Call to Yawahr: Opening a third space for collaborative music making between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities

Call to *Yawahr*: Opening a third space for collaborative music making between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

By Candace Kruger

Abstract

The 'Call to Y*awahr'*, is a sung open invitation in *Yugambeh* Aboriginal language of southeast Queensland, Australia, for all Aboriginal people to come together to participate in the performance of song and dance. This paper outlines how the 'Call to *Yawahr'*, at the behest of *Yugambeh* Aboriginal Elders, acts as an agent for all musicians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous to participate in the dreaming and weaving of collaborative music making through the call to come together. In this new space a place is created where Indigenous and non-Indigenous musicians can collaboratively make music together, connect with each other through the understanding of Indigenous knowledges and strengthen cross cultural relationships. Furthermore, this paper demonstrates how the *Yugambeh* Aboriginal songline *Morning Star and Evening Star*, passed down by Lottie Eaton, has contributed to opening the third space for collaboration between an Indigenous and non-Indigenous music organisation and fostered reconciliation with legacy outcomes for all Australians.

Call to *Yawahr*

Aboriginal music is a demonstration of living culture and is communicated in a place where past, present, and future intersect. As a moment in time, the place for music making allows for communication with ancestors, demonstrates the honour and respect for familial ties and heritage (including language) and validates sovereignty and connection to *jagun* (land). As a vehicle for communication,[1] music and music making allows for the sharing of cultural knowledge, is ever-present inside Aboriginal culture and is shared freely within the cultural bounds of Aboriginal community. However, for the outsider (non-Indigenous Australians), there are limited opportunities to connect to insiders (Indigenous Australians) cultural music understandings, and subsequently there are limited moments to unite Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in the active engagement of living cultural music participation and making. Additionally, for non-Indigenous music makers, connection with Aboriginal community and the understanding of cultural protocols can be difficult to navigate.

To address this balance, and as a reflection on the desire of *Yugambeh* Aboriginal community Elders to have song knowledge gathered, re-sung and shared with the wider (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) community, this *gaureiman* (story) discusses the necessity for a third space, where both cultures can intersect and the process of intercultural exchange and/or collaborative music making can occur.

As a *Yarrabilginngunn* (*Yugambeh* Aboriginal Songwoman), music educator and ethnomusicologist, I have been gathering community music anecdotal and historical records for over 25 years with the purposeful intent to have my community sing alive our shared heritage language.[3] Early on in this journey in 1996, my great Aunty *Kombumerri/Ngugi* woman Lottie (Charlotte) Eaton (née Levinge 1925-2013), in the presence of her elder brother and my grandfather, *Kombumerri/Ngugi* man Samuel Levinge (1918-2006), passed on knowledge of a star song narrative to me, *Kombumerri/Ngugi* woman Candace Kruger (née Levinge 1972-), her great-niece. The song *Morning Star and Evening Star, a Yugambeh Gaureima* (story) of the Gold Coast, Logan and Scenic Rim regions of Queensland, Australia, was recalled by Lottie as a song sung to her by her grandmother, *Kombumerri* woman Jenny Graham (née McGussy 1860-1943) in the 1930s in Southport, Queensland, which was passed to her by her mother, *Kombumerri* woman and apical ancestor, *Warru* (Sarah Clark).

Aunty Lottie recalled the *Yugambeh* tale 'Morning Star and Evening Star', as a lullaby sung to her by Granny Graham when she was a young girl and would stay with her grandmother at Brighton Parade Southport, to attend school. By 1996, when Aunty Lottie recalled this song narrative, she was an older woman and it had been over 60 years since she last sang or heard the song in *Yugambeh* language. Aunty Lottie was pleased she could remember the words in English and noted that as a child it was her favourite lullaby and sung in *Yugambeh* and English.

> Morning Star and Evening Star
> Who is the fat one and who is the thin one?
> Morning Star and Evening Star
> Who should come out first?
> Morning Star calls to Evening Star, "Come on!"
> Evening Star sings out, "No, you go ahead!"
>
> Lottie Eaton [Levinge], 4th January 1996[3]

Unfortunately, Lottie could no longer remember the melody, but requested at some point in the future a new melody be written so that the song could live on and be passed and shared with others. Lottie's wish was more than having a song re-sung and reclaimed, it was a wish for merging cultures to respect each other.

