergent use of grip, stance and gesture, as well as tone, timing, dynamics and "creativity". Although the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists each exhibit their own performance styles according to location, intention and form, when they all play the same melody at a competition the Aborigines invariably produce the loudest volume. Additionally, they vary the intonation, play *ad lib* at a slower tempo, and insert longer pauses between musical phrases.

Culture is manifest in customs that are patterned according to shared ideas, with Aboriginal leafists performing items in their own individual, syncretic musical styles. However, the character of the spoken introduction, dress and extrovert body language which accompanies the Aboriginal "gumleaf sound" varies from person to person, for as the performances and personalities of Patten, Boston and Dungay indicate, there is no prototype of an Aboriginal leafist. As McDonald (1996: 116) noted, people from the same society may express themselves differently while performing identical cultural operations.

The long-term future of the Aboriginal gumleaf music tradition depends on their finding their own solutions outside the context of the competition. As in the past, gumleaf music retains the potential to bring descendants of far-flung clans (who simultaneously belong to an amalgam of Aboriginal communities), together into unity. The leading leafists maintain responsibilities to their communities as they attempt to balance their artistic integrity with their political vision. As will become clear in the following chapter, the Aboriginal leafists possess a far deeper attachment to native leaves and the natural environment than the non-Aboriginal leafists do. Amongst other things, I will demonstrate how the perpetuation of a live, healthy gumleaf music tradition depends on man's resonance with the Australian environment.

# CHAPTER SIX

## TOWARDS AN AUSTRALIAN LEAF INSTRUMENT TYPOLOGY

*To a leaf player, a Yellow Box leaf is like a Stradivarius violin*
*-- why not call it the "Stradileaf"?* (Philip Elwood)

Throughout this thesis I alluded to the various uses and symbolic/ritualistic aspects of native flora in Aboriginal societies, and I represented gumleaf playing as a practical facet of the everyday interrelationship between the Aboriginal people and their plants. In the first part of this final chapter, I shall elucidate the ethnobotanical context of the leaf by conceptualising the vegetation of Australia as a potential instrumentarium from which traditionally preferred and/or satisfying sounding leaves are selected.

In recent years, anthropologists have become increasingly familiar with plant taxonomy. The recently developed science of ethnobotany is concerned with "the totality of the place of plants in a culture" (Ford 1978), which encompasses the human evaluation and manipulation of plant materials, *i.e.* plant-human relationships embedded in ecosystems of natural and social components. My contribution to this field is (i) a classification tabling the native leaf instruments of geographically distant clans, and (ii) a culture-specific typology of native and introduced plant selection by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists respectively. This includes citrus leaves as popular substitutes for eucalypt leaves.

In considering Australian leaf instruments in their spatial and temporal environments, I hypothesise that the processes by which leafists select their instruments is substantially dependent on time period, place and biodiversity. Selection varies greatly from area to area as a result, not just of the ecological disparities of climate and season, but also the adaptability of practitioners to their local leaf media, and the cultural significance of leaves as markers of

Aboriginal seasonal change or environmental/clan identity. Contemporary Aboriginal leafists remain partial to the native flora located in waterways, coastal scrub, savannah, tropical rainforests, mountains, plains and deserts, whilst non-Aboriginal leafists are more disposed to the large range of introduced flora.

In the second part of this chapter, I present a more technical study of the musical use of leaves, drawing on botanical sources to identify and explain their physical and aural suitability, functions and relative popularity. Leaf physiology deals with the functioning of the interrelated physical properties of leaves. In addition to the skill required from the musician, botanical investigations into its relevant aspects can inform one's choice or rejection of a leaf as a musical instrument. Most importantly, knowledge of the specific properties and limitations of the vibrating apparatus in hand can alert leafists to potential hazards. Some of the findings presented may be equally relevant to exponents and researchers of the leaf instrumental traditions which most closely resemble those of Australia.[1]

Knowledge of some of the crucial factors that govern a leafist's choice of an instrument for on-stage performance was gleaned from an original experiment, which I conducted between 1993-1995. In conjunction with microscopy conducted with Associate Professor Neil Hallam, this experiment aimed to categorise and rank leaf instruments in a cross-disciplinary study that I personally call "botanic musicology". In this field, botanical and musicological terms sometimes need to be merged. For example, some research participants emphasised their attachment to their own local "music trees",[2] "music bushes", or "music plants". Since all trees and bushes are plants, these terms are tautological; a "music plant" may be defined as any flora with dependable sound-bearing foliage.

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1Most notably, these include the pear and lilac leaf music tradition of Romania, the cherry leaf music tradition of the Ecuadorian highlands, South America, and the leaf music tradition of the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico. The Yi people of Southern China play leaves of Rhodea Japonica or Chinese Parasol, the Zhuang those of Banyan, Longan, Litche and Olive, and the Dong those of Green Oak and Camphrier (Shui-Cheng Cheng 1997: unpublished paper).

2Leafist Wally McLaughlin publicised the expression "music tree" via his busking.

# PART 1: FACTORS BEARING ON AUSTRALIAN FLORA AS A LEAF INSTRUMENTARIUM

In general, the use of native leaves in music-making is defined by the continent's physiographic and climatic boundaries, and therefore needs to be contemplated vis-a-vis the total flora. Leafists in northern Queensland, for example, are more likely to play rainforest leaves than eucalypt leaves, whereas central Victorians are bound to experiment with leaves from dry sclerophyll box/ironbark forests. However, whilst some plant species are quite localised, others occur over several climatic zones.

## 1. Time Period, Climate and Biodiversity

The history of Australian vegetation is subject to evidence of changes in environments in which the Aboriginal populations lived.[3] Leaf, flower and fruit fossils from 50 million years ago have been studied near Adelaide, SA; Anglesea, Victoria; and Nerriga, NSW (south coast). Nearly 300 distinct leaf types have been identified from these three sites, indicating the floras to have been either subtropical or warm temperate rainforest (Floyd 1989: 1).

Temperate rainforest is defined as a closed canopy of trees, usually with more than one tree layer and containing characteristic life forms such as vines and epiphytes (Floyd 1989: ix). The temperate rainforest belt of southeastern Australia follows around the NSW and Victorian coast close to Melbourne dry sclerophyll. The eucalypt forests of coastal and near-coastal regions otherwise comprise open forests and heaths.

Pristine Australia once consisted of fire-sensitive rainforest and shrubland with only a small amount of fire-dependent grassland and eucalyptus woodland, the complete reverse of what European settlers were to find at the end of the eighteenth-century. Aboriginal hunters, who

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[3]Some organisms originated in Asia and New Guinea, according to the "drifting continent" theory. Scientists are now more equipped to predict the direction of floristic change in Australia.

used firestick farming to create access into the thick bush, irrevocably reshaped the continent.[4] The (hypothetical) use of leaf soundmakers by Aboriginal peoples over long passages of time may have been variably recurrent, *i.e.* subject to regional firestick farming as well as flora changes brought about by climate change.

Most of the continent consisted of flat open land, undivided by large mountains and rivers, therefore fire changed it - only to be compounded by Europeans adding a new set of variables at an even greater speed in the late 1700s and beyond. Since 1788, the number of trees has been reduced by 70 per cent and the remaining rainforest occupies a quarter of the area it did before European settlement. The habitat meant one thing to the Aborigines in 1787 and something entirely different to the Europeans in 1788. Its meaning has since changed according to changes in economic and social life (based on Lawrence 1969: 241).

There are 20,000 native plant species in Australia (Cribb and Cribb 1981: 12), but only a portion of these bear potentially musical foliage. Leafists have successfully blown air across the blades of narrow, lance-shaped flax leaves and dockweed.[5] However, none of the grasses[6] illustrated in Burbidge (1966) are musically endowed apart from the Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*), a tall, bamboo-like aquatic plant which grows blades up to 5 cm in width in wetlands across Australia (for illustration and ethnobotanical uses see Gott and Conran 1991: 66). Herbert Patten likes to blow a high-pitched sound on the Common Reed, but cannot control it to the same extent as a leaf.

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[4]"Human transformation of the landscape a burning question", *The Australian*, Wednesday 24 January 1996: 9. The term "firestick farming" was coined by the prehistorian Rhys Jones. Aborigines entering the continent managed the landscape carefully because they possessed the knowledge of burning practices which man has known for half a million years (quote from an annual lecture by ethnobotanist Beth Gott of Monash University).

[5]Various weeds, species of the genus *Rumex*, are listed by Low (1985: 39-40).

[6]A grass plant is formed of jointed stems with a single leaf growing at each joint or node. The leaves consist of sheath and blade, at which junction there may be a membrane or a row of minute hairs on the inner side. Grass leaves are mostly scabrid, *i.e.* they feel rough when rubbed with the finger (after Burbidge 1988: 7).

Australia's climate has fluctuated during the past few million years and plant distributions have waxed and waned in response to temperature and rainfall changes, but Australia is drier now than in the past. Two-thirds of the Australian continent is classified as arid, and more than half consists of desert. Latz (1995) provides a comprehensive list of Central Australian plants used by Aboriginal clans, including their alternative language names. In areas where the Australian landscape is harsh, scope for the human invention and manufacture of musical instruments has been severely limited with the exception of the *Acacia* species (family *Mimosaceae*).

### 1.1 Acacia, Banksia, Grevillea, Waratah Leaves, etc: Reasons for Unsuitability

The hardwood of wattle (*Acacia*) trees is a popular resource for clapsticks and boomerangs (as well as utensils, shields, digging sticks and spear-throwers) because it can withstand heat and aridity. The Aboriginal peoples probably knew and used wattles from the time of their arrival on the island continent, calling them by a variety of names. Many of these have remained as common names, though not all are unique to a particular species (Tame 1992: 7).

Over half of the 800 Australian species of the genus *Acacia* are found in the arid zone. For the purpose of blowing sounds, all the bipinnate leaves are too thin and feathery, and most of the flat, leathery phyllodes - also called leaves - which form from the stalk of the bipinnate feathery leaves, are too stiff.

Likewise some members of the family *Proteaceae*, including banksias, grevilleas, waratahs, hakeas and dryandras, have prickly, irregular shaped leaves unsuitable for blowing. With the exception of these drastically "unmusical" leaves, the Aboriginal peoples are able to derive sounds from almost any species of leaf in their interaction with the environment.

## 1.2 Eucalypt Leaves: A Major Resource for Plant Music

In the well-watered parts of the Australian mainland, apart from the rainforests, the fire-tolerant eucalypt constitutes approximately ninety-five per cent of the nation's forest trees, having evolved to survive varied climatic conditions.[7] Regional lapses in the cultural transmission of leaf soundmakers probably occurred in areas where the genus *Eucalyptus* was discontinuous rather than continuous. In the unshaded areas shown in Map 4, *Eucalyptus* is confined to seasonal watercourses or rock clefts that cannot be represented to scale. In these remote desert areas, some eucalypts were important in the economic and philosophical life of inland Aboriginal clans.[8]

Baron von Mueller (1825-1896) contributed greatly to the first comprehensive account of the genus in Bentham's seven-volume *Flora Australiensis* (1863-1878), and also compiled *Eucalyptographia* (1879).[9] Blakely (1875-1941) published the first reference guide to the whole genus through a "natural system" of classification in 1934 (republished in 1965). Other botanists later compiled more specific classifications for the use of specialists. Several previously unknown species have been found in recent years, even in southeastern Australia, although it is likely that relatively few taxa still await discovery (Pryor and Johnson 1971: 1). The watercolour plates of Kelly (1969) are a popular source for leafists

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[7]Only a few eucalypts are native to the islands north of Australia, with one species extending as far as the Philippines. Many species have been planted in foreign lands such as California, Israel, the Middle East, South Africa and South America, but it is unlikely that traditional musical use is made of their leaves in these places.

[8]For example, the Creek Gum (an alternative common name for River Red Gum in western NSW) was associated with the story of how the moon reached the sky (Mountford 1966: notes). In central Australia, natives use Bloodwood (*itara*) gum-nuts (*tatu*) to thread strands of hair for a decoration known as *tjinjulu* (Goddard and Kalotas 1985: 22).

[9]As a large genus of the family Myrtaceae, *Eucalyptus* is taxonomically difficult. Coined by the French botanist L'Heritier, who named a specimen taken to the British Museum from Captain Cook's third tour, the genus name is derived from the Greek *eu* meaning "well", and *kalyptos* meaning "covered". It refers to the operculum (cap) which covers the flower buds before they open, eventually being thrust off by expanding stamens. This single feature characterises the genus, replacing free petals in the flowers. Since the operculum varies in each species, it is a main identifying feature along with seed capsules or fruit, bark, flowers, leaves and habit of growth.

wishing to identify their instruments, but the field guides of Brooker and Kleinig (1983 onwards) are more realistic.

Mature eucalypts range from low shrubs to tall trees. Brooker and Kleinig (1983: 4) distinguish the habit categories of forest trees, woodland trees and mallees. Usually less than 10 metres in height, mallees constitute "scrub" rather than "forest", and are common to southern inland districts. Of those bark types that commonly supply leaf instruments, box trees generally have rough bark made up of small postage stamp sized patches. Ironbarks are identified by their tough, black, kino-laden bark (a "fireproof suit"), while stringybarks have thick, coarse, fibrous bark. The sound-making properties of box, ironbark and mallee leaves come under experimental scrutiny in this chapter, but it should be noted that leafists also use(d) leaves of stringybark species, *e.g.* at Lake Tyers, Victoria.

### 1.3 Introduced Flora

After European settlement, Australia became a kind of species factory for introduced plants. Although confronted by a hostile frontier, many species adapted to the extreme summer heat. Research confirmed my hypothesis that non-Aboriginal leafists have experimented with a great number of these non-native species than Aboriginal leafists. Although they are generally (a) more palatable and (b) less tough to play than the average eucalypt, the underlying reason for this bias may simply be the absence of a centuries-deep cultural/spiritual bond with the native flora. McKie noted in his book *We Have No Dreaming* (1988) that after 200 years, non-Aborigines still have no inherent attachment to the land like Aborigines.

It would be over-deterministic, however, to suppose that urban Aborigines have an inherently better "feel" for leaves than rural non-Aborigines. Children usually select whatever leaves are at hand, regardless of whether they are native or introduced. For example, Salvation Army archivist George Ellis played a large, shiny non-native hedge leaf in Box Hill, Victoria in the 1940s.

Some non-Aboriginal leafists do prefer native instruments, but not necessarily eucalypts. For example, the preferred leaf of Arthur Foster of Killarney Vale, NSW was the Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*)[10], followed by the Camphor Laurel (*Cinnamomum camphora*).[11] The various lemon leaves which Foster tried were harder and stiffer to blow than the other two species. Foster rated the Kurrajong leaves well above those of the eucalypts in the district, and found the thin Camphor Laurel leaves easy to play because they were pliable.[12] Alan Kesby of Kempsey tried to play stringybark leaves in the NT, but they were too tough (pers. comm. from leafist Harry Boston, 2 November 1996).

### 1.4 Citrus Leaf Instruments (Native and Introduced)

The citrus species as trees contain tough characteristics that are similar to eucalypts.[13] The acid taste of lemon, orange, tangerine, grapefruit, mandarin and lime leaves is generally palatable, although practitioners usually say that playing citrus leaves causes the lips to tingle (due to oils in the leaves). Many non-Aboriginal leafists are favourably disposed towards lemon leaves. Alan Kesby prefers citrus because, unlike the eucalypt leaves in the area, they do not split when he folds them over at an angle of 90 degrees before putting them to his lips (pers. comm. from Harry Boston, 2 November 1996). Recordings of lemon and orange leaf tunes by non-Aboriginal leafists are held in the John Meredith Collection, NLA, Canberra.[14]

Rev. Graeme Paulson (pers. comm., 21 November 1993) noted that the Aborigines in the Tweed district often played lemon leaves; he personally prefers lemon because it "tastes nicer than a gumleaf". Ethel de Silva, one of the daughters of Gumbainggir Elder Frank Archibald

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[10]The leaves of Kurrajong are variable in form, some entire and drawn out into a long point, others deeply three-lobed. Kurrajong supplied Aborigines with fibre for fishing lines, dilly bags and nets (Cribb and Cribb 1981: 185).

[11]A native of Japan, Taiwan and China, which now grows wild in parts of Australia.

[12]See Meredith (Killarney Vale NSW 1984) NLA TRC 2222/49; Foster plays "O Sole Mio" on a Camphor Laurel leaf.

[13]Trifoliata (*Poncirus trifoliata*) is used as a root stock for cultivated citrus.

[14]For example, Meredith and Sullivan (Aberdeen NSW 1983) NLA TRC 2221/c20; TRC 2750 (Tom O'Brien plays lemon leaf); and Meredith and Willis (Griffith NSW 1991) NLA TRC 2590 (Kevin O'Connor plays orange leaf).

of Armidale, played a lemon leaf and a "bush leaf". The latter was probably a eucalypt, but de Silva did not supply exact information to Barry McDonald.

In addition to the introduced citrus species (native to China and Japan), there are some native Eremocitrus and Microcitrus, *e.g.* native limes. The native Bush Lemon or Wild Lemon (*Canthium oleifolium*) - which does not belong to the same family as citrus - has long been a food and medicinal source as well as a leaf instrument for some Aborigines in northern NSW towns, *e.g.* Taree, Kempsey, Armidale and Tweed Heads.

During both my visits to the home of Bert (Goonabahn) Marr at Purfleet (via Taree)), he played some loud, trumpety notes on a Bush Lemon leaf plucked from a tree conveniently situated in his front yard (Plate 2). Goonabahn (pers. comm., 9 July 1994) normally played gumleaves because they are "integral to the life cycle of an Aboriginal person" (during burials, for instance, gumleaves are thrown into graves). Goonabahn and his cousins always chose leaves of different pitches so that they could harmonise effectively, and all carried branches of gumleaves when they performed.

The Bowraville Aborigines who taught Walter McLaughlin to play in 1922 also used lemon leaves.[15] In northern Queensland, citrus leaves were popular instruments, along with various species of eucalypt and fig leaves. The residents of Mona Mona Mission played hymn tunes and songs on lemon and orange leaves, but as with the some of the NSW lemon leafists there is no record of whether they blew the leaves of native or cultivated varieties. Bradley recorded Grogan playing a high-pitched lemon leaf with a brassy tone.[16]

In southeastern Australia leaf instruments derive from a broad spectrum of terrain, especially dry sclerophyll forests.

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[15]Meredith (Drummoyne NSW 1984) NLA TRC 2222 R-27.

[16]Bradley and Ellis (Cairns Q'ld 1990) NLA TRC 2604.

## 2. Topography

### 2.1 Waterways

In times past, clans had invariably camped near waterholes, where they had ample opportunity to elicit sounds from native leaves. In choosing instruments from around lakes, rivers, lagoons, swamps, creeks, billabongs and waterfalls, twentieth-century leaf bandsmen may have been maintaining an ancient practice. Many of these waterways were sacred sites, which according to Aboriginal belief, were created by the ancestors as they travelled from place to place. Tribesmen performed periodic rituals beside them because their spirits, and those of their ancestors and the natural species, were believed to live there. Most notably, Smyth and von Sturmer (1981: 5, 20) collected the Swamp Bloodwood (*E. ptychocarpa*) leaf instrument (Plate 7) on the sandy sandstone banks of the permanent waterhole *Mandjaworlbiljdji* (Oenpelli waterfall, Western Arnhem Land) in 1980.

Most missions were set up on former camping grounds on the edge of another spatial world, that of the river, lake and bush, a land and seascape which retained familiar meaning and from which Aborigines continued to draw sustenance" (Attwood 1989: 65). For at least some time following missionisation, local leaf bandsmen were surrounded by the same plants that were known to their immediate ancestors.

#### 2.1.1 The Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers

The box leaf instrumentarium along the Murray River includes Yellow Box (Honey Box or Yellow Ironbox, *E. melliodora)*,[17] Black Box (or River Box, *E. largiflorens*)[18] and Inland

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[17]A medium-sized woodland or forest tree with grey-green/blue or slate-grey leaves, widely distributed in Victoria, NSW and southeast Queensland. Yellow Box provides excellent firewood, durable timber, and honey which is renowned for its quality; hence the scientific name *melliodora* or "honey-scented" (Kelly 1969: 65, Plate 215).

[18]Black Box is common in northern Victoria and along the Murray in SA, where it is found on higher ground than River Red Gum or forms open woodland. It has a crown of dull green leaves (Kelly 1969: 59, Plate 193).

Grey Box (*E. microcarpa*),[19] more common in "earlier days" (pers. comm. from Sharon Atkinson, Dharnyah Cultural Centre, Barmah Forest, 16 January 1996). According to Yorta Yorta descendant Ken Briggs (pers. comm., 12 January 1996), leaf bandsmen only selected smooth-surfaced box or River Red Gum (*E. camaldulensis*)[20] leaves, using lemon and orange leaves as a standby. Discrimination is always required in the selection of River Red Gum leaves, because some are "too long and narrow to blow with ease".

Along the Murrumbidgee River, NSW, the blowing of leaves was a popular pursuit amongst the Wiradjuri because of the satisfying echo effects heard across the river (Chapter 1).

### 2.1.2 Lake Tyers, Victoria

A leaf instrumentarium may vary markedly within one district, for instance at Lake Tyers, Victoria. Botanically, east Gippsland is the meeting ground of different floras from the north, west and south (Hopkins and Fox 1991: 152). In the Gippsland Lakes area the Kurnai language name *Bangalay* has been adopted for Southern Mahogany or Gippsland Mahogany (*E. botryoides*).[21] At the time of settlement, 40-metre high eucalypts grew along the shores of Lake Tyers (Goding 1990: 1), which is presently fringed by Coast Grey Box or Gippsland Grey Box (*E. bosistoana*) forest, co-dominant with White Stringybark (*E. globoidea*).[22] The Lake Tyers Forest Park also includes Silvertop Ash (*E. sieberi*);[23] Manna Gum (or Ribbony Gum; *E. viminalis*);[24] Messmate or Messmate Stringybark (*E. obliqua*);[25] Red Ironbark

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[19] A woodland species (Kelly 1969: 60, Plate 197).

[20] Artists and photographers popularised River Red Gum as a symbol of the Australian landscape. This large, gnarled tree follows mainland riverbanks with distinctly "weeping" foliage (based on Holliday and Hill 1969: 90). The Barmah State Forest, Victoria contains the largest stand, their maximum age having reached *c.* 1,000 years.

[21] *Bangalay* often grows near beach dunes. Its leaves are thick and glossy, dark green above and paler below (Kelly 1969: 16, Plate 29).

[22] Albert "Choppy" Hayes and Foster Moffatt prised off White Stringybark to construct canoes (Pepper 1980: 22).

[23] Saplings have silver-grey leaves that extend out from the stem (Kelly 1969: 51. Plate 162).

[24] The widest possible leaves would be required for blowing; most are long and thin (Gott and Conran 1991: 47).

(Aboriginal language name *Mugga,* specific Kurnai language name *Burirra-wi, E. sideroxylon*);[26] Forest Red Gum (Kurnai language names *Tallabri* or *Eurs*, *E. tereticornis*); and Red Box (Kurnai language name *Deu*, *E. polyanthemos*). The Lakes District contains remnants of rainforest vegetation, such as Lilly-pilly (*Acmena smithii*), whilst Yellow Box (Kurnai name *Dajan*; *E. melliodora*) grows in the more open woodlands near Buchan.

Lakes historian Jack Whadcoat (pers. comm., 15 January 1995) commented on the choice of leaf instruments available at Lake Tyers. The bandsmen mostly used the stiff-edged, pliable juvenile leaves of White Stringybark, otherwise Blue Box (Round-leaved Box, *E. bauerana*).[27] Most notably, the bandsmen who played at Bruthen in 1948 are all blowing round leaves, either from a branch of Blue Box or Red Box (Plate 12). The irregular-shaped leaf of Gippsland Mahogany includes a distinctly rounded curve, which is ideal for placing against the lip, and presently favoured by Yorta Yorta/Gunditjmara leafist Jarrod Atkinson of Melbourne.

Whadcoat assumes that bandsmen also played Southern Blue Gum (*E. globulus*) or Victorian Eurabbie (*E. pseudoglobulus*) before this species was logged. Kurnai descendant Michael Edwards (pers. comm., 30 November 1996) noticed that the Lake Tyers leafists picked instruments from the same eucalypt trees from which they extracted resinous gum to boil for jelly-making purposes. The leafists' own name for this species was "wattle",[28] but Edwards does not remember whether it was similar to the eucalypts which presently grow near his home, *i.e.* Yellow Box and Coast Grey Box. For their duets, Joe Wandin and Foster Moffatt sometimes played lemon leaves instead of gumleaves.

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[25]The first eucalypt to be botanically described in 1789 from a specimen collected on Bruny Island, Tasmania during Captain Cook's Third Voyage in 1777. The name *obliqua* refers to the asymmetrical base of the glossy, mature leaf (see further description in Gott and Conran 1991: 56).

[26]With 70% cineol content, Red Ironbark leaves produce high quality medicinal oil.

[27]A rough-barked tree characterised by a dense crown of round blue-grey leaves (Kelly 1969: 66, Plate 218).

[28]The English word "wattle" generally describes yellow-flowering *Acacia* trees.

### 2.1.3 Wallaga Lake, NSW

I visited Wallaga Lake in mid-1994 to investigate the leaf preference of the district's former bandsmen, assuming that they had selected leaves from trees around the lake. Patten (pers. comm., 7 July 1997) had already suggested that Sydney Blue Gum (*E. saligna*) leaves might have been played at Muckin's Point. The leaves on the sturdy stringybarks surrounding the old Aboriginal burial ground looked suitable for blowing, but I assumed that it was taboo to pick them.[29] The Elder Anne Thomas directed me to the foreshore of the beautiful lake, where I picked various eucalypt leaves. I then travelled up to Sydney to show these specimens to Guboo Ted Thomas, the only remaining living member of the Wallaga Leaf Gumleaf Band.

Guboo complained that the leaves were too soft to blow. The bandsmen, he said, did not pick gumleaves from the Wallaga Lake foreshore; they selected the stiff, medium-green leaves from small native bushes on Gulaga. This surprised me greatly because the mountain was eight kilometres north of the lake, as well as time-consuming and hazardous to climb.

Guboo did not know the leaf instrument's common name, Yuin language name, or botanical name, because the bandsmen used an invented anglicised name, "bone leaf", when discussing the instrument amongst themselves. This demonstrates how a fourth category, the Aboriginal English name, exists for some Australian botanical species. Guboo described a typical bone leaf as measuring approximately 8 cms along the mid-rib, and praised it for its toughness and broad, powerful sound. For a sharp, cutting blast and high pitch, the bone leaf surpassed all the other leaves which the bandsmen blew. Since each bone leaf only furnished two or three tunes,[30] the bandsmen transported a large supply with them on their tours, carrying them by hand in jars or bottles. The leaves were long lasting, even though the jars contained no water.

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[29]Morgan (1994: 25) mentions the existence of sacred trees at Wallaga Lake.

[30]The vast majority of leaves are exhausted as vibrating material after furnishing two or three tunes.

Most importantly, the bone leaves were probably not even eucalypt leaves, as they had serrated margins. This contradicts the opinions of many other leafists that soft, fresh, smooth-edged leaves are superior for blowing (Vaughan Livermore of Tingha, NSW, for one, played soft leaves only, stating that "a hard leaf does not give a good sound").[31] Six months later, after studying Forestry Commission literature on the flora of Gulaga, I climbed the mountain in order to find and identify the bone leaf "music" bush.[32]

**2.2 Rainforests/Mountains, *e.g.* Gulaga (Mt Dromedary), NSW**

Taking leaf characters into account, the musical suitability of southeastern Australian rainforest leaves can be gauged from examining the comprehensive subgroups of rainforest trees illustrated in Floyd (1989). Cool temperate rainforest leaves are usually smaller than subtropical rainforest leaves; and their texture is generally thinner than in the adjoining sclerophyll or open forest. Many species have a "drip tip" to facilitate drying of the leaves (Floyd 1989: 4).

Stands of rainforest scrub were probably never deliberately fired on Gulaga, but after the Rev. W.B. Clarke discovered gold in 1860, over 400 people denuded parts of the mountain into the early 1900s. The most pristine rainforest stands secure a World Heritage Listing; they give way to tall stringybarks such as Brown Barrel (*E. fastigata*), Messmate Stringybark (*E. obliqua*), and Yellow Stringybark (*E. muellerana*),[33] from which Yuin tribesmen extracted bark sheets to make their ceremonial dresses and wigs. The intermediate altitudes support a warm temperate rainforest dominated by vines and ground ferns. The cool temperate rainforest is dominated by Pinkwood (*Eucrypha moorei*) and Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*), both of which are believed to have existed before the ancient Gondwanaland

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[31]"Back to School Again", *Dawn*, February 1964: 17.

[32]Accompanied by my husband, I ascended the mountain on 14 January 1995 via Tilba Road, Central Tilba.

[33]Yellow Stringybark leaves are green, glossy and narrowish (Kelly 1969: 47, Plate 150).

continent broke up,[34] but neither are suitable for blowing. The main stand of cool temperate rainforest grows in the high saddle between the summit and the slightly higher peak to the northwest. White Ash (*E. fraxinoides*) occurs around the summit, and Silvertop Ash (*E. sieberi*) grows on the higher ridges. White Gum (*E. rossii*) and many other potential leaf instruments grow in the reserve at the base of the mountain.

Apart from rare saplings, most of the eucalypt branches are high above hand grasp. This may have precipitated the plucking of leaf instruments from the "small bushes" described by Guboo. [In spite of this, there is ample evidence that the Aborigines of southeastern Australia were swift climbers (Howitt 1904 [1996]: 82, 757, illustration; Adams 1981: 53), and some were even known as "tree climbers"].[35]

Another explanation for the popularity of the bone leaf sound might lie in the Yuin people's intimate knowledge of Gulaga's biologically diverse foliage and profuse birdlife. Since hills and vales maximise the echoing of sound, the likelihood that the Yuin found leaf blowing on the mountain to be an aurally satisfying activity is also strong. Meanwhile it is impossible to say whether cultural/economic use of the bone leaf preceded the musical use of "rude leaves and reeds" observed in the district corroboree of 1900.

Numerous natural springs still pump out gurgling water around Gulaga's summit. The bone leaf bush may have grown along the Dromedary and Little Dromedary Creeks flowing to the north, Tilba Creek to the east, or Couria Creek to the south of the summit.[36] The Native Cherry (*Exocarpus cupressiformis*), which furnished bullroarers for the Yuin (Howitt 1904 [1996]: 537-538), has leaves too scale-like to blow. The leaves of the Water Vine (*Cissus*

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[34]Dated in Palaeozoic and Mesozoic times, Gondwanaland included Antarctica, Australia, India, and parts of Africa and South America. The rich volcanic soil around Gulaga's base made it easy for newly migrated non-eucalypt plants (which probably arrived stuck to the feet and feathers of birds) to adjust to suit new conditions.

[35]"Aboriginal Initiations", *Albury Banner*, 15 June 1883: 9. See also "Aboriginal Scarred Trees", *Heritage Australia* 3/2, Summer 1984: 41.

[36]The Yuin had names for each spring and creek on Gulaga, the local word for "waterhole" being *bilabudja*.

*antarctica*) - a native rainforest grape-like species - are probably too soft (even though practitioners adapt to grape leaves by blowing on any rounded section of the leaf). The Butterwood (Yuin language name *Guligam*; *Callicoma serratifolia*) is a small to medium-sized tree which fits Guboo's description of leaf size and serrated margin, but its leaves are too hairy and coarsely toothed for comfort.

