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

Sydney Conservatorium of Music
University of Sydney
2014
I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Signed: 

R. M. Campbell

Date: 10 December, 2013
Abstract

Peter Sculthorpe began writing what he considered to be “truly Australian”
music some time in the mid 1950s. Many audience members, critics and culture
industry personnel also heard it as ‘Australian.’ Sculthorpe’s place in Australian
classical music has subsequently been very prominent, both locally and
internationally. His meteoric rise to prominence began in the early 1960s,
during what has since been described as his *Irkanda* period (1954-1965). This
period takes its name from a series of works *Irkanda I - IV*, a name Sculthorpe
borrowed from an Aboriginal word meaning “scrub country”, and which he
variously translated as “the huge scrub-country of Central Australia,” “an
austere and lonely place” and “a remote and lonely place.”

This thesis is a study of the *Irkanda*-period works on which Sculthorpe’s initial
highly successful reception is based, with the rationale that the period
constitutes the origin of his dominant and influential nationalist project and is
thus of significance in both his oeuvre and the history of Australian music. His
musical representations of aspects of Aboriginal ‘folklore’ and central
Australian landscapes have received significant amounts of popular and
academic attention. However, many accounts have been shaped by what is
argued was a culturally nationalist historiography evident in much of the
commentary on Australian music and culture from the mid-1960s.

This thesis aims to address some of the distorting effects of this historiography,
through biographical analysis, music analysis and source study. An overarching
aim is also to analyse the music and reception of Sculthorpe’s *Irkanda* works in
detail to address the question of what it was that his audiences found plausibly
Australian about them. Sculthorpe’s *Irkanda* music draws on longstanding
representational traditions in classical and entertainment genres of musical
exoticism, landscape, and ‘primitivism.’ His work is also strongly connected

with contemporary non-indigenous Australian cultural expressions of
landscape and ‘Aboriginality.’ The relationship of his work with these contexts
is explored, as is the nationalist basis of Sculthorpe’s music and its context
within wider Australian and transnational cultural traditions.

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This project would scarcely have been possible without the permission of Peter
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this. Whatever flaws this project may have, I hope I have approached it with
enough seriousness to warrant his assistance.

Nor would it have been possible to write this had Graeme Skinner not already
published his insightful, critical and comprehensively researched biography of
this period of Sculthorpe’s life. My debts to it are very apparent in footnotes. I
could not have taken on as much detail as I have in this thesis without the
existence of Graeme’s superb book, nor would I have been able to gain as many
perspectives on what happened after the Irkanda period. Graeme is also an
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Diagram showing relationships between *Sonata for 
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Introduction

In 1939, in the town of Launceston in Tasmania, Peter Sculthorpe, ten years old, reads and enjoys Keats, Shelley, Melville and Austen. Clearly precocious, he moves on to Ruskin and Malcolm Arnold. As adolescence takes hold he watches glamorous films, sometimes films about composers’ lives. He appreciates artistic nudes, and starts to consume headier fare, playing Debussy, listening to Mahler, reading T.S. Eliot. His French improves, he reads Baudelaire and Verlaine, he carves a napkin ring after Verlaine “music before everything”; intoxicated by the idea perhaps more than having any specific plans for a career as a composer.¹ He reads Virgil, encountering the classic source of the pastoral² before moving on to Sassoon, Spender and Nietzsche.³

This was not a very typical set of interests for Australians at the time.⁴ My paternal grandparents, for instance, spent these years in country New South Wales enjoying Steele Rudd’s “Dad and Dave” comedies and classic Australian bush novels by Ion Idriess. They were singing “The Road to Gundagai” and other popular songs around the piano, which my grandfather played by ear. In the late 1930s there was a copy of Margaret Mitchell’s American Civil War novel Gone with the Wind at just about every cattle station in rural Queensland; my maternal grandmother was able to read the entire book as she travelled from homestead to homestead, picking up where she left off at each successive place.

¹ Graeme Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 61, 70–73, 68, 77, 79, 82.
³ Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 88.
My family was of a similar class to Sculthorpe’s parents – my paternal
grandfather, like Sculthorpe’s mother, was a schoolteacher – but even in this
simplified account, the radical differences between their tastes and Sculthorpe’s
are readily apparent.