Lottie's song and other Aboriginal songs that have been gathered by myself and community since 1996,[3] are now sung by the *Yugambeh* Youth Choir.[1] As a result, when the choir perform they sing alive *Yugambeh* language songs and gift cultural knowledge in the form of socio-cultural capital to appreciative audiences,[2] culminating with the wider (non-Indigenous) community actively seeking permission to engage with *Yugambeh* Aboriginal songs. To this end, *Yugambeh* community, specifically Aboriginal *Yugambeh* and *Ngugi* Elders, the *Yugambeh* songwoman and *Yugambeh* community members, commenced discussions - informally and formally since 2014 (establishment of the *Yugambeh* Youth Choir) to create an Aboriginal community space where song narrative could be taught publicly for Aboriginal community and performed for the wider (non-Indigenous) community, along similar lines to the public corroboree (Aboriginal ceremony) performed in the *Buhl* (Bora) rings of a bygone era.[4]

Historically, for the *Yugambeh* and *Bundjalung* people of South-East Queensland and northern New South Wales, there were three *Buhl* ceremony types given to the *Yugambeh* and *Bundjalung* by the Dreamtime ancestors 'The Three Brothers: *Berrung*, *Mommon* and *Yaburong/Jabreen*'.[5] *Berrung* gave us *Yawahr Berungnah* (*Berrung's* corroboree), Mommon gave us *Girahn mumuhmna* (Mommon's corroboree) and *Yaburong*, also known as *Jabreen*, gave us *Waguya Yaburahnya* (*Yaburong's / Jabreen's* corroboree).[6] Of these three, *Berrung's* corroborree '*Yawahr'* is the corroborree type for all and is intended to be performed by everyone, including women and children.[7]

Within south-east Queensland, including Moreton Bay, anthropologists have uncovered and mapped no less than 108 corroboree sites where *Buhl* rings are still, or were situated.[4] In additional to being observed as either single, pair or triple ring sites, sacred and private corroborree was known to have taken place,[8] and public corroborees on these sites have been witnessed in Queensland by non-Indigenous people since colonisation. With a view to recording antiquity, witnesses began anecdotally recording Aboriginal people performing song and dance in early recollections and memoirs. In particular, and with detailed description of the corroboree's they witnessed, Tom Petrie wrote about a Brisbane corroboree with 'five hundred aboriginals…on Petrie's Creek…they came from all parts - some from the interior'[9] and at Amity, on Stradbroke Island, Welsby recalled 'about 1879, there were many natives at Amity…as the moon was at its full, an improvised corroboree was given by the men and their gins [women].[10]

On *Yugambeh* country, many public corroborees were witnessed by European settlers. Hinchcliffe (1931)[11] and Gresty (1947)[12] were informants on what they had witnessed. However, of note was the corroboree song heard by the Curtis family at the Albert River Bora Grounds near Tambourine village in 1872. As a significant site, the Albert River Bora Grounds are the only recorded Aboriginal ceremonial site in south-east Queensland where 'three earth circles [*buhl*/bora] were joined by a pathway'.[4]

> The site is in sandy soil, on a flat ridge rising 30-40 feet above the Albert River. The first ring is 80 feet in diameter…leading out of the large ring at its southern side is a path…this path is 400 yards long and is in a north and south direction. The path ends in a second ring, 30 feet in diameter…from the southern side of the small ring the path continued for another 400 yards, where it ended in a third wall of earth, this time of an oval shape. This oval enclosure measures 80 feet long by 30 feet in its widest part. The axis lies in the same direction as the paths, almost exactly north and south.[13]

Whilst knowledge of the *Buhl* sites of southeast Queensland and delineations by European informants of the public Aboriginal corroboree may seem unrelated to the process of intercultural relationships and music making, it is at this juncture that the content and context of an unknown and untranslated Aboriginal song can connect the past to the present and could speak to musical exchange for the future.