The Yuin used the rough-surfaced leaves of the small Sandpaper Fig (or Creek Fig, *Ficus coronata*) which grew on Gulaga to smooth or polish weapons and other belongings, much as we use sandpaper today (Forestry Commission of NSW booklet 1987: 23; see also Cribb and Cribb 1974: 35).[37] Taking the physiology of this leaf into account, leafists would have developed lacerated lips if they had blown these leaves regularly. The bone leaf bush is probably not extinct, but despite my efforts at solving this mystery it remains unidentified.

Further north, the ethnobotanical use of native fig leaves may have contributed to their accessibility and popularity as leaf instruments. For example, Aborigines made dugout canoes from the trunks of the Cluster Fig (western Arnhem Land Aboriginal name *Manmarnwarn*; *Ficus racemosa*). A large, diverse group of about 45 native figs including stranglers, creeping shrubs and climbers are found in their greatest variety in northern rainforests; the number of species decreases southwards until there are only two species occurring in Victoria, one introduced from Queensland (Cribb and Cribb 1974: 34). Notable varieties include the Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus macrophylla*) and Port Jackson Fig (*Ficus rubiginosa*). The shapes of most of the native fig leaves illustrated in Cooper (1994) are suitable for coupling to the mouth, but as with the Sandpaper Fig, the roughish texture of many species discounts comfort in playing.

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[37]Native figs also grew on Little Dromedary (Nadjinuga), according to Chittick and Fox (1997: 42).

Descendants of two clans in northeastern NSW (namely the Biripi of Taree and the Bundjalung at Coraki) played music on native fig leaves. Roseina and Harry Boston of Nambucca Heads (pers. comm., 23 March 1999) often play duets on the leaves of "Curtain Fig" (probably *Ficus microcarpa var. hillii*).[38] These smooth-surfaced, oval-shaped leaves emit a sharper, clearer and more piercing sound than most gumleaves. When the Bostons play these fig leaves at country-and-western gigs they don't need to use microphones.

Pastor Bill Reid of Bourke preferred the softness of fig leaves (Bagnall 1994: 37) to the tough, leathery eucalypt leaves of his dry, harsh environment. Reid probably played Common Edible Fig (*Ficus carica*) leaves, since Bourke's harsh, dry climate is not conducive to native figs. Clarrie Grogan of Kuranda, northern Queensland believed that evergreen fig leaves had the sharpest tone of all. He claimed that he could manage "any range at all" on a fig leaf, although it is no longer suitable once the sap is used up.[39] Grogan stressed that a leaf instrument should be broad-surfaced to cater for a wide range of notes. In this respect, fig and other native rainforest leaves such as Kurrajong were "easier to play than the gum".

Based partly on data presented in previous chapters, Table 7 brings together the predominant post-contact leaf playing clans of southeastern Aboriginal Australia, matching each to its corresponding habitats, birdlife, and most suitable leaf instrument species. For the purpose of contrast, some leaf playing clans of far southwest and northern Queensland are included. The leaf species chosen for (partly hypothetical) musical or extramusical functions would have been determined by the characteristic patterns of clan movement. However, in consideration of spirit trees, leaf spirits and leaf totems, folklore taboos probably existed on the picking and blowing of leaves from the totem trees of certain clans - just as the imitations of the birdcalls and animal cries, whether by human mouth, leaves, reeds or bones, would have been subject to totemic restrictions.

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[38]A deciduous tree from the rainforests around Cairns, the roots of which hang in curtain-like formations.

[39]Bradley and Ellis (Cairns Q'ld 1990) NLA TRC 2604.

| CLAN NAME (see Horton's map, 1994) | LOCATION | CLIMATE AND TERRAIN | BIRDLIFE (SOME TOTEMIC) | DOMINANT LEAF SPECIES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Birria (Marulta), Karuwali, Karangura, Maiawali, Mithaka, Yarluyandi | Mooraberrie in the Channel Country, Great Artesian Basin, (far southwest Queensland) | seasonal floods in the riverlands of the Diamantina River; claypans and sandhills | over 150 species of migratory birds and waterfowl, incuding brolga | Coolabah, Ironbark, Bloodwood, Ghost Gum, Native Box, Wild Orange |
| Yidinjdji and neighbouring clans | Mona Mona Mission, Kuranda (northern Queensland) | wet and dry seasons; tropical savannah rainforests, coastal mangroves, lagoons and swamplands, heath/grasslands | cockatoos and parrots (some New Guinean), emu, geese, crane/brolga | rainforest leaves (*e.g.* Kurrajong, native figs), Messmate Stringybark |
| Dainggatti Gumbainggir, Bundjalung (coast and lowland clans of northern NSW) | Kempsey Bowraville Nambucca H'ds Cabbage Tree Island, Coraki Woodenbong | Eastern coastland with uniform rainfall, rivers, low-lying mountains, and tall forest, dominated by eucalypts | Kookaburra, Willie-Wagtail, Square-tailed Kite, Leatherhead, cockatoos and curlews | Forest Red Gum, Bloodwood, Blackbutt, Ghost Gum, Spotted Gum, Brittle Gum, Curtain Fig |
| Biripi | Taree (northern NSW) | Eastern coastland, closed forest, uniform rainfall | *Kooridooki* Talking Bird (unidentified) | Bush Lemon, Spotted Gum, Forest Red Gum |
| Yuin, Tharawal, Ngarigo | Wallaga Lake (south coast of NSW) | Wetlands, Gulaga (Mt Dromedary) & Mumbulla Mtn | E. Whipbird, Black Cockatoo, Lyrebird, Sea Eagle | "Bone leaf" (unidentified), White Gum, Spotted Gum, native figs, |
| Kurnai | Lake Tyers (southern lakes district of Gippsland, Victoria) | Lakes district wetlands, low forest and scrub, sandy beaches | Black Swan, E. Whipbird, Boobook Owl, E. Curlew (Death Bird), Red-capped Robin | White Stringybark, Gippsland Mahogony, Blue Box, Southern Blue Gum |
| Yorta Yorta | Cummeragunga (NSW/Vic Border) | Murray River wetlands, especially Barmah and Moira Forests, subject to seasonal floods | Over 200 species; *e.g.* magpies, crows, hawks, cockatoos | River Red Gum, Yellow Box, Grey Box, Black Box |

**TABLE 7: NATIVE AUSTRALIAN LEAF INSTRUMENT CLASSIFICATION BASED ON CLAN, HABITAT AND ENVIRONMENTAL VARIANCE**

### 3. Eucalypt Leaf Selection for Competitive Purposes

The preferred instruments of some representative leafists who competed in the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship (1977-1997) are recorded below on a state-by-state basis:

#### 3.1 Victoria

At the inaugural competition in 1977, Wally French of Avoca insisted that the small, moist, semi-circular leaves from Sugar Gum (*E. cladocalyx*) or Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) suckers gave "a large contrast of notes".[40] Robert Haley of Melbourne preferred the low-pitched leaves from the Western Australian Red-flowering Gum (*E. ficifolia*), as well as leaves of the Lemon-scented Gum (*E. citriodora*)[41] and the mallee Bushy Yate (*E. lehmannii*).[42] Neil Seymour used to choose any small, flexible, fresh gumleaf, but played Photinia (possibly *Photinia glabra*) leaves in non-competitive contexts (Harrison 1997: 9).

Having discovered his talent through practising on soft rose leaves and petals, as well as dockweed, Philip Elwood (pers. comm., 31 October 1994) progressed to the slightly firmer lemon leaf in order to ease himself up to the toughness of eucalypt leaves. The Red Ironbark (Aboriginal name *Mugga*, *E. sideroxylon*) tree in the Bourke St Mall, Melbourne is the "busking tree" which provides a steady source of income for Elwood's family. For his winning performance at the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship in 1996, Elwood selected a cleaner, more mellow-sounding Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) leaf.[43]

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[40] "Which Leaf for You?", *Bendigo Advertiser*, 4 August 1977: 5.

[41] A graceful bloodwood tree with smooth bark of a greyish-white or pinkish colour. Its leaf contains 65-85% citronellal, the richest source of that chemical in the world (Cribb and Cribb 1981: 22).

[42] "Taking a leaf from Bach", *The Age*, 24 September 1983: 2.

[43] Ryan (Maryborough Vic 1996) RRCT10; V4.

Herbert Patten mostly used Yellow Box, Red Ironbark, and Gippsland Mahogany leaves during the contests, but plays Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*)[44] leaves on other occasions. Virgil Reutens singlemindedly chose Yellow Box for safety, because he has trouble pitching low-sounding notes on leaves of some of the other eucalypt species. Aside from contests, he plays various citrus leaves, Sycamore or Great Maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) leaves, and pittosporum leaves from his Mt Eliza garden.[45] His preferred dried leaves are Sugar Gum and Sydney Blue Gum; both are palatable due to their relative lack of oil glands.

The ironbark and box stands of Central Victoria furnished leaf instruments for the veteran competitors from this region. Keith Graetz of Stuart Mill (pers. comm., 2 August 1996) variously chose Red Ironbark, Yellow Box or Red Box leaves, and the wider leaves of the Lemon-scented Gum. Wendy Eva of Tatura (pers. comm., 10 August 1995) finds a thick, green leaf ideal for producing a low range of notes, but she is adamantly biased towards the silvery timbre and reliable high pitch of Candlebark (*E. rubida*) and Red Box (*E. polyanthemos*) leaves. They afford a pitch range about an octave higher than a fresh leaf, due to their stiffness.[46]

Eva dries and presses these leaves in a book on her Tatura farm about two weeks before a performance.[47] This procedure is now adhered to by the joint 1997 Champion, namely Eva's pupil Jeff Wilmott of Warburton. Will Lockwood of Toolamba discounted dried leaves, arguing that "the secret to success is a gumleaf that is kept fresh and green".[48] He and Leo Doyle of Alexandria usually played Red Box leaves in the contest.

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[44]Turpentine is common in tall eucalypt forests and rainforests, where it is often associated with eucalypts and angophoras.

[45]Ryan (Clayton Vic 1994) RRC T16. There are 9 genera and 150 species of pittosporum; Reuten's tree is possibly a Sweet Pittosporum (*Pittosporum undulatum*).

[46]Ryan (Tatura Vic 1995) RRC T8.

[47]When other contestants complained that Eva's instrument was a "reed", the rules of the competition were changed to permit the use of fresh leaves only, even though both fresh and dried leaves can be classed as reed instruments.

[48]*News*, Thursday, 30 September 1993: 4.

### 3.2 New South Wales

Wally McLaughlin of Sydney first practised blowing a soft Paddy's Lucerne (*Sida rhombifolia*) leaf, then graduated to citrus (lemon, orange, mandarin and grapefruit leaves are all very similar to play). McLaughlin eventually gave up playing gumleaves altogether, claiming that he had never met anyone who preferred to play gumleaves.[49] He has tried most non-native leaves apart from the poisonous Oleander (*Nerium oleander*), and prefers leaves from the unidentified camellia-like tree next to his unit on the Drummoyne foreshore. This "music tree" has low-spreading branches but, unlike the camellia, it does not flower. Its hard leaves afford a wide pitch range which can be heard approximately 90 metres away, a factor which enhances McLaughlin's busking profession at Circular Quay on Sydney Harbour.

Dudley Carter of Narromine elicited music from "river leaves" or "park leaves", taking care that leaves did not become so soggy or hot that their sound was minimised.[50] Brian Norris of Murwillumbah played the soft, round, papery-textured leaves of Red Box (*E. polyanthemos*) at most contests (Harrison 1997 insert between pp. 12-13), but otherwise played the leaves of White Mahogany (either *E. acmenoides* or *E. triantha*), Camphor Laurel (*Cinnamomum camphora*), and varieties of lemon, orange, apple and peach (Harrison 1997: 9).

The Kempsey area furnishes a number of suitable "music trees", including Rose Gum (*E. grandis*), Sydney Blue Gum (*E. saligna*), and White Stringybark (*E. globoidea*). The *yili* (gumleaf) which James Goorie Dungay transported to Maryborough, Victoria in 1997 was the Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*, also known as Blue Gum), because it is thicker and more durable than a lot of other leaves and provides a bright, saxophone-like timbre. A former district forestry worker, Goorie has also played the leaves of Blackbutt (*E. pilularis*, the most

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[49]Meredith (Drummoyne NSW 1984) NLA TRC 2222 R-27.

[50]Meredith (Narromine NSW 1984) NLA TRC 2222/30.

common tree in the area), Red Bloodwood (*E. gummifera*), and White Mahogany (*E. acmenoides*).[51]

Although Roseina Boston (pers. comm., 6 October 1995) plays fig leaves, she is more attached to gumleaves from the cultural and spiritual standpoint. She finds most of the eucalypt species in her district suitable for music, provided that the leaves are broad-surfaced. For this reason, she played Ghost Gum (*E. papuana*)[52] and Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*) leaves at the 1995 and 1996 contests respectively. Harry Boston produced his first sounds on a Passionfruit (*Passiflora laurifolia*) leaf, but played a Brittle Gum leaf at the 1996 contest.

### 3.3 Southeast Queensland

Les Hawthorne of Palm Beach was renowned for playing dried eucalypt leaves, a preference which has so far been ignored by Aboriginal leafists. In the late 1970s, he also introduced the idea of using an industrial plastic leaf instrument, but his colleagues at the Maryborough competition did not wholeheartedly adopt the notion.

### 3.4 South Australia

Gaynor Tabe of Borrika (pers. comm., 5 October 1997) transported Sugar Gum (*E. cladocalyx*) leaves interstate to the 1997 contest.

### 3.5 Tasmania

Gordon Mahnken of Launceston preferred the moist Tasmanian eucalypt leaves to the dry ironbark/box leaves [illegible] the 1979 test piece (Harrison 1997: 6).

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[51] Ryan (Glen Iris Vic 1997) RRC T14.

[52] The Ghost Gum features strongly in Aboriginal mythology, and was made famous by Aboriginal painters. Individual trees often represent Dreamtime ancestors (Latz 1995: 193). Ghost Gum inhabits river flats subjected to periodic flooding, where it is often mistaken for the River Red Gum. Its drooping branches carry bright green, somewhat twisted leaves.

### 3.6 Western Australia

The broad-surfaced leaves of Marri[53] (*E. calophylla*) which Keith Lethbridge transported to Victoria in 1995 did not survive. Some Karri (*E. diversicolor*)[54] sucker leaves make good instruments, but it is much easier to select leaves from the branches of low-lying species (letter from Keith Lethbridge, 7 March 1996). Lethbridge also plays young, supple Jarrah (*E. marginata*) leaves, and leaves of Western Australian Red-flowering Gum (*E. ficifolia*) and Flooded Gum (Aboriginal name *Moitch, E. rudis*).[55]

## 4. Leaf Instrument Treatment: Specialist Knowledge

With this enormously diverse range of leaves to choose from, what specific problems do leafists face before gumleaf contests? The insights of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists were enthusiastically aired at the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championships. Instruments were always carefully tested by rangers, some of whom sent some competitors out into the night to find genuine eucalypt leaves.

The well-worn path of champions involves close hands-on knowledge of certain "music plants" and the relative size, shape and age of their leaves. To use an unfamiliar leaf is to enter into an uncharted region where embarrassing mishaps can occur and for this reason leafists are fussy. In addition to personal taste, geographic location and seasonal considerations are crucial factors.

For a start, old-growth and polluted leaves are not as suitable as the new-growth leaves which appear in spring, when most of the Maryborough contests were held. Newly sprouted leaves or small sucker leaves are also excellent instruments for beginners. Patten (pers. comm., 2

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[53]Aboriginal for "beautiful leaf".

[54]Climatic conditions enable Karri trees to grow up to 30 feet around and 250 feet upwards; tree-climbing Aborigines may have blown Karri leaves in ancient times.

[55]The Aborigines who blew hunting leaves at Mingenew, WA in the late 1960s (Chapter 1) were probably using *Moitch*, which is also known locally as River Gum or Blue Gum.

December 1997) always selects leaves from the shady rather than the sunny side of a tree because they are softer, greener, more supple and more "sonorous" than exposed or drier leaves. He chooses leaves at head level after discounting pesticide use and the presence of insects such as spiders, ants or ladybirds on a leaf, as well as lerp.[56] To remove a leaf from its sprig, he grasps it gently by the stalk (petiole) and pulls it back towards the branch of the limb to prevent damage to the tree. He then washes the leaf with a damp cloth.

Patten prefers broad-surfaced leaves; he does not recommend Gippsland Mahogany because at the 1978 contest the leaf material split and he needed to switch midway through his tune from the lower side to the upper side of this dorsiventral leaf. Furthermore, if a leaf is too soft, he can only obtain notes from the lower register. For this reason, Patten played the Yellow Box leaf an octave below the other contestants in 1997 (Tape Example 19).

Most on-stage competitors use a new leaf for each tune. Since a really fresh leaf might break during performance, some pick sprigs a couple of days before the event. Reutens places the bottom end of some small sprigs in wet wool covered with alfoil before storing them in an "Eskie" ice-box. He then dries each leaf with a handkerchief just before he performs. If a leaf is too dry he dips it in water for about ten seconds to rehydrate it.

If green leaves are not kept damp and cool, they will turn limp or curl, thus losing their flatness and crispness as they dry off. Ideally, the top of a fresh leaf should bend over easily in the hand. In 1995 and 1996, Roseina Boston transported a large quantity of Ghost Gum and Brittle Gum leaves from Nambucca Heads, NSW to Maryborough, Victoria in 1995 and 1996 respectively. Wrapped in damp cloth, the leaves serviced her needs for seven days. Other competitors sometimes transport leaves in billy cans or plastic bags. As part of their vocation as entertainers, Reutens and Elwood play music on indoor plants in restaurants. This is an aesthetically pleasing experience; they enjoy the faint rustling sound emitted by the

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[56]An Aboriginal word denoting the sweet, waxy secretion found on some eucalypt leaves. Central Australian Aborigines collect lerp and mould it into lollies (see Goddard and Kalotas 1985).

other leaves on a sprig as they play. It has become fashionable for leafists to preserve all foliage on mobile trees. In any case, the success of a performance does not depend on a leaf being plucked from its source, but rather the characteristic pitch range and flexibility of the particular botanical species. The numerous potential hazards which leafists should try to avoid, if possible, are summarised in Table 8.

- The most common reason for missed beats is the tearing or splitting of a leaf. This necessitates a quick swap to its untorn side, or the deft snatching of a new leaf.
- The effect of high blowing pressure may induce breathlessness.[57]
- Headache may result from blowing too hard and long on an very thick leaf.
- Hypertension (elevation of the blood pressure) can lead to emphysema or a ruptured lung.
- Too much practice at a time may cause calluses and cold sores to appear on the lips, or ulcers inside the mouth.
- False teeth may shift about during a performance, and excessive playing may lead to jaw cramps.
- Blowing a leaf which is too highly perfumed (*e.g.* with a very high eucalypt oil content) may lead to nausea. To avoid this, play the leaf on the outside of the mouth.
- The Plane Tree (*Platanus hybrida*) leaf contains surface hairs that may cause asthma.
- Urban leafists should wipe all soot off their instruments in order to protect their lungs.
- Some blue gum leaves put Koalas in a drunken stupor (*i.e.* their gut contents convert to alcohol).
- Poisoning may result from blowing the Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) and other toxic leaves. High levels of phenolic compounds and aromatic oils in some eucalypt leaves oblige leaf-eating koalas and possums to make special adaptations to detoxify those substances in their livers. Avoid sucking juvenile leaves of Manna Gum (*E. viminalis*) and Sugar Gum (*E. cladocalyx*), since hydrocyanic acid is dangerous to koalas, domestic stock and insects (Pizzey 1988: 142). At certain times of the year, juvenile Manna Gum leaves also contain very poisonous cyanide compounds (Gott and Conran 1991: 47).
- Les Hawthorne introduced the industrial plastic "leaf", but if overused its "mini-jackhammer" action may burn and sear the lips, causing bleeding from under the top lip, and even calluses.

**TABLE 8: SOME HAZARDS OF LEAF SELECTION AND PLAYING**

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[57]This is not the same as hyperventilation (abnormally increased respiration) or hypoventilation (the insufficient exposure of the lungs to oxygen).

## 5. Cross-Cultural Leaf Instrument Typology

To summarise Part 1 of this chapter, some indication of the ways in which post-contact interference with the native Australian vegetation has shaped leaf instrument selection - and, consequently, the types of sounds produced - is given in Table 9. This is based on my fieldwork in southeatern Australia and attendance at the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship from 1993-1997. Presented in alphabetical order, the Australian native leaf instruments which command the most interest historically, culturally, or musically are highlighted with an asterisk and represented according to geographic location on Map 5.

For the purpose of contrast, introduced leaf instruments are also tabulated. Since this sampling only summarises the efforts of one researcher, it should be assumed that many other plant species have been toyed with by Australian leafists. Meanwhile, Table 9 confirms the Aboriginal leafist's preference for Australian flora, with all those interviewed showing a distinct preference for native leaves.[58]

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[58]In the literature, the only Aboriginal leafist who did not prefer gumleaves was Reid, who played fig and rose leaves (Bagnall 1994: 37). Goorie graduated from rose, to lemon and orange leaves, and finally to gumleaves (his favourites). Ambrose Golden-Brown of Nowra (pers. comm., 13 January 1995) never attempted to blow any leaves introduced from overseas.

# TABLE 9: COMPARATIVE TYPOLOGY OF AUSTRALIAN LEAF INSTRUMENTS

| ABORIGINES' CHOICES | NON-ABORIGINES' CHOICES |
|---|---|
| **NATIVE FLORA** | **NATIVE FLORA** |
| Black Box or River Box (*E. largiflorens*) | Boobialla (*e.g. Myoporum acuminatum*) |
| Blackbutt (*E. pilularis*)* | Bushy Yate (*E. lehmannii*, a mallee) |
| Blue Box or Round-leaved Box (*E. bauerana*) | Candlebark (*E. rubida*)* |
| Bone leaf (unidentified species on Gulaga) * | Jarrah (*E. marginata*), if young & supple* |
| Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*)* | Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*)* |
| Bush Lemon or Wild Lemon (*Canthium oleifolium*) | Lemon-scented Gum (*E. citriodora*)* |
| Coast Grey Box or Gippsland Grey Box (*E. bosistoana*) | Lilly-pilly (*Acmena smithii*) |
| Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) | Marri or WA Blue Gum (*E. calophylla*) |
| Coolabah or Coolibah (*E. microtheca*)* | Red Box (*E. polyanthemos*)* |
| Curtain Fig* (probably *Ficus microcarpa var. hillii*) | Red-flowering Gum (*E. ficifolia*)* |
| *E. porrecta* (NT leaf-whistle, no common name)* | Red Ironbark (*Mugga, E. sideroxylon*)* |
| Flooded Gum (*Moitch, E. rudis*)* | Red Gum (unidentified species) |
| Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*)* | Sugar Gum (*E. cladocalyx*)* |
| Gippsland (Southern) Mahogany (*Bangalay, E. botryoides*)* | Sweet Pittosporum (*Pittosporum undulatum*) |
| Ghost Gum (*E. papuana*)* | White Gum or Scribbly Gum (*E. rossii*) |
| Grey Box or Inland Grey Box (*E. microcarpa*) | Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*)* |
| Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*)* | |
| Manna Gum or Ribbony Gum (*E. viminalis*) | |
| Red Bloodwood (*E. gummifera*)* | |
| Red Box (*E. polyanthemos*)* | |
| Red Ironbark (*Mugga, E. sideroxylon*)* | |
| River Red Gum (*E. camaldulensis*)* | |
| Southern Blue Gum (*E. globulus*) or Victorian Eurabbie (*E. pseudoglobulus*) | |
| Spotted Gum (*E. maculata*)* | |
| Sugar Gum (*E. cladocalyx*)* | |
| Swamp Bloodwood (*E. ptychocarpa*)* | |
| Swamp Mahogany (*E. robusta*) | |
| Sydney Blue Gum (*E. saligna*) | |
| Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) | |
| White Mahogany (*E. acmenoides*; *E. triantha*) | |
| White Stringybark (*E. globoidea*)* | |
| Wild Orange (*Capparis mitchellii*) | |
| Yellow Stringybark (*E. muelleriana*)* | |
| Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*)* | |
| Yellow Box (*E. phoenicea*, NT) | |
| Yellow Mallee (*E. incrassata*) | |

# TABLE 9: COMPARATIVE TYPOLOGY OF AUSTRALIAN LEAF INSTRUMENTS (continued)

| ABORIGINES' CHOICES | NON-ABORIGINES' CHOICES |
|---|---|
| **INTRODUCED FLORA** | **INTRODUCED FLORA** |
| Common Edible Fig (*Ficus carica*) | Apple (*Malus domestica;* various species) |
| Flax (*Linum sp.*) | Almond (*Prunus dulcis*) |
| Orange (*Citrus sinensis*) | Banana (*Musa spp.*) |
| Rose (leaves and petals of [illegible] | Camellia (*e.g. species of Camellia japonica*) |
| Lemon (*Citrus limon*) | Camphor Laurel (*Cinnamomum camphora*) |
| | Common Edible Fig (*Ficus carica*) |
| | Cumquat (*Fortunella sp.*) |
| | Dock (various weeds of the genus *Rumex*) |
| | Grapefruit (*Citrus paradisi*) |
| | Lilac (*e.g. Syringa oblata*) |
| | Lemon (*Citrus limon*) |
| | Lime (*Citrus aurantifolia*) |
| | Mandarin (*Citrus reticulata*) |
| | Paddy's Lucerne (*Sida rhombifolia*) |
| | Passionfruit (*Passiflora laurifolia*) |
| | Peach (*Prunus persica;* various species) |
| | Pear (*Pyrus communis*) |
| | Plum (*Prunus domestica*) |
| | Photinia (*e.g. Photinia glabra robusta*) |
| | Privet (*e.g. Ligustrum lucidum tricolor*) |
| | Rose (leaves and petals of *Rosa sp.*) |
| | Sweet or Common Violet (*Viola odorata*) |
| | Sweet Orange (*Citrus sinensis*) |
| | Sour or Seville Orange (*Citrus aurantium*) |
| | Sycamore (*e.g. Acer pseudoplatanus*) |
| | Variegated Periwinkle (*Vinca major*) |
| | Wandering Jew (*Tradescantia sp.*) |

## PART 2: THE LEAF PHYSIOLOGY OF THE EUCALYPTS

How do the composite physical attributes of a leaf and the many important physiological and chemical processes controlled at its surface contribute to one's choice or rejection of it as a musical instrument? First of all, a leaf may be defined as an outgrowth from the stem of a plant consisting of a leaf base, petiole (stalk) and lamina (flattened blade). A general summary of different leaf characteristics is represented in Figure 3. Rainforest leaf type, for example, varies from simple to lobed, palmate, pinnate and bipinnate; leaf shape ranges from small needles and scales through lanceolate and ovate to round.

Pryor (1976) noted that in some of their general biological features, eucalypts are like other woody dicotyledons;[59] yet they differ in many morphological, physiological, ecological and genetic aspects. The following section may enable practitioners to predict a eucalypt leaf's suitability as a musical instrument with respect to its age, morphology, texture, venation, moisture content, and characteristic number of oil glands and air spaces.

### 1. Age of Leaves

Jacobs (1955) showed that the average life of eucalypt leaves (the vast majority of which are evergreen)[60] is about eighteen months. With a few exceptions, eucalypts develop five structurally different types of leaf during their lifetime, each type corresponding to a certain stage in the development of the tree. This process is known as heterophylly. In order of chronological development, leaf types are classified as (i) cotyledons (ii) seedling leaves (iii) juvenile leaves (iv) intermediate leaves and (v) adult leaves, although with certain species some of these leaf types may not present at all.

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[59]Flowering plants are divided into the monocotyledons and dicotyledons according to whether there are one or two seed leaves present. Monocotyledon leaves are long and narrow with parallel venation. Leaf shapes of dicotyledons vary enormously according to the network arrangement of veins and the development of lamina between them.

[60]The only deciduous members are a few tropical species that shed their leaves during the summer months (Penfold and Willis 1961: 31).

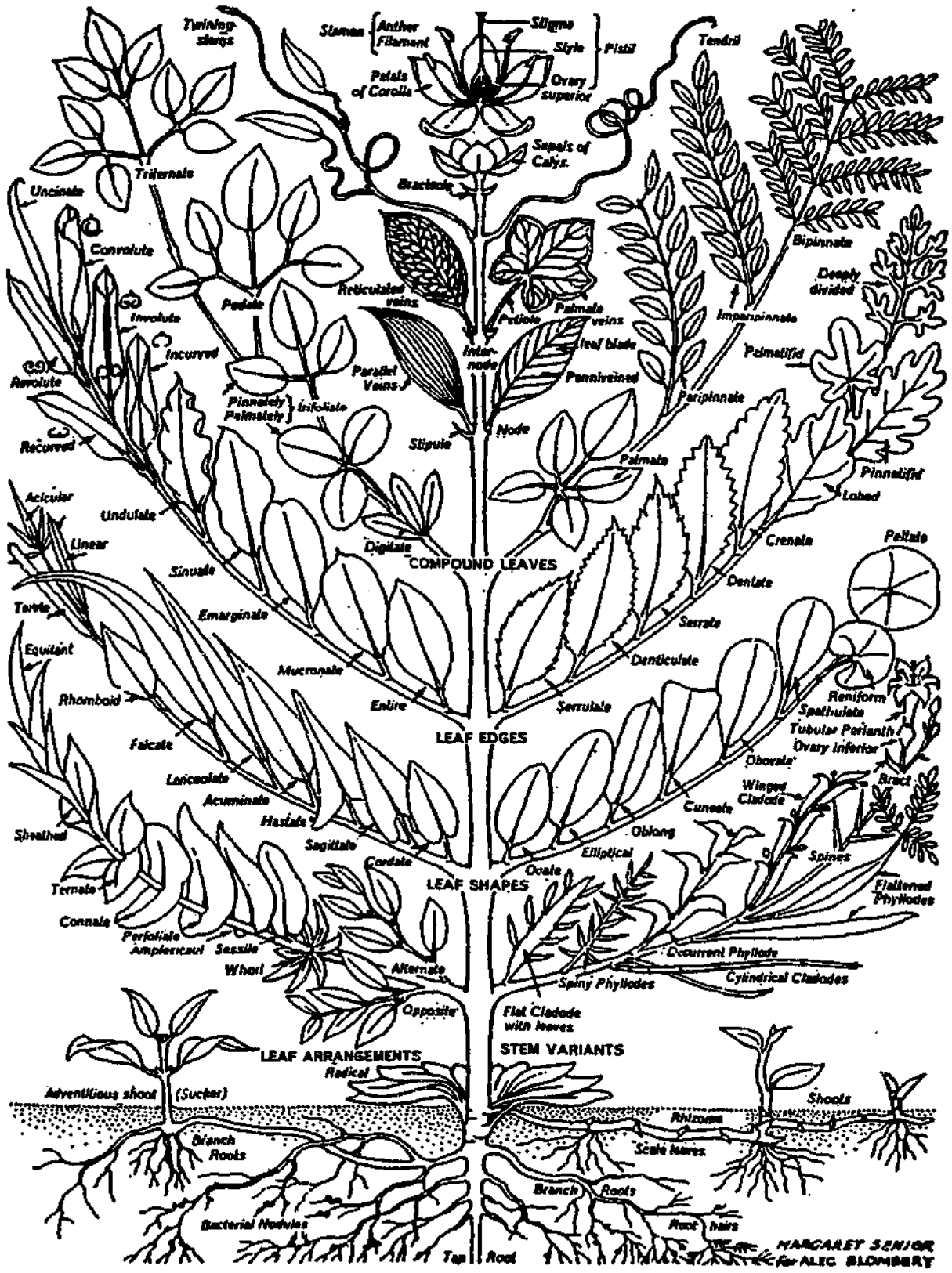


**FIGURE 3: A DIAGRAMMATIC DRAWING OF AN IMAGINARY PLANT SHOWING DIFFERENT LEAF CHARACTERISTICS**

**(Source: *Australian Native Plants: The Authoritative Guide to Australia's Unique Plant Life* by A.M. Blombery, 1967, London: Angus and Robertson: 9)**

Most eucalypts produce broad juvenile leaves that clasp the stem, or narrow, stalked adult leaves that hang vertically. Juvenile leaves may be so different from adult leaves in texture, the presence of hairs, and glaucousness,[61] that one can hardly believe they belong to the same species. Most or all of the foliage of a mature tree is made up of adult leaves, where the term "adult" refers to an ontogenetic stage of development rather than to the physiological age of the leaf.

