

# Theatre and Internationalization

Perspectives from Australia,  
Germany, and Beyond

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## **4 Localizing Aboriginal and Pacific performance on internationalized stages**

1967–73

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# 4 Localizing Aboriginal and Pacific performance on internationalized stages

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*Amanda Harris*

## Introduction

In October 1970 an ensemble of musicians and dancers from Australia's far north travelled to Osaka, Japan, as the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation (Figure 4.1).<sup>1</sup> The performers were to feature in a show for the international Expo, emceed by folk entertainer Rolf Harris, and featuring Australian jazz performers Judy Stone and Don Burrows. This variety show complemented Australia's displays of technological feats, the modernist architecture of its exhibition hall, a musical accompaniment to the exhibit by composer George Dreyfus, the Australian Youth Orchestra performing a new commission by Peter Sculthorpe alongside music by Percy Grainger and European composers (Crotty 2015), and Aboriginal bark paintings that demonstrated Australia's unique visual art contribution to the world's culture.<sup>2</sup> The Australian Government's Aboriginal Affairs had agreed on the participation of an Aboriginal dance group, on the condition that they were directed by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust's (AETT) Artistic Director Stefan Haag (Harris 2020a).<sup>3</sup> They also expressed a concern that assimilationist aims be kept in view while including Aboriginal people in the exhibits:

The point should be made in treating the exhibits that Australian human history did not start in 1788, but some 30,000 years ago. (At the same time it is important also that the various presentations should not portray Aboriginal persons, culture and structures as being merely supplemented by the modern Australian counterparts, but as being gradually integrated into them).<sup>4</sup>

Australia had only resumed participation in international exhibitions three years earlier, in Montreal's Expo '67, after a hiatus of thirty years (Barnes and Jackson 2008). In the 1967 Montreal pavilion, entitled 'From Stone Age to Space Age', Aboriginal performers had not been included (Dvoretzky 1967). Instead, non-Indigenous man Frank Donnellan performed a unique Australian tradition of throwing a returning boomerang, after reportedly out-competing Aboriginal throwers for the honour.<sup>5</sup> Donnellan's performance of Aboriginal culture was accompanied by an exhibit of bark paintings. Though their arts and



Figure 4.1 Aboriginal Theatre Foundation Performers in Osaka, 1970. Dhambuljawa Burarrwanga, Rrikin Burarrwanga, Mulun Yunupingu, Wulurrk Mununggurr, Banambi Wunungmurra, Justin Purantamiri, Max Kerinauia, Henry Kerinauia, David Gulpilil, Dick Budalil, Talbert Jalkarara, Djoli Laiwanga, David Blanasi, Felix Wambunyi, Lawrence Biellum. International Exhibition Expo 70 Osaka Japan – Aboriginal Dance Ensemble F1, 1968/3396, National Archives of Australia (NAA), Darwin

cultural practices were represented, no Aboriginal people went to Montreal, in spite of a proposal from the National Aborigines' Day Observance Committee (NADOC) (Canberra Times 1966). The NADOC committee proposer, R.P. Greenish, responded to this exclusion with a cutting satirical song:

There'll be a ball held in old Montreal  
Some Australians will be there – but not all ...  
Not only the folk of the ACT  
But aborigines too are not free ...  
We have here a colour bar  
Quite as black as any tar  
But let's not blazon this afar  
Second-class citizenship can jar.<sup>6</sup>

Though Aboriginal paintings were featured in both the 1967 and 1970 Expos, the 1970 inclusion of live performers was significant. This change, amounting to a rethinking of who should represent regionally specific Aboriginal performance

traditions, is indicative of wider shifts following the momentous milestone in the history of Aboriginal rights – the 1967 referendum. The referendum is popularly remembered, especially among many Aboriginal people, as the event that shifted the classification of Aboriginal people from ‘part of the flora and fauna’ to citizens of Australia. As Gumbaynggirr man Gary Williams puts it, it meant ‘we were recognized as people’ (Williams 2007). This memorialization attests to the widespread experience of being treated as less than human that so many Aboriginal people recall.

More widely, the referendum is remembered as the moment Aborigines got the right to vote (though Aboriginal people had had at least the theoretical right to vote, if they were able to comply with the conditions of the individual state or territory that governed their lands). More than 90 per cent of the Australian population voted ‘Yes’ to the constitutional changes proposed in the referendum, which removed the power of states to exercise discriminatory powers applying only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and counted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the total population. The ‘Yes’ result, indicating that an overwhelming majority of Australians thought that Aboriginal people should be regarded as citizens of the nation, had effects far more profound than just constitutional ones (Attwood and Markus 2007, p.64).<sup>7</sup> Rodney Hall, involved with the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, recalled Aboriginal families dressing up and going into parts of the city they would never normally visit, imbued with a new sense of entitlement.

