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### Local difference and issues of heritage identity in the formulation of music policy for Darwin

PHILIP HAYWARD

#### INTRODUCTION

In November 2004 Ian Buchanan, Professor of Cultural Studies at Charles Darwin University (Darwin), arranged for me to meet Dr Rolf Gerritsen, Director of Economic Policy in the Department of the Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government, to discuss his ideas for the development of Darwin as a “creative city” along the lines suggested by Richard Florida (2002, 2005). The particular aspect of Gerritsen’s plans that interested me was his desire for music culture to play a strong role in establishing and promoting that identity. During the discussion with him I made strong arguments that any such development should be informed by issues of local heritage. My intervention was evidently taken seriously since I was invited to submit a short report on Darwin’s musical heritage to feed into the Department’s deliberations.

The report’s brief was threefold:

- to provide an account of the music heritage of Darwin;
- to provide a discussion of how heritage issues – and particularly those concerning music – could inform the development of cultural policies;
- to provide recommendations of how local heritage could be considered in developing the music culture of Darwin and its potential to be a focus for cultural tourism (and thereby to employment and general economic development).

The report was researched between November 2004 and April 2005 using archive and library facilities in Darwin, and through interviews with cultural activists, musicians and academics (in Darwin and elsewhere).

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This article analyses a set of issues arising from the report with particular regard to the processes of selection necessary to the project and to the nature of the musical history and heritage uncovered. It provides a reflection on the nature of policy research in tandem with a schematic (but by no means exhaustive) overview of Darwin's musical history.

### HERITAGE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Cultural heritage is a concept that operates in communities from the micro/local level through to the international. It is frequently drawn on to support initiatives aiming to preserve and/or renovate aspects of material or intangible culture that are perceived to have fallen into neglect or appear threatened by various aspects of development and/or cultural change. As such, heritage is a flexible and often highly partisan concept that is often opposed by groups wishing to resist the cultural validation and degree of protection that bestowal of heritage status brings. Property developers are the most obvious example of the latter but there can also be a series of other, often subtler and more complex, opponents of heritage initiatives whose position reflects their particular interests and identity politics.

Heritage is something that is not so much apparent as projected. Elements of heritage can be variously forgotten, hidden or 'out-of-focus' at particular times, only to be mobilised and/or highlighted at others. This situation often prevails in areas that have experienced marked disruptions due to factors such as population dispersal, transience, influxes (and/or related economic or environmentally calamitous events). This situation of 'obscured heritage' is one that can be modified by various initiatives, such as broad-based socio-cultural movements focusing on heritage-related issues (on their own terms or as part of other agendas and activities); small groups or individuals involved with local culture; or outside cultural workers.

Within this activity there is a subset of further issues and concerns. The heritage that is 'objectively there' comprises the totality of culture that has been produced and circulated in a region or community. However, this aspect of heritage resists easy employment and mobilisation and is, consequently, seldom used in discussions of local heritage and attempts to support, revive and/or develop aspects of local culture. The concept of heritage most commonly deployed in this context is that of *distinct* local heritage – ie those elements within that continuum that can be identified as most distinct to the locale; those that can be read as expressing and embodying local cultural difference. There is – obviously – a distinct 'politics of difference' involved here, the valorisation of elements of distinction over everyday (trans-locational) culture.

Indigenous cultural forms, particularly those that involve aspects of local languages (of various kinds) represent one of the most clearly distinct aspects of a location. A second element comprises locally distinct blendings and/or syntheses of more broadly circulated forms or locally themed articulations of

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these. A third comprises external cultural forms that are uniquely present in specific locations. The following section provides an account of Darwin's musical history that emphasises those musical scenes and styles that are most distinct to the city. The implications of such a selective emphasis for the formulation of cultural policy are returned to later in the article.

### DARWIN'S MUSIC HISTORY: 1870-1910

The area of Larrakia clan land now occupied by central Darwin was chosen as the site for the future capital of Northern Territory in 1869. Despite their displacement – and the increasing influence of Anglo-Australian culture, religion, administration and harassment – the Larrakia continued their traditional songs, dances and other practices well into the 20th century, developing these into new forms as a result of intermarriage with other groups and as a reaction to cultural contact with the new population of the area.

Music formed a part of Euro-Australian settlement life from the earliest period. De La Rue (2004) has identified that:

*Music was a favourite pastime in the evenings and crossed the social boundaries to some extent. Harriet [Douglas] recorded evenings spent around the Douglas family's piano and also listened with great pleasure to the regular impromptu concerts when men gathered in The Camp after their meals to play their concertinas or flutes and sing popular songs. (27-28)*

As settlement developed such activity became more elaborate and formalised. Colgrave (1998) has documented that Palmerston Dramatic and Musical Society provided regular entertainment between 1883-1887 (only subsiding when a number of its key members left the Territory in 1887). Occasional balls and concerts continued and the local social scene was enlivened by occasional visits, such as that from the touring British ensemble Harding's Mikado Opera Company, which visited Darwin in September 1888 (after appearing at Thursday Island), and performed nine separate shows (including a presentation of *The Mikado* itself).