The majority of leafists interviewed would prefer to play intermediate leaves, *i.e.* those which are in gradual transition between the juvenile and adult stages of maturity. However, in some species juvenile leaves give way rapidly to adult foliage, making it difficult for practitioners to find a reasonable number of "intermediate" leaves. For example, the Series *Siderophloiae* (ironbarks) contain both juvenile and adult leaves, which are in many cases quite similar. To a lesser extent, a similar condition exists in the Series *Buxeales* (boxes). In any case, neither of these two groups shows heterophylly to the same extent as the other groups. The juvenile leaves of the ironbark and box species are suitable for music-making, although very fresh leaves may be too thin and can easily break because the cellulose is not as strong and thick. Leafists generally discount adult leaves for being too stiff and leathery; some even call them "veteran" leaves.

## 2. Leaf Morphology

A sample of suitable and unsuitable leaf shapes for music-making is contained in Figure 4. The shape of eucalypt leaves is extremely variable; a leaf may be broadest either in the middle, near the base, or near the apex (tip). Most adult eucalypt leaves are falcate (curved or sickle-shaped), or oblique at the base. In addition, many juvenile leaves are cordate (heart-shaped) at the base. Since the margin of most eucalypt leaf blades is smooth (entire), leafists regard them as ideal for comfort in playing.

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[61]Glaucous leaves are covered with a gleaming, blue-grey or whitish bloom.

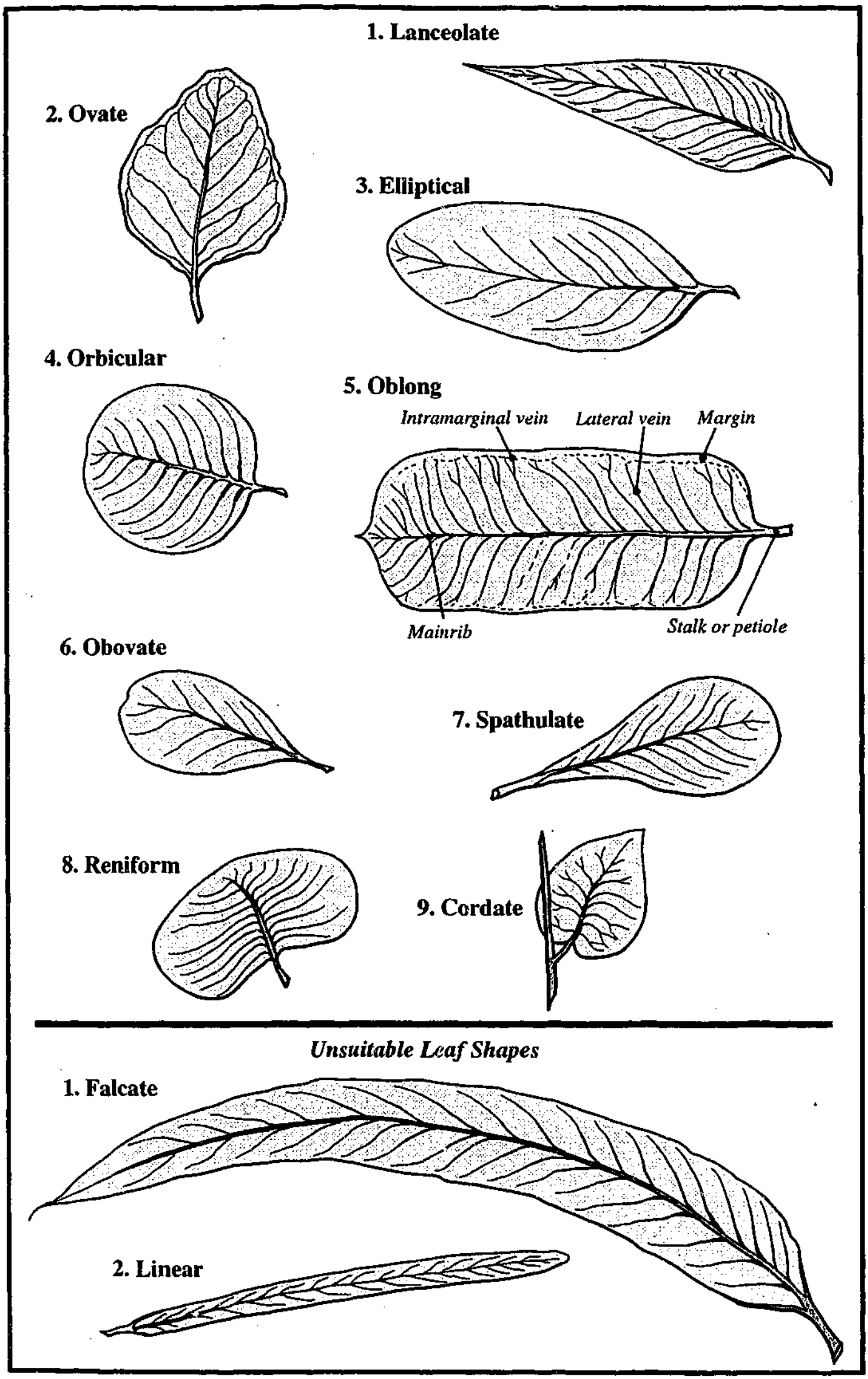


**FIGURE 4: LEAF SHAPE SUITABILITY FOR MUSIC-MAKING**

It can be seen that falcate- and linear-shaped leaves do not couple comfortably to the human lips because too much air escapes. Only one or two species of leaves have a wavy (crenate) margin, whilst the juvenile leaves of a few species are denticulate (minutely toothed).[62]

In a "simple" leaf, all parts of the lamina are continuous and nowhere separated from each other or the mid-rib. A typical eucalypt leaf is symmetrical, *i.e.* its lamina is separated into two equal parts at the mid-rib. In determining the shape of eucalypt leaves, consideration is given to the longitudinal and transverse axes. This is explained more fully in Penfold and Willis (1961: 22-23), where L = the length of the longitudinal axis (corresponding roughly with the mid-rib of a straight leaf, or, in the case of falcate leaves, with a straight line connecting the central point at the base of the leaf blade to its apex); and B = the breadth of the leaf. Both the position which this line takes in relation to the mid-line, and its span in relation to L (the L/B ratio) determine the main shapes of eucalypt leaves.

With respect to size, a leaf comparable to the size as well as the shape of the mouth is preferable. However, a larger leaf and even an irregular-shaped leaf can also prove satisfactory, providing one presses the most rounded section of the leaf blade (normally slightly folded or curled under) against the lip; leafists call this the "curve" or the "bump" Most practitioners play on the underside of a leaf; their reasons for this range from "it gives me a feeling of security" to "it gives a better sound".

Most eucalypt leaves are isobilateral, *i.e.* they have the same internal structure on both sides - as opposed to dorsiventral leaves, which are structurally different on the upper and lower surfaces (*e.g.* Gippsland Mahogany). Isobilateral leaves are more suitable for music-making because their structure is more uniform across the central folding line, thus allowing for greater resilience. The leaf vibrates more uniformly and causes minimum interruption to sound when one switches sides from the upper to the lower surface of the leaf. By contrast,

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[62]Several non-native leaves with softly notched or senate blades have been successfully played, *e.g.* roses.

the leaves of most of the introduced species favoured by non-Aboriginal practitioners are dorsiventral. Other features such as flexibility and palatability contribute to their suitability as musical instruments.

### 3. Leaf Texture

The flexibility, pliability or elasticity of a vibrating leaf instrument is dependent on texture. The more air spaces present, the lighter the leaf. Since the texture of eucalypt leaves varies according to season (*i.e.* texture is reduced with loss of water), leafists concerned to find a particular texture sometimes change their species preference during the year.

With regard to potential pitch range, a thick green leaf is ideal for the lower register, that is it vibrates relatively slowly (*i.e.* it requires a great deal of air to vibrate), and may not be reliable in the higher tessituras. At the opposite extreme, if a leaf is too thin, one may find it difficult to seal the edges sufficiently in order to prevent air from escaping.

For reasons of comfort, it is also preferable for a leaf instrument to be relatively free of hairs, scales, and wax. The juvenile leaves of the Lemon-scented Gum (*E. citriodora*) may be somewhat rough and hairy, although in most cases the hairs are very small. If too much wax covers the surface of a blue-green or grey-green leaf, the leaf could prove too slippery when pressed against the mouth.

### 4. Leaf Venation

Details of leaf surface and the arrangement of veins in a leaf, assisted by computer pattern analysis, are of great value in checking the affinities of species suspected of being closely related. According to Klucking (1988: 9), differences in leaf venation patterns are related to the ontogeny of a leaf, *i.e.* the development of its individual organisms. The ridges or veins which run across a leaf (as, for example, in Illustration 9 of a Ghost Gum leaf) indicate the position of conducting strands which carry sugar, amino acids and water. The vascular bundle

contains xylem (woody tissue) which is on top of the phloem (sieve tubes and companion cells, secretory cells, etc.) There is also usually some strengthening tissue as fibres on each side of a vein.

Secondary veins (those of second-degree strength that depart from the mid-rib, mid vein or primary vein) are of five types in the family Myrtaceae (Klucking 1989: 18-19). Both the primary and secondary veins in a eucalypt leaf blade may range from prominent to scarcely visible, but thick cells called fibres surround each vein. The lateral veins, which run from the mid-rib towards the edge of the leaf, terminate in an intramarginal vein that runs around the leaf, either close to, or some distance from, the edge. Depending on its width, the position of the intramarginal vein is a factor that can prevent the ripping and tearing of a leaf instrument during performance. Patten manicures it with scissors when he wants to produce high sounds, but leaves it intact for performances in lower keys.

Also of importance to leaf music is the fact that venation partly controls a leaf's rigidity, toughness and durability. Some leafists fold their instruments neatly in half at the mid-rib, which is usually raised above the leaf surface (hence the development of the term "folded-leaf whistle"). However, most simply make a small fold along one edge of the leaf and press it against the top or bottom lip.

### 5. The Contribution of the Cuticle to Leaf Durability

The cuticle is a colourless or transparent, non-living membrane which covers the lamina of a leaf like a waxy varnish to act as a bounding layer between the body of the plant and its environment. The cuticle is impervious to water (*i.e.* it waterproofs the plant), yet it permits gas exchange through many tiny pores called stomata (singular = stoma). The contribution of the cuticle to the well-being of a plant is significant because it functions as a smooth interceptor of wind, and protects the plant against physical abrasion by holding the cellular tissues compact and firm.

The musical suitability of a eucalypt leaf instrument is relative to the great diversity in the form and composition of cuticles because some are thin and fragile, whilst and others are thick and tough. The cuticle comes into direct contact with a leafist's lips - a very thick cuticle, for instance, helps to hold a vibrating leaf intact.[63] The outer layer of the cuticle is called the "catachouc" and it stretches as the leaf enlarges. Several eucalypts have a thin, rubbery catachouc that is only present when the leaf is very young, typified by the Western Australian Red-flowering Gum (*E. ficifolia*) and the *E. porrecta* (no common name) leaf introduced in Chapter 1. At the end of the wet season, the Mayali blow up the catachouc of the *E. porrecta* leaf (Plate 8) to produce musical notes, but as the leaf ages it is no longer useful for this function. The same probably holds for Swamp Bloodwood (*E. ptychocarpa*) leaf "whistle" (Plate 7).

Australian plants in particular have had to adapt to harsh climatic conditions, especially in the Central Desert where there is a high level of sclerophylly (vegetation with typical xeromorphic characters). Xerophytes are plants capable of living in dry conditions. The xeromorphic characters that help eucalypts to resist drought are abundant sclerenchyma,[64] a thick, tough cuticle, sunken stomata, and few air spaces. Stiff leaves do not wilt, because the fibres that develop around their vessels prevent excessive water loss.[65] Leaves that are stiff and contain many fibres tend to lose less water than those leaves lacking in fibres.

In the twentieth-century, the practice of gumleaf music - including both the Aboriginal gumleaf band tradition and the competitive solo tradition - has proliferated in the temperate southeast zone of the mainland. Desert eucalypt leaves are not usually suitable to play because they are so hard and tough, but leafists still adapt to their local foliage.[66]

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[63] *E. porrecta* is endemic to the Top End and does not have a common name (this is not unusual in northern Australia).

[64] Supporting or protective tissue, composed of thickened or hardened cells from which protoplasm has disappeared.

[65] In other areas, plants may even benefit from poorly developed cuticles by absorbing water from rain or dew.

[66] "The Day That Johnny Cash Came to Town", *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Newsletter* 1/3, June 1973: 33.

### 6. Leaf Moisture Content

The moisture content of a leaf is determined by (i) the process of transpiration (the more moisture present in the surface texture of leaves, the more the loss due to evaporation) and (ii) stomata resistance (which varies according to humidity and temperature, and has a bearing on vibration). The less moisture present in the leaf, the higher pitched the vibrating sound produced by the leaf. Similarly the higher proportion of fibres in the leaf, the stiffer the leaf and the more high pitched is the sound. This can be demonstrated by testing the pitch range of a leaf, then drying and pressing it and testing its range at a later date.

### 7. Essential Oils

One of the most characteristic features of the eucalypts is the presence of oil glands[67] in the leaves of all species;[68] it is the essential oils that give the characteristic scent when a leaf is crushed. When a large number of oil glands are present in a species, leafists experience a strong taste of resin after blowing only a few notes, with juvenile leaves exuding the strongest aroma. The oils in leaves are often to be found in glands that show as clear spots if the leaf is held up against the light (Cribb and Cribb 1981: 15). The number of oil glands per square centimetre of eucalypt leaf varies from species to species, with the more primitive species containing less oil.[69]

The oil in a Lemon-scented Gum leaf is rich in citronella,[70] and its lemon aroma is pleasant to the taste. The mature leaves are generally long and narrow to broadly lanceolate in shape; only sub-species that contain wider-shaped leaves are suitable for music-making.

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[67]Cineol or eucalyptol is a colorless liquid terpene ether ($C_{10}H_{18}O$).

[68]Acacias, by contrast, lack oil glands altogether.

[69]The type and quantity of oil glands in a leaf may have a bearing on its tone and timbre (see section on Yellow Box).

[70]Lemon-scented Gum leaves are often crushed for commercial use.

## PART 3: THE STATE-OF-PREFERENCE TEST

Taking the main physiological properties of eucalypt leaves into account, I devised and conducted a State-of-Preference Test (*i.e.* a test involving the techniques of psychological choice). My subjects were three expert leafists who (i) independently performed on sets of undisclosed leaf species in the same sound studio, (ii) commented on the suitability of each for music-making, and (iii) ultimately, chose the most suitable leaf instrument. Non-eucalypt leaves and preserved leaves were also tested because some leafists use them under performance conditions.

The original concept of the test underwent improved stages of development between its first implementation on 30 May 1994 and the final test conducted on 1 June 1995. As the experiment developed, I introduced a plastic leaf as a standard against which to compare the relative parameters of pitch, timbre and volume, taking into account the general need for a particular musical tessitura and preferred sound quality. The leaf specimens were sized and pressed, and their shapes tabulated in diagrams. Sections of some leaves were cut for botanical analysis. I then considered their respective timbres and pitch ranges in the light of their oil gland content and characteristic arrangement of veins.

Unfortunately, an optimal number of observations could not be made because the methodology associated with the various tests conducted was constrained by personal factors. It was not possible to test all leafists on the same day, or even during the same season of the year, thus a new set of leaves had to be used each time. Although several species were tested by all three subjects, each leaf needed to be considered as an individual musical instrument with respect to its age, size, shape, etc. In spite of these discrepancies, a similar test administered to champion leafist Wendy Eva on her farm at Tatura, Victoria on 10 August 1995 delivered the same result.[71] The methods and results of each test are outlined below.

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[71] Ryan (Tatura Vic 1995) RRC T8.

## TABLE 10: STATE-OF-PREFERENCE TEST 1 (RRC T16)

(conducted by Robin Ryan at 11 a.m., 30 May 1994 in the Monash University Sound Studio)
**Leafist:** Virgil Reutens (**Subject A**); **Recordist:** Ron Haymes; **Leaf Analyst:** Neil Hallam

### 1. EUCALYPT LEAF INSTRUMENT TEST

**Method:** The subject blows each leaf in turn, then chooses the most suitable instrument from each of four pairs of leaves. In a second round, the subject eliminates three of the remaining four species, thereby isolating the most ideal leaf for music-making. The identity of each leaf is withheld from the subject until after testing. The recorded parameters of the pitch, timbre and volume of each leaf instrument are then stored for comparative analysis.

| PAIRED SPECIES | SUBJECT A's COMMENTS |
|---|---|
| 1) **Lemon-scented Gum** (*E. citriodora*) | unsuitable for music; leaves too stiff and thin |
| 2) **Spotted Gum** (*E. maculata*) | high notes clear, low notes hard to execute |
| 3) **Yellow Box** (*E. melliodora*) | |
| (a) from Mt Eliza | high notes excellent |
| (b) from Monash campus | wide range; a soft but strong, pliable leaf which stretches like elastic |
| 4) **River Red Gum** (*E. camaldulensis*) | leaves too thin |
| 5) **Snow Gum** (*E. pauciflora*)[72] | unsuitable for music; splits easily due to brittleness |
| 6) **Red-flowering Gum** (*E. ficifolia*) | suitable for music making, but rather stiff |
| 7) **Sydney Blue Gum** (*E. saligna*) | takes a lot of effort to play; best. to choose soft leaves; high notes clear, low notes difficult to execute |
| 8) **Manna Gum** (*E. viminalis*) | high notes clear, low notes difficult to execute |

[72] A hardy cold country eucalypt, Snow Gum (White Sally, Cabbage Gum or Weeping Gum), is widely distributed in southeastern Australian open forests and woodland above 1200 metres, *e.g.* the high Gippsland plains (Adams 1981: 15).

## 2. NON-EUCALYPT LEAF TEST

| | |
|---|---|
| **Silver Wattle** (*Acacia dealbata*) | bipinnate leaves too thin and feathery to blow |
| **Sweet Pittosporum** (*Pittosporum undulatum*) | hard to find a suitably smooth leaf |
| **Camellia** (*Camellia japonica*) | not easy to play, too soft and could break; low notes good, high notes difficult to execute |
| **Lemon** (*Citrus limon*) | some leaves too rough and bumpy; serrated edges could be uncomfortable; need to look for smooth, flat leaves |
| **Pincushion Hakea** (*Hakea laurina*) | quite unsuitable for music; too thin |
| **Turpentine** (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) | a thick, stiff dorsiventral leaf; low notes difficult; slippery surface of leaf unsuitable (unlike the eucalypts, Turpentine has opposite leaves) |

The most suitable non-eucalypt leaf is then pitted against the most suitable eucalypt leaf.

**RESULT:** In the opinion of Subject A, Yellow Box is the most musically suitable of all fresh leaves tested in Experiment 1.

**Preserved Leaf Instrument Test:** an assortment of dried leaves is tested, assessed, and compared to the sounds of the fresh leaves.

**Plastic Leaf Instrument Test:** pieces of industrial plastic are cut to the shape of leaves (roughly the shape of the lips) being tested, and their sounds compared to genuine leaves.

**RESULT**: High notes were very easy to obtain on both the preserved and plastic leaves. Preserved leaves contain less moisture than fresh leaves and are therefore less dense. It is possible to produce a higher note with the same amount of tension. Likewise, if the plastic contains less mass per unit length than the fresh leaf, it will also produce a higher note than the fresh leaf under the same tension.[73]

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[73]It can be shown that the transverse wave velocity through a medium is proportional to the tension and inversely proportional to the mass per unit length of the medium (Halliday and Resnick 1963: 402).

## TABLE 11: STATE-OF-PREFERENCE TEST 2 (RRC T17)

(conducted by Robin Ryan at 10.40 a.m., 31 October, 1994, in the Monash University Sound Studio)

**Leafist:** Philip Elwood (**Subject B**); **Recordist:** Herbert Sunderland
**Comments on Acoustics:** Sinisa Djordjevic; **Leaf Analyst:** Neil Hallam

### 1. EUCALYPT LEAF INSTRUMENT TEST

**METHOD:** In addition to the steps carried out in Test 1, record the pitch range (highest and lowest tone) peculiar to each leaf blown. Listen back to the sounds of each leaf and compare the parameters of pitch, timbre and volume to that of the plastic leaf (the standard).

| PAIRED SPECIES | SUBJECT B's COMMENTS |
|---|---|
| 1) **Lemon-scented Gum** (*E. citriodora*) | too thin and stiff |
| 2) **Yellow Box** (*E. melliodora*) | beautiful mellow sound |
| 3) **Gippsland Mahogany** (*Bangalay*; *E. botryoides*) | not good for high notes |
| 4) **Red Ironbark** (*Mugga*; *E. sideroxylon*) | very wide range; trumpety tone colour |
| 5) **Red-flowering Gum** (*E. ficifolia*) | too tight and stiff, but emits a clear tone |
| 6) **Flooded Gum** (*Moitch*; *E. rudis*) | play on the round part of large leaves |
| 7) **Red Bloodwood** (*E. gummifera*) | better for high-range notes; has dorsiventral leaves, parallel veins, and a very prominent mid-rib |
| 8) **Bushy Yate** (*E. lehmannii*; a mallee) | branch contained juvenile, mid-range and adult isobilateral leaves. The juvenile leaves split too easily and the mature leaves are too thick and leathery |

## 2. NON-EUCALYPT LEAF INSTRUMENT TEST: using the lemon leaf as a standard

| | |
|---|---|
| 1) **Cumquat** (*Fortunella sp.*) | emits a higher-pitched sound than lemon but some leaves are too small to play |
| 2) **Camellia** (*Camellia japonica*) | a two-note chord was produced (similar to a split reed on a saxophone); one note from both the lips and the leaf, and the other as air escaped from the leaf. This may have been caused by overblowing[74] |
| 3) **Rose** (*Rosa macrantha*) | a soft beginner's leaf, but likely to snap; best to place serrated edge under the top lip |
| 4) **Turpentine** (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) | a thick, stiff leaf with wavy margins; underside covered with rusty hairs; sound varied from clear to muffled |
| 5) **Common Fig** (*Ficus carica*) | Subject B chose a rounded section of this large lobed leaf to work around, but it didn't taste good. In addition, the leaf's underside was too rough and furry |
| 6) **Privet** (*Ligustrum lucidum*) | very soft; good for beginners |

**RESULT:** Although Subject B thought some leaves were excellent for beginners, the lemon leaf emerged as the most suitable sound tool. All of these non-native leaves are dorsiventral.

**Plastic Leaf Instrument Test**: method as in Test 1

**Preserved Leaf Instrument Test**: method as in Test 1

**RESULT**: A far higher pitch range is attainable on plastic and preserved leaves than on fresh leaves, but a different technique is required on the part of the practitioner. Whereas a eucalypt leaf may be played with one hand, two hands are required to control a plastic leaf.

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[74] At Djordjevic's suggestion, Subject B attempted to play two leaves at once, but this proved too difficult.

## TABLE 12: STATE-OF-PREFERENCE TEST 3

(RRC T18; Tape Example 20; tape runs out before completion of test)

(conducted by Robin Ryan at 10.00 a.m., 1 June, 1995, in the Monash University Sound Studio)
**Leafist:** Herbert Patten (**Subject C**); **Recordist:** Ben Webb; **Leaf Analyst:** Neil Hallam

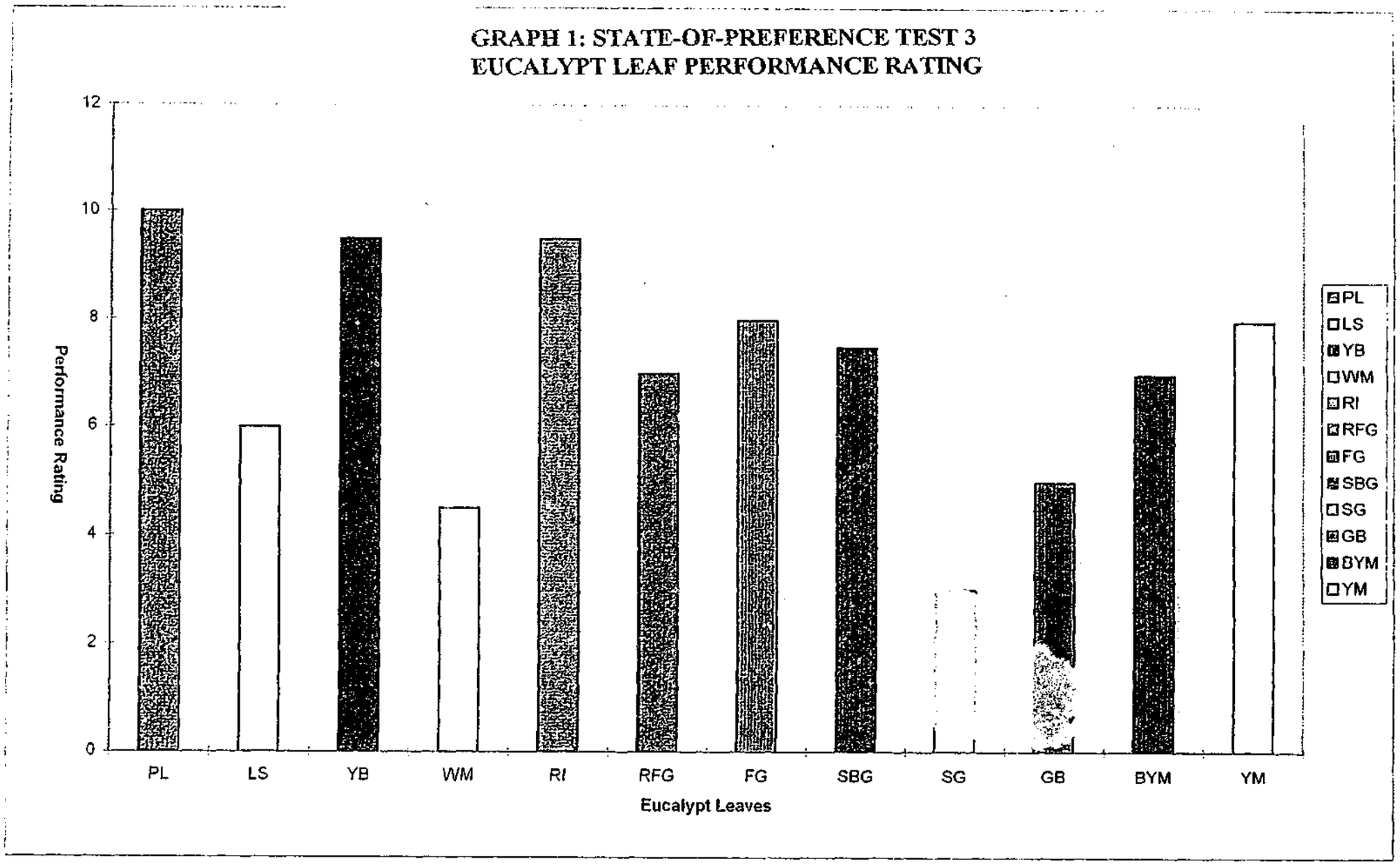
### 1. EUCALYPT LEAF INSTRUMENT TEST

**METHOD**: Use industrial plastic cut to the shape of a leaf (roughly the shape of the lips) as a standard, and compare its sound (10/10) to that of selected eucalypt leaves. All plastic "leaf" instruments of the same size, cut from the same sheet of plastic, can be regarded as standard, unlike natural leaves, which even if plucked from the same plant are prone to enormous variability in age, shape and size between the stages of old- and new-growth. Find the lowest and highest notes on the plastic leaf, and record a tune on it. Test each eucalypt leaf in the same way, comparing each to the plastic leaf. Plot results on a colour graph.

| EUCALYPT SPECIES | CODE | RATING (scale of 10) |
|---|---|---|
| **Plastic Leaf** (good range of high notes) | **PL** | 10 |
| 1) **Lemon-scented Gum** (*E. citriodora*)<br>very thin "emergency leaf" for small sounds<br>(*e.g.* "blue" notes); not high-pitched, nice tone | **LS** | 6 |
| 2) **Yellow Box** (*E. melliodora*)<br>flexible, pliable & durable (lasts for 3-4 songs);<br>mild taste compared to most eucalypts | **YB** | 9½ |
| 3) **White Mahogany** (*E. triantha*)<br>"emergency leaf" only;<br>requires too much pressure on lips | **WM** | 4½<br>(assessed after<br>taped section) |
| 4) **Red Ironbark** (*E. sideroxylon*)<br>excellent; a strong, trumpety sound | **RI** | 9½ |
| 5) **Red-flowering Gum** (*E. ficifolia*)<br>thick, strong and sturdy (requiring extra<br>pressure); dubbed the "tuba of leaves" | **RFG** | 7 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6) **Flooded Gum** (*Moitch*; *E. rudis*)<br>has a plastic covering (flaws show up);<br>Subject C wouldn't use this leaf, although<br>it is sometimes played in WA | **FG** | 8 |
| 7) **Sydney Blue Gum** (*E. saligna*)<br>very brittle, splits easily; play rounded part | **SBG** | **7½** |
| 8) **Snow Gum** (*E. pauciflora*)<br>not an ideal leaf, as it splits easily;<br>trumpety timbre (the thicker<br>the leaf, the deeper the sound) | **SG** | 3<br>(re-assessed after<br>taped section of test) |
| 9) **Grey Box** (*E. microcarpa*)<br>very thick, round leaf of the "tuba" category;<br>good for birdcalls, but limited higher range | **GB** | 5 |
| 10) **Bushy Yate** (*E. lehmannii*)<br>a mallee sapling covered with white powder;<br>thin and flexible, but could split easily | **BYM** | 7 |
| 11) **Yellow Mallee** (*E. incrassata*)<br>for a good sound, pick juvenile leaves and<br>play them within the first few hours | YM | 8 |

**RESULT:** The Yellow Box leaf had a distinct edge over the Red Ironbark leaf and the plastic leaf. When blowing a plastic leaf, Subject C relies on his own saliva, which soon dries up. The plastic becomes hot and dry; excessive playing causing a burning sensation in his mouth and blisters and calluses may form under his lip. Subject C would need three eucalypt leaves to furnish the same number of tunes played on one plastic leaf. Although it is thinner than a eucalypt leaf, a plastic leaf is stronger and therefore does not crack or fray. A leafist can exert more control over the notes to obtain an "in-pitch" sound, *i.e.* less "white noise" is produced than with natural leaves. The relative performance rating for eucalypt leaves is represented more clearly in Graph 1, using the leaf codes above.


