Musical collaborations from the East Coast to Desert Country

Brydie-Leigh Bartleet · November 17, 2014

Musicians from Winanjiikari Music Centre recently teamed up with a group of music students from Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University for the award-winning Winanjiikari Service Learning Program. Since 2009, this program has involved students travelling 2,500 km’s to Tennant Creek to work alongside Indigenous artists and Elders at the Winanjiikari Music Centre on a range of community-led programs, such as recording and writing albums, documenting cultural activities, staging performances, building community arts infrastructure, running school programs and most recently performing at the Desert Harmony Festival.
This year a highlight was performing together with Winanjikari musicians at a special jam night as part of the festival to an audience of locals and tourists, as well as 530 people via live streaming on the web, and 100s who viewed it in remote communities via ICTV. Another high point was performing as part of the BAMFest event to 100s of locals, 100s of viewers via live streaming, a live CAAMA broadcast, and ICTV screening in remote communities in the Northern Territory. This event showcased the rich depth of talent and musical styles of a number of Indigenous bands from across the Barkly Region and featured the renowned Tjintu Desert Band as the headline act. Singing in the Aboriginal language of Luritja, Tjintu Desert Band combine funk, rock, reggae and dub grooves to create a distinct desert sound that simultaneously captures its wide-open spaces, its brutal beauty and its formidable darkness.

The Winanjikari Service Learning Program is distinctive in Australia and internationally due to its focus on strong partnerships with Indigenous communities and reliance on community-led approaches to learning and teaching. Indeed, the notion of partnership building between communities, higher education, Indigenous artists and tertiary students, via service learning, is a new and distinctive concept in Australian higher education and shows tremendous promise for music educators. As renowned Indigenous musician Warren H Williams suggests:

“This is good for say Aboriginal black fella and white fella relations, in anything, in music and in culture because the students, when they come to an Aboriginal black fella community, they’ve got no idea what it is. The only sort of stories they have is what they see on the news and what other people tell them about black fella communities. So when they come here it’s really good for them, get them to learn first-hand and you know, and they get involved. Then they go back with different ideas from what they come with in the first place... the students also bring in things that they learn from another place, they can pass it onto the community people.”

Although there is a long tradition of this work internationally, it is a still an emerging field in Australian universities, and has rarely been done before with...
Indigenous communities. Over the past three years, we have been practising and researching in this area in collaboration with colleagues at Curtin University and the University of Western Sydney. Read more about what we’ve found here.

This work has revealed an extremely rich and multilayered picture of the intercultural processes and outcomes associated with each of the programs. It has highlighted the complexities and realities of Australia’s socio-political history and the lingering impact that colonisation and policies have had on Indigenous peoples and communities. It has also shown how a relationship-focused, strengths-based approach, underpinned by community leadership and critical reflection, can lead to transformational learning experiences for all involved. As James Winwood (who attended in the first year and then returned to work in the region and is now co-manager of the Winanjikari Music Centre) reflected on this learning experience:

“...

The Winanjikari Service Learning Program not only focuses on benefits for students, but also for the community involved. This program assists Indigenous artists in Tennant Creek with programs of cultural significance, facilitates social outcomes by meeting community needs, and expands Indigenous artists’ disciplinary knowledge. This is echoed in Alan Murn’s (Executive Officer, Barkly Regional Arts, Tennant Creek) observations:

“...

Students from this year’s trip will be presenting a showcase of digital stories about the experience in Brisbane. For further information please contact Project Leader Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, Phone:
About: Brydie-Leigh Bartleet

Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet is Deputy Director of the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre. She has worked on a range of national and international projects in community music, arts-based service learning with Australian First Peoples, intercultural community arts, and arts-based health and wellbeing for refugee and asylum seekers. She is on the Board of Music Australia, the new Chair of the International Society for Music Education’s Community Music Activities Commission, and serves on a range of international and national boards including the International Journal of Music Education – Practice and the International Journal of Community Music to mention a few.

View all posts by Brydie-Leigh Bartleet

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Comment