There were black people on the streets in a way that we had never seen them ... It was so touching. People were up ... and walked out in the streets of Brisbane, down Queen Street where they never went.

(Attwood and Markus 2007, p.57)<sup>8</sup>

This sense of liberation was mirrored in new potential for theatre and dance companies and the stages available to them. Performers were released from the arbitration of government intermediaries and worked towards self-determination in Aboriginal-run companies over the five years following the referendum, resulting in an explosion of new performing arts organizations and productions in the 1970s. Most prominent among these in presenting music and dance were the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT, formed in 1976 – later NAISDA), and the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation (ATF founded in 1969). These two organizations would have a significant impact on the Aboriginal performance landscape, and their actions arguably continue to shape it today. Theatre companies working in the sphere of narrative theatre also proliferated in this period, especially in the activities of Sydney’s Black Theatre and Melbourne’s Nindethana Theatre. Considerable research has focused on developments in Aboriginal theatre after 1975 (Casey 2004) but the transitional years 1967–73 are less well understood.

This chapter focuses on major international events involving Aboriginal performers in national celebrations and in dialogue with Pacific neighbours

between 1967 and 1973. While constitutional change offered new possibilities for internationalization, this was complicated by the shifting ground for public representation of Aboriginal culture preparing the way for a blossoming of performance companies in the 1970s. Before 1967, the Aboriginal performance landscape had been dominated by representationist performances staged by non-Indigenous people to the exclusion of Aboriginal custodians of cultural practice. These non-Indigenous productions continued after 1967, but in the face of growing resistance to their appropriative representations, they gradually changed their orientation to feature Aboriginal performers. The post-referendum era created unprecedented opportunities for international tours of Aboriginal performers, whose performances in the period 1967–73 emphasized regionally specific practices performed by the custodians of those traditions. In this way, the entry of Aboriginal music and dance onto the international stage of ‘world theatre’, or perhaps more aptly ‘world music’, was localized, not globalized.

This chapter starts by examining the formation of the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation in 1969 and the discourse-shifting changes engendered by that organization. It then examines the ongoing non-Indigenous representations of Aboriginal performance that began to meet increasing resistance between 1968 and 1973 and explores the ways that these contestations played out in the programming of internationalized performance festivals for major Australian commemorative events of 1970 and 1973.

### **Internationalizing Aboriginal performance: the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation**

The first meeting of the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation (ATF) took place on 22 October 1969. Dedicated to fostering Aboriginal performing, and related arts, the ATF was incorporated in 1970 and boasted a full programme of activities in 1971 (Durack 1971, pp.17–18). The ATF’s founding Chair, Justice R.A. Blackburn, led a board initially populated by Welfare Administrators from the Northern Territory, Harry Giese, Ted Evans, and Bill Gray, who had overseen the management of the territory’s Aboriginal population throughout the Assimilation era (on the Assimilation era see Haebich 2007; McGregor 2011). This government presence was supplemented by Arts Administrators such as Stefan Haag of the AETT and writers and artists such as Mary Durack, with curator Lance Bennett appointed Director. Most board members had been closely involved with a range of Aboriginal-themed cultural productions of the preceding two decades, only some of which featured Aboriginal performers. Giese, Evans, Gray, and Haag had collaborated on the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust’s 1963 *Aboriginal Theatre*, Bennett’s mother Dorothy Bennett had staged the art exhibitions associated with those 1963 shows, and Durack had worked with Haag and composer James Penberthy on his 1958 opera *Dalgerie* (based on Durack’s novel *Keep Him My Country*, which features relationships between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous protagonists).

After only two years, by 1972, members of the ATF Executive Committee now included substantial representation from emerging and established leaders

of Aboriginal performance, who would continue to play a leading role in the international touring and performance opportunities of the future. The membership emphasized the representation of the northern states and territories, in which Regional Committees were also formed (Western Australia (WA), Queensland (Qld) and Northern Territory (NT)). Albert Burunga (Mowanjum, WA), George Winunguj (Maung, Waruwi, Goulburn Island, NT), Horace Wikmunea (Weipa South, Qld), and Harry Kolumboort (Wadeye, NT) all became members of the Executive in 1971 or 1972, with Johnny Short (Lockhart River, Qld) joining in 1974. In the report ending in 1971, membership of the Foundation was reported as 248 Aboriginal and 66 non-Aboriginal.<sup>9</sup> When the Executive of the newly rebranded Aboriginal Cultural Foundation were elected in 1975, all were Aboriginal.<sup>10</sup>

The scope of activities of the ATF included not just touring concerts like one in 1971 in which Northern Territory performers toured the southern state of New South Wales (reminiscent of the AETT's 1963 *Aboriginal Theatre* tour), but also international tours and inter-community exchange, in which, for example, Northern Territory dancers visited communities in the Kimberley, Western Australia. This approach to cultural exchange brought together music and dance traditions separated by great distances yet linked by historical trade practices. Sally Treloyn and Allan Marett have shown that *balga*, *lirrga*, and *wangga* song traditions have been traded across hundreds of kilometres between the Daly River region of the Northern Territory and Kimberley region of Western Australia since at least the 1940s, but likely earlier (Treloyn 2014; Marett 2005).