In the early days of settlement the fledgling community also utilised the performing talents of local indigenous people for various ceremonies and entertainments. Specific instances of this recorded in contemporary accounts include Larrakia people performing with members of the neighbouring Wulna clan near the official residency in 1891 and the staging of a Larrakia corroboree accompanied by Larrakia male Bubs Mananilla's didjeridu playing for the Governor of South Australia on his visit in 1905 (Unattributed, 2001: ix). Such activities continued in the early 1920s, as tourism became more formalised, with press accounts recording that Brinken and Tiwi performers staged a corroboree on Mindi Beach for a visiting cruise ship in 1923 and that members of the Larrakia clan staged a "peace dance" for visitors in 1928 (ibid: xvi).

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During the 1870s and 1880s Darwin had experienced an influx of Chinese workers who developed the Chinatown area as a distinct precinct. Despite the passage of the South Australian 'Chinese Immigration Restriction Bill' in 1888<sup>2</sup>, various forms of Chinese culture continued within the confines of Darwin's Chinatown and, on occasion, spilled over into the wider city space (such as the open air public concerts staged in 1893 by a visiting Chinese opera troupe<sup>3</sup>). However, increasing administrative pressures and social resistance to the prominence of Chinese labour and culture resulted in the retraction of the local community and such cultural performances from the early 1900s on.

In the period from the mid 1880s to the early 1900s a substantial number of Japanese, Malay, Filipino and Timorese ('Koe-pangers') were employed in the pearling trade that traversed the upper Australian coast from the northerly waters of Western Australia, across the Top End, through the Torres Strait and down the mid north Queensland coast. While Thursday Island was *the* major regional centre for Japanese residence, with frequent cultural performances (see Hayward and Konishi, 2001), Darwin also housed a number of establishments catering for male Japanese workers. A report published in the Queensland magazine *Boomerang* in 1888, for example, identified five "brothels" and twenty five Japanese "prostitutes" working in Darwin (James, 2000: 77-78). While sexual services were obviously a prime attraction for their (near-exclusively Japanese) clientele, research into the nature of such establishments on Thursday Island suggests that drinking, communal singing and, in some cases, informal musical performances by female workers or patrons may also have been present. However, there is no evidence that this music was heard outside the immediate Japanese community. Similarly, there is no record of what musical activities Malay, Timorese or Filipino lugger crewmembers might have engaged in while in port.

### 1910-1939

The downturn in the local pearling industry in the years immediately prior to the First World War led to measures that were to precipitate some of the most distinct developments in Darwin's musical life and heritage. For this reason the following section of this report provides a detailed discussion of its dynamics (based on transcripts of oral history interviews lodged in the Northern Territory Archives, the work of independent researcher Jeff Corfield, and the author's own research).

Core performer Delphin 'Dolph' Cubillo has provided significant insights into the establishment of Darwin's Filipino music scene. Cubillo's ancestry combined the racially mixed Northern Territory community and the newer Filipino migrant culture. Born in 1914, his mother, Magdalena (Lily), was the daughter of Larrakia woman Annie Duwun and Scottish pearling boat operator George McKeddie. His father, Filipino Antonio Cubillo, came over from the Philippines in 1886 to work on a lugger operated by McKeddie. In 1911, the acting city administrator, Finnis, persuaded a community of non-Euro-Australian residents to relocate from the vicinity of Cavenagh Street to the former police paddock site at Stuart Park.

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Cubillo grew up in this location, in close proximity to a number of families of varied and mixed ancestries. Drawing on family memories, he described his father's active development of a Filipino music scene in the following terms to oral history researcher Helen Wilson in June-July 1985 (transcribed in the NT Archives – TS424):

*See, in 1925-26, I think, when the cattle boats started arriving here, he started to order the instruments [mandolins and guitars] and, of course then 'right-o you boys' – there was five of us you know – got stuck into it and learnt to play. And then of course, we got other Filipinos to sing ... and a lot of old Filipinos who still played the instruments they joined us as well. And we had a very good band going ... just the guitars and mandolins and a big [upright] bass.' (21)*

Like many vernacular musicians Cubillo never had formal lessons or learnt to read music, learning to play with basic instruction and subsequent imitation and improvisation. The band's specific repertoire appears to have comprised contemporarily popular dance tunes (used to accompany dances such as the waltz and foxtrot) together with Filipino, Malay, Spanish and Latin American songs and other popular material. Cubillo's work with Filipino bands in the late 1920s and 1930s, alongside members of the Angeles, Calma and Damaso families, also attracted the attention of another, more recent, migrant group who would often gather for impromptu parties:

*See, when the Vesteys Meat-works opened up in 1919, there was a lot of Spanish people ... Came over from Queensland and the canefields. And they all lived in Salonika. That's Spanish. Well, every Saturday they'd race over to the police paddock. Because the Filipinos speak Spanish as well, fluently, and an old man plays concertina, plays the guitar, play a bass, and another old Filipino played a violin and big button accordian. Well, we'd have dance there Saturday night and it'd finish up early hours of Sunday morning. (19)*

While Cubillo refers to this group as "Spanish" a number, at least, appear to have been from Patagonia, in southern Argentina, raising issues about what musical styles and song and/or dance repertoire they may have contributed to the development of music at this time.