GRAPH 1: STATE-OF-PREFERENCE TEST 3
EUCALYPT LEAF PERFORMANCE RATING
Performance Rating
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
PL
LS
YB
WM
RI
RFG
FG
SBG
SG
GB
BYM
YM
Eucalypt Leaves
PL
LS
YB
WM
RI
RFG
FG
SBG
SG
GB
BYM
YM

## 2. NON-EUCALYPT LEAF INSTRUMENT TEST (lemon leaf (10/10) = the standard)

**Note:** All of these leaves are dorsiventral. According to Subject C, lemon leaves are similar in flexibility to eucalypt leaves, but oilier. As one applies pressure to produce high notes on a lemon leaf, it weakens and frays and sometimes a whole crack may develop, in which case one needs to exert extra pressure, or exchange sides.

| NON-EUCALYPT LEAVES | CODE | PERFORMANCE RATING |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Lemon (*Citrus limon*) | LL | 10 |
| 2) **Wandering Jew** (*Tradescantia sp.*) Subject C has blown this leaf many times in gardens; it is small and fragile, and splits easily, but he rates it 10/10 for a teaching leaf, because it is soft | WJ | 5½ |
| 3) **Camellia** (*Camellia japonica*) too brittle, and its serrated edge could also pull on the lip. (note: W. McLaughlin of Sydney plays softer Camellia leaves) | CL | 2 |
| 4) **Rose** (*Rosa macrantha*) Subject C is wary of the serrated edge, giving it 10/10 as a teaching leaf, even though it can split easily | RL | 5 |
| 5) **Turpentine** (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) Subject C allocated 10 for its look, comfortable feel and texture; a good "stand-by leaf" which is reliable in both low and high pitch ranges | TL | 10 |
| 6) **Common Fig** (*Ficus carica*) irregular-shaped lobed leaf; too thin to obtain a full tone, although a pleasant note was obtained from a fresh leaf | FL | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7) **Variegated Periwinkle** (*Vinca major*) shaped like a thin wafer; a beginner's leaf only, so must be blown within an hour of picking | **VP** | 2½ |
| 8) **Sweet or Common Violet** (*Viola odorata*) a furry, feathery feel minimises usefulness in music-making; there is a fine line between splitting the leaf and obtaining the type of sound one wants | **VL** | 3 |
| 9) **Black Bamboo** (*Phyllostachys nigra*) tested in the Phonetics Laboratory, the actual sound rates 10/10, but due to its parallel venation the leaf folds over too much; blow on it sideways after folding it in the other direction to stop air from escaping | **BL** | 10 |

**RESULT**: As shown in Graph 2 (see leaf codes above), Turpentine and Black Bamboo were rated the same as the lemon leaf. The Turpentine leaf is equivalent to the lemon leaf in toughness.

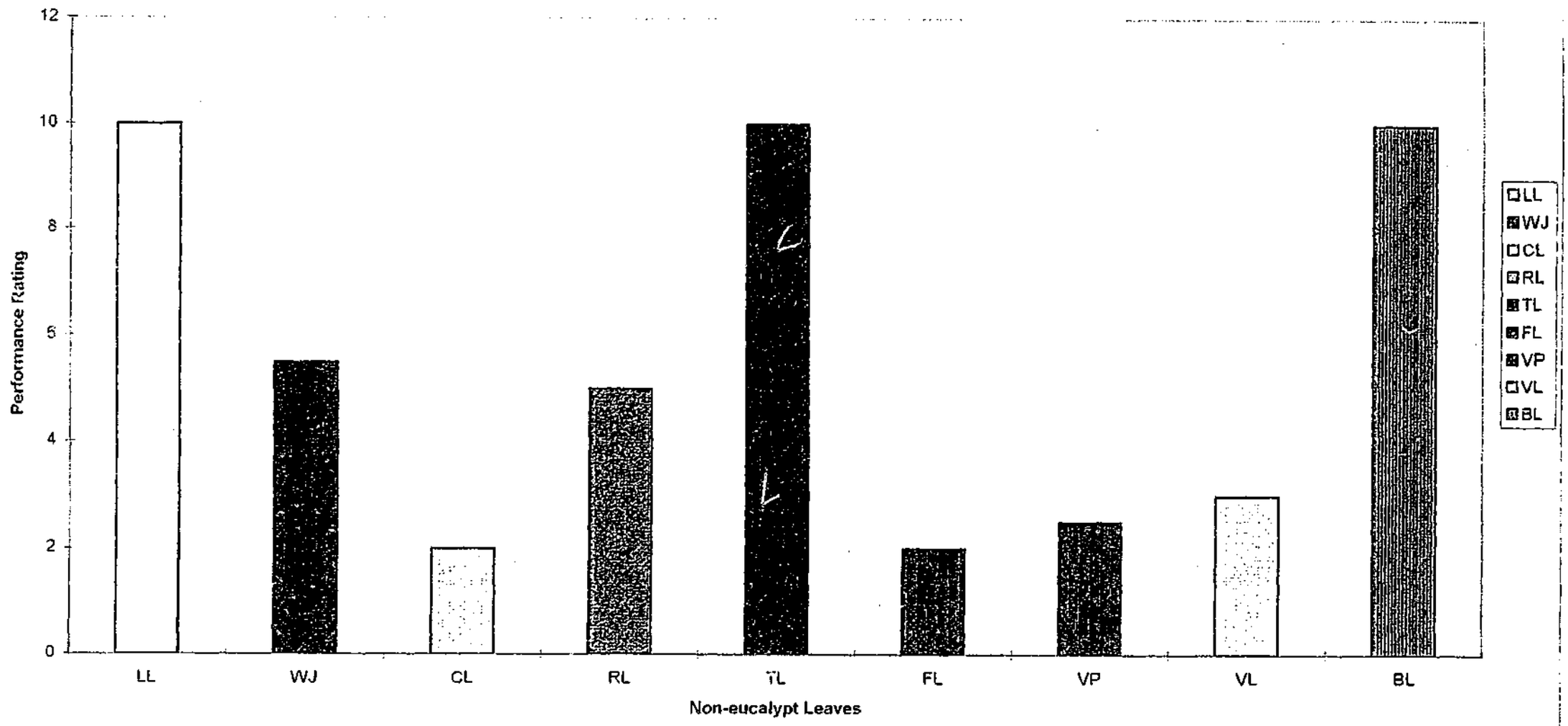
**Preserved Leaf Test:** Method as in Tests 1 and 2.

**RESULT**: As for Tests 1 and 2.

* * * * * *

Microscopy complemented the State-of-Preference Test findings. Table 12 summarises the relevant physiological aspects of the eight representative leaf instrument samples that Neil Hallam analysed on 30 May 1994.

**GRAPH 2: STATE-OF-PREFERENCE TEST 3**
**NON-EUCALYPT LEAF PERFORMANCE RATING**



## TABLE 13: MICROSCOPE ANALYSIS OF EIGHT POTENTIAL LEAF INSTRUMENTS

| SPECIES | COMMENTS ON STRUCTURE |
|---|---|
| **River Red Gum** (*E. camaldulensis*) | isobilateral; very thick intramarginal vein; palisade cells appear right across the leaf; more stomata and smaller veins than Turpentine |
| **Snow Gum** (*E. pauciflora*) | many oil glands, larger than those of River Red Gum but not as numerous; flat, smooth surface shines like River Red Gum; "parallel venation" (small/ small/ small/ large/vein pattern); rich in woody fibre and tissue but splits easily due to brittleness |
| **Lemon-scented Gum** (*E. citriodora*) | similar to River Red Gum in all features except the venation pattern, which is totally different; very thin intramarginal vein and islands of veins between chlorophyll cells; small oil glands close to both surfaces in equal numbers |
| **Manna Gum** (*E. viminalis*) | oil glands sparsely distributed |
| **Red-flowering Gum** (*E. ficifolia*) | markedly dorsiventral (underside a much paler green); prickly, convoluted spicular cuticle on the lower surface; oil glands large, few and far between; extensive band of palisade; irregular mesophyll cells |
| **Sydney Blue Gum** (*E. saligna*) | isobilateral; thick cuticles; uniform epidermal cells; veins protrude; few air spaces; very thin intramarginal vein; small oil glands, similar distribution to River Red Gum but not as numerous |
| **Yellow Box** (*E. melliodora*) | comparatively few oil glands; low cineol content and a large number of air spaces; thin, papery-soft texture; veins densely reticulate (disposed like the threads of a net); wide intramarginal vein |
| **Turpentine** (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) | dorsiventral, very thick intramarginal vein; fewer stomata than River Red Gum; upper cuticle thicker than lower cuticle |

## CONCLUSION

As an old, yet newly documented subdivision of both ethnomusicology and ethnobotany, the study of plant music requires that a researcher be both culturally informed and scientifically rigorous in his/her approach to documenting folk knowledge. The present study of Australian leaf instruments points to the scope that exists for the collection of more solid data about the plants, people and environments respectively. The burden of integrating such data is yet in its infancy.

The suitability of indigenous plant species for music-making is determined by wide climatic variations across Australia and seasonal variation in the old- and new-growth of foliage. Eucalypts make up the greatest number of native leaf instruments, although various other native leaves have been used. In Aboriginal Australia the natural environment imposes constraints on the choice and cultural use of leaf instruments in coastal, outback and rainforest regions respectively. Selection depends on the natural distribution of species, and in the past it may also have been determined by factors such as seasonal human migration, intertribal communication, ethnobotanical use of plants, and folklore restrictions on leaves. The Wallaga Lake leaf bandsmen selected high-pitched "bone leaves" from Gulaga, the sound of which determined their aesthetic preference.

Drastic changes in post-contact vegetational habitats are reflected in the species selections of non-Aboriginal leafists, who do not possess the same attachment to native Australian leaf instruments as Aborigines. They invariably experiment with all kinds of introduced leaves.

General principles of leaf selection hold fast. Allowing for degrees of individual preference, one should choose a leaf with a clean, smooth edge, much the same shape as the mouth.[75]

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[75]The shape of many of the leaves which players use is strikingly similar to the shape of the human lips.

Lanceolate, ovate, orbicular (round) and elliptically shaped leaves contain curves that fit neatly and comfortably against the lips. A leaf instrument should be neither too thick nor too thin; pliability and suppleness are an advantage as a tough, dry or brittle leaf splits too easily. Some species of soft, moist leaves may split easily, and are prone to slip and slide on the lips. Juvenile (new-growth) leaves fall into this category; therefore intermediate leaves are ideal.

Constraints taken into account, the test pointed to several species-specific leaf characteristics that deserve consideration, even though it was preliminary in nature. Due to practical restrictions, many species were not included in this experiment. Another study might concentrate on eucalypts from WA such as the Jarrah, Karri, Marri and Flooded Gum, or non-eucalypt native leaf instruments such as the Kurrajong, Bush Lemon, and various native figs. The following factors, some of which govern the flexibility and durability of a leaf instrument, ultimately determine the potential quality of leaf music performance:

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) age | preferably an intermediate leaf |
| (b) morphology (shape and size) | preferably mouth-shaped and isobilateral |
| (c) blade condition | preferably rounded and smooth rather than notched |
| (d) texture | preferably neither too thick nor too thin |
| (e) venation | controls leaf rigidity, toughness and durability |
| (f) cuticle thickness | must be thick enough to hold a vibrating leaf intact |
| (g) moisture content | a factor affecting vibration |
| (h) relative number of oil glands | preferably fewer for comfortable palatability |

**FIGURE 5: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE QUALITY OF LEAF MUSIC**

The most fundamental advance gained from this study is botanical explanation for the popularity of Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) leaves amongst champion Australian leafists. Three subjects, all tested independently under laboratory conditions, selected the lanceolate Yellow Box leaf (see light microscope section, Figure 6) as their preferred instrument amongst those tested, as did an ex-champion subjected to a similar test on her country farm.

The low cineol content of the Yellow Box contributes to its palatability, its large number of air spaces to its lightness, and its thin texture to its elasticity and dependability in the upper pitch range. Yellow Box leaves are thinner than a lot of other eucalypt leaves, but stretch like elastic because they are both strong and flexible. Depending on age and season, they match the softness of paper in consistency even though they are strong. The leaves of the other eucalypt species tested by three subjects proved to be less durable sound generators.

Yellow Box leaves are easy to transport, comfortable to play, have a pleasing timbre, and allow scope for wide-ranging tunes. They are unmatched for pliability, and usually have mouth-shaped curves on opposite extremes of the leaf. Red Ironbark leaves, by contrast, are fairly soft and easy to blow, but not as durable as Yellow Box leaves. They become thinner as they get older, sometimes even as one plays them, whereas Yellow Box leaves retain a good shape throughout a performance. Because they are so reliable, Philip Elwood calls them his "Stradileaves".

The preliminary experiments outlined in this chapter indicate that a more detailed scientific examination of the pitch range and timbre of leaf instrument species could be fruitful. Notwithstanding the fact that human factors impinge on leaf playing as much as - and probably even more than - the morphological characters and physiological reactions of leaves, those striving to master such a difficult instrument could benefit from familiarising themselves with the relevant supporting facts of leaf physiology.

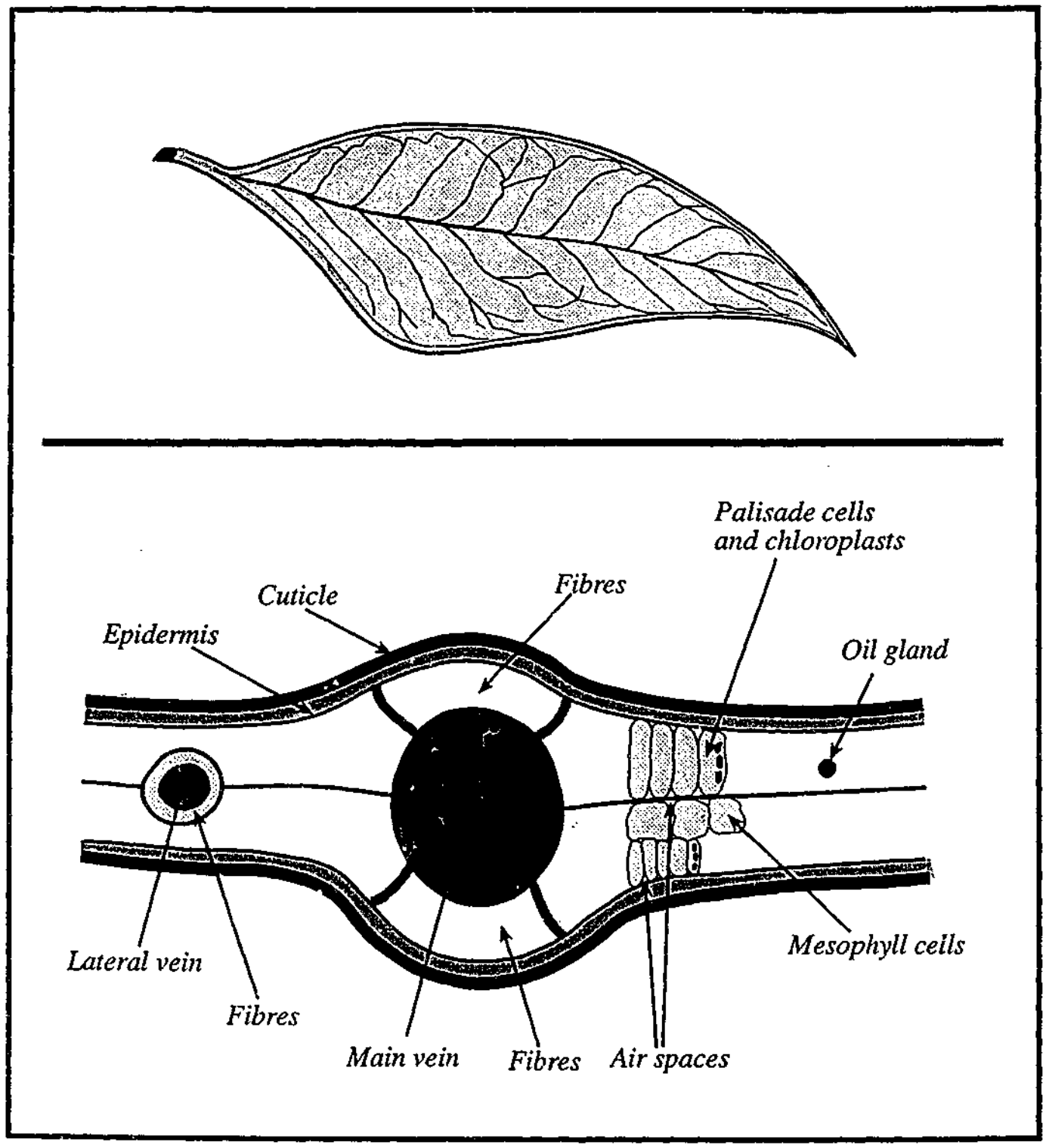


**FIGURE 6: LIGHT MICROSCOPE SECTION OF A YELLOW BOX (*E. melliodora*) LEAF (diagrammatic)**

# CONCLUSION

## RELEAFING THE TREES

The history of the "gumleaf music culture" associated with the Aboriginal tradition of leaf playing must be interpreted through an understanding of the key dynamics and changes that have shaped this history, most notably the social, economic, political and music-stylistic. Fluid concepts of tradition and ownership permeate the documented processes of the transmission, exchange and appropriation of gumleaf music. Consideration of the unique botanical properties of Australian native leaves is also pertinent, yet even so the depth of understanding required for this interpretation must include the development of perspectives beyond those offered by academic institutions. Indigenous spiritual, Christian, and secular musical forces have all worked together to shape a unique Aboriginal sound aesthetic for which there is no other counterpart.

A simple leaf reed aerophone constitutes one of the oldest soundmakers available to humankind in a natural form. Unlike a whistle, which has no moving parts, leaves are subject to far more variations in shape than conventional instruments as they couple with the human organs of lips, tongue and soft palate. One simple acoustic model accounts for what happens when a leaf is blown, regardless of the size, shape and texture of the leaf or the manner in which it is folded, held and blown. However there is scope for further research into the characteristics of the leaf as a sound generator, for example various species could be analysed in relation to their pitch range, timbre, and potential for the execution of idiosyncratic leaf performance techniques.

In Australia, specialist use is made of a gamut of eucalypt leaves characterised by individual timbres. The processes by which practitioners select leaves and perform music on them depends on biodiversity and the ecological disparities of climate and season, as well as personal adaptability to the leaf medium. An analogy drawn between past and present soundscapes has allowed the first step to be made in classifying native leaf instruments according to Aboriginal clan habitat and environmental variability. However further fieldwork, enhanced by ethnobotanical readings on the various plants, people and

environments, is needed to elicit native classifications of instruments, including the leaf instrument, in different Aboriginal communities.

The suitability of indigenous plant species for music-making is determined by wide climatic variations across Australia and seasonal variation in the old- and new-growth of foliage. Eucalypts comprise the greatest number of native leaf instruments used, although various other native leaves have been used. In addition to human creativity, the sonic capabilities of a leaf instrument depend on the strength and limitations associated with its physical and chemical structure, in particular its age, morphology, texture, venation, moisture content, and quantity of oil glands and air spaces. These factors partly contribute to a musician's choice or rejection of a leaf as an instrument as well as its potential hazards.

Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) leaves are favoured amongst champions because of their flexibility and durability. Microscopic botanical analysis on a section of a Yellow Box leaf confirmed its low cineol content (the reason for its palatability), while a large number of air spaces contributed to its lightness, and thinness of texture to its elasticity and dependability in the upper range. Juvenile Yellow Box leaves match the softness and consistency of paper, even though they are strong sound generators.

Although often dismissed as an ephemeral cultural item, *i.e.* the humble means by which marginalised Aboriginal people performed unnotated popular music, the gumleaf is actually a live, dynamic instrument in the service of those whose lives it reflects and whose dignity it celebrates.

Many Aborigines and non-Aborigines perceive gumleaf playing to be an activity based on known precedents and models which have been passed on repeatedly in a relatively fixed form. Orally derived information gathered to date indicates that the Aboriginal people of southeastern Australia regard the gumleaf as a "traditional" instrument. It is closely associated with the reinforcement and reconstruction of Aboriginal cultural identity because it supplies meaning at both the personal and clan level. For some musicians, gumleaf playing is even a predestined talent and symbol of identity.

Considering the time-span of Aboriginal occupation of the island continent, it would be presumptuous for non-Aboriginal academics to cursorily "write off", or underestimate, the

use of leaf material as a pre-colonial sound producer in the Aboriginal societies. Many post-contact Aborigines have blown native leaves in cultural and/or economic interaction with the natural environment, as part of their longstanding ethnobotanical uses of the same. Seven solutions for the historical roots of leaf blowing in Australia were explored, including descriptions of a gumleaf instrument blown in a traditional ritual context at the start of the twentieth century. Duncan-Kemp's writings imply that this practice was disseminated by leafists in the itinerant *Wannameeri* (Red Ochre Party) which travelled the trade routes via the Channel Country of southwest Queensland.

Taken together, these seven solutions elevate the activity of gumleaf playing above and beyond quasi-indigenous cultural status, although notions of so-called "authenticity" are now more constructively centred in the leaf instrument's potential for projecting indigenous identity and conveying political messages.

Yet in consideration of the fact that it is normal for musical change to result from culture contact, the history of gumleaf music can be defensibly conceptualised in either one, or a combination of two cultural continuums, according to how, why, when and by whom it was found meaningful and transmitted. For example, both the first Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal solo leafists received wide exposure through the mechanism of itinerant evangelistic outreach in the first decade of the twentieth-century. From then on, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leafists operated both independently and in tandem (*i.e.* there was some cross-cultural transmission of the practice).

The two histories impinged on each other through a crystallisation process that threw the material and social conditions of each cultural group into relief. At the end of the twentieth-century, we are now in a better position to conceptualise gumleaf music as a tradition which has been transculturated from both ends of the spectrum, *i.e.* each culture directly influenced the other by contributing those elements of leaf playing which musicians had developed with the greatest degree of specialisation. A focus on southeastern Aboriginal Australia facilitated the historicisation of six periods in the history of gumleaf music.

A curious double adoption of the leaf instrument took place in the second half of the nineteenth-century, possibly earlier. Further research into the Lutheran experience of

gumleaf playing may eventually solve the mystery of why South Australia furnishes the earliest location to which tangible evidence of leaf playing amongst both settlers and Aboriginal people can (so far) be ascribed. The one-handed leaf grip used by shepherds in Germany resembled the "traditional method" used by some Aboriginal bandsmen in the 1920s and 1930s. If it could be proved that some South Australian Lutheran settlers had previously played leaves in their Prussian hometowns, then it would follow that leaf music became "White Australian" by importation. Meantime, we can safely assume that the gumleaf was (re)introduced to Aboriginal people in SA as an instrument on which singable European tunes could be played - probably in the late nineteenth-century when the instrument had outworn its economic usefulness amongst Lutheran settlers.

A so-called "eucalyptus band" emerged in the context of a Salvation Army march in outback SA in 1892, furnishing the earliest written source on this topic. The roots of the ensemble phenomenon probably stemmed from earlier contact between Aborigines and missionaries; and the possibility that Aboriginal people were coerced to form gumleaf ensembles should not be discounted.

Late nineteenth-century gumleaf performance was oppositional to the predominant colonial aesthetic; general rejection of the genre left a vacuum or space in which Aboriginal musicians on the outskirts of society were free to develop their own syntheses of the medium. With their natural mimicking skills, they quickly adjusted to playing European tunes on native leaves; their approach to musical sound already issuing from an alfresco culture. Another reason for them to have embraced the challenge enthusiastically lay in the key locus of their longstanding aesthetic, *i.e.* ceremony (an essentially demonstrative social medium).

Scattered, yet substantial evidence indicates that the geographical prevalence of a leaf instrument that extended from its populous base in coastal NSW inland into the wet and dry areas of Queensland, Victoria and SA was more widespread than previously assumed. The activity of leaf playing was disseminated by stockworkers as well as the missionaries who made frequent use of gumleaf ensembles in church services. Aborigines have busked in country towns and cities since at least the 1920s, and in northern NSW at least two leafists persist with this activity today.

Both contradictions and recurring themes emerged in the reinterpretation of this history across culture. For one thing, non-Aboriginal interests and expectations usually contributed to representations of the gumleaf band as a point of articulation between the two societies. From the elitist viewpoint of some city dwellers, leaf playing was a rustic signifier of the material poverty of detribalised Aboriginal lifestyles. Yet for the people themselves, participation in gumleaf ensembles added an intangible richness and spontaneity to life which defied their social living conditions and called into question the value of material gain as a social end. Leaf playing may be interpreted as a link between the Aboriginal leafist's quest for "selfhood" in the midst of "otherness".

The main sociohistorical processes associated with gumleaf playing have been transmission and appropriation. Patten, Boston, Dungay and Thorpe are all presently engaged in transmitting gumleaf playing skills to subsequent generations. A successful example of apprenticeship can be seen in the case of Patten's protegé Jarrod Atkinson, who, like Patten, is taking on a traditional musician's role by drawing on the instrument's past repertoire - including a small number of traditional tunes from various clans, Aboriginal folk/country songs, hymns and war songs. Some non-Aboriginal Australians in the twentieth-century have tailored the skills taught them by Aboriginal leaf bandsmen to suit their own cultural contexts. Most notably, contemporary Aboriginal leafists have appropriated gumleaf music as a resource for nativistic revival.

In short, the half-century long tradition of the Aboriginal gumleaf band demonstrates the incumbent pattern of transculturation and the Aboriginal people's response to it. Although many leafists, *e.g.* Peter Wandy, emerged as the star pupils of a paternalistic mission culture, most leaf bands were isolated from the rest of the Australian population and only a small number toured the eastern and southern seaboards. The main centre for the dispersal of the tradition in southeastern Australia was Wallaga Lake, NSW, followed by Lake Tyers, Victoria, and Cummeragunga, NSW.

As a result of the processes of culture contact during the "missionary music period", Aborigines under compulsion substituted Western musical repertoires for traditional songs and dances. As these were incorporated into their oral music-making, some musicians adapted tunes to suit the pitch ranges and idiomatic qualities of leaf instruments. In the "touring gumleaf band period" which began in the late 1910s, some characteristically

Aboriginal leaf techniques emerged as the result of Aboriginal creative endeavour. Classical trills, jazz "blue" notes and wa-was were definitely of introduced origin, but it is not yet possible to say whether the techniques of sliding between notes (common in both Western and non-Western music), wobbling, and playing the leaf "no hands" emerged indigenously or by introduction. Likewise, the pulsating leaf vibrato favoured by Aboriginal leafists could owe its origins to the "shaky voice" technique of traditional singing, music played on the saw with a violin bow, or the "jungle" sounds peculiar to the "novelty jazz" of the 1920s.

The previous cultural and musical conditioning of individual leaf bandsmen determined the aesthetic of their prevailing musicianship. The autonomous WLGB of NSW developed more creative freedom than bands confined to mission stations, with some lively traits of their performance behaviour defying stereotypical perceptions. Although exclusively Western (and mostly secular) in nature, the bandsmen's repertoire retained the use of clapsticks and traditional tribal steps. The relationship of gumleaf music to other aspects of living culture was evident; some aspects of the Aboriginal gumleaf performance tradition still reflect the social and environmental principles of Aboriginal culture - not merely those traits which have been adopted and adapted from foreign models.

The LTGB manifested a new vernacular model for Aboriginal musical culture in east Gippsland. The practice of leaf ensemble playing was introduced to Lake Tyers by the Stewart brothers of Wallaga Lake around 1917, after which it was mediated by church and government officials. The performance behaviour of the Lake Tyers bandsmen did not reflect any specific aspects of Kurnai musical or artistic heritage.

The zenith of popularity of gumleaf bands straddled the 1920s jazz era and the 1930s Depression, with some bands persisting into the 1940s due to economic need. Portrayed by entrepreneurs and film directors as picture-postcard versions of a make-believe past, leaf bands became an anachronism that reinforced White perceptions of Black Australia as an underdog category. Both the WLGB and the LTGB were exploited as national commodities and the showcased subjects of tinsel tourism. Army officials regulated the Lake Tyers outfit tightly during World War II, after which the leaf bandsmen fragmented into casually grouped quartets, trios and duos.

Typical twentieth-century performance contexts for the non-Aboriginal leaf tradition included stage shows, Amateur Hours and competitions, harmonica bands and dance bands, fairs and shows, bush bands and busking. From 1977-1997, the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship operated on an annual basis in Maryborough, Victoria, providing a focus for enthusiastic leafists from around the country. One contestant had learnt the gumleaf from Salvation Army Captain Mudgee Robertson in 1900; at least a dozen others had learnt from Aborigines, beginning with Walter McLaughlin in 1922. No firm evidence exists for any nineteenth-century Black-White transmission of the activity.

Due to the relative historical youth of this research, patience will be required on the part of future researchers who attempt to put the remaining pieces of the mosaic into place. The late nineteenth-century silence in the historical sequence between the Lutheran adoption of the gumleaf instrument and the Salvation Army's appropriation of the same remains to be filled, as does the missionary provenance of the instrument prior to 1892. Fieldwork in SA could prove fruitful on many counts. According to Map 2, the majority of Aboriginal leafists of the twentieth-century lived in NSW, but the story of leaf music in Queensland is still vastly under-researched. By the same token, a wider field of leaf instrument usage could still be unearthed in the NT, WA and Tasmania.

Although gumleaf music is a reinvigorating antidote for some of the more alienating popular music of today, it is not a form of musical expression free from commercialism in the form of casino promotions and food sales on and offshore. By the mid-1990s, it had become largely dependent on media promotion for its survival. As Stubington (1987: 7) noted, if a sound is to reach a market it must either be fixed by a sound recorder and processed into a commercial product, or the musician himself must be transported to the market.

The gumleaf carries deep symbolism as an environmental, aromatic and sonic icon, although the epithet "Australian" is often applied in a restrictive way which trivialises the beauty of leaf playing, and compromises Aboriginal society. Some gumleaf competitions have been the location of conflicting positions (both explicit and implicit) in which ownership of the tradition has become an issue. By its very nature, competition is basically at odds with the Aboriginal person's use of the gumleaf as a regenerated icon or referent for his/her culture. The Aboriginal person's chance of attaining success in sporting competitions is far greater because sporting results are not linked to value judgements.

Gumleaf sounds "belong" to Australia; their stereotype has become a common site for the nation's need for icons. As an example of the gumleaf's relocation in consumption, Clemenger Melbourne's 1995 muesli bar commercial exposed various subtleties that exist behind the encroachment of gumleaf playing upon an essentially conservative music industry. Desensitised by urban culture, the gumleaf is now a site of appropriation for nationalist assertion of a monochromatic set of Australianist values based on a semi-mythical bush tradition.

At the other end of the spectrum, the current manipulation model of the Aboriginal political movement is characterised by an idealistic attempt to recapture the remembrance of a whole culture, including the concept of the nurturing earth that preceded land degradation. In the tribal lifestyle, the relations between Aboriginal people, plants and animals had involved the spirit world, with the leaves of some of the trees which grew on sacred ground often being regarded as the essence of the sacred site itself. Blown leaves have thus become palpable tools for reinforcing clan affiliations, and an implicit statement of local identity.

As a symbol of the land and a means of personal expression, leaf instruments facilitate a spiritual reconnection with the earth; for one thing they carry with them associations with specific birds and links with some of the social activities and art forms mentioned in the foregoing chapters. Aboriginal leafists are their people's spiritual representatives, thereby creating new images, symbols, metaphors and mythologies by emphasising some of the past paradigms (*e.g.* the gumleaf band) which enabled them to survive. These are all valuable means for rescuing gumleaf playing from the irreversible engulfment of the new hegemonic order.

The driving agenda of the nation's two leading Aboriginal leafists therefore consists of showcasing the gumleaf as a regenerated referent for indigenous culture. Herbert Patten uses birdcalls to produce identifiably native Australian sounds in his various performances and talks, whereas Roseina Boston connects her gumleaf sounds with the beautiful natural environment of the Nambucca district. An increasing sophistication and heightened sense of their own position as artists has enabled these leafists to translate complex responses to Aboriginal culture into elements of their own vision of things.

The contradictions which exist between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal gumleaf traditions have been manifest in markedly different attitudes towards leaf instruments themselves. The manner in which an Aboriginal leafist performs is influenced by the patterns of his/her culture and the behavioural processes that he/she has learnt as an individual member of it. Performances of leaf music can therefore only be fully understood in the light of cultural relativism.