The public display of Aboriginal dance forms was articulated by the ATF not just as a form of entertainment for Australian and international audiences, but as an explicit strategy in ensuring the continuation of cultural practice. In summaries of the first year of activities, the Foundation reported that in areas where few young people were learning the dances, such as Kununurra, public performances at Darwin's North Australian Eisteddfod were fostered in order to 'boost local Aboriginal interest in the traditional culture'.<sup>11</sup> Committee member Mary Durack confirmed that these public performances were not conceived as 'promotion of tourism but that of Aboriginal confidence and sense of identity' (Durack 1971, p.18).<sup>12</sup> The North Australian Eisteddfod featured as a meeting place for senior custodians of cultural performance knowledge to negotiate the terms of performance. In 1972 elders from across the north had also held a non-competitive festival at Winnellie Showground. Participation was only for Aboriginal people, though a non-Indigenous audience was allowed (Rowse 2017, p.142; see also Phipps 2016 on the role of festivals and public performances of culture in insisting on the survival of Indigenous cultures).

In the first fifteen years of its operation, performers from the communities of Yirrkala, Bamyili (Beswick/Barunga), Groote Eylandt, Arakun, Gapuwiyak, and Lajamanu were part of international tours to Fiji, New Guinea, Samoa, Hawaii, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Hong Kong, mainland USA, Italy, and France.<sup>13</sup> The performance opportunities created by the ATF were important to the

future of Aboriginal music and dance performance. Many of the performers engaged in these international tours would continue to pursue performing careers. Perhaps most famous among these were David Gulpilil, Djoli Laiwanga, and David Blanas. Blanas had already established a performance relationship with the 1970 Osaka show's principal artist – Rolf Harris – and even while the Expo shows were taking place, plans were being made for ongoing professional opportunities for the show's performers. As a newspaper article reported, the Osaka Expo '70 dancers were expected to form the 'nucleus of a full-time Aboriginal Theatre'.<sup>14</sup>

The formation of the ATF and its participation in the 1970 Osaka Expo were not just momentous in comparison to how Aboriginal culture was represented at Montreal in 1967. Rather, the new possibilities for overseas touring by Aboriginal performers that these structures created was a radical shift away from practices before the referendum. While collections of tangible artworks had long toured in exhibits curated by non-Indigenous collectors and anthropologists, living Aboriginal performers were restricted from leaving the country. From the 1930s onwards, non-Indigenous Australian choreographers, theatre makers, composers, and visual artists had drawn extensively on Aboriginal culture to inspire new productions that aimed to create a distinctive Australian style. These productions rarely included Aboriginal people. Across this period, entrepreneurial Aboriginal performers also created new performative works that received rave reviews, but were blocked from international tours by policies that gave 'protection' and 'welfare' boards oversight of the mobility of Aboriginal people. These included the 1951 *Aboriginal Moomba: 'Out of the Dark'*, in which leaders of Melbourne's Australian Aborigines' League produced a show featuring Aboriginal performers from up and down the east coast in 'traditional' and contemporary music and dance, and the 1963 *Aboriginal Theatre* featuring Aboriginal performers from the Northern Territory (Kleinert 1999; Harris 2020a, 2020b).<sup>15</sup> Even once the 1967 referendum removed these legal obstacles, in some domains the representation of Aboriginal performing cultures in the absence of Aboriginal people continued, as in Australia's contribution the 1968 Mexican Cultural Olympics.

### **'Aboriginal' culture on an international stage – 1968 Mexican Cultural Olympics**

Months after the referendum, a new 'Aboriginal ballet' was in preparation, programmed to represent Australia on the international stage of the upcoming Mexican Cultural Olympics. The choreographer for this event, Beth Dean, had initially proposed part of John Antill's iconic *Corroboree* ballet (1946 with 1954 choreography) for the Olympic festival since she considered it to be 'the best example of Australian Folkloric theatre'.<sup>16</sup> When the Mexican Ambassador raised some problems with performing Antill's score, the Director of Mexico's Ballet Folklorica, who would be performing the work, suggested that their ensemble members could learn Aboriginal songs and learn to play the didjeridu

to accompany Dean's choreography. Dean's response was indicative of her efforts to act as gatekeeper for Aboriginal cultural representation:

For your information, members of the Sydney Symphony orchestra and other musicians here, have tried for years to learn to play the didjeridu, the aboriginal drone tube. They have not succeeded. Therefore, it is impossible for musicians from Mexico to play it, especially without a skilled teacher and at least a year's practise. *There are no teachers.* Aborigines have not been able to explain clearly their techniques. And those who do play this instrument live thousands of miles from Sydney as wards of the government in their tribal state. Detribalised aborigines neither play nor dance. Nor can the quality of the sound, the intent of their chants be duplicated by a people whose ear is more accustomed to Western scale music sounds.<sup>17</sup>