The Cubillo's house was the usual venue for such events as it was one of the largest at the camp. Ensemble line-ups included guitar, mandolin, octavin, violin and accordion. While members of Darwin's Euro-Australian establishment did not visit the camp for such entertainments, word of the skills of the Cubillo band reached them and in the early 1930s, Mrs Abbott, wife of the Governor, began to regularly employ the ensemble:

*We played for her dinner parties or any dance night ... They'd be in the dining room and we were playing out on the verandah ... soft background music. (20)*

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This employment became a form of official patronage (which is itself a notable aspect of Darwin's musical heritage) as she provided components of their uniforms for such events, purchased an additional guitar for the ensemble and also provided them with food and drink (in addition to payment).

Along with Filipino *rondalla* bands, the other significant ensembles that performed from the 1920s on were stringbands formed by members of Top End mixed race, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Malay families. These bands featured acoustic guitars, mandolins and, in some instances, lap-steel guitars, basses and accordions. A pool of performers appeared in line-ups that appeared under names such as the Darwin String Band, The Thursday Island String Band, the Pons Brothers String Band and Joe Pon's String Band.

One of the key players in these bands was Valentine 'Val' Bynoe McGinness. Summarising a detailed study provided by Corfield (forthcoming), McGinness was born in 1910 to a Kungkarukanj Aboriginal mother, Alyandabu 'Lucy', and an Irish father, Stephen McGinness, and took up accordion playing in his teens, while resident at Katherine. Returning to Darwin he started to play mandolin in the 1930s and performed in a band led by Torres Strait Islander songwriter Jaffa Ah Matt (composer of the well-known song *Old T.I.*) and Malay musicians Jacob and Herman Pons. Their repertoire was acquired from other musicians, the Darwin Brass band, hapa haole Hawaiian music, Spanish ballads and dance tunes and other popular songs learnt from gramophone records. For popular dance sets such as *The Pride of Erin* they played medleys of Irish traditional songs and also performed music for a traditional Filipino partner dance, learnt from *rondalla* bands, known as the *Shake Hand Dance*.

Val McGinness's niece, Kathy Mills, has credited the influence of Torres Strait music, as performed by Ah Matt and others, with modifying the style of local ensembles:

*When they first started, the musicians played a type of old ballroom dancing music adapted for Aboriginal people but the Torres Strait musicians brought in different rhythms and bar chords and that South Seas beat – and that changed it and we made that style our own here. (i/v with the author, April 2005)*

While McGinness left Darwin in 1937, local stringbands continued playing a similar repertoire until the outbreak of War and the evacuation of Darwin in 1941.

### 1941-45

The war years, particularly 1941-45, saw a major disruption of Darwin's pre-War musical life, with many residents departing for the duration of the conflict. While there were musical practices that were associated with the Australian military during this period, research and discussion of these (while important in its own

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regard) has been omitted from this paper since they did not appear to have influenced the re-establishment of local post-War music culture in any significant way.

### 1945-1960

Maisie Austin (1992) provides a report of the re-establishment of local indigenous stringband music in the city immediately after World War II that suggests that many of the preceding traditions (and performers) resumed where they had left off:

*The local "String Band" was formed when families returned after the war by musicians who lived at the Parap Camp – Herman and Jacob Pon, Ken and Gabe Hazelbane, Peter Cardona, Ray Perez and Delphin Cubillo. When the men from Thursday Island came to Darwin, they always brought their guitars ... "sing-songs" and parties were often organised on the spur of the moment. The kids were sent around the neighbourhood to tell the people, who wandered in after dinner and joined in the singing, danced, or just listened to the music ... The bass was a piece of string held taut by a broom handle set up on a tea box and the castanet sound was made by clicking two spoons together. At some parties, Uncle Tim Angeles and Herman Pon played their mandolins, Ray Perez played the violin, Uncle Div Collinson blew the saxophone, Clyde Dowling played his piano accordion, others strummed their guitars. When a piano was available, Rowena Stroud entertained us. The music was great – all impromptu. (35-36)*

Kathy Mills has emphasised the crucial social role that the music played:

*The community kept together through the music – we were a very isolated people during the restrictions [ie prior to Aboriginal citizenship]. The Sunshine Club at Parap was a gathering and meeting place. Like Bob Marley's song Movement of the People – they were enjoying themselves, having fun and keeping strong. (i/v with the author, April 2005)*

Members of the *rondalla* band who returned to Darwin after the War performed less often than in the pre-War period and usually for family and community functions. Dolph Cubillo played with the Pons Brothers Band and also formed his own ensemble, Dolph and the Merry Men, playing at the Sunshine Club at Parap and private functions. But despite its reduced profile, *rondalla* music, with additions to its repertoire to suit changes in musical fashions, remained central to Filipino social identity in Darwin.