As a cultural group, non-Aborigines are already confident of their identity within the dominant society; and so there is no need for them to associate extramusical meaning to such ephemeral instruments as leaves. There is no strong evidence that they conduct any deep communion with the environment whilst playing leaves, which they select from the large range of introduced as well as native flora. The notion that "gumleaf music" is a uniquely Australian activity tends to override the fact that citrus leaf instruments have also enjoyed popularity amongst both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal musicians.

The Australian Gumleaf Playing Competition (1977-1997) facilitated the continuation of gumleaf music, but detracted from the character of leaf music as an Aboriginal cultural activity. The gumleaf's voice as an authentic vernacular instrument is stifled in the "contested ground" context, since leafists gradually, if somewhat unconsciously, adapt their performances to suit standardised European-based criteria.

A dearth of early nineteenth-century sources on this topic makes it impossible to gauge the extent to which contemporary Aboriginal leafists manifest their own modified extensions of ancient systems of leaf playing from the pre-contact period. What can be said with certainty is that they have retained some performance elements from the missionary music period, the touring gumleaf band period, and the post-war dissemination period. During contests, some of these elements stood out in relief when Aboriginal leafists performed the same annual compulsory tunes as non-Aboriginal leafists. Most notably, they included extroverted body language, a penchant for loud dynamics, some tonal ambiguity, and a slower pace of delivery with long pauses between phrases. The so-called "gumleaf jazz" style has tended to assimilate other styles by shaping them to its own image.

The cross-cultural model for the performance behaviour associated with leaf playing should be useful to the adjudicators who set criteria at gumleaf competitions. With

attitudes shaped by eurocentric musical conditioning, they have generally lacked understanding of, or appreciation for, the worth of the Aboriginal musical aesthetic or the notion that those idiosyncratic features of performance practice which most readily distinguish Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal leafists are all culturally determined.

What, then, would ensure the continuing revival of a vigorous, indigenous gumleaf music tradition? Firstly, the remaining handful of dedicated proponents must endorse the cultural continuity of gumleaf music through solidarity and a coordinated approach. Secondly, Aboriginal communities need to provide supportive audiences to revive such a pastime; gumleaf playing has virtually come to a standstill in many of the locations where it once flourished. Thirdly, gumleaf music is made live and healthy through the interaction of players with the Australian environment, with elements of spiritual resonance in the Aboriginal gumleaf tradition stemming from intimate experiences of the harmony and balance of nature.

This study not only alerts us to ways in which competitions can be used as the arena for unravelling musical agendas, but also socio-political - including nationalistic - agendas, such as the debate on an Australian republic. In this age of rapid communication, opportunist market forces are bringing many influences to bear on Australia's few remaining leafists. Yet it is not the whim of fashion or pressing nostalgia that continues to revive interest in gumleaf music. Rather, it is a fundamental need to experience music afresh in a way that defies both economics and the predicability of constructed instruments.

Leaf playing demonstrates how the (presumedly ancient) Aboriginal practice of leaf blowing transformed itself in collaboration with European culture. Leaf instruments may be found in many other music-cultures, and comparative research can only enhance our knowledge of the Australian tradition. My cross-cultural databank into the leaf aerophones and aboriginal taxonomies of other cultures presently indicates that the botanical species and the characteristic cultural uses of blown leaves vary more than the playing methods employed. A study has yet to be made of functional similarities in the domain of the hunt, leaf toys, signalling practices, and the evocation of spirit noises. I particularly recommend that a detailed comparative study be made between the leaf instruments of China and Australia, and that research be undertaken into the possible use of ironbark or citrus leaf instruments by Chinese immigrants on the mid-nineteenth century Victorian goldfields.

Characterised by cultural innovation and exchange, gumleaf playing is no longer contained by Aboriginal culture, but is available to popular culture in general. In fitting the mould of unpretentious entertainment, the activity would appear to be an ideal ploy for escapist Western fantasies of the pseudo-pastoral world of "others", especially if the popularity of 1920s and 1930s leaf bands is any indication of how turn-of-the-century performances by solo leafists might fare. Performers of the calibre of Patten and Boston could easily evoke a sensually satisfying soundscape of Australian birdlife, since their presentations of leaf music are both colourful and clever.

Beyond this, how might the art of gumleaf music react to future changes in Australian culture? As two faces of the same coin, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal traditions both command unique positions in Australian music history and practice, and as future events unfold, elements far larger and deeper than mere musical repertoire could still be shared. Such elements include tenets of worldview, understanding of the environment, and greater social integration between Aborigines and other Australians.

A true cultural convergence of leaf playing traditions, across this kind of gap, is obviously still a very long way off. Whereas the Western order is increasingly transcending localism with objective globalised accounts of the world and its musics, the carriers of Aboriginal cultural traditions persistently resist Westernisation and globalisation through their equally perennial emphasis on the specific and local. As has been amply demonstrated in this thesis, contemporary leafists seek to use the Aboriginal tradition as an identity-marker, with ever more nuanced messages of clan affinities and sonic identities. Allowing for the intrinsic fascination of gumleaf playing and the mostly spontaneous nature of revivification, generational gaps in its musical production might best be viewed as opportunities for fresh traditions to be recast at a later date.

# APPENDIX 1

## TYPOLOGY OF LEAF PLAYING METHODS

In the 1920s and 1930s many Aboriginal bandsmen folded the leaf along the mid-rib, with the folded edge uppermost. They fixed the leaf in place with two fingers, but held it with the mouth, blowing air across the top of the fold so that the lower leaf vibrated. Alternatively, they bent the leaf to the shape of their lips, controlling it by holding it with two fingers at top and bottom. This one hand/two finger method is sometimes referred to as the "traditional method".

The majority of contemporary musicians now play the leaf with two hands, resting the leaf against the lower lip with a curled-over section placed either against or under the upper lip. Air is then blown across the top part of the leaf as the thumb and index fingers of each hand seal air off from the corners of the lips. Most play on the outside of the mouth, reserving the use of the inner mouth and tongue for trills and other ornamental effects. The inhalation of breath rejuvenates the energy required for attacking, sustaining and (in some cases) slowly decaying notes. The teeth, tongue and facial muscles also contribute far more than most players realise. The following descriptions give some indication of the variables involved.

### 1. METHODS OF SOME ABORIGINAL LEAFISTS

- **Albert Dennison** (*dec.*) folded a Kurrajong or ironbark leaf along its centre, placed the whole leaf in his mouth, and pressed it against the lower lip with the first and second fingers which he also used to change pitch. The leaf vibrated when a current of air was directed against the upper half of the leaf, which touched the top lip. Dennison is also remembered for playing the leaf "no hands" to cattle (exact method n/a).

- **Bert Marr** (Goonabahn, *dec.*) folded over the top edge of the lemon leaf and gripped it with the index and middle finger of his left hand. He scarcely moved the position of the

leaf when he changed pitch. During my second visit, however, he held the lemon leaf with two hands as he showed me how he wobbles his tongue to makes bird sounds. Goonabahn played on the inside of the lemon leaf.

- **Clarrie Grogan** (*dec.*) was renowned for playing a large leaf with the mouth only (see *New 10 News* 53770; exact method n/a). Using his hands, he also bent the leaf over, gripped it firmly with his lower lip, held two fingers as if whistling, and put his hand over his mouth for variation in the same way that harmonica players do. The top part of the leaf vibrated. Grogan also used some "slides" but these caused the intonation to flag. For Grogan this may have been considered displeasing, given that the Aboriginal aesthetic of gumleaf playing differs markedly from the Western aesthetic.

- **Irwin Riley** also plays the leaf in the manner of a harmonica.

- **Ambrose Golden-Bown** (*dec.* ) placed a gumleaf on the top lip and sealed off the corners with his fingers. He didn't necessarily play on the rounded part of the leaf, although most other competitive players are careful to do this.

- **Guboo Ted Thomas** plays over the top of the leaf without folding it at all.

- **Roseina Boston** presses the topside of the leaf against her lower lip and rests it on her upper lip. She folds the leaf slightly and blows gently from the throat, gripping the leaf with both her hands. As Roseina explained, "Each gumleaf has got different sounds, you know. They all sound different. Some you can get a real low sound and some you can get a real high sound. But mainly it comes from the way you present the leaf to your lips and blow, and the certain way that you blow to get the sounds out" (RRC, 27 April 1995).

- **The Kelly and Ballangarry families** normally gripped the leaf with one hand only. Because he had lost his top incisors, John Ivan Ballangarry performed the leaf for me with some difficulty; he felt more comfortable playing a duo with Roseina Boston.

- **James Goorie Dungay** started learning on a rose petal (which made a whistling noise) and worked his way up to citrus leaves. He rests the leaf on his lower lip and allows the upper lip to do all the work. The tongue must not get in the way of the air that has to blow over the top of the gumleaf. He positions the tongue below the teeth near the bottom of his jaw, well out of the way. He holds the leaf firmly and blows air out of the mouth.

- **Graeme Paulson** plays the leaf on the lower lip, although he commented that South Australian Aborigines played the leaf on the upper lip.

- **Herbert Patten** cups his upper lip over the leaf, stretching it (smooth side facing towards the lips) across the embouchure with about the same gentle pressure it would take to tear a piece of folded tissue. As Patten stiffens the upper lip, he places the inside of the tip of the tongue against his upper front teeth. The leaf curves into the shape of the mouth as it is blown mainly on the inside of the mouth (*eucalyptus* nausea doesn't bother Patten too much). Patten rests his thumbs on the corners of the mouth with forefingers almost touching to create support for the leaf. He licks his tongue to produce a moister mouth and blows, as if softly blowing out a candle.

- **Extra Tips:** Patten bears down gently on the diaphragm to intensify the stream of air vibrating the leaf, and exploits circular breathing technique whenever possible. Vibration can be felt in his jawbones and ears. Patten is still improving his breath control to render longer "decay" time on the final notes of phrases, having devised his own exercises to warm up muscles prior to performance. He uses the top of his jaw above the cheeks to push air across the leaf, thus equipping himself with power to hold notes (this can be compared to the way trumpeters control their playing from around the mouth). The fingers execute "flexi-movements", whilst the tongue is rolled to produce glissando or to "round off" phrases. Using taut cheeks, Patten "kicks" from the diaphragm to attack high notes, changing the pressure of the lips to achieve greater loudness. He also tucks the tip of his tongue behind the rim of his teeth to produce high notes, whilst his low notes are best achieved by "puffing up" the cheeks and playing on the bottom lip.

## 2. METHODS OF SOME NON-ABORIGINAL LEAFISTS

- **Wally French** (*dec.*) bent the leaf to the shape of his lips and held it with two fingers to control it at the top and bottom. He claimed that he did not move the leaf or his lips.

- **Dudley Carter** (*dec.*) held the leaf on the upper lip with one hand; air passed through the bottom lip and the leaf. He usually trimmed the leaf at the point so that it was about 5 cm. long with a straight stem edge. Cupping his other hand around like a mouth-organ player, he would move it rapidly (as well as his tongue) to create trills, turns and tremolo effects.

- **Robert Haley** (*dec.*) used the "whistling" method, which he taught as follows: "Air is forced through a confined space to produce a note, which depends on the condition of the leaf edge, the lip space, and mouth cavity. Air is forced between the leaf and top lip to make the leaf edge vibrate. Increased tension of leaf and lip reduces the space and increases the vibration of the leaf edge on the lip to give a high note. Release of this leaf and lip tension increases the air space to allow freer vibration (a lower note)" (1982 press release).

- **Fred Roberts** (*dec.*) gradually perfected his own original technique whereby he played the leaf inside his mouth "no hands" as he performed on his accordion. Fred would cut a piece of leaf 1" across and ¾" high, to fit under his tongue. He would place this under his lower lip, holding it firmly between his lower lip and teeth, and blow with his upper lip. The top edge of the leaf would come in front of the upper lip and vibrate there. Sometimes Fred would cup his hand over his mouth to give the sounds more "tang".

- **Walter McLaughlin** holds the leaf with one hand only, as taught him by Aborigines in 1922. McLaughlin does not play the leaf on the centre of his mouth, but uses the thumb, index finger and middle finger of his left hand to press the slightly folded leaf against the upper lip on the left-hand side of his mouth (even though he is right-handed). He blows over the edge of the leaf so that the leaf vibrates to make a sound, with all the air coming

out over the top of the leaf (*i.e.* the air pressure comes out over his upper lip). Walter plays on the edge of the underside of the leaf only, so that he doesn't need to swap sides.

- **Alan Kesby** folds citrus leaves over at an angle of 90 degrees before putting them to the lips.

- **Will Lockwood** holds the leaf to the lower lip and blows from the upper lip to make it vibrate. He starts with a shrill whistle, then sucks and blows the leaf as he turns it over a number of times. Sometimes Lockwood cups one hand over the other, lifting the top hand off to produce effects that have been likened to the "warble of a magpie".[1]

- **Wendy Eva** believes, like Haley, that gumleaf playing is similar to whistling. **Fresh Leaves:** Eva holds the leaf with her first and second fingers. She directs the shiny side of the leaf inwards and holds it against her lower lip, pressing two fingers on the mid-rib of the leaf. She allows the top part of the leaf to bend over so that her upper lip rests on the horizontal part of the leaf and vibrates against the bent section. Eva blows harder than whistling strength, directing the wind into a small chute over the top of the leaf so that it vibrates against the top of her lips. The shiny side of the leaf must be facing in. She takes care that wind does not escape from the corners of her lips. Eva controls the range of notes by (i) pressure applied by her hands (ii) pressure applied by pursing her throat, mouth and tongue as for whistling. Eva directs beginners to blow two or three times harder when first learning to play the leaf. She asks them to imagine that they are blowing up a balloon. **Dried Leaves:** A dried leaf should be placed higher up on the lip than a fresh leaf. To produce ornaments Eva moves her fingers up and down and flicks them. She is adept at switching a tone from a higher to lower level or vice versa, a necessary skill when a leaf's range does not hold up (Ryan Tatura 1995 RRC T7).

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[1]Letter from Will Lockwood, 28 April 1994. See also "Blowing his way to a championship" in *News* (Shepparton, Victoria), 30 September 1993: 4.

- **Philip Elwood:** curls a small section of the rounded part of the leaf under his upper lip and presses the lower section against his bottom lip, gently blowing air across the leaf. He uses the thumb and index finger of each hand to seal air off from the corners of his lips. The rest of his fingers are then free to execute special sound effects or artistic visual effects. At the ends of phrases Elwood snatches breath through both nostrils and mouth. He exploits his cheeks as air reservoirs and strongly exerts his throat and neck muscles during performance. Elwood plays the leaf on the outside of the mouth to avoid *eucalyptus* nausea and generally prefers to work on the topside of a dorsiventral leaf. However, if the latter is too glossy it sticks to his lips if they are too dry, in which case Elwood opts for the less slippery underside of the leaf, provided that its texture is not too furry. Since saliva is an essential ingredient for the production of gumleaf music, Elwood often needs to lick his tongue.

- **Virgil Reutens:** has fairly thin lips, the right side is higher than the left. **Fresh leaves:** Reutens does not bend the leaf on the mid-rib as some players do. He gently folds over a fraction of the top part of the leaf, so that it rests either against or under the upper lip. He rests the remainder of the leaf on the lower lip, stretching it to just the maximum limit without fraying it, then blows air across the top part of the leaf. Reutens holds the leaf at the distal edges between the thumbs and index fingers, with his other fingers held high and free for effects such as muting. He plays mainly on the outside of the mouth, reserving the use of the inner mouth and tongue for trills and other ornamental effects. **Dried leaves:** Reutens cuts a small rectangle from the centre of a leaf and places it either on the top or bottom of his tongue, depending on the flexibility of the leaf. He uses this special "no hands" technique for a one-man band act as he plays 12-bar blues melodies accompanying himself on guitar and bass pedal.

## 3. SOME LESS COMMON METHODS

- Do not "fold" the leaf. Press it against the upper or lower lip with two fingers (the index and middle finger) or the index finger and a thumb. Purse the lips, as in whistling, and blow air gently across the leaf. Alter pitch by varying the tension on the leaf with the fingers. Note: German shepherds simply pressed the leaf to their lips with index and middle fingers and vibrated the "plate" from the air streaming out (Sarosi 1986: 124-5).

- Fold the leaf into three sections (information supplied by Dr. John Cawte of Sydney, who viewed performances by the late Aboriginal Pastor Bill Reid of Bourke, NSW.)

- A slit may be made in the leaf, into which air is gently blown. This causes the inner leaf section to vibrate. (Meredith, cited by Bradley 1993: 239-240).

## 4. METHODS COMMONLY USED BY CHILDREN

- Fold the leaf in half along the mid-rib, pull the bottom downwards, and blow air in through the crack at the top to produce a single, shrill high-pitched note. Non-Aboriginal Victorian children commonly used this "folded leaf whistle" during the Depression.

- Sandwich a blade of grass between the two thumbs. Grip it at both ends and place it vertically across the mouth. Alter pitch by moving the thumbs to vary tension. The leaf also twists, periodically closing the aperture. Neville Fletcher (pers. comm., 4 November 1993) described this method which he used as a boy.

- Using a sharp fingernail, peel off the top layer of the inside of the leaf so that its venation is visible, and blow across it. My late father, John Woodhams, described this method on 2 January 1995. John and his playmates blew new-growth Jarrah and Forest Red Gum leaves at Dwellingup, WA in the late 1920s. Herbert Patten saw children peeling leaves in a similar manner in Orbost, Victoria around 1950.

# APPENDIX 2

## CHRONOLOGICAL SOURCE LIST OF RELEVANT LITERATURE BY OTHER AUTHORS

(Australian musicologists represented below are Brunton, Ellis, Gummow, Jones, McDonald, Moyle and Wild)

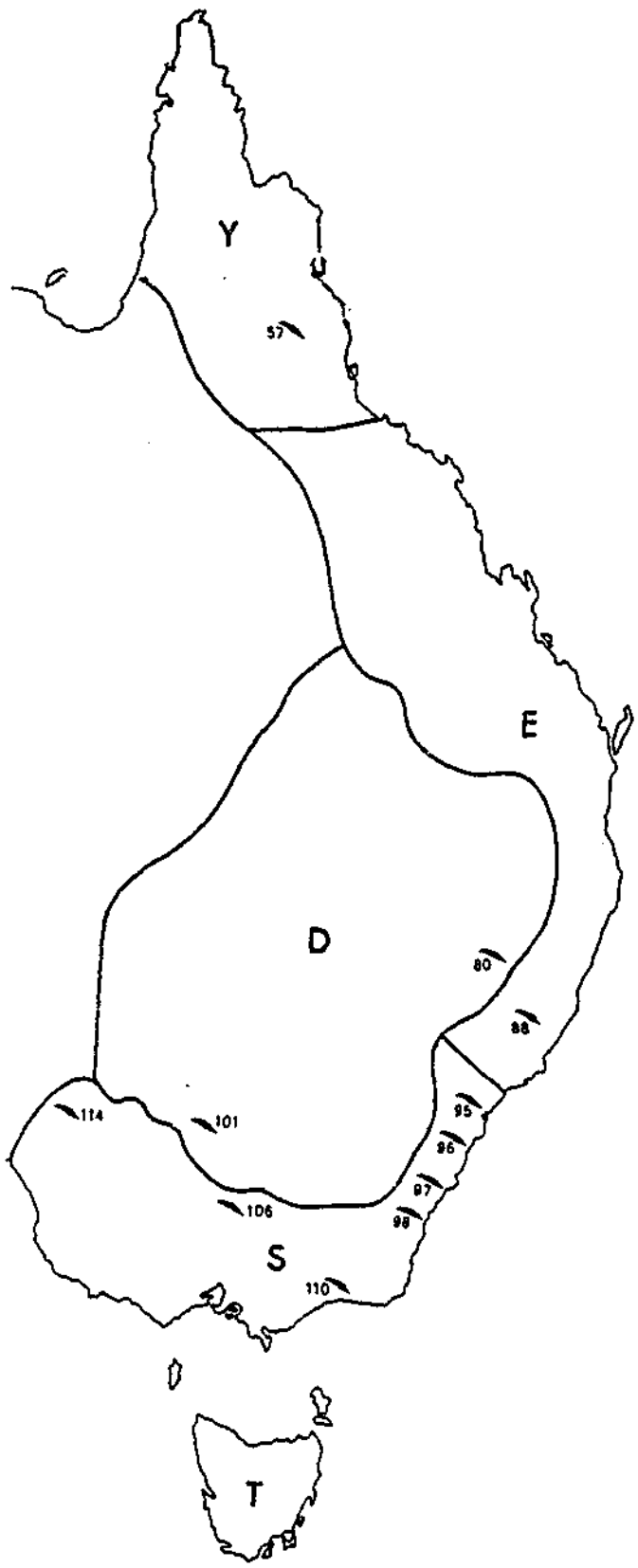
| DATE | AUTHOR | REGION(S) IN FOCUS |
|---|---|---|
| 1892 | Temora | Bordertown, SA |
| 1898; 1902 | Roth | Q'ld |
| 1919 | Mjöberg | Q'ld |
| 1933 | Duncan-Kemp | Q'ld |
| | Kennedy | NSW, Q'ld |
| 1934 | Leason | Vic |
| 1938 | Brauer | SA |
| 1939 | Telfer | NSW, WA |
| 1946 | Wilson | NSW |
| 1948 | Moresby | Q'ld |
| 1949 | Reay | NSW |
| 1951 | Vroland | Vic |
| 1952 | Duncan-Kemp | Q'ld |
| 1959 | Richards | NSW |
| 1956 | Moyle | Vic, NSW, Q'ld |
| 1968 | Duncan-Kemp | Q'ld |
| 1971 | Jackomos | NSW, Vic |
| 1972 | Thorpe Clark | Vic |
| 1977 | Tucker | Vic, NSW |
| 1978 | Moyle | Vic, NSW, Q'ld |
| 1979 | Fox | SA |
| | Thorpe Clark | Vic |
| 1980 | Ellis | Vic, NSW |
| | Jones | Australia |
| | Pepper | Vic, NSW |
| 1981 | Smyth and von Sturmer | NT |
| 1984 | Chaloupka and Giuliani | NT |
| | Gummow | NSW |
| | Pepper and De Araugo | Vic, NSW |
| 1987 | Cameron | NSW |
| 1988 | Brock | NT |
| | Ellis *et al* | SA |
| | Haebich | WA, NSW |
| | Laubenthal | SA |
| | Sullivan | NSW, Q'ld, Vic |
| 1989 | Breen | SA, NSW, Vic |
| 1990 | Goding | Vic |
| | Nicholson | Vic |
| 1991 | Jackomos and Fowell | Vic, NSW |
| 1992 | Gummow | NSW |
| 1993 | Bradley | Australia, overseas |
| | Jackomos and Fowell | Vic |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1994 | Ellis | Vic, NSW, Q'ld |
| | Haagen | Q'ld, NT |
| | Horton | Vic, Q'ld |
| | Howie-Willis | Australia |
| | Morgan | NSW, Vic |
| | Wild | Australia |
| 1995 | Anderson | Vic |
| | Bradley | Australia, overseas |
| | Meredith | Victoria, NSW, Q'ld, overseas |
| 1996 | Broome | Vic |
| | McDonald | NSW |
| 1997 | Chittick and Fox | NSW |

# APPENDIX 3

## MAPS

1. "Gumleaf Whistle - by Standing or Seated Men" (Moyle 1974: 400)
2. Documented Locations for Aboriginal Gumleaf Playing
3. Documented Locations for Non-Aboriginal Gumleaf Playing
4. Natural Distribution of *Eucalyptus* in Australasia
5. Native Australian Leaf Instruments: Documented Locations




**LEGEND: GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS**

**Y = northern Q'ld, including Cape York**

**E = eastern Q'ld and part of eastern NSW**

**D = Darling-Murray River Basin in NSW and Q'ld**

**S = part of eastern NSW, Vic and an adjacent sector of SA**

**T = Tasmania**

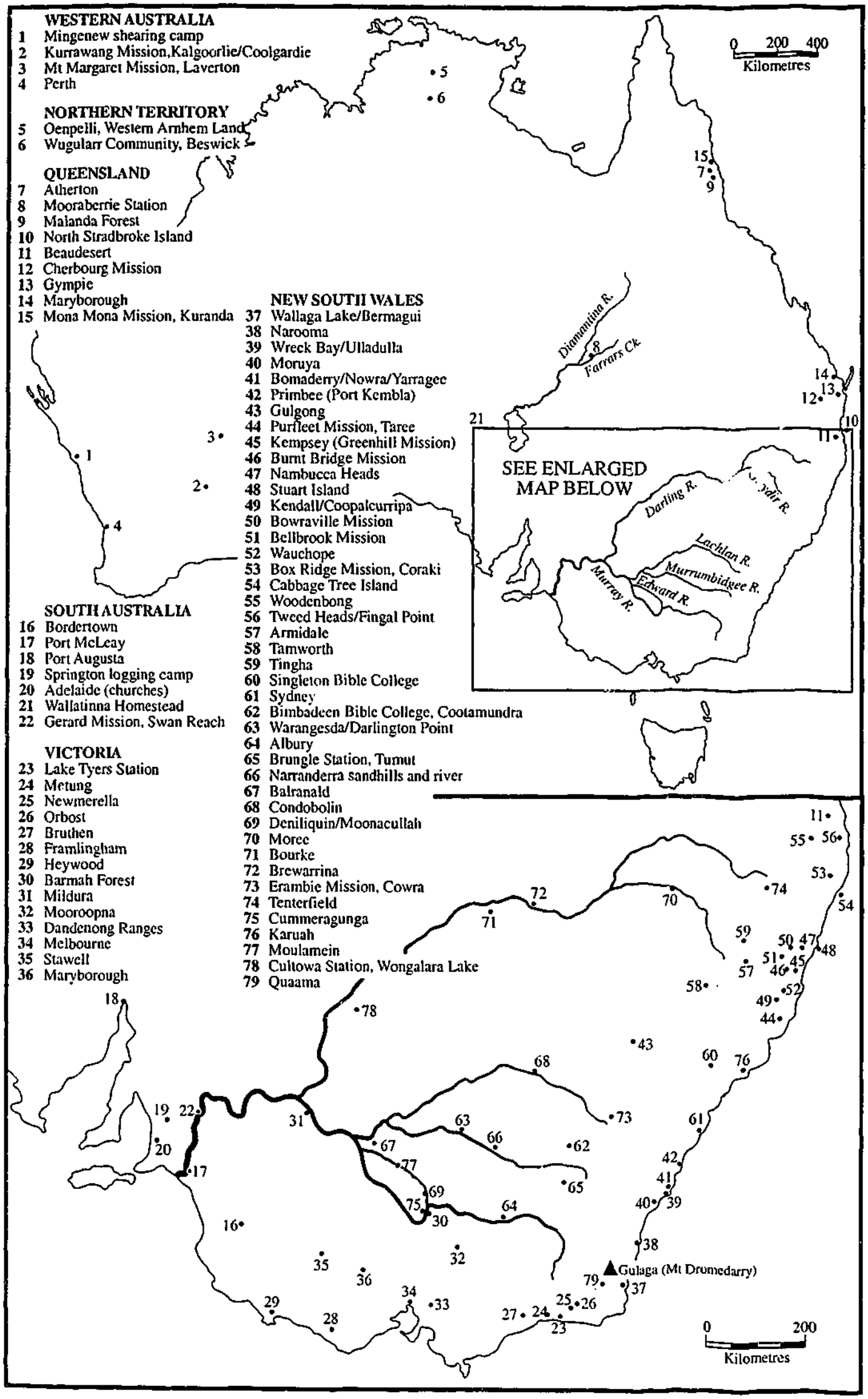
**CHRONOLOGICAL LOCATION LIST**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 57 = Atherton, Q'ld | Roth | 1894-1901 |
| 101 = Balranald, NSW | Ellis | 1962 |
| 114 = Gerard Reserve, SA | Ellis | 1962 |
| 88 = Newcastle to Grafton, NSW | Holmer | 1964 |
| 97 = Eurobodalla (shire), NSW | Mathews | 1964 |
| 95 = Wreck Bay, NSW | Mathews | 1965 |
| 96 = Bateman's Bay, NSW | Mathews | 1965 |
| 80 = West Moree, NSW | Gordon | 1965 (more correctly 1968) |
| 110 = Lake Tyers, Vic | Jackomos | 1971 |
| 106 = Cummeragunga, NSW) | Jackomos | 1971 |
| 98 = Wallaga Lake, NSW | Jackomos | 1971 |

**MAP 1: DOCUMENTED LOCATIONS FOR**

**(A "GUMLEAF WHISTLE" BLOWN BY STANDING OR SEATED MEN)**

**Source: North Australian Music. PhD Thesis by Alice M. Moyle, Monash University, 1974: 400 (Map 4; relevant section only)**




**MAP 2: DOCUMENTED LOCATIONS FOR ABORIGINAL GUMLEAF PLAYING**
**(sources complied 1892-1998)**

## DOCUMENTED LOCATIONS FOR ABORIGINAL GUMLEAF PLAYING

(according to written sources 1892-1998, and information supplied by research participants*; use in conjunction with **MAP 2**)

| Western Australia | Context/Format and Date | Source(s) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Mingenew shearing camp | hunting, camp music (1960s) | L. Doyle* |
| 2. Kurrawang Mission, Kalgoorlie/Coolgardie | impromptu leaf music (1973) | press report |
| 3. Mt Margaret Mission, Laverton | minstrel band (1940s-1950s) tours interstate/Ben Mason | photo, F. Grant |
| 4. Perth | (i) evangelistic tour of leafist Peter Wandy (1907-8); (ii) gumleaf buskers (1956) | E.J. Telfer (AAM); Captain R. James* |

| Northern Territory | Context/Format and Date | Source(s) |
|---|---|---|
| 5. Oenpelli district, Western Arnhem Land | leaf whistles blown at the end of the wet season (1980s) | G. Chaloupka and P. Giuliani; D.M. Smyth and J.R. von Sturmer; J. Brock* |
| 6. Beswick | impromptu leaf music (20th c.) | D. Blanasi* |