Though Dean claimed there were no teachers of didjeridu, Mialli man David Blanasi (Bulanatji) (who would later perform with the ATF in Osaka) had, just earlier that year (and before the referendum), made headlines when he travelled to London to perform as didjeridu virtuoso on *The Rolf Harris Show*, instructing Harris in playing the instrument while on tour with him, in the beginning of an ongoing professional association (Canberra Times 1967a, 1967b). Group workshops in didjeridu playing would later become a mainstay of Blanasi's international career and reputation as a master of the instrument. In a review of the AETT's 1963 *Aboriginal Theatre* a few years earlier, Beth Dean had also praised the 'star of his instrument' Duluwangu, Yolgnu man Joe Yangarin from Yirrkala, whom she would later involve in the *Ballet of the South Pacific*.<sup>18</sup>

Instead of proposing to bring a *yidaki* (didjeridu) master such as Yangarin with her to Mexico, Dean ultimately negotiated with ethnomusicologist Alice Moyle (on recommendation from Stefan Haag at the AETT) to use a recorded song cycle from Arnhem Land as the taped soundtrack for the new ballet she would choreograph – *Kukaitcha*.<sup>19</sup> The story on which the ballet was based came from a book published by Dean's husband Victor Carell (1960). 'Kukaitcha', originally recorded in Spencer and Gillen's (1899) *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, an account of Aranda (Arrente) traditions from Central Australia, was a tale of transgression, one that Dean seemed to find particularly tantalizing, if the frequency with which it was mentioned is any indication. In the programme note for the ballet, Dean indicated that:

Kukaitcha is the story of a ritual spearing, told by the old songman. Accompanied by the Didjeridu musician. Aboriginal tribal sanctions are invoked by Kukaitcha, the wiseman, against Wura, the woman who witnessed forbidden sacred ceremonies ... The focal object in the ballet is a Tjuringa. The spirit of life is believed to reside in these sacred boards or stones. These sacred totemic symbols may be handled only by those disciplined people who through trial by ordeal i.e. stringent self denial and

initiation, have proven their integrity ... *No woman or uninitiated boys may look upon these sacred symbols.* Death is the penalty for those who dare.<sup>20</sup>

Dean's ballets, focusing on elusive secret knowledge reproduced from a late-nineteenth-century publication, stood in stark contrast to emerging performances from ensembles like the ATF. In their international performances, the ATF emphasized public genres and locally owned song and dance entertainment, rather than this kind of secret-sacred knowledge that had never been intended for public consumption.

### **An international festival to commemorate Captain Cook in 1970**

In 1969 the kinds of representative ballets staged by Beth Dean and the new genre of public Aboriginal theatre pioneered by the ATF came into direct contact during negotiations with the Minister for Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs about how the Cook Bicentenary should be commemorated. In April 1970 a week-long festival of performing arts marked official celebrations of the Cook Bicentenary – 200 years since Captain James Cook had landed at Kamay (Botany Bay). Cook's brief visit in 1770 had become a foundation moment in celebratory narratives about the Australian nation state (Gapps 2002; McGrath 2017; Daley 2019).

In previous national events, especially the 1954 coronation tour of Queen Elizabeth II and the 1963 commemorations of 175 years since British settlement, Beth Dean and John Antill's collaborative 'Aboriginal ballets' had been front and centre. Their ballet *Corroboree* was the centrepiece of the gala concert for the Queen in 1954, and another ballet *Burraborang Dreamtime* had featured in a Pageant of Nationhood for the Queen in 1963. But in 1970 proposals for these representative ballets, that involved no Aboriginal people, were not greeted with the same enthusiasm. In 1969 Dean and Carell engaged in discussions with the Artistic Directors of the Australian Ballet (formed in 1962) Peggy van Praagh and Robert Helpmann about the possibility of staging *Corroboree* for the bicentennial celebrations. In a terse exchange, van Praagh expressed her doubt about the wisdom of attempting to represent Aboriginal dance through European ballet:

As was discussed in Canberra, when you are transferring an aboriginal rite to a westernised form of theatre it needs extremely sensitive handling, and I believe Sir Robert [Helpmann] feels as I do, that we would like to see how you intend to do this before finally committing ourselves to the production of 'Corroboree'.<sup>21</sup>

Van Praagh's response was evidently taken by Dean and Carell as the slight it was intended to be, and Carell responded:

We were told later that he [Helpmann] informed the Trust that he had ‘got rid of that problem’ [staging *Corroboree*]. It will now be performed as part of the Arts Council and Cook’s Memorial Bi-Centenary Committee’s event in March 1970.<sup>22</sup>

The Arts Council of Australia’s President Dorothy Helmrich, who had commissioned several of the earlier ‘Aboriginal ballets’ had also been made aware of the potential sensitivities by leading anthropologist A.P. Elkin. Elkin had cautiously recommended the production, though his response could equally be read as a diplomatic reproach:

I thought quite highly of it [*Corroboree*]. I thought Miss Dean had made great use of her studies of the literature and the field, and had presented a highly commendable work of art ...