During the 1950s the influence of Thursday Island music, and the adopted and adapted form of Hawaiian hula that took root there in the immediate pre- and then post-War period, spread to Darwin through family contacts. As Austin recalls:

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*Aunty Jane McGinness (Dad's sister), her husband Val and Roy Assan travelled to Darwin from Queensland in a jalopy ... Aunty Jane taught us to do the Hula and spent hours teaching us dances of the Torres Strait. We were celebrities for a time when a dance group run by Duke and Edith Alley arranged for us to perform at an Eisteddfod and a party. When we could not wear the traditional grass skirts, we made them from different coloured crepe paper. Our youngest sister, Gina, who was about 3 years old at the time, did the hula well and was always entertaining us with her antics. (1992: 37)*

Austin's account also indicates the decline of string bands as the standard accompaniment to parties as, first, recorded music became more prominent:

*Sometimes the band did not play until late in the evening and people danced to records. Mum and Dad had a great collection of 78-playing (and later, 33 LP) records. I remember having to wind up the box gramophone [sic] and gently lowering the needle on to the record. It was a few years later before we could afford an automatic radiogram. Music sounded in our house every day – from Guy Mitchell's "Singing the Blues" to the Four Aces "Love is a Many Splendoured Thing" ... (37)*

and then when western popular music began to infuse their performance repertoire:

*and when the gramophone was not on someone strummed a guitar. We learned the first part of "Tom Dooley" and that was that. (ibid)*

In the late 1950s Radio 5DN started broadcasting pop music and rock and roll dances started to be held (attracting 'moral panic' criticism in organs such as *The Northern Territory News*). Young people of various ethnic backgrounds congregated to pop and rock and roll as an enticing form of cultural modernity in the city.

In addition to the music of the mixed race and Filipino communities, Darwin's Euro-Australian music scene continued to thrive in the immediate post-War years, with jazz, Latin American, Hawaiian, dance and classical music concerts being regularly staged. Barr (1998) – and her various appendices – provide a detailed account of this period with particular regard to the various performing activities of migrant French musician Leon Bremond (to which the reader is referred for further discussion).

## 1960-2000

While there is no hard bar between the 1950s and 1960s in terms of musical style, as the 1960s progressed popular music performance (of various kinds) came to



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dominate Darwin's musical landscape. Jazz music continued as a niche form, with the Great Northern Jazz Band becoming an enduring institution, but the rise of pop and rock music was more dramatic. While a detailed history of Darwin's pop and rock scene remains to be researched and written, particularly with regard to the years immediately prior to and post Cyclone Tracey (1974), some documentation about the variety of acts performing in the 1980s and early-mid 1990s (and their recordings) is included in Kelly (1995). Bands such as the Swamp Jockeys, which performed in 1983-88 (and some members of which later joined acclaimed Yolngu band Yothu Yindi), were accomplished and well-regarded but have not been succeeded by other notable local rock acts. The in-depth research that has been undertaken on Darwin's live music scene has principally concentrated on legal and public order issues (D'Abbs [1994] and D'Abbs and Forner [1995]). While there do not appear to have been any prominent Darwin-based Aboriginal bands, the rise of Northern Territory Aboriginal rock/pop/country outfits in the 1980s was reflected in occasional Darwin gigs, although Euro-Australian venue managers remained reluctant to host performances that would attract substantial Aboriginal audiences (D'Abbs and Forner [1995]). This factor further emphasises the important role that Christian churches have had as venues for participatory music performance for Aborigines in Darwin (an area that merits further research in its own right).

Similarly to jazz, country and folk music have also been enduring strands of Darwin's music scene. One of the earliest country music performers in Darwin – back in the days when the genre was still called 'hillbilly' – was Tex Morton, who visited and performed at the Lims hotel in the late 1930s. His principal local legacy is the song *Fannie Bay Blues* (inspired by his two week confinement in Fannie Bay jail for train-jumping). More recent country music in the city has benefited from two key organisers, Mike Friganiolis and Bev McShannag, who have run (separate) country music clubs in Darwin since the 1980s and also participated in local country music festivals. A number of country music performers have been based in Darwin over the last two decades, such as Sandy Williams who released an album of original compositions entitled *Buffaloes can't fly* in 1982. In recent years Darwin-based trio Toe Sucking Cowgirls have achieved a degree of prominence in the Australian country music scene and Darwin singer Karen O'Shea's membership of rising trio Bella and the success of 14-year-old Jessica Mauboy in the 2004 'Road to Tamworth' contest have also attracted attention to Darwin's musical talent pool.