Beyond the passing of Aboriginal corroboree practice for Aboriginal people of the region, an unnamed and unknown *Yugambeh* Aboriginal song heard by non-Indigenous people in 1872, and gifted back to *Yugambeh* descendants in 2003,[3] significantly unlocks knowledge of public Aboriginal corroboree practice for *Yugambeh* people. Although unknown to European listeners, the song recalled is a 'call' that invites everyone listening to gather for the *Yawahr*, the 'corroborree for all'.

'Wa, yawahr-yah, yawahr-yah, yawahr-yah, yawahr-yah, yawahr-yah,
wulya-wulya, wulya-wulya wulya'
All come and give at the big dance. Translation Candace Kruger, 2016[1]

The word *Yawahr* and the lyrics of the piece translate to 'all come and give to the big corroboree'. Examined by myself, using Sharpe's collection of *Yugambeh* language,[6] my own familial *Yugambeh* language knowledge and Curtis's evidence, the sung call in this context is an open invitation to all listeners to participate in public performance. Although unlikely originally intended for merging cultures, this song was reactivated, with permission from Elders, and performed by the *Yugambeh* Youth Choir in a public forum in 2016, and is now well accepted as a song that gathers people together.

The circumstances of the 'Call to *Yawahr's'* survival and the placement of this song heard on the site of the only known three *buhl* circles on *Yugambeh* country speaks deeply to myself, to family, to other Aboriginal community members and to *Yugambeh* Elders. For here is a long-ago connection to our dreamtime ancestors and evidence of spirituality, law, language, and ceremony, found in one place through one song. By the agency of non-Indigenous people who authenticated and documented Aboriginal culture, comes good will, and by way of this connection comes respect, which is Aunty Lottie's wish and the desire of *Yugambeh* Elders both past and present. Therefore, as suggested by the open invitation of the 'Call to Y*awahr'*, we should all come together to participate in the making of music, where we find ourselves, as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous musicians, in the third creative space where the opportunity for dreaming, weaving and collaborative music making will strengthen our Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, and provide a place where non-Indigenous music makers can be supported to understand and connect with Indigenous knowledges.

Morning Star and Evening Star: 2021 AMEB Online Orchestra Song

In 2016, after the first and subsequent public performances of 'Call to *Yawahr'* and other *Yugambeh* songs, I conceptualised the notion of publishing *Yugambeh* Aboriginal songs as the demand for song knowledge by educators within the *Yugambeh* region was growing. With an initial idea to approach a music organisation known for its reach to music educators across Australia, I was introduced to the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) Federal team, based in Melbourne, through contacts at a *Yugambeh* Youth Choir performance in Brisbane. Here, Fiona Seers, Head of Examining (AMEB) briefly explains this organisation:

> The Australian Music Examinations Board is fundamentally a non-indigenous organisation. The not-for-profit company which is owned by six universities and education bodies around Australia (Universities of Melbourne, Adelaide and Western Australia, the Minister for Education, New South Wales, the Minister for Education, Training and Employment, Queensland, and the Minister for Education and Training, Tasmania, through the University of Tasmania), is based on a Western culture of classical music. Over the past 100 years, AMEB has written exam syllabuses for orchestral instruments and voice, expanding to contemporary instruments and dance syllabuses in recent years. Exams in Speech and Drama subjects are also offered. Australia's Aboriginal heritage has not been acknowledged in our operations in any meaningful way for most of those 100 years.[14]