Apart from the Jubilee of the Arts Council, this is a good year for bringing Aboriginal art and ideas into prominence because of the new emphasis being laid on Aboriginal affairs by Commonwealth and State Governments. I personally would like to see Aborigines from the north come down again to Sydney, to show what they themselves can really do in forms of artistic expression.<sup>23</sup>

Helmrich and the Arts Council proceeded with the new *Corroboree* production, though it was altered (whether in response to these concerns is unknown) by casting Australian-based African American dancer Ronne Arnold in the lead role of the ‘boy Initiate’ instead of Beth Dean, who had performed the lead herself for the Queen in 1954. But instead of *Corroboree* featuring in the key celebrations of the bicentenary by the Australian Ballet, it was produced in the suburban Gunnamatta Park in Cronulla featuring Arnold’s Australian Contemporary Dance Company (1967–72), alongside two other Antill ballets with choreography by Dean and Arnold (Kusko 1970). Unlike in 1951, or in the Royal performances in 1954, 1959, and 1963 (which they referenced while extensively lobbying for a role in the 1970 celebrations), *Corroboree* was not the headline event of the official celebrations, and was not attended by the Queen.<sup>24</sup>

In a retreat from their initial pitch for their ‘Aboriginal ballet’ to form a central part of the celebrations, Dean’s collaborator husband Victor Carell also proposed an internationalized *Ballet of the South Pacific* that would include Aboriginal performers alongside dancers from New Zealand and the Cook Islands. His proposal suggested that ‘our recommended dance expert (who is best qualified in this country for this job outside of my wife)’, Ronne Arnold, should be sent by the department to remote Aboriginal communities in order to select dancers to be brought to Sydney for a month of training with Beth Dean. Carell and Dean also asserted that their involvement was central to producing a high-quality performance, though they expected no payment:

We need to develop our culture in a way that will bring us into the internationally accepted art forms and as we will be presenting aboriginal culture we want it performed in a manner that will bring pride to our Aboriginal people and pride and interest and more knowledge for the rest of Australians.<sup>25</sup>

The proposal was greeted with a mixed reception by the Minister for Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs, and by Northern Territory administrators, as well as by the Chair of the Advisory body of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs H.C. Coombs (also Chair of the new Australian Council for the Arts, later the Australia Council). Coombs agreed with the Minister that the inclusion of Aboriginal dancers was an interesting proposal, but emphasized that the Council's first priority was to support the new performance troupe assembled for the Expo '70 in Osaka. Establishment of the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation was already in progress 'with the aboriginal communities themselves', reported Coombs, underpinned by support from the Australia Council for the Arts for the move to professionalization.<sup>26</sup>

That the Council's focus was not only on developing a professional Aboriginal Theatre organization, but also on emphasizing the 'aboriginal communities themselves' and prioritizing international touring, indicates how different the possibilities for Aboriginal self-representation in performance had become. Ultimately, Carell was given permission to self-fund a tour of the Northern Territory recruiting Aboriginal dancers. In the meantime, the proposed ATF had been established, but the Aboriginal members of the ATF declined to participate in any commemoration of Cook's visit in 1770. As the *Northern Territory News* reported, 'there were divided views on the celebrations among the Aborigines of Australia' and the Foundation had felt it 'unwise to take sides on the matter'.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Aboriginal residents of all major cities protested the commemoration of invasion of their land, even while some actors, dancers, and musicians took paid work performing in the festivities. The planned protests were also widely reported in the media (Manderson 1970).<sup>28</sup>

The message that not all Indigenous people would welcome a celebration of Cook was reinforced to Dean and Carell by their friend and associate Leslie Greener, who wrote to them: 'I could wish that the occasion for this co-operation of three Governments was something other than Capt. Cook's arrival. What the Cook Islanders, the Maoris and the Aborigines have to celebrate about that I don't know'.<sup>29</sup> However, Dean and Carell remained aloof from these political debates, characterizing Cook as 'humane' and a 'navigational genius' who should finally be celebrated for his contribution to bringing different parts of the world into close contact with one another.<sup>30</sup>