Ted Egan, one of the key figures in Darwin and the Top End's post-War music scene straddles the folk-country genre divide. His songs have addressed a range of Darwinian, NT and northern Australian topics and his elevation to the role of Governor General of NT has made him an icon of Top End culture (or, at least, its more politically progressive version). His body of songwriting represents a major heritage item in its own right and is discussed in Smith (2005).

Since its inception in 1971, Darwin's Folk Club has been the focus of local performance of folk music. Various activists have helped the club continue, and

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former Larrikins' accordionist Tony Suttor, who relocated to Darwin in 1982, has been a mainstay of the scene as an organiser and performer. The DFC has also been notable for its systematic audio taping of performances of music played at the club and also through the release of compilation cassettes (such as *Top End Folk Club* [1974] and *Roll back the years* [1992]). Notable Darwin based folk ensembles include the dance-orientated Darwin Ceili Band, Tony Suttor's band The Bilge Ratz (which has recorded two albums – *Swing the lead* [1989] and *All at sea* [1992]) and a recent group, Murphy and Friends (also featuring Suttor). While the repertoire of these ensembles has primarily comprised Anglo-Celtic and North American tunes, the latter two have also included material sourced from Val McGinness's repertoire (*Ti Tree Waltz*, *Ali's Waltz* and *Adelaide River*) and from Torres Strait Islander Jaffa Ah Matt (*Old T.I.*) to give their repertoire "some relevance to Darwin and the culturally varied Australia that used to be left out of Australian folk music" (Suttor, i/v with the author, April 2005).

Val McGinness's return to Darwin in late 1959, after nearly twenty years away from the city, facilitated a minor revival of stringband music (although on a more occasional and family-orientated basis than the immediate post-War period). Often accompanied by his son John and grandsons Donald and Wayne, he performed at dances, parties and impromptu family gatherings. During the 1960s and 1970s he also turned to songwriting, following his earlier humorous songs (such as *Darwin town in the boom* and his creole language version of *Waltzin' Matilda*) with newer celebratory songs (such as *Adelaide River* and *Darwin town by the Arafura Sea* [often referred to as Old Darwin]).

Familiarity with McGinness's career prompted former Darwin resident and folk club activist Jeff Corfield (who now lives in Townsville) to compile a soon-to-be released biographical study of McGinness's musical network and oeuvre. Corfield was also instrumental in the staging of two associated presentations in 2002 with members and associates of the Mills family, 'String bands and shake hands: a tribute to the life and music of Valentine Bynoe McGinness' presented at the National Folk Festival, Canberra, and 'Valentine Bynoe McGinness – a musical life', held in conjunction with the screening of the film *Buffalo Legends* (1997) at the Deckchair Theatre. Corfield's program notes for the Canberra event provide a characterisation of its music that my own research supports:

*Darwin's rich, multicultural music and dance heritage should be a national treasure, yet it remains largely unknown, even among the broader Darwin community. It is a unique tapestry, woven from indigenous, Asian, Torres Strait, Polynesian, Melanesian and European threads. Yet this top end legacy is as much Australian as the more Anglo-celtic dominated folk and community heritage of southern Australia ... Though Darwin sits smack in the middle of this top end geographical and cultural arc, its contribution to this rich northern legacy has yet to flower, at least publicly ... Perhaps the greatest legacy of Darwin's rich melting pot was the flourishing string band era of the 1930s and early 1940s, before WWII. A proliferation of bands played traditional Spanish/Filipino,*

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*Hawaiian, Island and European styles of music, adapting, exchanging and mixing it along the way to make it their own. (np)*

The Mills family have continued the McGinness family tradition of musical performance and inflected it in new ways. Kathy Mills, a Kungarkan who moved to Darwin from Katherine, and her Larrakia husband David Mills have both been involved in the music and broader performance culture of the city. Their daughters, Barbara, Violet, Alie and June, have continued the family tradition establishing a reputation in and around Darwin for their vocal harmony work as the Mills Sisters<sup>5</sup>, recording a cassette album (*The Arafura Pearls* [1987]), supporting visiting pop and rock acts and through solo performances. Their repertoire has included songs such as their mother's composition Arafura Pearl and US country songs (blending another genre thread into their Darwin musical mix). At the time of writing, June Mills was also completing a solo album for the CAAMA (Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association) label.

Members of Darwin's Larrakia community have also returned to more traditional performance practices over the last two decades, reconnecting with the history discussed in the initial stages of this section. Under the aegis of bodies such as the Larrakia Nation's Art and Culture initiative, didjeridu making and performing and traditional dance are being presented and taught to school students. They have also been presented at the Northern Territory Museum on various occasions and are planned to be an integral part of the Larrakia Cultural Facility scheduled for construction at Bullocky Point in the near future.