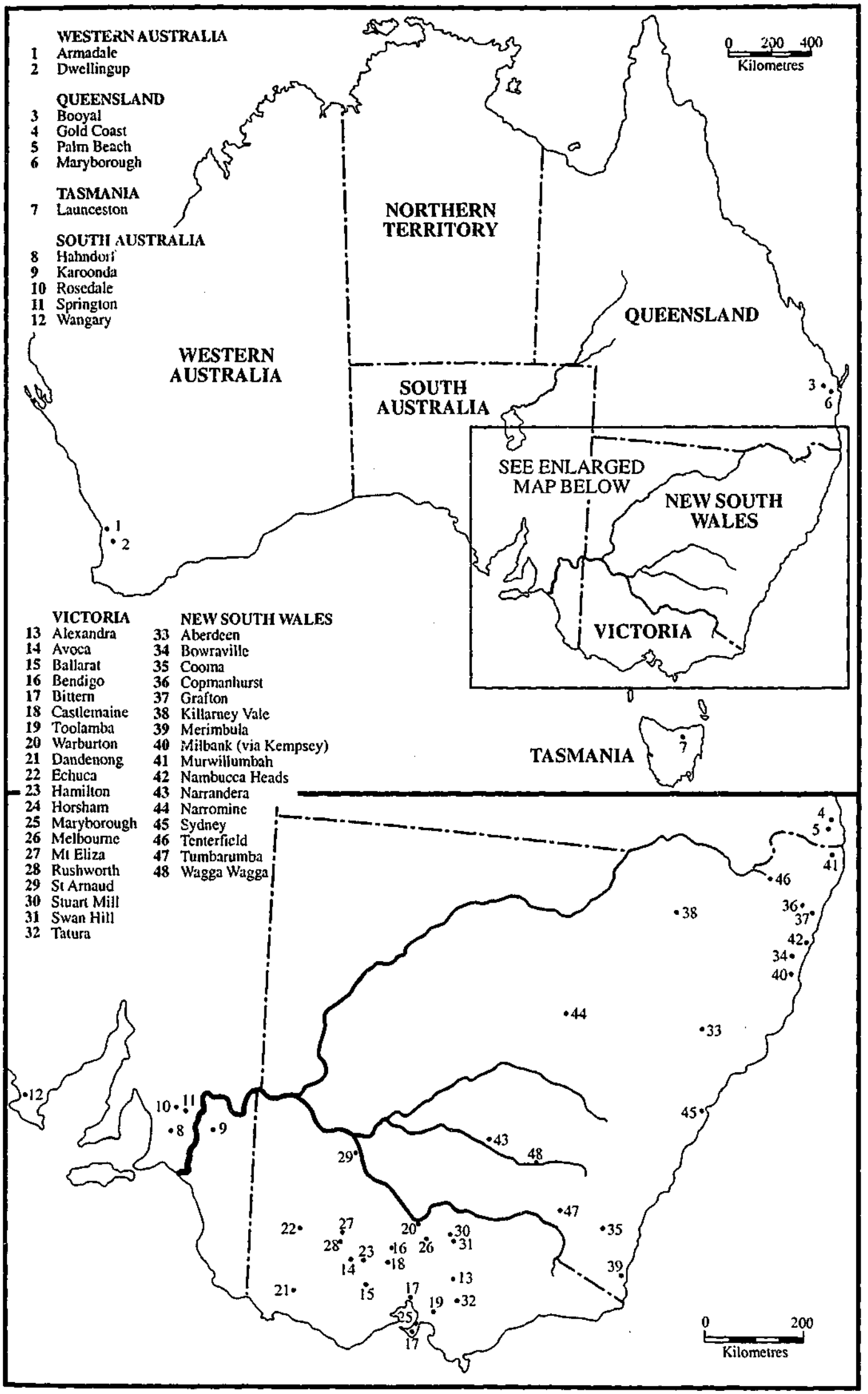
| Queensland | Context/Format and Date | Source(s) |
|---|---|---|
| 7. Atherton | leaf music toy (1890s) | W. E. Roth |
| 8. Mooraberrie Station | traditional corroboree (1900s) | A. Duncan-Kemp |
| 9. Malanda Forest | leaf music toy (1910s) | E. Mjöberg |
| 10. North Stradbroke Island | gumleaf band (1993) | H. Patten* |
| 11. Beaudesert | concert band (1937) | press report |
| 12. Cherbourg Mission | tea-party (1935) [illegible] and gumleaf band (1937) | mission reports |
| 13. Gympie | Kina family band (mid-1940s) | B. Brunette* |
| 14. Maryborough | soloist Norris Blair (1970) | N. Holmer |
| 15. Mona Mona Mission, Kuranda | church band (1940s?); Grover's signalling leaf (Carrie Grogan); soloist Irwin Riley (1990s) | C. Grogan (K. Bradley audiotape), L. Riley* |

| South Australia | Context/Format and Date | Source(s) |
|---|---|---|
| 6. Bordertown | Salvation Army "Eucalyptus Band" (1892) | Temora |
| 17. Port McLeay | "improvised" gumleaf music | M. Brunton |
| 18. Port Augusta | AEF annual conventions | H. Patten* |
| 19. Springton logging camp | gumleaf band of six (1942) | K. Graetz* |
| 20. Adelaide (churches) | soloist Yami Lester (1970s?) | M. Breen |
| 21. Wallatinna Homestead | soloist Yami Lester (1990s) | Lester's grandson* |
| 22. Gerard Mission, Swan Reach (Upper Murray) | gumleaf duo (Annie Mason and Cyril Lindsay (1962) | C. Ellis |

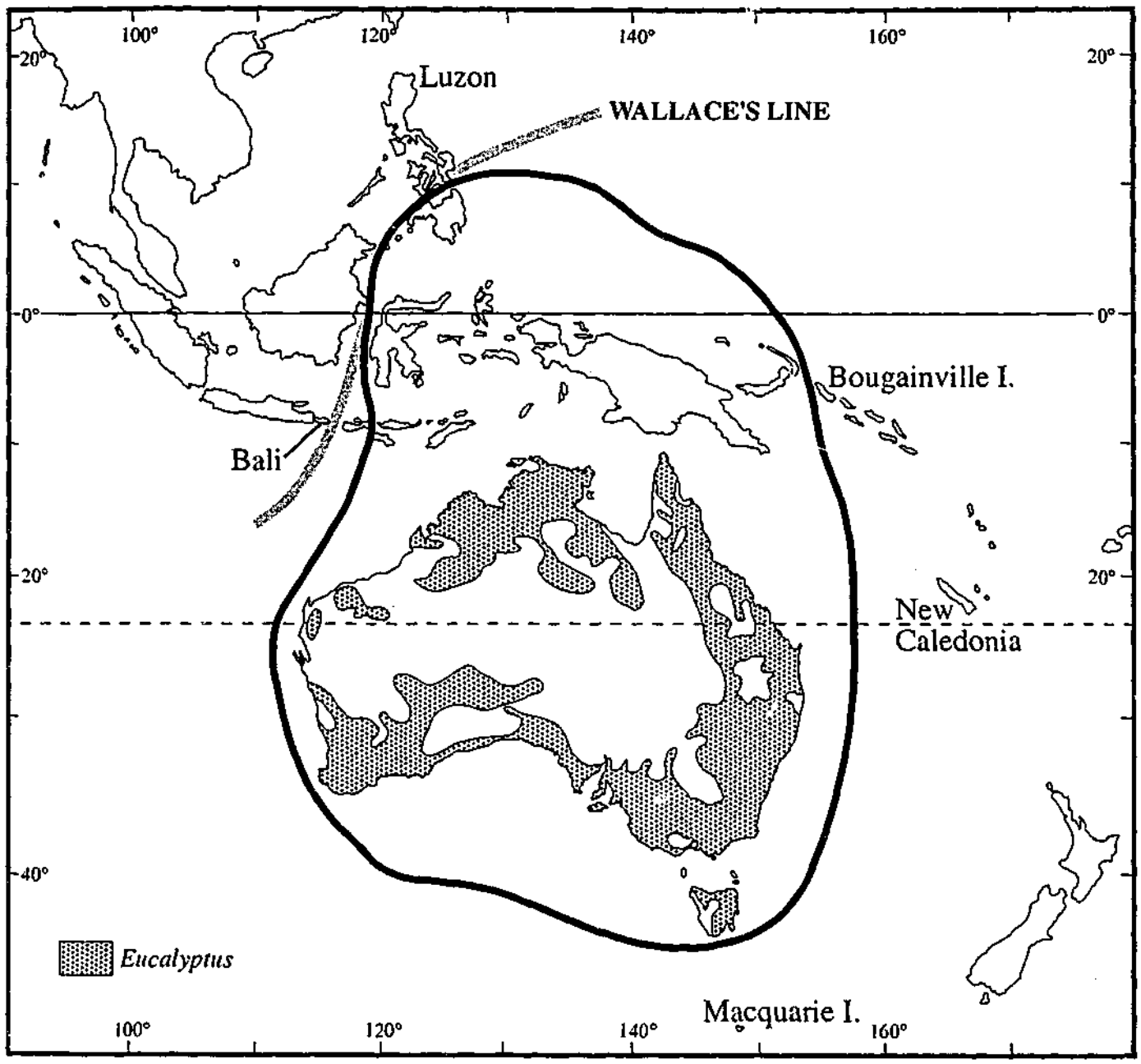
| Victoria | Context/Format and Date | Source(s) |
|---|---|---|
| 23. Lake Tyers Station | gumleaf bands (1917-1950s) | Pepper/Jackomos |
| 24. Metung | concerts at Gilsenan's home | C. Gilsenan* |
| 25. Newmerella | Lindsay Thomas (1940s), Herbert Patten (1950s) | H. Patten* |
| 26. Orbost | amateur competition (*c.* 1950) | H. Patten* |
| 27. Bruthen | gumleaf band of 11 men (1948) | press photo |
| 28. Framlingham | Alice Clarke, Lionel Harradine | L. Patten* |
| 29. Heywood | Angus Williams (1980s) | M. Breen |
| 30. Barmah Forest | Aaron Briggs (1961) | C. Ellis |
| 31. Mildura | Pastor Brian Cavanagh (1990s) | I. Atkinson* |
| 32. Mooroopna | Shady James (1930s-1940s) | W. Eva* |
| 33. Dandenong Ranges | art shop band (1940s-1950s) | M. Tucker |
| 34. Melbourne | Gore St Church, (1940s-1950s) | M. Thorpe Clark |
| 35. Stawell | visit of LTGB (*c.* 1939) | A. Jackomos |
| 36. Maryborough | competition (from 1977) | press, fieldwork |

| New South Wales | Context/Format and Date | Source(s) |
|---|---|---|
| 37. Wallaga Lake/Bermagui | Bermagui corroboree (1900); touring gumleaf band 1920s-1930s; tradition maintained through to the 1980s (leaf duo) | press reports; G.T. Thomas*, E. Morgan/Chittick & Fox, M. Brunton* |
| 38. Narooma | Herbert Patten (1994, 1998-9) | H. Patten* |
| 39. Wreck Bay/Ulladulla | Stan Mundy (1965) | J. Mathews, press |
| 40. Moruya | touring "Leaf Band" (1930s) | press report |
| 41. Bomaderry,/Nowra/ Yarragee | Jimmy Little Sr (1964) Ambrose Golden-Brown | J. Mathews; A. Golden-Brown* |
| 42. Primbee (Port Kembla) | Jimmy Little Sr (1969) | J. Mathews |
| 43. Gulgong | "Gumleaf Jazz Band" (*c.* 1930) | R. Wallis |
| 44. Purfleet Mission, Taree | gumleaf quartet (1950s) | B. Marr* |
| 45. Greenhill Mission, Kempsey | Fred Bugg (1964); leaf busker J. Goorie Dungay (1990s) | N. Holmer; J.Goorie Dungay* |
| 46. Burnt Bridge Mission | Burnt Bridge Gumleaf Band (1920s) | R. Boston* |
| 47. Nambucca Heads | Roseina Boston (1980s-1990s) | R. Boston* |
| 48. Stuart Island | impromptu bands (1950s) | R. Boston* |
| 49. Kendall/Coopalcurripa | leaf playing to birds (1990s) | R. Boston* |
| 50. Bowraville Mission | Kelly family band (1922-1940s) | I. Ballangarry* |
| 51. Bellbrook Mission | church band (1965) | R. Boston* |
| 52. Wauchope | (Burnt Bridge) gumleaf band of Possum Davis (1926) | J. Bain, H. Suters* |
| 53. Box Ridge Mission, Coraki | gumleaf/mouth organ duo (*c.* 1960s -1970s?) | E. Morgan* |
| 54. Cabbage Tree Island | family reunion band (1989) | R. Langford |
| 55. Woodenbong | church band (1950s) | C. Sullivan, M. Gummow |
| 56. Tweed Heads/Fingal Point | gumleaf band (1930s); church band (1960s) | press report; G. Paulson |
| 57. Armidale | syncretic corroborees (20th c.) | B. McDonald* |
| 58. Tamworth | leaf busking (1996-1999) | Boston & Dungay* |
| 59. Tingha | Vaughan Livermore (1964) | press report |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 60. Singleton Bible College | church band (Ben Mason, David Kirk, etc., 1950s) | F. Grant photos, AIATAIS |
| 61. Sydney | (i) La Perouse soloist Peter Wandy (1907); (ii) WLGB at Harbour Bridge opening (1932); (iii) footballers play leaves at Arncliffe (1934) | E.J. Telfer/A. Haebich; press report/photo (Hood Collection); audiovisual footage |
| 62. Bimbadeen Bible College, Cootamundra | Pastor David Kirk teaches Eric (James Goorie) Dungay, 1984 | J. Goorie Dungay* |
| 63. Warangesda Mission and Darlington Point | gumleaf band (1930s, possibly earlier) | photo, AIATSIS |
| 64. Albury | LTGB plays during WW II; Oliver Jackson plays in pubs | A. Jackomos, press S. & O. Jackson* |
| 65. Brungle Station, Tumut | "walkabout" leafists (1930s) | J. Fury* |
| 66. Narrandera sandhills and river | church band (1930s); leaves echo across riverbanks | N. Rooke*, L, Lyons* |
| 67. Balranald | dance band (*c.* 1930s?) | J. Meredith |
| 68. Condobolin | impromptu music on riverbank (1930s-1940s) | C. Grant* |
| 69. Deniliquin and Moonacullah Mission | gumleaves played at wedding (probably late 1910s) | M. Tucker |
| 70. Moree | Signalling leaf (Albert Dennison 1968) | J. Gordon |
| 71. Bourke | Pastor Bill Reid (*d.* 1993) | J. Cawte* |
| 72. Brewarrina | Johnny Marshall | T. Pearce* |
| 73. Erambie Mission, Cowra | Roy Carroll, Alec Grace | L. Carroll* |
| 74. Tenterfield | Black-to-White gumleaf tuition | M. Harrison |
| 75. Cummeragunga | vaudeville band (1930s); leaf soloist/teacher Doug Nicholls | A. Jackomos M. Thorpe Clark |
| 76. Karuah (via Newcastle) | mission gumleaf band (*c.* 1919) | mission report |
| 77. Moulamein | composite gumleaf band (1939) | mission reports |
| 78. Cultowa Station, Wangalara (Wongalara Lake) | stockman's leaf; leaf and fiddle duo (Paddy and Old Albert) | W. Wilson |
| 79. Quaama | concert at Lyceum Hall, 1903 | press report |



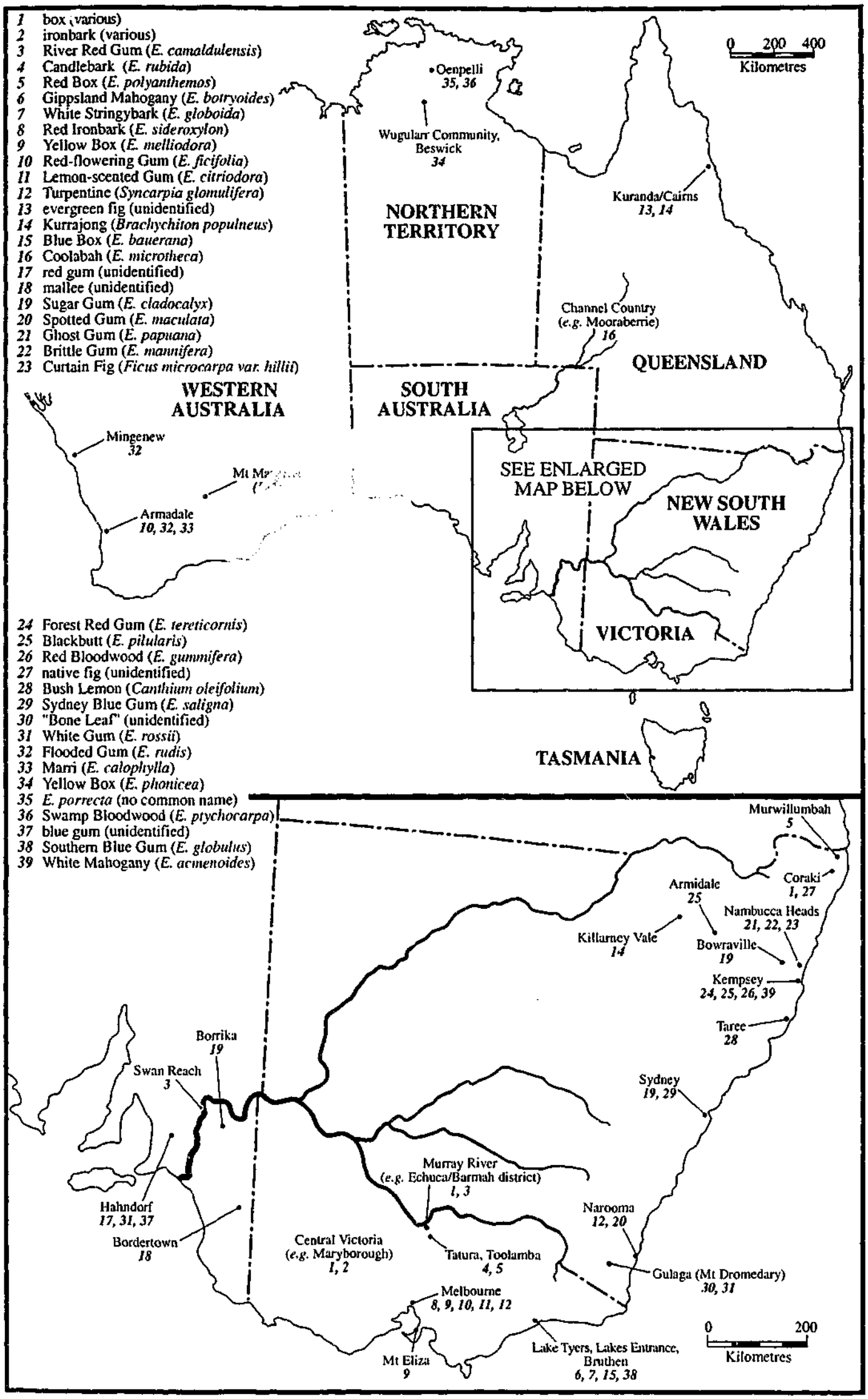

**MAP 3: DOCUMENTED LOCATIONS FOR NON-ABORIGINAL GUMLEAF PLAYING**
**(sources complied 1938-1998)**




**MAP 4: NATURAL DISTRIBUTION OF *EUCALYPTUS* IN AUSTRALASIA**

The solid line shows the close conformity of *Eucalyptus* on the northwest boundary with Wallace's Line, which it does not cross to the Asian Side

(Source: *The Biology of Eucalypts* by Lindsay D. Pryor, 1976, London: Edward Arnold (Pubs.) Ltd, based on field maps by J.A. Carnahan)




**MAP 5: NATIVE AUSTRALIAN LEAF INSTRUMENTS: DOCUMENTED LOCATIONS**

# APPENDIX 4

## PLATES

1a & b. Herbert Patten

2. Roseina Boston

3. Guboo Ted Thomas

4. Bert (Goonabahn) Marr

5 & 6. James (Goorie) Dungay; Wayne Thorpe

7. Swamp Bloodwood (*E. ptychocarpa*); blown leaf membrane

8. *Eucalyptus porrecta* leaf whistle (no common name)

9. The Stewart Brothers of Muckin's Point, Wallaga Lake, NSW

10. Members of the Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band around 1930

11. The Aboriginal Contingent at the Opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge

12. Alex Innes with his Gumleaf Band at the "Back to Bruthen" Celebrations

13. Lake Tyers Gumleaf Trio in the 1930s

14a & b. Walter McLaughlin busks at Circular Quay, Sydney

15. Scratch Gumleaf Band, Maryborough, Victoria 1977

**Plates 1 (a) and (b): Herbert Patten performs "wa-was" on a Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) leaf**

**Plate 2:** Roseina Boston performs on a Ghost Gum (*E. papi*[illegible]) leaf which she transported to Maryborough, Victoria to play in competition

Plate 3: Elder Guboo Ted Thomas (the only remaining member of the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band at 85 years) plays an unidentified eucalypt leaf selected by the author at Wallaga Lake, NSW

Plate 4: Elder Bert (Goonabahn) Marr (*d.* 199 ) plays a Bush Lemon (*Canthium oleifolium*) leaf outside his home in Purfleet, NSW

Plate 5: James (Goorie) Dungay plays a Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*) leaf which he transported to Maryborough, Victoria to play in competition



Plate 6: Wayne Thorpe plays an unidentified eucalypt leaf which he picked at Reservoir, Victoria

**Plate 7:** **The leaf membrane of Swamp Bloodwood ("Aboriginal" name *Mangolanglang*; Mayali name Anbamberre; E. *ptychocarpa*) is blown to make musical notes, *e.g.* at Oenpelli Waterfall, NT**

**(Courtesy John Brock, *Top End Native Plants.* Darwin, 1988: 179)**

**Plate 8:** *Eucalyptus porrecta* (Mayali name *anngal*; no common name) "leaf whistles" are blown at the end of the Eastern Arnhem Land wet season (courtesy John Brock, *Top End Native Plants*. Darwin, 1988: 177)

**Plate 9:** **The Stewart Brothers of Muckin's Point, Wallaga Lake, NSW (n.d.), who formed a gumleaf band and married into Lake Tyers families**

**L to R: Henry, Les, Christopher (Baker), Charlie, Billy, Wally, and Norman**

**Alick Jackomos Collection, courtesy AIATSIS, Canberra**

**Plate 10:** **Members of the Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band, *c.* 1930**

**Willie Johnson, Bobby Johnson, Alan McDougal, Alec Harrison, Fred Johnson Campbell Johnson, Syd McCrae, Dingo Hood, Charlie Green, William Logan, Gordon O'Rourke, Gordon Marks, Frank Marks, Tom Foster, Alec Moffatt**

**(photographed by H.D. Bulmer, Alick Jackomos Collection, courtesy AIATSIS, Canberra)**

**Plate 11:** **The Aboriginal contingent march at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (March 20 1932); Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band to the rear (Hood Collection)**

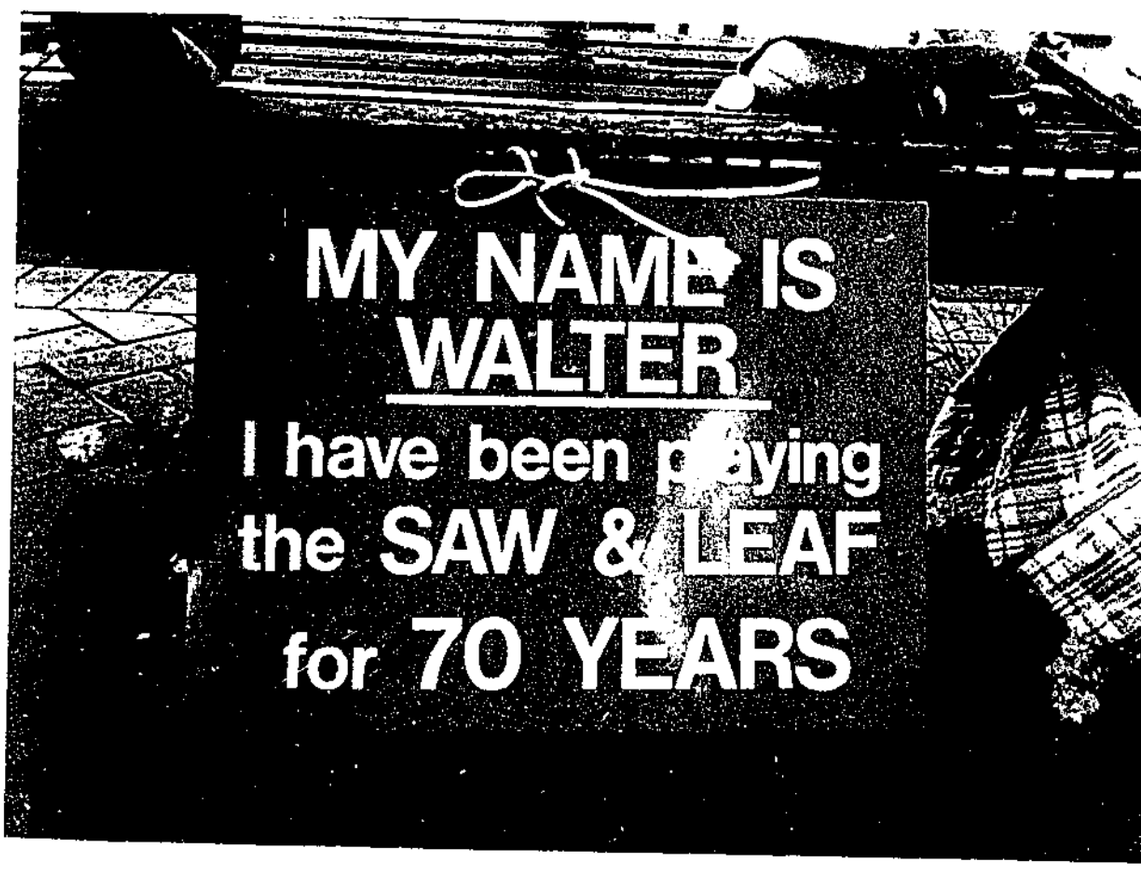
**Courtesy Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW**

**Plate 12 :** **Alex Innes with his Gumleaf Band at the "Back to Bruthen" Celebrations, *The Weekly* Times, Wednesday 7 April 1948: 21). The branch of leaves is either Blue Box (Round-leaved Box, *E. bauerana*) or Red Box (*E. polyanthemos*). Herbert Patten's great-uncle Lindsay Thomas is pictured third from the right.**

**Courtesy East Gippsland Historical Society, Bairnsdale, Victoria**

Plate 13: **Lake Tyers Gumleaf Trio in the 1930s: Laurie Moffat, Ted (Chook) Mullett and Campbell Johnson**

Alick Jackomos Collection, courtesy AIATSIS, Canberra



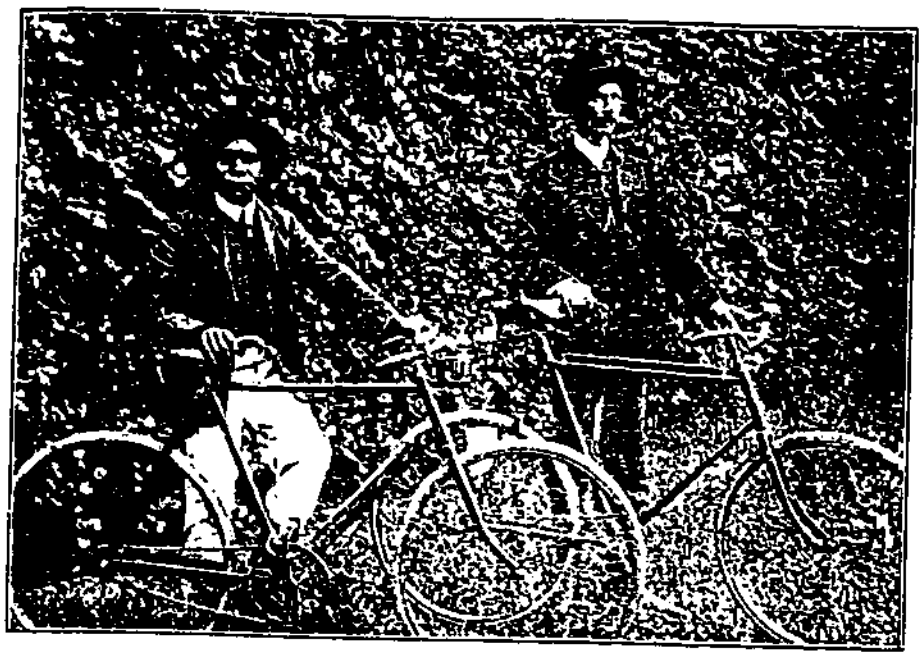

Plates 14 (a) and (b): Walter McLaughlin (86 years, taught leaf by Aborigines in 1922) busks on a Camellia leaf at Circular Quay, Sydney on Anzac Day, 1995

Plate 15: **Finalists in the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship, Philip Gardens, Maryborough, Victoria form a "scratch band"**

L to R: Gaynor Tabe (concealed), Herbert Patten, Virgil Reutens, James Dungay, Jeff Wilmott, Keith Graetz, Philip Elwood and Jarrod Atkinson

# APPENDIX 5

## ILLUSTRATIONS



Wandy and Rev. E. J. Telfer.

Peter Wandy.
"Me go West Australia."


**Illustration 1** **(a) Leafist Peter Wandy with missionary Rev. E.J. Telfer on the 1907 preaching journey; (b) Peter Wandy: "Me go West Australia" (Source: Telfer 1939: 119)**

**(c) Masthead of the monthly organ of the Australian Aborigines Mission (AAM), July 31 1908, featuring Peter Wandy, First Native Helper**

COME AND SEE THE BAND OF

# Abo Entertainers

**GUM LEAF JAZZ BAND**

Dancing, Singing, and Wonderful

## BLACKFELLOWS' CORROBOREE

Half Proceeds in aid of Gulgong District Hospital

## Pictoria Theatre Tuesday, May 20

PROGRAMME

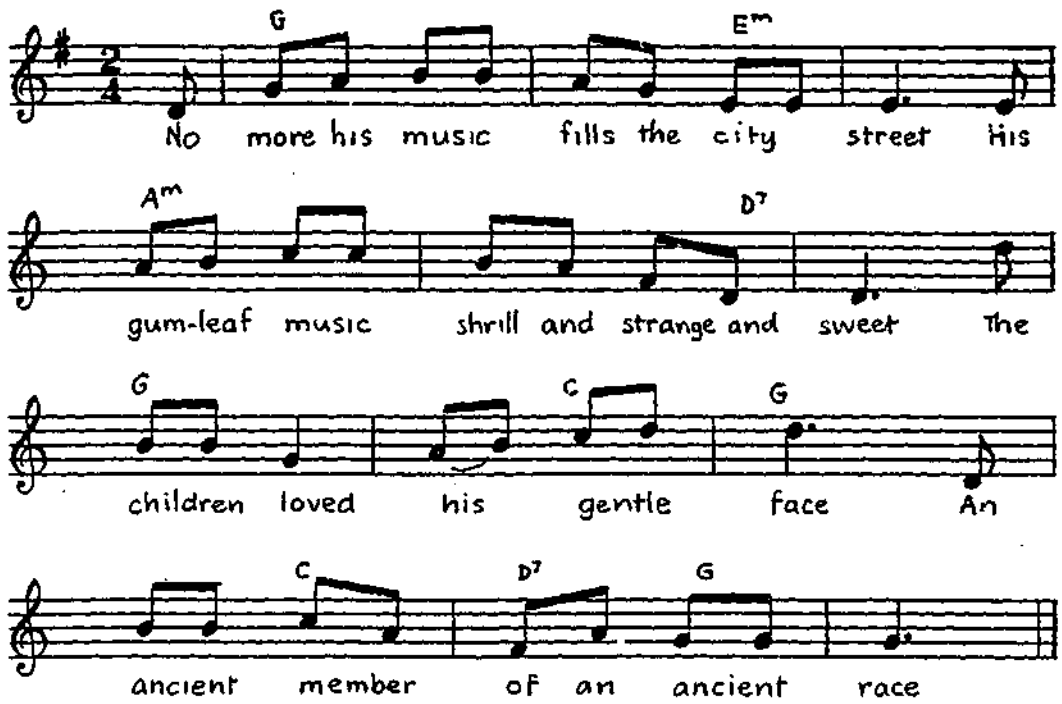
1. COMPANY
2. SONG—"My Mother's Eyes"
3. DUET ON GUM LEAVES
4. DUET ..... Misses DOLLY and DAISY MADDEN
5. SONG ..... FRED ROBERTS
6. CLOG DANCE ..... W. DUNCAN
7. GUM LEAF JAZZ BAND
8. GUITAR DUET
9. GUM LEAF DUET

**Illustration 2: Programme for the Aboriginal Entertainers Concert, Gulgong *c.* 1930**

**(Source: Roma Wallis, *Gulgong in the Roaring Days. History of Prince of Wales Opera House.* Dubbo, NSW: Macquarie Publications. 1982: 74)**


**Illustration 3: Advertisement: The Corroboree Season at Wirth's Olympia, Melbourne** (source: *The Argus*, 16 April 1949)

# THE GUM-LEAF MUSICIAN




1. No more his music fills the city street,
   His gum-leaf music shrill and strange and sweet;
   The children loved his gentle face,
   An ancient member of an ancient race.