The *Ballet of the South Pacific* opened at Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney on 6 April 1970. Plans for the inclusion of a Maori performing troupe had been thwarted by lack of funding from either the Australian or New Zealand governments.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, the production still brought Aboriginal performance into an international context, programming twenty Aboriginal performers

from the north alongside dancers from the Cook Islands (Australian Women's Weekly 1970).<sup>32</sup> Dean and Carell sought further international performance opportunities for the Aboriginal dancers involved.<sup>33</sup> The areas of Australia represented (Tiwi Islands, Yirrkala, Milingimbi, Mornington Island, and Daly River region) had never been visited by Cook, who charted the east coast some 4,000 km distant from the central north. Only a couple of dancers represented each community, and it is possible that the failure to recruit whole ensembles of dancers (such as those involved in the ATF) that would include the appropriate owner of particular dance practices may have led to the negative reviews of Aboriginal performers, who were characterized as serious, in comparison to the joyful Cook Islanders, and as nervous, or unused to the stage.<sup>34</sup> The Aboriginal performers' entrance on stage was foreshadowed by an image of Cook and his crew landing on Australian shores, with a voice-over describing the encounter between the travellers and Aboriginal people as the stage gradually illuminated.<sup>35</sup>

In the lead-up to the *Ballet of the South Pacific*, Dean and Carell had helped to set up the Cook Islands National Arts Theatre (CINAT) in 1969, as well as the Dance Theatre of Fiji, and would mount the first South Pacific Festival of Arts in Suva, Fiji in 1972 (Alexeyeff 2009). Dean and Carell's initial input in starting the companies and seeking to choreograph and manage productions that fitted within the mould of modern Australian/American dance theatre later faced resistance, with both companies rejecting their Westernized interpretations of Cook Islands and Fijian dance (Cochrane 1995). The ATF did participate in the first and subsequent South Pacific Festivals, the event fitting with the objectives of the Foundation and its approach to promoting and sharing culture, devoid of any veneration of Cook.<sup>36</sup>

The South Pacific Festival was also imported to Sydney to celebrate the 1973 opening of the Sydney Opera House in a two-week festival featuring ensembles from Fiji, the Cook Islands, New Zealand, Tonga, West Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea, along with the ATF. For several days this event crossed over with a folkloric programme of dancers from Balkan countries, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and South America (also produced by Dean and Carell).<sup>37</sup> This festival internationalized the Sydney performing arts scene in ways not previously realized on this scale. Maori and Cook Islands groups even accompanied the Queen's Royal Inspection of the Sydney Opera House in October 1973. However, non-Indigenous representations of Aboriginal culture remained in view in the 1973 celebrations, with Beth Dean's long-term collaborator John Antill's orchestral work *Jubugalee* (the Gadigal name for the location of the Opera House, also known as Bennelong Point) featuring as the opening work in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's opening night programme.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

Rustom Bharucha (1993, p.14) has suggested that the practices of 'world theatre', in which 'unexamined ethnocentricity' generated an unreflective

'interculturalism', brought no benefit to the cultures whose products were exploited in the process. Echoing Bharucha's discussion of interculturalism, ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (2000, p.148) has traced the term 'world music' from its benign uses in the early 1960s to describe non-Western musics, into a space 'where the audibility of intercultural influences was mixed down or muted'. In Australia these kinds of interculturalist productions by non-Indigenous performers had proliferated in mid-twentieth-century Australian dance, narrative theatre, and art music.

Though Aboriginal performance (constituted by music and dance rather than narrative theatre) moved into the internationalized realm of 'world theatre' and 'world music' through 'Aboriginal Theatre' shows in the period 1967–73, these were not characterized by the muted interculturalism of globalized world music and theatre. Instead, the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation was momentous in localizing the performance of Aboriginal culture internationally, bringing a regional focus to owned and self-represented cultural practice and redress to intercultural performances of the pre-referendum era that had excluded Aboriginal self-representation. This was not only a local practice, but rather it generated a new internationalized Aboriginal performance, delivering regional practice to an international audience, and bringing the world to Australia, in festivals of Indigenous music and dance.

## Notes

- 1 Sections of this chapter have been reworked from Chapter 6 of my book *Representing Australian Aboriginal Music and Dance 1930–70*, Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2020.
- 2 Australian Commonwealth Film Unit, Australian Colour Diary. No. 36, Title No.: 12732, National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), Canberra; Gregson Edwards, 'Dancing for the Future', clipping in Aboriginal Theatre Foundation 1963–1983, Harry Christian Giese Collection, 15-036-005, Arafura Research Archive, Charles Darwin University (henceforth Giese Collection).
- 3 Haag had built a reputation directing similar shows through the 1963 *Aboriginal Theatre* that toured to Melbourne and Sydney.
- 4 B.G. Dexter to The Commissioner-General, (Australian Exhibit Organisation for Expo 70, Canberra) 16 September 1968, International Exhibition Expo 70 Osaka Japan – Aboriginal Dance Ensemble F1, 1968/3396, National Archives of Australia (henceforth NAA), Darwin.
- 5 Pavilion of Australia, Expo 67 in Montreal, [http://expo67.ncf.ca/expo\\_australia\\_p1.html](http://expo67.ncf.ca/expo_australia_p1.html), [accessed 24 September 2019]; Clipping, Letter to the Editor: 'Boomerang Throwing for New Australians', 13 November 1967 [details not recorded] in A.W. Grant papers relating to NADOC and Aboriginal Welfare, MLMSS 4265, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney (henceforth SLNSW).
- 6 National Aborigines' Day Observance Committee (Australia) (1964). MS 3677, National Library of Australia, Canberra (henceforth NLA).
- 7 Attwood and Markus also suggest that the moral authority the referendum bestowed on the incoming Labor Government in 1972 gave the government the mandate it needed to implement a major programme of reform.