While recent generations of Filipino musicians have not introduced new variants to family/community music heritage in the same manner as the Mills family performers, *rondalla* music has persisted in the Filipino community through to the present, not least due to the continued participation of veteran players. The staging of Gary Lee's play about Darwin's Filipino community *Keep him my heart* in 1993 provided an opportunity to revivify the *rondalla* tradition. New activist members, such as Filipino émigré Christian 'Bong' Ramillo,<sup>6</sup> became involved with the ensemble in the 1990s and have continued to play a significant role in its continuance. Ramillo has explained his commitment to the group and genre in the following terms:

*Rondalla is a Tagalog tradition, part of my heritage as a lowland Filipino, but it's also part of Darwin's tradition as well, for nearly a hundred years now. I'm involved with it as a historical obligation to keep it for the local community and to pass it on. If it goes then some of our historical identity here goes too. (i/v with the author, April 2005)*

For their participation in the 1993 play, and in their subsequent live performances, the performers have consciously combined material from Darwin *rondalla* bands' early 20th century repertoire with newer material added in the 1960s and 1970s, drawn from diverse sources (and including Elvis Presley songs,

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which were very popular in The Philippines in the 1950s-1970s). To date the ensemble hasn't performed any original material (but is open to expanding in this direction). While the ensemble has received occasional external financial support for specific activities, it is principally a community-based and supported venture, a clear sign of its continuing cultural relevance.

Filipino musicians have also played an important role in broader musical activity in the city. Music educator Emma Varsoiva-Tantengco, for instance, relocated to Darwin in 1986 and was instrumental in establishing various choral initiatives, including the Darwin Youth and Children's Choir (formed in 1994) and the Darwin Multicultural Choral Groups (1998). These ensembles complemented the activity of the longer-established Darwin Chorale (founded in 1984) in providing public performances of high-quality choral music. In tandem with such choral enterprises, the 1980s and 1990s were also a notable period for western art music in the city by virtue of the foundation of the Darwin Symphony Orchestra (comprised of professional, semi-professional and amateur musicians) in 1989 and the establishment of the biennial International Guitar Festival in 1993. Both of these initiatives have been based at the Music Department of Charles Darwin University (formerly NTU), which continues to provide a valuable community service to the city in this genre.

## 21st CENTURY MUSIC CULTURE

Almost all of the musical styles discussed in this report have continued on into the 21st century in one form or another. They form part of the complex and multiply niched popular music culture that exists, in many versions (some more locally distinct than others) across the western world. But the music that typifies much of the inner city space of Darwin's clubs and pubs in the early 2000s is the electronic dance music that has established itself as a popular international form largely outside the previous circuit of live music performance that typified popular music in the 1960s-1990s. Clubbing is an international phenomenon, marked by the role of celebrity DJs and theme night events. Clubs such as Mitchell Street's 'Discovery' feature a high proportion of such music and attract considerable audiences of local clubbers and backpackers. Within this musical genre and subculture issues of locality and local heritage are so minor as to be invisible. There is, however, a flip side to the internationally orientated backpacker culture in that the didgeridu and/or a didgeridu recording are standard souvenirs of Australian visits (and, indeed, didgeridu lessons are advertised for tourists in Darwin). These are however generically Australian – despite the *yidaki's* origins in Arnhem Land – and didgeridus are just as likely to be purchased by visitors to Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane as they are in proximity to their traditional performers' homelands in NT.

Along with the dance party scene, other locally based performers have attempted to engage with the vogue for 'world music' (the selection and repackaging of elements of non-western music for an international market), Darwin's Drum

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Drum being a significant example. Formed in the mid 1990s, the ensemble combines various traditional Papua New Guinean musical styles and rhythms with western/Australian elements. Although Papua New Guineans have not been prominent in Darwin at any stage since its foundation (and don't appear to have played any significant role in the late 19th and early 20th century local pearling) the band's specific connection to PNG is through its co-founder Airi Ingram, whose mother is from Papua New Guinea. The band's music combines performances of rhythm based percussion pieces from various areas of PNG with original songs and instrumental music in other styles. The highly accomplished group have recorded several CDs, toured extensively in North America, Europe and Asia and – perhaps as significantly – have actively sought out new local collaborations and joint event projects aimed to promote musical dialogue and diversity in the region'. While they might be 'outsiders' to the local stringband and *rondalla* traditions highlighted in this report, their cross-cultural spirit is in synchrony with much of Darwin's multicultural music history and represents a new stage in Darwin's distinct and developing musical heritage.

## HERITAGE, PLACE AND IDENTITY

The identification and assertion of unique and/or distinct aspects of local culture can produce a local identification with these. If these aspects are accepted and communally or institutionally facilitated, local senses of place (and/or pride in such a place) can be amplified. In communities that have a high proportion of generational stability (and/or individual family heritages) the effect is to revive and reactivate aspects of local history to articulate a new cultural present. In communities with a high degree of transient population this can give a sense of place (where one might seem effectively absent). If activated successfully, it can also invite and implicate newcomers into local cultural practices and identities. With regard to tourism – for those areas in which it is significant – this re-articulation of heritage involves creating a distinct 'brand identity' for a region (that can, if successfully deployed, serve as an attractor for tourists).