2. We took away his living and his land
   And left him with a gum-leaf in his hand,
   But with this leaf, in return for wrong,
   He made for us his kindly gift of song.

3. He knew our courtrooms and our prisons well,
   He died last week within a prison cell,
   But sometimes still, in the bustling throng
   We'll hear the haunting echo of his song.

4. We'll see again his gentle, wrinkled face
   And catch a vision of a brown-skinned race
   Who come with eyes that are warm with pride
   To stand at last as brothers by our side.

Words by Len Fox, tune by Joy Durst from "Lord Franklin".
Refers to Billie Bull who played gumleaves in Melbourne streets till 1954.

**Illustration 4: Score: "The Gum-Leaf Musician" by L. Fox and J. Durst**

**(Source: Joy Durst Memorial Australian Song Collection, republished by the Victorian Folk Music Club, 1980: 63)**

**OUR COVER:**

This charming study of John Campbell, fullblood aboriginal fisherman of Wreck Bay, was taken by "Pix" cameraman Bob Donaldson.

John Campbell has lived on the Wreck Bay settlement for more than 50 years.

**Illustration 5** (a) John Campbell of Wreck Bay (*Dawn*, February 1952 1/2, cover photo)

(b) Jimmy Little Senior in gumleaf duo with A. McLeod (left), accompanied by M. Williams (all of Nowra); NADOC ceremony at Martin Place, Sydney (*Dawn*, July 1961 10/7: 3)

(c) Percy Mumbulla of Nowra (*New Dawn*, February 1971, cover page)

# The Song of the Gum Leaf

A QUICK MARCH

DEDICATED TO THE OFFICERS AND MEN
OF THE
R.A.A.F.

Words by.
Ethel Phillips Fox.

Song and Orchestral Music
by
Florence M Donaldson-Ewart.

"The Song of the Gum Leaf"

Marching Time — Introduction

(Keep up the drums ad lib.) mf

A Tempo — 1st VERSE

Rall. I'll sing you a song of a Gum Leaf of a

Rall. A Tempo

leaf that is tough and true emblem of those who are

fighting — fighting for me and for you — so wear a

mp

"REFRAIN"

gum leaf — just a gum leaf — wear a gum leaf on your coat to —

(Humour accens)

— day — then post it in a letter, they'll ask for nothing better, will the

(Humour accens)

ff

boys when they're far a way — — — — — — — they've

Rhythmically

ff

Rhythmically — "2nd VERSE" — Same

gone to fight for freedom — for all that is right and true they've gone to whack the

P serrur — rhythmical

mp TENDERLY — "REFRAIN"

Nazi — s they're fighting for me and for you So wear a gum leaf

p TENDERLY

ff

(3rd VERSE
Same as first)

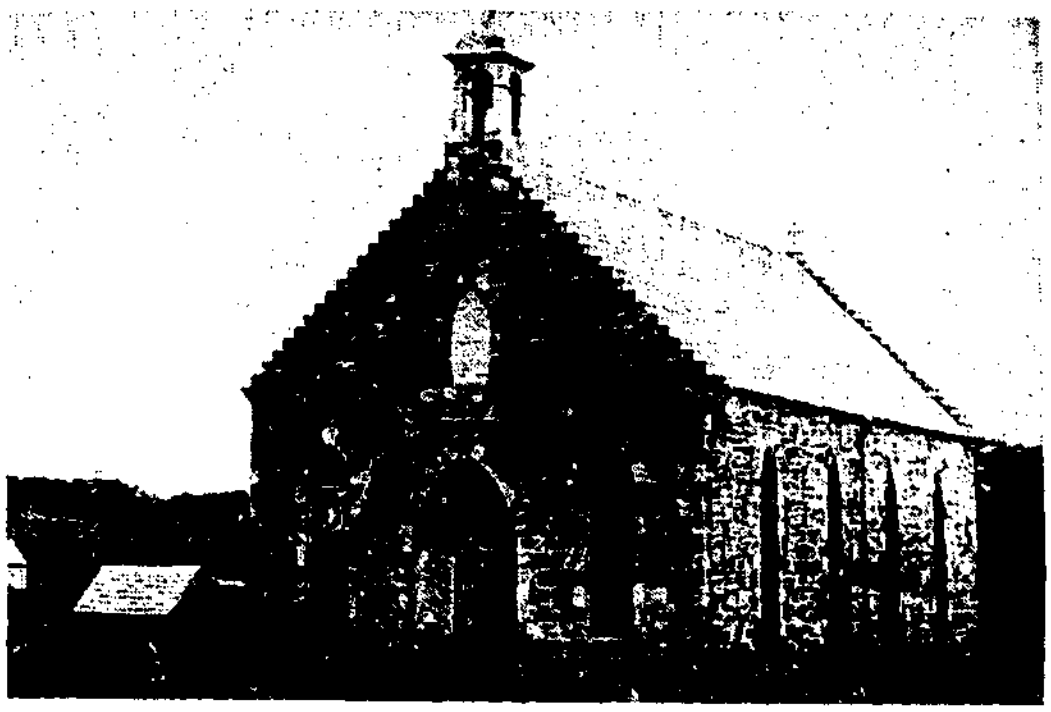
"And when they return we will greet them
With laurels and wreathe of Bay.
But they'll bring the little old Gum Leaf
You wore when they went away"

REFRAIN ONCE MORE.

**Illustration 6. "The Song of the Gumleaf" by E. P. Fox and F. Donaldson-Ewart**

**(publisher uncited); source kindly supplied by John Whiteoak**


*This map shows some of the townships where the founders of St. Michael's Congregation lived before emigrating in 1838. The present boundaries are marked in heavy line whereas the original boundaries of the provinces of Brandenburg, Silesia, etc. are marked with a dotted line.*



*St. Michael's Lutheran Church 1859.*

**Illustration 7a & b** **(a) The Homelands of the 1838 Lutheran Immigrants**

**(b) St Michael's, Hahndorf SA, 1959**

**(Source: Anni Fox, St Michael's Lutheran Congregation Hahndorf 1839-1979: 8, 4)**

THE WAR CRY

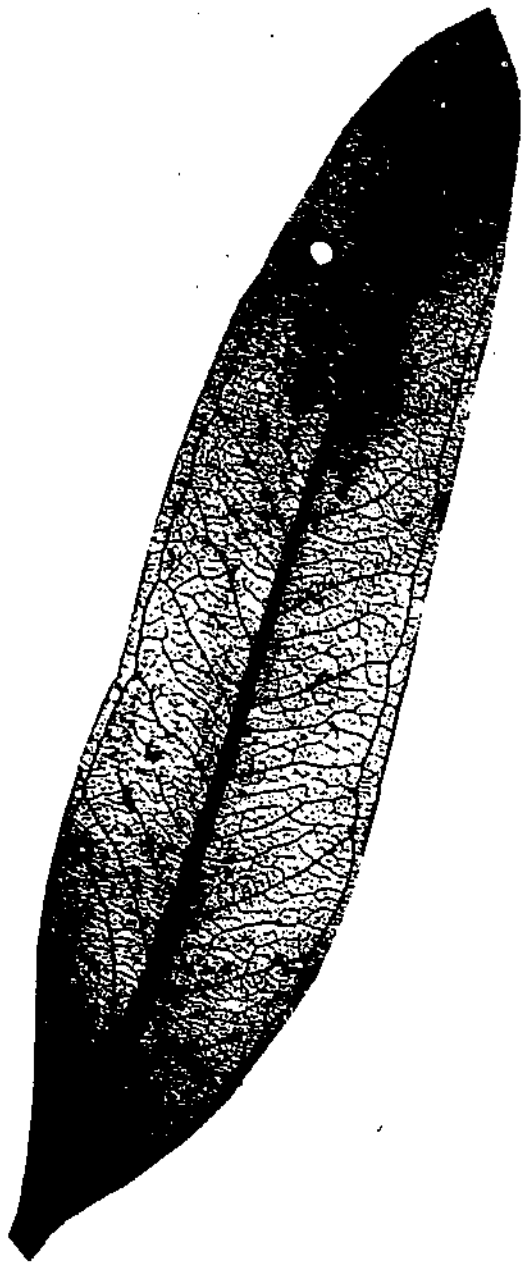
OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE SALVATION ARMY IN SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA

BRAMWELL BOOTH, GENERAL — WILLIAM BOOTH, FOUNDER — HUGH E. WEATHERS, COMMISSIONER

VOL. XLVI.—No. 46 — MELBOURNE, NOVEMBER 23, 1907 — PRICE, TWOPENCE

**Illustration 8.** **"The Mad Captain": Tom "Mudgee" Robertson**

**(Source: Drawing by Joseph Hoy; courtesy Salvation Army Archives)**



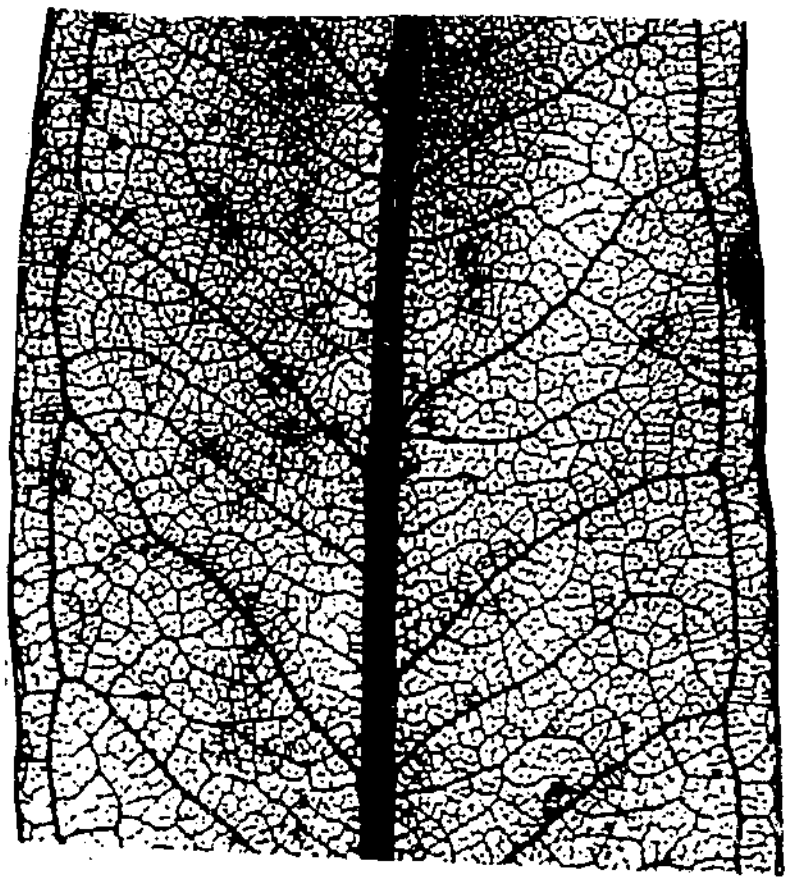


**Illustration 9 a & b:** **The Venation Pattern of a Ghost Gum (*E. papuana*) Leaf**

**(Source: Klucking 1988: Plate 33, enlarged photographs)**

# APPENDIX 6

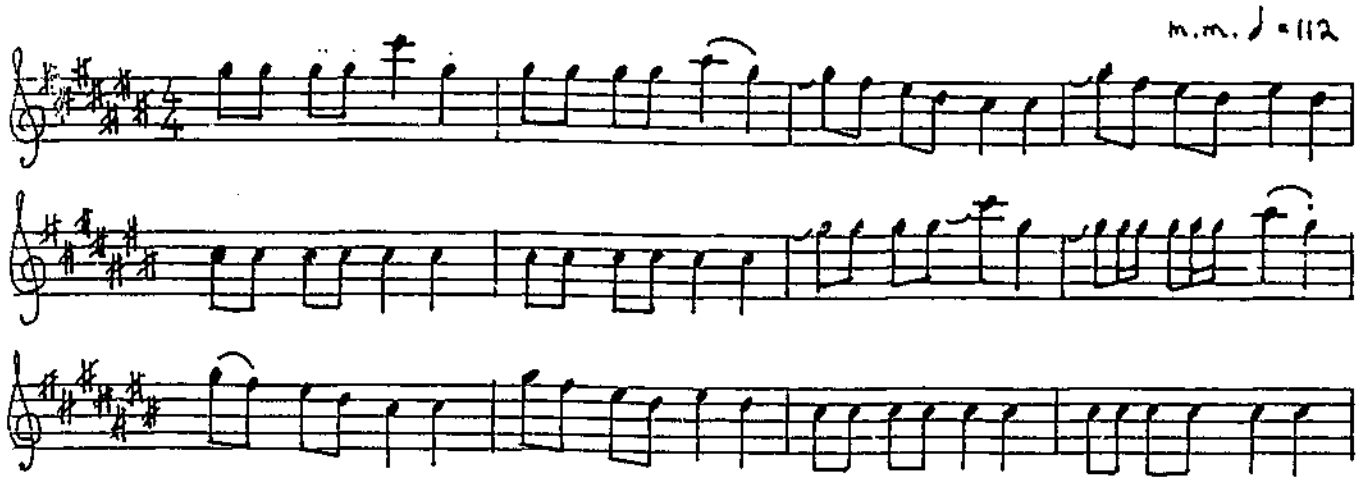
## MUSICAL EXAMPLES

1. "Yumi Yumi Yari"

2. Yorta Yorta Love Song

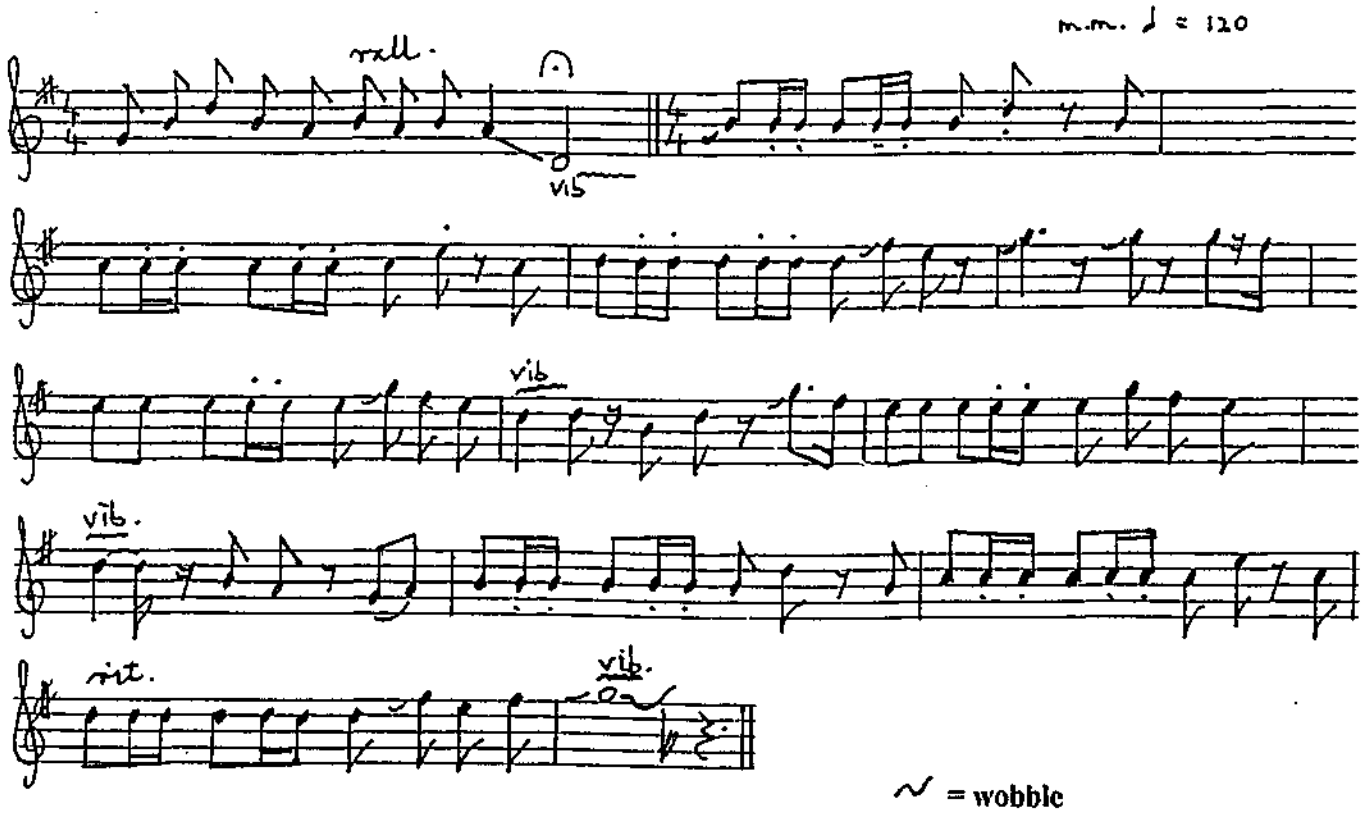
3. "The Old Rugged Cross" (gumleaf duo)

4. "The Old Rugged Cross" (original score)




**Musical Example 1: "Yumi Yumi Yari" (traditional welcome song)**

**Performed on a Ghost Gum (*E. papuana*)**
**leaf by Herbert Patten, 6 October 1995**
**Transcribed by Robin Ryan**
**Tape Example 12 (RRC T9)**




**~ = wobble**

**⌣ = short glide up to pitch with forced timbre**

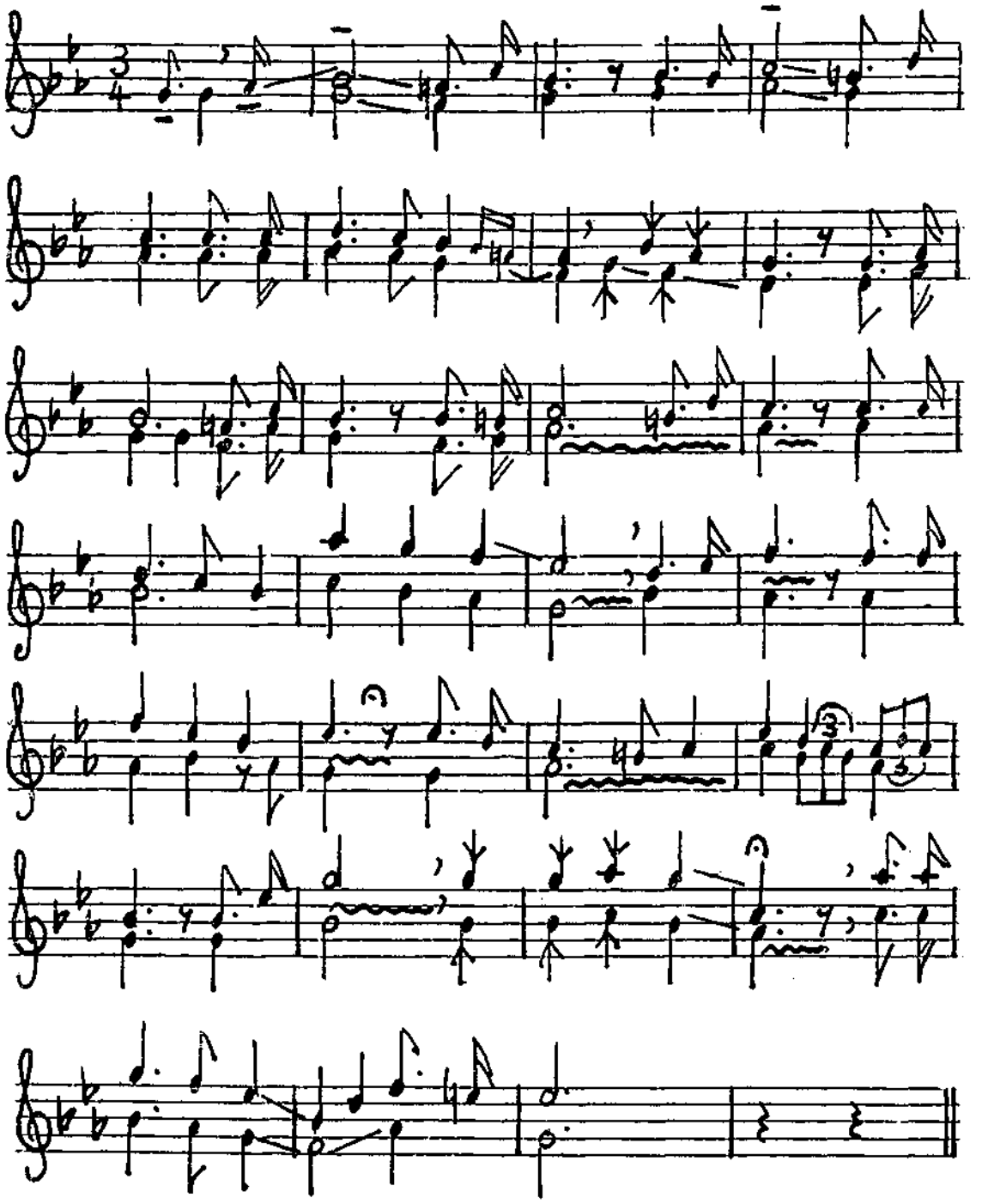
**vib. = vibrato**

**Musical Example 2: Yorta Yorta Love Song (title unknown)**

**Performed on a Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*)**
**leaf by Herbert Patten, 5 October 1996**
**Transcribed by Robin Ryan**
**Tape Example 13 (RRC T10)**

# THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

m.m. ♩ = 72
(irregular)



**Musical Example 3: "The Old Rugged Cross"**

**Composed by George Bennard (1873-1958)**
**Performed by gumleaf duo A. Mason and C. Lindsay**
**Recorded by Cath Ellis at Gerard Mission, SA, 1962**
**Transcribed by Robin Ryan**
**Tape Example 14 (AIATSIS Ellis 3324)**

**= emphasis**

**= glide**

**= breath**

**= "pushed tone"**

**= vibrato**

# The Old Rugged Cross.

Words and music by REV. GEO. BENNARD
(By Permission)

Andante M. ♩ = 84.

Key B♭.

1. On a hill far a-way stood an old rugged cross, The emblem of suff'ring and shame,— And I
2. Oh, that old rugged cross, so des-pised by the world, Has a wondrous at-traction for me;— For the
3. In the old rugged cross, stain'd with blood so di-vine, A won-drous beauty I see,— For 'twas
4. To the old rugged cross I will e-ver be true, Its shame and reproach gladly bear;— Then He'll

CHORUS.

love that old cross where the dearest and best For a world of lost sinners was slain.— So I'll
dear Lamb of God left His glo-ry a-bove, To bear it to dark Calva-ry.—
on that old cross Je-sus suffered and died, To par-don and sancti-fy me.— So I'll
call me some day to my home far a-way, Where His glo-ry for e-ver I'll share.—

cherish the old rugged cross,— Till my trophies at last I lay down;— I will
cherish the cross, the old rugged cross, I will

cling to the old rugged cross,— And ex-change it some day for a crown.—
cling to the cross, the old rugged cross,





**Musical Example 4: "The Old Rugged Cross"**

**Original version published in *The Musical Salvationist*, May 1924, 40**

# GLOSSARY

## PART 1: PLANT SPECIES MENTIONED IN THESIS

### (introduced species are marked with an asterisk*)

| COMMON NAME | ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE NAME (where known) | SCIENTIFIC NAME |
|---|---|---|
| Almond | | *Prunus dulcis* |
| Black Bamboo | | *Phyllostachys nigra* |
| Black Box | | *E. largiflorens* |
| Blackbutt | | *E. pilularis* |
| Blue Box (or Round-leaved Box) | | *E. bauerana* |
| Boobialla | | *e.g. Myoporum acuminatum* |
| Brittle Gum | | *E. mannifera* |
| Brown Barrel | | *E. fastigata* |
| Bush Lemon (or Wild Lemon) | | *Canthium oleifolium* |
| Bushy Yate (a mallee) | | *E. lehmannii* |
| Butterwood | *Guligam* (Yuin) | *Callicoma serratifolia* |
| Camellia | | *Camellia japonica sp.* |
| Camphor Laurel | | *Cinnamomum camphora* |
| Candlebark | | *E. rubida* |
| Coast Grey Box (or Gippsland Grey Box) | | *E. bosistoana* |
| Common Edible Fig | | *Ficus carica* |
| Common Reed | *Kaerk* (Tjapwurong); *Tarrk* (Gunditjmara) | *Phragmites australis* |
| Coolabah (or Coolibah) | | *E. microtheca* |
| Cluster Fig | | *Ficus racemosa* |
| Creek Fig | | *Ficus coronata* |
| Cumquat | | *Fortunella sp.* |
| Curtain Fig | | *Ficus microcarpa var hillii* |
| Dock | | *Rumex sp.* |
| Flax | | *Linum sp.* |
| Flooded Gum | *Moitch* (WA) | *E. rudis* |
| Forest Red Gum | *Tallabri* or *Eurs* (Kurnai) | *E. tereticornis* |
| Ghost Gum | | *E. papuana* |
| Gippsland (or Southern) Mahogany | *Bangalay* (Vic) | *E. botryoides* |
| Grapefruit | | *Citrus paradisi* |
| Grey Box (or Inland Grey Box) | | *E. microcarpa* |
| Jarrah | | *E. marginata* |
| Karri | | *E. diversicolor* |
| Kurrajong | | *Brachychiton populneus* |
| Lemon | | *Citrus limon* |
| Lemon-scented Gum | | *E. citriodora* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lilac | | *e.g. Syringa oblata* |
| Lilly-pilly | | *Acmena smithii; syn. Eugenia smithii* |
| Lime | | *Citrus aurantifolia* |
| Mandarin | | *Citrus reticulata* |
| Manna (or Ribbon) Gum | | *E. viminalis* |
| Marri (or WA Blue Gum) | | *E. calophylla* |
| Messmate (or Messmate Stringybark) | | *E. obliqua* |
| Moreton Bay Fig | | *Ficus macrophylla* |
| Native Cherry | | *Exocarpus cupressiformis* |
| Oenpelli leaf-whistle (no common name) | *anngal* (Mayali) | *E. porrecta* |
| Oleander | | *Nerium oleander* |
| Orange | | *Citrus sinensis* |
| Paddy's Lucerne | | *Sida rhombifolia* |
| Peach | | *Prunus persica sp.* |
| Pear | | *Pyrus communis* |
| Photinia | | *e.g. Photinia glabra robusta* |
| Pincushion Hakea | | *Hakea laurina* |
| Pinkwood | | *Eucrypha moorei* |
| Plane Tree | | *Platanus hybrida* |
| Plum | | *Prunus domestica* |
| Port Jackson Fig | | *Ficus rubiginosa* |
| Privet | | *e.g. Ligustrum lucidum tricolor* |
| Red Bloodwood | | *E. gummifera* |
| Red Box | *Deu* (Kurnai) | *E. polyanthemos* |
| Red-flowering Gum | | *E. ficifolia* |
| Red Ironbark | *Mugga*; *Burirra-wi* (Kurnai) | *E. sideroxylon* |
| River Red Gum (Creek Gum, western NSW) | | *E. camaldulensis* |
| Rose | | *Rosa sp.* |
| Rose Gum | | *E. grandis* |
| Sassafras | | *Doryphora sassafras* |
| Silver Wattle | | *Acacia dealbata* |
| Silvertop Ash | | *E. sieberi* |
| Snow Gum (White Sally, Cabbage Gum) | | *E. pauciflora* |
| Sour (or Seville) Orange | | *Citrus aurantium* |
| Southern Blue Gum | | *E. globulus* |
| Spotted Gum | | *E. maculata* |
| Sugar Gum | | *E. cladocalyx* |
| Swamp Bloodwood | *Mangolanglang*; *anbamberre* (Mayali) | *E. ptychocarpa* |
| Swamp Mahogany | | *E. robusta* |
| Sweet Orange | | *Citrus sinensis* |
| Sweet Pittosporum | | *Pittosporum undulatum* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sweet (or Common) Violet | | *Viola odorata* |
| Sycamore | | *e.g. Acer pseudoplatanus* |
| Sydney Blue Gum | | *E. saligna* |
| Turpentine | | *Syncarpia glomulifera* |
| Variegated Periwinkle | | *Vinca major* |
| Victorian Eurabbie | | *E. pseudoglobulus* |
| Wandering Jew | | *Tradescantia sp.* |
| Water Vine | | *Cissus antarctica* |
| White Ash | | *E. fraxinoides* |
| White Gum (or Scribbly Gum) | | *E. rossii* |
| White Mahogany | | *E. acmenoides, E. triantha* |
| White Stringybark | | *E. globoidea* |
| Wild Orange | | *Capparis mitchellii* |
| Wild Almond | *Elborjeeta* (Channel Country) | n/a |
| Yellow Stringybark | | *E. muelleriana* |
| Yellow Box (Honey Box) | *Dajan* (Kurnai) | *E. melliodora* |
| Yellow Box (or Scarlet Gum, NT) | | *E. phoenicea* |
| Yellow Mallee | | *E. incrassata* |

## PART 2: BIRD SPECIES MENTIONED IN THESIS

| COMMON NAME | ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE NAME (where known) | SCIENTIFIC NAME |
|---|---|---|
| Australian King Parrot | | *Alisterus scapularis* |
| Australian Magpie | *Bleng-bun* (Kurnai) | *Gymnorhina tibicen* |
| Boobook Owl | *Barndagrin* (Kurnai); | |
| or Southern Boobook | *dunuuj* (Yuin) | *Ninox novaeseelandiae* |
| Eastern (or Australian) Curlew | *Dulligar* Bird (Kurnai) | *Numenius madagascariensis* |
| Eastern Whipbird | *Brinjeri* (Kurnai) | *Psophodes olivaceus* |
| Gippsland Black Swan | *Guniyaruk* (Kurnai) | *Cygnus atratus* |
| Grey Wagtail | *Guri djugi* (Mail Bird) | *Motacilla cinera* |
| Laughing Kookaburra (Messenger Bird) | *Gaagum* (Gumbainggir) | *Dacelo novaeguinae* |
| Leatherhead (Noisy Friarbird) | | *Philemon corniculatus* |
| Rainbow Lorikeet | | *Trichoglossus haematodus* |
| Red-capped Robin | *Tutbring Bubiswrens* (Kurnai) | *Petroica goodenovii* |
| Singing Bushlark | | *Mirafra javanica* |
| Soldier Bird (Noisy Minor) | | *Manorina melanocephala* |
| Spotted Turtledove | | *Streptopelia chinensis* |
| Square-tailed Kite | | *Lophoictinia isursa* |
| Sulphur-crested White Cockatoo | *Bre-ek* (Kurnai) | *Cacatua galerita* |
| White-bellied Sea Eagle | | *Haliaeetus leucogaster* |
| White Thrush | | *Zoothera dauma* |
| Willie-Wagtail | *Jingir-jingir* (clan n/a) | *Rhipidura leucophrys* |
| Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo | *Way-lar* (a rain-bringer) | *Calyptorhynchus funereus* |

**Note**: common names have not yet been established for the *Guragalang* (Mail Bird) and Kooridooki Talking Bird (Biripai Aboriginal English).

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# SOUND SOURCES

## 1. Field Recordings (Audiocassettes).

All items listed below are held in the Robin Ryan Collection (RRC). Copies will be deposited in the archives of the Department of Music, Monash University.

**Recordist**

Boston, Roseina

1996 *Gumleaf Playing by Roseina Boston*, including "Bill Bailey", "Swanee River" ("Old Folks at Home"), "How Great Thou Art" and "The Old Rugged Cross". Recorded at Nambucca Heads, NSW on 24 September (**RRC T1**).