- 8 The authors quote from Rodney Hall, interview, 'The Fair Go: Winning the 1967 Referendum', ABC Television, 1999.
- 9 President's Report 1969–1971, p.6, Aboriginal Theatre Foundation 1963–1983, Giese Collection.
- 10 Aboriginal Theatre Foundation 1963–1983, Giese Collection. Giese recalled that Coombs had pushed for the Foundation to be Aboriginal-run, though he (Giese) had believed there would be benefits in retaining the expertise of the non-Indigenous members: Side A, Tape Eighteen, Harry Giese Oral History, NTRS 226 TS 755, Northern Territory Archives, Darwin.
- 11 President's Report 1969–1971, Aboriginal Theatre Foundation 1963–1983, Giese Collection.
- 12 Other cultural festivals begun in the last two decades have developed into more pedagogical models that aim to educate settler Australians, like Garma (Yolgnu lands near Nhulunbuy), or alongside those strongly oriented in the culture of the host community, like Milpirri (Warlpiri lands in Lajamanu) or Mowanjum (Worrorra, Ngarinyin and Wunambal lands in Derby) (Slater 2018).
- 13 List compiled by Lance Bennett, Aboriginal Theatre Foundation 1963–1983, Giese Collection.
- 14 'Expo Dancers Will Continue' *News*, 18 May 1970, clipping in International Exhibition Expo 70 Osaka Japan – Aboriginal Dance Ensemble F1, 1968/3396, NAA, Darwin.
- 15 A rare exception to this was Aboriginal tenor Harold Blair, who toured the USA in 1949. A few years later, when producer, artist and Aboriginal activist Bill Onus sought to do the same, his visa was blocked by ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation). See Amanda Harris, Tiriki Onus, and Linda Barwick, 'Performing Aboriginal Workers' Rights in 1951: from the Top End to Australia's Southeast' (forthcoming 2021).
- 16 Beth Dean to Lloyd Edmonds, 14 October 1967, Subject file: 'Kukaiitcha. Technical Papers, Letters etc.', 1967–1969 Correspondence, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, MLMSS 7804/19/5, SLNSW. Original spelling, grammar, and capitalization are retained in quotations from correspondence unless otherwise indicated.
- 17 Dean to His Excellency Eugenie de Anzorena, Ambassador of Mexico, 4 November 1967, Subject file: 'Kukaiitcha. Technical Papers, Letters etc.', 1967–1969 Correspondence, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, MLMSS 7804/19/5, SLNSW, emphasis added.
- 18 Beth Dean, 'Aboriginal Theatre: An Insight into Native World', *Daily Telegraph*, 6 December 1963. Transcript of review retained in Divider – Aboriginal Theatre, Box 46 Folder 65–12, Records of Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust MS 5908, NLA. Photos of Yangarin, Nalakan and Mungali performing for schoolchildren accompany those of Yangarin numbered AR00019.012.084 and AR00019.012.104 in the Beth Dean Carell collection no. 1, National Museum of Australia, Canberra.
- 19 Beth Dean to Alice Moyle, 1 March 1968, Subject file: 'Kukaiitcha. Technical Papers, Letters etc.', 1967–1969 Correspondence, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, MLMSS 7804/19/5, SLNSW.
- 20 Notebook in Subject file: 'Kukaiitcha. Technical Papers, Letters etc.', 1967–1969 Technical Papers, MLMSS 7804/19/6, SLNSW, emphasis added.
- 21 Peggy van Praagh to Beth Dean, 6 June 1969, 'Notes & letters re early efforts to get Ballet into National repertoire', 1954, Beth Dean and Victor Carell: Correspondence: Corroboree, MLMSS 7804/3/6, SLNSW.