The desire to identify and/or publicly assert and promote distinct local cultural identity arises from various impulses. In recent years, particularly in post-colonial contexts and in the face of a multi-national global culture that many perceive as erasing regional difference, there is a specific cultural-political agenda. Tourism engages with the enterprise of local heritage assertion and facilitation in various ways. As mentioned above, local branding is an important aspect of tourist marketing. While a group of locations may benefit from a shared product identity that might be of a generic appeal to visitors (such as an exotic beach location well-serviced by quality accommodation, restaurants and nightclubs), it is difficult to assert anything individual from this to give market identity and edge. Local branding, achieved through articulation of distinct local combinations and locally distinct aspects, can be an advantage (if successfully managed).

In musical terms, for instance, various locations have drawn upon elements of their heritage to create distinct attractors that combine music with a set of other

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leisure activities. In the case of cities such as New Orleans and Nashville, this is due to their identity as the 'homes' of particular musical styles (jazz and country, respectively). Similarly, in island locations such as Hawaii or Trinidad, their associations with, respectively, hula and calypso/steelband have become signature identities. More pertinently for this specific report, in locations such as Fiji, which do not have such a strong identity as the home and centre of globally recognisable musical and dance practices, music has become an important factor in tourism through the employment of stringband ensembles playing a blend of pan-Pacific popular music, Fijian songs and western pop at hotels. So prevalent has this form been that particular bands are known by their resort employer names (such as the famous Garden Island Resort Band).

The connection with heritage is interactive here: the music provides a distinct local heritage identity and the adoption of that identity creates a need for such music to be performed and recorded (in order to sustain and substantiate that identity). This creates a market for performers and products, which in turn creates a situation where development (and innovation) can occur (in order to maintain product 'freshness' and/or in response to creative enterprise). Tourism therefore constitutes an important complement to heritage development when the two can be articulated in a mutually beneficial manner<sup>8</sup>.

## DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL, STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion to my report to the NT Government was that in order to give Darwin a viable musical identity premised on and defined by the most distinctive aspects of its musical heritage, it was necessary to support and develop those practices, promoting and showcasing them as the heritage identity of Darwin.

One of the issues that was most apparent to me during my research in Darwin was that the city's most distinctive musical heritage forms were not easily accessed in material form. At present neither the *rondalla* band nor contemporary musicians working in the stringband tradition have CD material to promote their music and allow them to obtain financial benefit from its sale. This, in turn, means that there is no readily available 'Darwin music' for tourists, newly arriving residents and/or long-term dwellers. Indeed, my requests for such music in Darwin retail outlets commonly resulted in baffled or inappropriate responses (resulting in me being directed to CDs by Arnhem Land band Yothu Yindi and the Thursday Island Mills Sisters).

In terms of tourism, it was apparent that *rondalla* and stringband music were versatile forms that could easily be drawn on to characterise Darwin in tourist venues, events and experiences. They sit particularly well with the middle-older age visitors who arrive by train or else stay at the city's more upmarket resorts. This aspect points to a profitable audience orientation for a ready-made musical style (which would not need 'compromise' or dilution to obtain a tourist audience).

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With regard to younger visitors and residents, research suggests Darwin is unlikely to establish a musical identity through established live musics such as rock and pop, since it has not sufficient population mass and venue infrastructure to facilitate a band scene comparable to larger Australian cities (several of which also have little in the way of distinct local identities despite much larger human resources). Similarly, contemporary dance music offers little in the manner of local identity, unless it is based around the *scene* – rather than *sound* (such as the Byron Bay/Nimbin rave scene, which has been identified as Australia's 'answer' to Goa). While such an identity might be constructed in or around Darwin it is doubtful whether it could produce a signature identity for the city for anyone else but backpackers and interested young locals.

The 'world/roots' music genre allows for a greater focus on the youth/lower middle-aged market and here Darwin is well positioned in terms of both its own autonomous acts, particularly Drum Drum, and through its proximity to the wealth of Aboriginal musical talent in the Top End. While this music is unlikely to appeal to Darwin venue owners on anything but an occasional basis, it is particularly well suited to outdoor events and festivals (of the type that already constitute the international world music circuit, of which Womad is but one example). This area of music is also one that can connect with the *rondalla* and stringband traditions in both festival contexts and through developing the musical styles concerned into new contexts.

An obvious focus for the above is to imagine and facilitate Darwin as an interzone between (indigenous and non-indigenous) Australia, Torres Strait/Melanesia and South East Asia<sup>9</sup>. This identity remains faithful to Darwin's multicultural history, its present and (in one manner of imagining) its future.