From initial discussions, and across the next two years of relationship building by method of face-to face and email communications, *Yugambeh* songs continued to be discussed and developed within *Yugambeh* community while AMEB simultaneously developed their inaugural Online Orchestra project (2021). Then in 2018, the *Yugambeh* Youth Choir and AMEB strengthened this newly formed relationship through performance capabilities. Alongside thousands of musicians from around the country, the *Yugambeh* Youth Choir performed the 2018 Online Orchestra song 'Waltzing Matilda'[15] in both English and *Yugambeh* and in 2019, for the second Online Orchestra project, went on to record a version of 'I Am Australian'[16] in *Yugambeh*. Widely well-received and through recognition that this was 'incredibly meaningful to have those words sung in an Aboriginal language by young people of Aboriginal heritage', the burgeoning relationship was firmly established. *Yugambeh* Elders and community were proud of hearing and seeing *jarjum* sing these well-loved and widely known Australian Folk songs and were elated that *Yugambeh* was heard across the Nation. Through participation in the 2018 and 2019 AMEB Online Orchestra projects, and based on the positive benefits gained by the *jarjum* from these projects, including AMEB supporting the choir to raise funds to support ongoing costs of the choir, the *Yugambeh* community, the *Yugambeh* Youth Choir and *Yugambeh* Elders were very happy to continue to move forward with the idea of publishing *Yugambeh* song[17]. From an initial meeting in 2016 to National recognition in 2019, each moment of engagement between the *Yugambeh* community, myself and the AMEB team has continued to develop good will and consequently cultivated the trust required to move us all forward to the place where we could begin to engage in mutually beneficial collaborative music making between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

> By way of the collaboration between the Yugambeh Youth Choir and AMEB moving to a deeper level over 2018 and 2019, in 2020 we have worked together towards the 2021 Online Orchestra performance, where we (AMEB) have decided to commission a brand-new Aboriginal song based on a Yugambeh lullaby[14].

Commencing with AMEB CEO and other AMEB staff members visiting with Elders and *Yugambeh* family members living on North Stradbroke Island in late 2019, to establish face-to-face relationships and further good-will, we held an informal gathering.

The Aboriginal people present at the meeting were Elder Aunty Rose Nott (nee Graham), Elder Uncle Ivan Nott, Elder Uncle Ian Levinge and myself, alongside AMEB representatives CEO - Bernard De Pasquale, Head of Examining - Fiona Seers and Head of Publishing – Steven Hodgson. By the end of the day and through the process of the informal meeting, it was determined that Lottie's recollection of the Yugambeh songline and song *Morning Star and Evening Star* would be gifted as the concept for the 2021 Online Orchestra Piece. As a narrative handed down through the seven generations of *Kombumerri* people and recalled as a 'song of her childhood' by Aunty Rose Nott (Lottie's cousin) the *Morning Star and Evening Star*, the first song gifted to me to share in 1996, felt to everyone present to be the 'perfect' song to share on a National platform.

In recognition of other *Kombumerri* family members who had a strong connection with Aunty Lottie, I invited *Kombumerri* musicians to work on the piece. My cousin Lann Levinge and my daughter Isobella Kruger were keen to be involved and together the song writing process commenced. From my initial discussions with AMEB Head of Publishing Steven Hodgson, we were able to set the parameters required for this song to be easily sung and performed by amateur musicians anywhere in the country. AMEB hoped that the piece could be '*catchy, rhythmically simple and tonal, and within the standard classical music format*'[14], whilst I, wanted the piece to reflect *Yugambeh* Aboriginal melodic lines, tonalities and rhythms echoing the piece as it would have been sung by generations of song women. These parameters were unquestionably agreed upon; therefore, I began to gather the anecdotal and historical evidence surrounding the original narrative and, on this basis, wrote a historical analysis of the song and incorporated the original song text into a poem ready for musical scoring. Providing all parties with the historical analysis of the song, including Dreamtime and ecological knowledge, was the initial shift in the collaborative process. This analysis elevated the *Morning Star and Evening Star* beyond 'song' to a vehicle for the dissemination of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and shifted the creation of a song into cultural exchange.

> The Morning Star and Evening Star poem was then set to music by Candace and her daughter Isobella. Lann Levinge, Candace's cousin, was then brought in to turn the song into a 'pop' song and he collaborated on melody and the percussive middle section. At every stage of the process Candace and Lann worked with AMEB Head of Publishing Steven Hodgson who was responsible for the production of the orchestral arrangement. The consultation was two-way. Steve wanted to ensure that the Indigenous essence of the song was captured in the arrangement and the songwriters needed to bring their song into a format that would work for the project. Changes and tweaks were made to pitches, rhythmic patterns, song structure and tempo to create an end product that suited its purpose whilst staying true to itself. The result is an uplifting and catchy song that tells an ancient story of two stars in our skies. Our hope is that the song will become a staple piece of repertoire for school orchestras and choirs for years to come.[14]