Patten, Herbert

1992 *Gumleaf Excerpts*, including *Danny Boy*, the war song medley, and an improvisation on Pachelbel's *Canon in D*; two birdcalls. Recorded in Reservoir, Victoria, 15 August (**RRC T2**).

*Herbert Patten discusses his Life History and Koorie Music*. Recorded in Reservoir, Victoria, 18 August (**RRC T3**).

1998 *Gumleaf Birdcalls and Dramatic Leaf Re-enactments, with Commentary*. Recorded in Thornbury, Victoria, 19 January (**RRC T4**).

Ryan, Robin

1993 *The 1993 Golden Gumleaf Award*. Maryborough, Victoria, 2 and 3 October (**RRC T5**).

1994 *The 1994 Golden Gumleaf Award*. Maryborough, Victoria, 1 and 2 October (**RRC T6**).

1995 *Storytelling and Gumleaf Playing by Roseina Boston*. Recorded with the assistance of Jobby Jarrett at the Aboriginal Land Council, Bowraville, NSW, 27 April (**RRC T7**).

*Interview and Leaf Items, Wendy Eva, Gumleaf Champion of 1982 and 1985*. Recorded at Tatura, Victoria, 10 August (**RRC T8**).

*"Yumi Yumi Yari" played on leaf by Herbert Patten; the 1995 Golden Gumleaf Award*. Maryborough, Victoria, 7 and 8 October (**RRC T9**).

1996 *The 1996 Golden Gumleaf Award*, including the unnamed Yorta Yorta Love Song and "Petite Fleur" played by Herbert Patten; and "Bill Bailey" played by Roseina Boston. Maryborough, Victoria, 5 and 6 October (**RRC T10**).

*Gumleaf Birdcalls and Stories by Roseina Boston; Oral History of Harry Boston*. Recorded at Glen Iris, Victoria, 7 October (**RRC T11**).

1997 *Herbert Patten Performs and Discusses the Aboriginal Folk Song "Jacky Jacky"*. Recorded at Glen Iris, Victoria, 7 July (**RRC T12**).

*Gumleaf Music, Original Songs and Oral History of James Dungay*. Recorded at Glen Iris, Victoria, 3 October (**RRC T14**).

*The 1997 Golden Gumleaf Award*, including the annual "scratch band".Maryborough, Victoria, 5 October (**RRC T13**).

## 2. Sound Studio Laboratory Recordings

Haymes, Ron

1993 *Items of Music performed by Herbert Patten (gumleaf, male voice and guitar)*, including "Jacky Jacky", "Newmerella Pines", and a war song medley. Recorded at Monash University Sound Studio, Clayton, Victoria, 6 December (**RRC T15**).

1994 *State-of-Preference Test 1*. Devised by Robin Ryan and performed by Virgil Reutens (gumleaf and guitar) and Colleen Reutens (voice). Recorded at Monash University Sound Studio, Clayton, Victoria, 30 May. Leaf analyst: Associate Professor Neil Hallam (**RRC T16**).

Sunderland, Herbert

1994 *State-of-Preference Test 2*. Devised by Robin Ryan and performed by Philip Elwood (gumleaf). Recorded at Monash University Sound Studio, Clayton, Victoria, 31 October (**RRC T17**).

Webb, Ben

1995 *State-of-Preference Test 3*. Devised by Robin Ryan and performed by Herbert Patten (gumleaf). Recorded at Monash University Sound Studio, Clayton, Victoria, 1 June (**RRC T18**).

## 3. Archival Audio Material

All the archival leaf recordings held at the NLA, and some of those held at AIATSIS, are listed in Bradley (1995-11-13). All items in the Chris Sullivan Collection, and some recorded by Bradley and Meredith, were inaccessible to the author. According to the AIATSIS system, A = Archival Version and LA = Library Archive or Listening Version.

Bradley, Kevin

1994 *From Gumleaves to Microphones: Field Recordings at the National Library of Australia*. Talk delivered at the Australasian Sound Recordings Association (ASRA) Conference, Canberra 8 April.

Bradley, Kevin and Peter Ellis

1990 *Interview with Clarrie Grogan, Irish/Aboriginal Leaf Player.* Recorded at Cairns, Queensland on 18 April. NLA TRC 2604.

Ellis, Catherine

1962 *Anne Mason and Cyril Lindsay (gumleaf duo) perform 'Whispering Hope', 'The Old Rugged Cross' and 'Out of my Bondage'.* Field tape recorded on 13 December at Gerard Mission, Swan Reach, SA. AIATSIS, Ellis Collection 3324 (also part of a collection from the 1950s and 1960s made for the Folklore Society of Victoria).

Grieve, Ray

1980 *Les Hawthorne plays Leaf* ("Wild Colonial Boy", "Mockingbird Hill" and "The Irish Washerwoman") at Palm Beach, Queensland and *Walter McLaughlin plays Leaf* ("Two Little Girls in Blue") and *Leaf Birdcalls* (the Black Cockatoo and White Cockatoo) at Drummoyne, NSW. Copies held by Ray Grieve and Robin Ryan.

Gordon, John

1968 *Kamilaroi Albert Dennison plays Leaf.* Recorded at West Moree, NSW on 27 August. AIATSIS 1220B.

Holmer, Nils M.

1964 *Fred Bugg plays Gum Tree Leaf ("The Old Rugged Cross") and tells Stories from the Shark Tribe in English.* Recorded at Greenhill Mission via Kempsey, NSW, March/April. AIATSIS 1760-1.

1970 *The traditional tune "Gurrjinjanami" is played on an unidentified Leaf at the home of Norris Blair, possibly by Blair himself.* Recorded at Maryborough, Queensland. AIATSIS 4387, Track B (42: 35).

Mathews, Janet

1964 *Albert Thomas mentions the Leaf Bands that used to play in the Old Days.* Recorded at Wreck Bay, NSW on 9 July. AIATSIS LA1013.

*Gumleaf solo "Jacky Jacky" by Jimmy Little Senior.* Recorded at Yarragee, NSW on 1 September. AIATSIS A1015A; sound component to "Gumleaf Playing" in *EAA* CD-Rom (AIATSIS 1994)

1965 *Stan Mundy (leaf) performs "Jacky Jacky", "Two Up" and "The Old Rugged Cross".* Recorded at Wreck Bay, NSW on 22 April. AIATSIS 1020. Transcribed by John Gordon: AIATSIS LA5379; A1020A, 11:47 (3).

1969 *Jimmy Little Senior (leaf) plays "I'll take you home again, Kathleen".* Recorded at Primbee (Pt Kembla), NSW on 10 September. AIATSIS LA1015B.

Meredith, John

1984 *Arthur Foster plays Leaf, Fiddle and Mandolin, and Sings.* Recorded at Killarney Vale, NSW, 27 March. Folkloric recording, NLA TRC 2222/49.

*Walter McLaughlin plays Leaf and Musical Saw (bowed).* Recorded at Drummoyne, NSW on 3 October. Folkloric recording, NLA TRC 2222 R-27.

*Dudley Carter plays the Leaf.* Recorded at Narromine, NSW on 12 October. Folkloric recording, NLA TRC 2222/30.

1991 *George Brown talks about the Leaf sound.* Recorded at Wreck Bay, NSW on 14 May (held by the collector).

Meredith, John and Kevin Bradley

1994 *Will Lockwood plays Gumleaf.* Recorded at Toolamba, Victoria on 13 January. NLA TRC 3000/82.

*Leo Doyle plays Gumleaf and Snakeskin.* Recorded at Alexandra, Victoria on 14 January. NLA TRC 3000/82.

*Wayne Thorpe, interviewed at Lake Tyers Village, Victoria.* Recorded on 17 January. NLA TRC 3000/85.

Meredith, John and Chris Sullivan

1983 *Tom O'Brien plays Fiddle and Lemon Leaf.* Recorded at Aberdeen, NSW, 18 April. Folkloric recording, NLA Oral History Program TRC 2221/c20; TRC 2750.

Meredith, John and Ian Tait

1990 *Frank Mumbulla plays Leaf.* Recorded at Bomaderry, NSW, 24 February. NLA TRC 2222/393.

Meredith, John and Rob Willis

1990 *Fred Roberts plays Gumleaf and Mouth Organ, talks and recites, and his daughter Wendy Eva plays Leaf.* Recorded at Tatura, Victoria on 14 March. Folkloric recording, NLA TRC 2222/402.

1991 *Kevin O'Connor demonstrates Leaf Playing on an Orange Leaf.* Recorded at Griffith, NSW on 15 November. Folkloric recording, NLA TRC 2590.

1992 *Keith Graetz plays Gumleaf.* Recorded at Stuart Mill, Victoria on 19 August. NLA TRC 2590/41.

O'Connor, Norm and Maryjean Officer

1961 *Aaron Briggs sings, plays Gumleaf and speaks of Aborigines at Cummeragunga Mission*. Recorded at Barmah, Victoria. Folkloric cassette, Norm O'Connor Collection, NLA Oral History Program TRC 2539/032.

Paton, John

1953 *Folk Songs from Wally Carter (includes Wally Carter and Foster Moffatt, gumleaf duet)*. Norm O'Connor Collection, NLA Oral History Program, NLA TRC 2539/076.

Recordist uncited

1977 *Les Morton (Button Accordion Player) is Interviewed on Dances, Musicians, and Tunes Played at Dances* (includes gumleaf playing), 17 February. Catalogue of the NFSA, 1994 (173551).

## 4. Broadcast Material (in chronological order)

1994 *Late Night Live*. Philip Adams interviews Virgil Reutens and Kevin Bradley on Radio National: 7 November.

1995 *Arts Today with David Marr*. Sharn Pryor interviews Herbert Patten, Robin Ryan and Kevin Bradley on Radio National, 26 June.

*Australia Remembers the Black Diggers 1939-1945*, produced and presented by Ian Braybrook in conjunction with the Dja Dja Wrung Media Association, Radio KLFM, Bendigo, August.

1996 *The Doug Aiton Show*. John Fain interviews Roseina Boston on 3LO, Radio National, 4 October.

*Transpoes*. ABC Classic FM programme on birdcalls, produced in Sydney by Sherre Delys, featuring Herbert Patten and Philip Elwood, 14 October.

"Tribute to Lin Onus" (including Gumleaf Lament by Herbert Patten), *Awaye*, November. Melissa Jackson and Ronald Briggs, Aboriginal Liaison Librarians.

1999 *Music Deli with Paul Petran*. ABC Radio National programme, featuring excerpts from Herb Patten's CD *How to Play the Gumleaf* (Sydney: Currency Press), 8 May.

## 5. Commercial Recordings (in chronological order)

*c.* 1906-1912 "Whistlin' Pete". Excerpt demonstrating minstrel whistling. Rena Records (held by John Whiteoak).

| | |
|---|---|
| 1981 | *Songs from North Queensland.* Recorded by Alice M. Moyle, released by Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra. Features the Wintjinam whistle. |
| 1988 | *Whistling Gumleaves*, Keith Graetz. A Pioneer Country Sounds Production, 1 Ford St, Swan Hill, Victoria. |
| 1994 | *Aboriginal Sound Instruments.* Recorded and edited by Alice M. Moyle; an abridged version of the author's record booklet (1978). Features the Wintjinam whistle. |
| 1999 | *How to Play the Gumleaf.* A combined book and CD featuring 40 tracks of leafist Herbert Patten, recorded and produced by Greg White for Currency Press, Sydney. |
| forthcoming | "Australian Musical Instruments", Vol. 20 of *Soundabout Australia* (CD to include the gumleaf). Centre for Studies in Australian Music, Faculty of Music, the University of Melbourne. |

# FILMOGRAPHY

**1. Field Videos** (in chronological order) held in the Robin Ryan Collection (RRC).

**Recordist**

Ryan, Robin

The 1993 Golden Gumleaf Award, Maryborough, Victoria, 2 and 3 October (RRC V1).

Dean, Deirdre and Robin Ryan

The 1994 Golden Gumleaf Award, Maryborough, Victoria, 1 and 2 October (RRC V2).

Atkinson, Jarrod and Robin Ryan

The 1995 Golden Gumleaf Award, Maryborough, Victoria, 7 and 8 October (RRC V3).

The 1996 Golden Gumleaf Award, Maryborough Victoria, 5 and 6 October (RRC V4).

**2. Archival Audiovisual Material**

(**Note:** some videos are held privately by John Meredith)

Meredith, John and Kevin Bradley

1994 "Wendy Eva plays Gumleaf" at Tatura, Victoria on 13 January. NFSA, John Meredith Collection

**3. Televised Material (in alphabetical order)**

ABC/TV

1993 *Forgotten Heroes. Aborigines at War from the Somme to Vietnam* by Alick Jackomos and Derek Fowell (book launch features Cinesound Review 488 of the Lake Tyers Military Gumleaf Band, 1941). *7.30 Report*, 23 April.

Channel 7

1980 "Gumleaf Whistling" (moving image), *Shirl's Neighbourhood* (childrens' series combining stories, both informational and entertaining, in music and song), produced by Puppetstuff Pty Ltd, Series 138183 (NFSA Preservation Material).

Channel 9

1993 Segment on the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship, featuring Virgil Reutens and Herbert Patten, 6 pm *News*, 3 October.

1999 Segment featuring Herbert Patten on the launching of his booklet/CD "How to Play the Gumleaf" (Sydney: Currency press), *Today. News and Current Affairs, presented by Tracy Grimshaw*: 17 May.

Channel 10

1986 "Golden Wattle Festival Gumleaf Championship", *News*, 7 September.

1988 "Maryborough Festival Gumleaf Competition", *News*, 2 October.

1989 "Cooee Calling Championships", *News*, 13 August.

"Maryborough Gumleaf Championship", *News*, 8 October.

1990 "Clarrie Grogan, Gumleaf Player", *New 10 News*, 25 May, Cover No. 53770; ABC 9977.

1993 *Forgotten Heroes. Aborigines at War from the Somme to Vietnam* by Alick Jackomos and Derek Fowell (book launch features Herbert Patten playing "The Last Post" on gumleaf), *New 10 News*, 23 April.

1998 "Sorry Day Celebrations, Melbourne, Victoria". *New 10 News* (includes footage of leafist Herbert Patten).

Clemenger Melbourne

1995 Uncle Tobys Fruit Break Advertisement, featuring leafist Virgil Reutens (screened on various channels throughout Victoria).

Golden West Television

1994 "The Gumleaf Maestro", featuring Herbert Patten, segment from the *Milbindi* Series filmed in Broome, WA.

## 4. Commercial Films and CD-Roms (in chronological order)

Unattributed

1912 *Derniers Indigenes Australiens: État de Victoria 1912* (The Last Indigenous Australians: State of Victoria 1912). black and white silent film, including footage of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal settlement; all intertitles in French (NFSA, Canberra: 9216).

Australian Movietone

1932 *Opening of Sydney Harbour Bridge* (includes brief glimpse of the Aboriginal contingent, including the leafists). Movietone News A0012; C1159.

Cinesound Productions Ltd.

1933 *The Squatter's Daughter*. Based on the play by Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan, directed by Ken G. Hall, black and white film held at AIATSIS, NFSA and NLA, Canberra. (Excerpt of gumleaf band also available in "Music and the Movies: An Overview of the Australian Contribution from 1894-1969", ASRA, NFSA).

Filmworld

1934 *Highlights of the Week. Abo's Play War Cry on Gum Leaves before Downing Scots Team in Football Clash at Arncliffe [NSW]*. Cinesound Review 149 (NSFA 7093, Rack#: ABA000432).

Columbia Pictures

1936 *Rangle River*. Story by Zane Gray revised by Charles and Elsa Chauvel, directed by Clarence Badger at National Studios, black and white film (held at NFSA).

Cinesound

1941 *Aborigines are True Soldiers of the King*. Cinesound Review 488, featuring the Lake Tyers Military Gumleaf Band. Footage of the Aborigines training is contrasted with traditional Aboriginal activities (NFSA summary; held at AITSIS and NFSA, Canberra).

Cinesound

1949 *Native Talent in Aboriginal Corroboree - 1949 Style* (shows Aborigines performing a corroboree, playing in a gumleaf band and performing on stage). Cinesound Review 0942, black & white film released 28 November, photography by Geoff Thompson (held at NFSA, Canberra).

Sixpence Productions

1983 *Lousy Little Sixpence*. Produced by Alec Morgan and Gerald Bostock, directed by Alec Morgan, 16 mm, colour (NFSA, Canberra).

Aboriginal Studies Press for AIATSIS

1994 Gumleaf solo "Jacky Jacky" performed by Jimmy Little Senior, and recorded by Janet Mathews at Yarragee, NSW in 1964, *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia: Aboriginal and Torres St Islander History, Society and Culture*. Electronic CD-Rom edition produced and designed by Kim McKenzie, D. Horton and Robyne Bancroft.

# PERFECT BEAT

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RIFFS

# UKULELES, GUITARS OR GUMLEAVES?

## Hula Dancing and Southeastern Australian Aboriginal Performers in the 1920s and 1930s

ROBIN RYAN

## Introduction

Before the so-called 'Golden Age' which Hawaiian music experienced internationally from the 1930s–1950s, various visiting and locally based Australian troupes featured hula dancing as part of their acts[1]. This short article serves as a postscript to the comprehensive studies of Hawaiian music and hula dancing in Australia previously published in this journal by Bambrick and Miller (1994) and Coyle and Coyle (1995) and documents the recruitment of renowned Yuin elder Gaboo Ted Thomas[2] to a Hawaiian-oriented performance troupe in the 1920s.

Many thanks to Gaboo Ted Thomas for relaying the history of his artistic career during interviews on 7 July 1994 and 19 March 1996, and for authorising publication of this short article. All quotations referenced below are taken from these interviews.

## 1. GABOO TED THOMAS, TAP DANCER

Thomas was born under a bush near Braidwood, New South Wales on 27 January 1909, to an Aboriginal elder, Willy (William) Iberia Thomas, and a Chinese/French mother, Gwendoline Linno Mary Ahoy (whose Chinese father was a market gardener during the Mt. Dromedary Gold Rush at the turn of the century). During his childhood at the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Reserve, Thomas was singled out to become a future elder and taken north, at about twelve years of age, to learn the lore of tribal people. He later spent many years camping out or going walkabout.

As a child Thomas excelled at tap dancing, a skill which he acquired by observing

others. In the 1920s his talent was discovered by Dot Hartman, a part-Aboriginal performer who recruited him into a Hawaiian-style performance troupe from New Zealand[3]. While Thomas is reluctant to put calendar dates to their tours[4], his recruitment to the group occurred before he began touring with the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band in 1928, with which his father had also performed, so he must have still been a teenager when he left to work with Hartman.

Thomas recalls having no difficulty in picking up the hula dance sequences and songs. These were accompanied by ukulele and guitar only, with Thomas also sometimes taking turn to strum along on guitar. He wore a brightly coloured shirt with long silk pants held up by a cummerbund, a normal hairstyle, and face make-up applied by the women in the company. The troupe performed in front of "hundreds" of people, including many children who always gave them an "enthusiastic reception" as they toured the eastern seaboard as far north as Beaudesert, Queensland[5]. They transported a large tent in which to perform their acts, usually held at showgrounds[6]. Thomas recalls that the predominantly female troupe doted on him to the extent of protectively surrounding him during the night.

## 2. LEAF BAND VAUDEVILLE SHOWS

After touring with the Hawaiian-style performance troupe discussed above, Thomas began working with a gumleaf band. Aboriginal leaf band performances typified fringe entertainment in the 1920s and 1930s. The gumleaf (along with the violin, accordion and guitar) was a staple instrument at Wallaga Lake, where Thomas and his brothers joined the local, sol-fa trained, gumleaf ensemble. Because the Aboriginal station was not excessively missionised, creative characteristics of Aboriginal performance practice, such as clowning and 'painting-up', persisted in the band's presentations. When members of the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band sang "I came to the river and I couldn't get across", for instance, Jimmy Little Senior[7] would suddenly spring on stage to spear (imaginary) fish. Thomas recalls that they made a "beautiful sound", with the gumleaf players and kangaroo-skin drum situated behind the singers. They walked all the way to Melbourne to perform at the Palais Royal, and marched at the official opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932[8]. While it is unclear whether hula dancing featured in the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band's performances in the 1930s, a photograph of the band taken in 1958 (reproduced in Morgan, 1995: 98) shows four young women in hula skirts posing with the ensemble and listed as members in the accompanying caption.

Hula dancing also featured in the repertoire of another Aboriginal gumleaf ensemble simply known as 'The Leaf Band'. This ensemble, which also included Jimmy Little Senior and his brother Jackie from the Wallaga Lake band toured New South Wales in the early 1930s. May and Marjy Butler, daughters of the troupe's proprietor Tom Butler of Ulladulla[9], performed hula dances. A photograph of the troupe published in *New Dawn* magazine, in 1971[10] indicates that Campbell, who designed the troupe's costumes, also participated in hula dancing. The accompanying article

stated that the musical accompaniment of leaves, jews-harps, harmonicas and violins was said to have made a "fair razz-a-ma-tazz" (unattributed, 1971: 12–13).

## CONCLUSION

Evidence of artistic crossover occurring between Australian Aborigines and Polynesian performers or performance models in the early 20th Century is thin, but the stories of Gaboo Ted Thomas and The Leaf Band indicate that at least one link took place in the 1920s, with Hawaiian dance functioning as a catalyst for the collaboration. Since a number of influential early performers of Hawaiian music in Australia were Maori (Coyle and Coyle, 1995: 41), it is likely that the performance practice and costuming of hula dancing by Aboriginal fringe-dwellers both evolved from and was modelled on Maori versions of Hawaiian dance rather than its slicker mainstream counterparts. Gaps in documentation exist because marginalised Aboriginal performers did not generally receive media coverage of the magnitude afforded to the Hawaiian Variety acts which toured in the context of the Tivoli circuit.

## ENDNOTES

1. Ernest Kaai's Hawaiian troupe was apparently the first to visit Australia, touring in 1911 (Coyle and Coyle, 1995: 34).

2. Most of the inhabitants of Koori Village, Wallaga Lake are descendants of the Yuin or Coast Murring clan, the peace-loving people of the black duck (umbarra). See Horton, 1994 for the clan's background. The tribal name Gaboo means 'great spirit' or 'good friend'.

3. Thomas does not recall the troupe having any fixed name. He also has not specified whether all the New Zealanders were Maoris. It should be noted however, that evidence exists that Maori musicians such as Billy Bishop enhanced the development of Hawaiian music in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s (Coyle and Coyle, 1995: 41).

4. Thomas prefers to stick to the traditional Aboriginal custom of reading seasonal changes in the flora and fauna and times of the day by the phases of sunrise and sunset.

5. Thomas cannot recall any other Hawaiian troupes touring the coast at the same time, but he may not have had access to media information on the subject.

6. This was not uncommon practice. Max Ives recalled seing a troupe of six or eight Maori players perform for a local agricultural show in the early 1920s (Coyle and Coyle, 1995: 41).

7. Father of the first Aboriginal singer to top the mainstream singles charts, with *Royal Telephone*, in 1970. Jimmy Little Senior was still performing gumleaf in the early 1960s.

8. The routes of the band's extensive travels are being documented in greater c by the author.

9. Further research on this troupe is needed to establish, for example, whether proprietor was Aboriginal.

10. A photograph of Campbell, wearing a hula skirt, appeared alongside unattrib 1971: 12–13.

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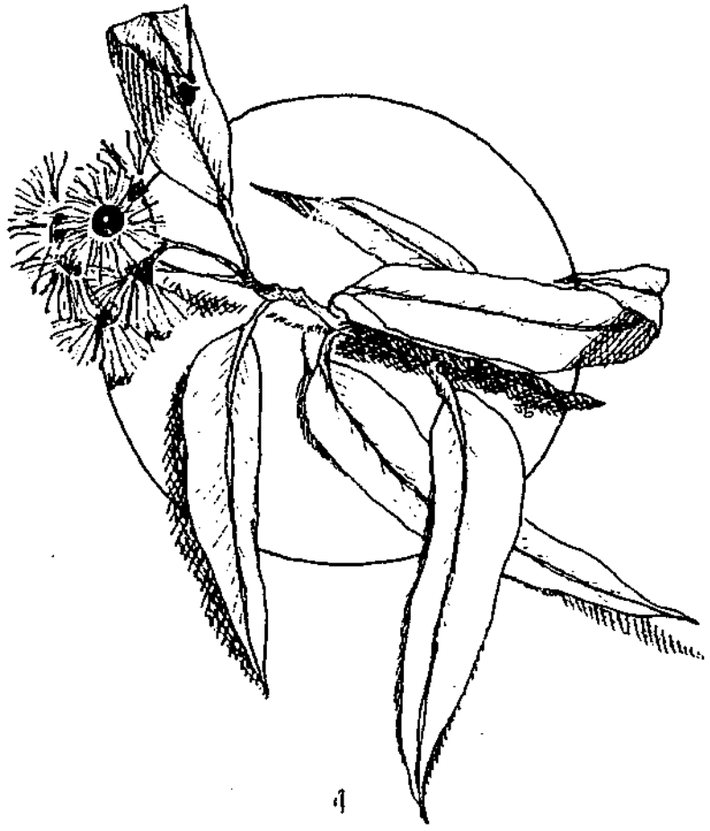




# FOREWORD

Robin Ryan

The gumleaf is a unique Australian musical instrument which holds a fascination for young and old. Youngsters love to produce a loud, high-pitched blast of sound as they blow air past a blade of grass or a leaf held between the hands. But the gumleaf is no superficial novelty instrument - when played seriously it is capable of complex and highly expressive music. The sound of the gumleaf also varies markedly depending on the player and the type of leaf used. It has been mistaken for a whistle, flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, violin and female voice. Although gumleaf playing has been primarily identified with Aboriginal players and taught by Aboriginal teachers, there is also a colonial and twentieth century non-Aboriginal tradition of gumleaf playing. From 1977 to 1997 the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship (held annually in Maryborough, Victoria), with its coveted Golden Gumleaf Award, became a focus for enthusiastic Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal players from around the country.

This is the first book to publicise a method for gumleaf playing and it is fitting that it be created by Australia's leading Aboriginal exponent, Herb Patten.

A renowned musician and singer, he is also a researcher, lecturer and teacher of Aboriginal cultural traditions. It has been my privilege to research the indigenous gumleaf playing tradition with Herb over a period of five years. Our colleague John Whiteoak, a most inquisitive thinker and musicologist, has been the driving force in bringing this book to fruition. There is no right or wrong way to play the gumleaf. Herb's tried-and-true method emphasises leaf selection, gumleaf grip, initial sound production, breath control, and the production of special effects through skilled use of the fingers and tongue.

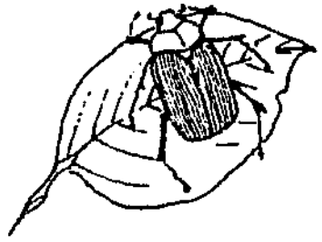
Most Aboriginal people adhere to the belief that gumleaf playing is 'traditional', and many regard it as a predestined talent. Some believe that the art was passed on by the Elders, who played gumleaves during walkabout, and that the gumleaf emits a 'spiritual' sound. There is some evidence for its use as a ceremonial instrument, hunting device, musical toy, danger signal, and 'ghost sound' maker. Aborigines adapted with facility to playing European music on leaves: so much so that the activity has been woven into the cultural fabric of Aboriginal community life throughout the twentieth century.

The Aboriginal gumleaf band tradition was instigated by missionaries and peaked from the 1920s-1940s. Members of the Wallaga Lake Gumleaf Band of NSW marched at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in



1932. The Lake Tyers Gumleaf Band of Victoria performed for thousands of tourists and many of its bandsmen were exploited in army recruiting drives. In outback areas Aboriginal drovers played leaves to quieten cattle, and gumleaf buskers played in towns and cities. One of the last full-blood Gunai (Kurnai) tribesmen, Bill Bull, was arrested for playing gumleaf hymns on Melbourne street corners. His death-in-custody in 1954 provoked debate and inspired many verses.

Today possibilities abound for the use of the unpretentious gumleaf instrument in eco-tourism. Herb closely associates his leaf instruments with the natural environment, seeing them as a symbolic link between land and culture. Using leaves from a particular location strengthens his sense of place and spiritual connection to the earth, whilst the presence of environmental sounds, especially bird-calls, influences the sounds he makes on the instrument. As he plays the leaf, Herb feels bonded to the musicians who preceded him – countless men and women who played gumleaves daily to express their joys and sorrows.



# INTRODUCING HERB PATTEN

Robin Ryan

Born in Orbost, Victoria in 1943, Herb is the grandson of Jack Patten senior, a skilled police black tracker known as 'the Sleuth' and noted for solving many mysteries beginning in the late 1920s. Herb's father George and Uncle Jack were both daring, gifted speakers on behalf of the Aboriginal cause. Jack Patten junior (1904-1957) was arrested for leading the famous 1939 Cummeragunga Walkout, when descendants of the Ulupna, Yorta Yorta and Wiradjurie followed him across the River Murray into Victoria – only to endure refugee status in their own land.



Herb's maternal great-grandfather George Thomas was only a boy when the last great battle between the Brabuwooloong and the Bratowoloong took place in the 1850s at the mouth of the Tambo River, Gippsland. After George's parents died in the battle he was reared by two Brabuwooloong who persuaded John Bulmer to set up a mission at Bunyarnda (Lake Tyers), a traditional meeting place for clans of the Gunai (Kurnai) nation. George later married and reared a family in a mia-mia at Newmerella until a cottage was built; his granddaughter Susie married George Patten in 1940 and also settled at Newmerella.

Inspired by the leaf blowing of his great-uncle Lindsey Thomas, seven year-old Herb religiously practised on resinous stringybark leaves as he played in a large gravel pit near the settlement. His first public performance took place in the Orbost Mechanics Hall in the early 1950s and was featured in the local press. Accompanied by his aunt at the piano, Herb came second in an amateur competition with his medley of war songs, namely 'Pack up your Troubles', 'Roll out the Barrel' and 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'.

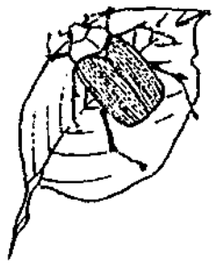
After years as the leader of the New South Wales coastal rock band the House of the Rising Sons, Herb gained confidence to appear as a guest artist with the Country Outcasts. He wrote the country-and-western ballad 'Newmerella Pines', and is an authority on the well-known Aboriginal folksong

'Jacky Jacky'. In 1993 Herb came second in the Australian Gumleaf Playing Championship and in 1994 he won a talent quest in southern NSW. Following this, Herb featured as the Gumleaf Maestro in Golden West Television's Milbindi Series and worked in Hong Kong performing leaf music for "A Taste of Australia" promotions. He played gumleaf at the opening of Melbourne's 1995 Moomba Festival and 1998 Sorry Day. He has performed at countless other Aboriginal and mainstream events.

Herb has also had a long and respected record of voluntary and professional service to the Aborigines' Advancement League (AAL), the Harold Blair Hostel, the W.T. Onus Hostel, the Aboriginal Elders' Caring Place (AECS), and the Melbourne Koorie Funeral Service. Herb and his resourceful wife Bunta have assisted the cultural development of many children and teenagers at Aboriginal Awareness Camps in rural Victoria and NSW. Herb's enthusiastic public relation skills greatly enhance the process of Reconciliation. In 1996 the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Incorporated (VACSAI) honoured Herb for his valued contribution to the Aboriginal community.



# LEARNING TO PLAY THE GUMLEAF WELL



Learning to play the gumleaf well can take as much hard work, enthusiasm, and patience as it does to master any other musical instrument. Yet, just being able to play a few simple tunes on the gumleaf can give a deep sense of achievement, and this gift of musical self-expression will stay with you always. The hardest thing in gumleaf playing is making those all-important first steps. This book will show you how.

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