- 22 Victor Carell to van Praagh, 24 June 1969, 'Notes & letters re early efforts to get Ballet into National repertoire', 1954, Beth Dean and Victor Carell: Correspondence: Corroboree, MLMSS 7804/3/6, SLNSW.
- 23 Elkin to Dorothy Helmrich, 10 February 1969, Carell, Victor – Proposed ballet of the South Pacific A2354 1969/289, NAA, Canberra.
- 24 Victor Carell to W.C. Wentworth, 25 February 1969, Carell, Victor – Proposed ballet of the South Pacific A2354 1969/289, NAA, Canberra. Correspondence in this collection and in the Mitchell Library, SLNSW shows the extent of their lobbying for inclusion in these events – first by proposing that Dean's ballet *Kukaitcha* be staged, then attempting to convince that their input was essential to any performance involving Aboriginal dancers from the Top End and asking to work with Stefan Haag on a production, and finally working with Helmrich on *Corroboree*. Carell again proposed that *Corroboree* be staged for the 1988 bicentenary, a proposal that was considered by the General Manager of the Sydney Opera House and passed on to Sydney Dance Company Artistic Director Graeme Murphy, but ultimately rejected. Victor Carell to Lloyd Martin, 5 May 1985, Beth Dean and Victor Carell: Correspondence: Corroboree. Beth Dean and Victor Carell: Correspondence: Corroboree; 'Notes & letters re early efforts to get Ballet into National repertoire', 1954, Beth Dean and Victor Carell papers, MLMSS 7804/3/6, SLNSW.
- 25 Victor Carell to W.C. Wentworth, Minister for Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs 26 May 1969, Carell, Victor – Proposed ballet of the South Pacific, A2354 1969/289, NAA, Canberra.
- 26 H.C. Coombs, Chairman to W.C. Wentworth 4 June 1969, Carell, Victor – Proposed ballet of the South Pacific, A2354 1969/289, NAA, Canberra. Funding of \$20,000 to establish the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation was matched by the Council for Aboriginal Affairs. Aboriginal Theatre Foundation 1963–1983, Giese Collection.
- 27 'NT Theatre Foundation Shuns Cook Celebrations', *Northern Territory News*, 14 February 1970, clipping in Carell, Victor – Proposed ballet of the South Pacific A2354 1969/289, NAA, Canberra.
- 28 'Aborigines' Ban Won't Stop Cook Ceremony', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 February 1970; 'They Won't Dance for Captain Cook', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 February 1970. Clippings in Folder 'Aboriginal Protest', II. Files of photocopies of newscuttings concerning the Bicentenary, 1970, MLK 376, Sir Asher Joel – papers, 1953–1970, MLMSS 3284, MLOH 3, SLNSW.
- 29 Leslie Greener to Beth Dean and Victor Carell, 28 February 1970, Letters received from Leslie Greener Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, 1953–1970, MLMSS 7804/3/2, SLNSW.
- 30 Unaddressed handwritten letter in Beth Dean's hand, n.d. (but content indicates it was written in the lead-up to the Bicentenary 1969/70), Subject file: Captain Cook Bi-Centenary Celebrations, 1960–1970, MLMSS 7804/11/3, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, SLNSW.
- 31 Report Australian Tour of the Ballet of the South Pacific April/May 1970, Subject file: Ballet of the South Pacific – Reports, Statements of Account and related papers, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, MLMSS 7804/10/4, SLNSW.
- 32 The full cast included Irene Babui, William Caulda (Nalayandi), William Frederick (Nanganaralil), Jackson Jacob, Larry Lanley, Leon Puruntatameri, Gordon Watt, Regina Portamini, John Mungali, Billy Nalakan, Cyril Ninnal, Edward Puruntatameri, Arthur Roughsey, Simon Tipungwuti, Joe Yangarin (Gumana)

- Subject file: Ballet of the South Pacific – Reports, Statements of Account and related papers, MLMSS 7804/10/4, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, SLNSW, Sydney. *Ballet of the South Pacific* also toured to Canberra Theatre 24–25 April 1970, see Canberra Theatre Centre Ephemera at the ACT Heritage Library.
- 33 Carell wrote to Ted Shawn (who had publicly applauded Aboriginal dancers after visiting the Delissaville community in 1947), suggesting an international tour of Aboriginal dancers to Shawn's theatre, Jacob's Pillow. Victor Carell to Ted Shawn, 27 September 1970, Subject File: Ted Shawn, 1947; 1968–84, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, MLMSS 7804/25/2, SLNSW.
- 34 Barbara Hall, 'Islanders Upstage Aborigines' [no other details retained], clipping in Subject file: Captain Cook Bi-Centenary Celebrations, 1960–1970, MLMSS 7804/11/3, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, SLNSW.
- 35 Leslie Walford, 'Our Town', *Sun Herald*, 12 April 1970, clipping in Subject file: Captain Cook Bi-Centenary Celebrations, 1960–1970, MLMSS 7804/11/3, Beth Dean and Victor Carell Papers, SLNSW.
- 36 Aboriginal Theatre Foundation 1963–1983, Giese Collection.
- 37 Programme of the South Pacific & National Folkloric Festival, Australian Tour 1973, Sydney Opera House Archives, Sydney.
- 38 Programme for Official Opening by Her Majesty the Queen, 20 October 1973; Programme for Royal Concert, 20 October 1973, Sydney Opera House Archives, Sydney.

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