Morning Star and Evening Star, as a newly formed song product and vehicle for disseminating Aboriginal cultural knowledge, then required a platform and format for users to engage with the material. AMEB, in conjunction with myself, engaged *Kamilaroi* artist Paula Nihot to

work with *Kombumerri* artist Isobella Kruger to create artworks, imagery and a design template suitable for the educational materials and on-line platforms. In this instance Paula and Isobella already have an established friendship through the *Yugambeh* Youth Choir, where Paula is a parent and volunteer and Isobella is a performer, however through this process they became artist and mentor. Here Isobella shares her thoughts:

> This was a great opportunity for me to share my culture with Australia. We often only get to share our culture and language within the region of southeast Queensland. We are lucky to be supported by the AMEB organisation to create music and reignite some of our stories and culture, empowering us to keep our song going. As a young Kombumerri woman, the opportunity to work with known artist Kamilaroi woman Paula Nihot on a professional level empowered me to recognise my own talents and allowed me to see that there are strong leaders within my own community. I am also grateful to AMEB for the way that they have celebrated my culture and utilised my artwork in print publications and on social media platforms. This makes me proud of who I am.[18]

Conclusion

As Indigenous representatives with collective purpose, my cousin Lann Levinge, daughter Isobella Kruger and friend Paula Nihot are proud of our contribution to the 2021 AMEB Online Orchestra songline *Morning Star and Evening Star.* Beyond our familial connections to each other and the way in which Aboriginal people work together in community, as professionals, we collectively recognise that through the production of this piece we pay great respect to Elders past and present across Australia and make our own communities proud. Although our initial purpose was to share Aboriginal song and song knowledges, we discovered along the way that our true purpose was to demonstrate the process of collaboration between Aboriginal people, and the process of collaborative music making and cultural exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

As a pivotal moment in the relationship between two organisations where one is Indigenous and the other non-Indigenous, AMEB's decision to commission an Indigenous song for their 2021 Online Orchestra project was powerful. With far wider implications than the creation of a song, including the research and development of indigenous knowledges, the navigation and creation of Aboriginal ethics, protocols and permissions which foreground future protocols for other organisations working with Indigenous Arts knowledges, the negotiation of intercultural boundaries, and the advancement in the development of pedagogical implications for the dissemination and engagement with Indigenous knowledges, this decision and joint collaboration required a shift in processes and thought and the outcomes for AMEB have had a transformative reach beyond what they had also anticipated.

> Musically, the collaboration on the 'Morning Star and Evening Star' project has been rewarding on both sides and the collaboration between AMEB and Candace Kruger is a shift in the company's desire to contribute to reconciliation. Since the 2021 Online Orchestra collaboration AMEB has written its first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and is in the process of setting goals and targets around the

> inclusion of Aboriginal music in its syllabuses, employment, and service provider diversity. Staff at AMEB are enthusiastically undertaking cultural awareness activities and Acknowledgement of Country is now a standard, yet heartfelt and meaningful, addition to our meetings and gatherings. What started as a small musical collaboration between an indigenous group and a non-indigenous organisation has resulted in not only a new Australian work, but a deepening understanding of reconciliation and Aboriginal inclusion within the national music education sector. Our association with Candace has brought light to this void and the company is now keen to make changes where we can.[14]

Furthermore, AMEB asked the 2021 Online Orchestra participants to consider including an Acknowledgement to Country on which they live, and to pay respects to their local Aboriginal Elders as part of their entry. AMEB have stated that 'the response to this was very moving and a montage of these Acknowledgment of Country messages will feature as part of the final performance video'.[14]

In conclusion, projects such as the 2021 AMEB Online Orchestra project, should be viewed as a methodological approach to enter the third space where reconciliation, cross-cultural connectedness and intercultural exchange occurs when Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and/or organisations collaborate. Furthermore, this methodological approach assists Indigenous communities to contribute to legacy outcomes as the resources developed during the project allows for and provides sustainability for the continual dissemination of cultural information both now and well beyond for future generations.

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