Reflecting the above, I made the following recommendations:

1. That there be official recognition of the city's *rondalla* and stringband music traditions as prime 'intangible cultural assets'<sup>10</sup> for Darwin and the NT.
2. That since stringband music performance is currently in recess, following the 2002 revival concerts (discussed above), a series of workshops be funded and organised to attract and educate young performers in the style and allow for the nucleus of a new ensemble to be formed.
3. That the NT Government and/or Darwin Council become patrons for ensembles performing *rondalla* and stringband music, by ensuring that they become regular presences for official events and occasions and that they are employed to perform and run workshops at schools (to maintain the profile of the genres).
4. That in order to facilitate the organisation of *rondalla* and stringbands as regularly employed (and therefore semi-professional) ensembles, training and seed funding for (part-time) managers of these groups be provided (in order to assist the sustainability of their performing activities).
5. That grant assistance be provided for the production of quality CDs of

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- rondalla* and stringband music and the promotion and distribution of these (at both conventional and non-conventional outlets) and that the Darwin Council and NT Government purchase a substantial number of these to use in standard promotional packages for the city.
6. That a digital audio-visual resource on Darwin's musical history (encompassing all the forms discussed above but particularly showcasing *rondalla* and stringband), be researched, produced and installed (on a permanent basis) as a community and educational resource for residents and tourists alike.
  7. That a song contest be organised to stimulate the production of new songs about the past and present of Darwin, in any language (English, creole, Larrakia Tagalog, etc) and any musical genre (*rondalla*, rap, stringband, country, rock, pop etc), and that the finalists be selected for inclusion on a recorded compilation CD aimed to give the city a contemporary 'voice' and to communicate this more broadly.
  8. That a feasibility study be conducted into the organisation of a festival of Top End/South East Asian music in Darwin, either as a 'stand alone' event or else in proximity with the Arafura Games (or a similar occasion) and that, if the study identifies such a proposal as feasible, the NT Government and/or Darwin Council consider contributing funding to this as a continuing regional promotion/tourist attraction.

## CONCLUSION

The recommendations were formulated and identified (out of a range of other options) as a package of small-medium scale projects whose interaction could create the nucleus for an early 21st century musical identity for the city (within the particular approach to heritage elaborated in this article<sup>11</sup>) and were intended to complement and accompany existing cultural funding for music in the city (such as funding for Larrakia Nation and other indigenous music projects and support for the Darwin Symphony Orchestra and the annual International Guitar Festival). The report was accepted and favourably received by Dr Gerritsen in July 2005. As befits a document recommending expenditure in non-traditional areas – let alone for such an intangible asset as cultural heritage – the report was considered as part of a sustained strategic process. In terms of timing, its submission was at an inopportune moment in the Territory's "budget electoral cycle", being received on the eve of state elections (which returned the Clare Martin led Labor government with an increased majority), and then being considered when the Government and its offices were "in post-election budget cutting mode" (Gerritsen, pc with the author, 2005). Its recommendations were however pertinent for Dr Gerritsen's development of an Indigenous Contemporary Music strategy for NT, intended for support in the 2006 budget. At the time of writing it is too early to assess whether the ambition of Dr Gerritsen's office and the specific recommendations of the report will produce a successful



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institutional intervention into local music culture (or, indeed, how the success of such a venture might be gauged) but it does, at least, indicate that there is the potential for researchers and policy makers to make local musical heritage (as articulated here in terms of locally distinct traditions) a factor for cultural planning in urban environments.

[Thanks to Rolf Gerritsen for inviting me to undertake the study upon which this article is based; to Ian Buchanan for facilitating the association and encouraging my research; and to Jonas Baes, Francoise Barr and the Northern Territory Archive Service, Jeff Corfield, Rebecca Coyle, Kathy Mills, Christian 'Bong' Ramillo, Mark Smith, Tony Suttor and Brenda Williams for their various assistances with research for this project.]

## ENDNOTES

1. I have not attempted to discuss the music forms associated with every ethnic group in Darwin, nor of every genre; this would require a doctoral-sized project and dissertation and was beyond the scope of my brief.
2. Northern Territory being administered by South Australia at this time.
3. Such troupes also performed regularly in the Goldfields in this period (De La Rue, 2004: 113).
4. I have corrected the spelling ("base") in the archive transcript.
5. Not to be confused with the identically named Mills Sisters from Thursday Island, who released a number of CDs and solo albums in the 1990s and 2000s.
6. Ramillo left The Philippines during the Marcos era and was initially based in Sydney before moving on to Darwin.
7. Such as their involvement with the Asia Pacific Cultural Village project (see [www.drumdrum.com.au/](http://www.drumdrum.com.au/) for further details).
8. For a detailed discussion of one such set of experiences – specifically, a discussion of music, tourism and cultural development in the Whitsunday region of Queensland – see Hayward, 2001.
9. Darwin's twin city relations with Ambon and Haikou (Hainan Island, China) are significant in this regard.
10. A term used in Japan to refer to non-material heritage items and practices (such as music and dance).
11. This is not to argue that other forms of music should not be nurtured and assisted but rather that the forms that I have identified form local heritage priorities.

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