Despite such beginnings, Sculthorpe later became recognized by many as the
creator of the most significant *oeuvre* of nationalist Australian classical music in
the history of the country.\(^5\) In academic and journalistic accounts in Australia
and internationally he has been discussed in terms such as the following: “[h]e
became the voice of Australia, in the public’s eye”\(^6\) and “[w]hen the history of
music in twentieth-century Australia is assembled, there is little doubt that
Peter Sculthorpe will emerge as the most important and original composer, for
he is certainly the first, and perhaps the only one, who seems to have
established for himself a concept of what an Australian music might be, and the
only one who has thought seriously of the kind of response which is
appropriate to our social sensibility.”\(^7\) “He has emerged as Australia’s
representative composer, both in Australia and overseas,”\(^8\) and “[p]robably
more than any other composer living in this country, Peter Sculthorpe has
taught other composers and musicians, and music lovers generally, what it
means to be an Australian composer and to be conscious of being Australian.”\(^9\)

---

\(^5\) The term “nationalism” is used in this thesis as it is in History, Globalisation Studies,
etc. to mean a preoccupation with nation, but not with the association of belligerence
that it tends to carry in more popular usage. “Classical” and “concert” music are used
to mean composed musical works whose notational conventions, instrumentation,
social practices of performance and the training of composers broadly place them as
contemporary iterations in the tradition of European-derived classical music.
Australian classical music therefore refers not to the performance of works within this
international tradition in Australia, but works in this tradition composed in Australia
or by Australians.

\(^6\) Andrew Ford, *Composer to Composer: Conversations About Contemporary Music*
(Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), 164.

\(^7\) Michael Hannan, "Peter Sculthorpe," in *Australian Composition in the Twentieth
Century*, ed. Frank Callaway and David Tunley (Melbourne: Oxford University Press,
1978), 136.

\(^8\) James Murdoch, *Australia’s Contemporary Composers* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1972),
163.

\(^9\) Roger Covell quoted in Jill Sykes, "Sculthorpe at Fifty," *The Sydney Morning Herald*,
28 April, 1979, 15.
His work is described as “[t]he most original sound to emerge from Australia since Nellie Melba and the first to show awareness of regional contexts; it established Sculthorpe as musical figurehead for the entire Pacific basin”\textsuperscript{10} and “[f]rom the mid 1960s Peter Sculthorpe began to occupy a position in Australian musical life similar to the one Aaron Copland held in the United States.”\textsuperscript{11} Additionally, in many accounts, it is clear that Sculthorpe was acclaimed by the public. For example, Frank Harris wrote in 1971 “Peter Sculthorpe has only to walk onstage and listeners applaud madly.”\textsuperscript{12} In informal conversations with various older Australian musicians and audience-members it is apparent that Sculthorpe’s music was meaningful, relevant and important to many of them, and such interpretations are largely borne out in the many quotations from reviews and academic texts throughout this thesis. Whilst this view of Sculthorpe’s position and pre-eminence has been contested multiple times – there are certainly dissenting voices\textsuperscript{13} - his overall importance in the history of Australian music is well-established and indeed his nationalist project was of great interest to many, especially from the 1960s to the 1980s.

It is thus clear that many people in this period responded very positively to Sculthorpe’s nationalist Australian classical music, and the often rapturous reception of his work points to the potential existence of factors and anxieties in Australian culture and society that shaped a perceived need for such cultural expression. This interpretation is supported by a number of commentators who even as far back as the 1970s recognized that Sculthorpe’s music had fulfilled an existing desire for nationalist culture. For example, James Murdoch wrote that “[h]is arrival on the Australian musical scene was perfectly timed and he has


\textsuperscript{13} For example, see John Carmody, "The Sound of Other People's Ideas: Review of Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer by Graeme Skinner," \textit{The Australian}, February 6, 2008, 22.
fulfilled an important role in Australian music, which would be very different without him.”

Later, Gordon Kerry was of the opinion that Sculthorpe was “the right person at the right time to bring a sense of Australianness to our music.”


Australianness has been an almost ever-present element in the public discourse Sculthorpe presents on his music. However, the contrast outlined earlier between Sculthorpe’s early interests and the contemporary cultural preoccupations of my grandparents shows that Australianness was not always Sculthorpe’s primary cultural concern, nor initially even much of a peripheral one, despite the many ‘distinctively’ Australian elements in contemporary Australian popular and so-called ‘high’ culture. The point at which this conclusively changed for Sculthorpe was in the early 1950s: after his childhood as something of an aesthete and Europhile, and after he had returned to Launceston after obtaining a Bachelors degree in music from Melbourne University, he decided to focus his compositional energies on writing what he initially described to the press as “truly Australian music.” As implied above, this project has continued throughout his life, whilst also incorporating engagements with Asian and more recently Afghani culture in his work, elements that have always been, however, framed in relation to overarching Australian themes.

Implicit in this initial discussion are several themes that form the main concerns of this thesis:

- The central question of this thesis is what are the characteristics of the music of Sculthorpe’s Irkanda period (1954 – early 1965) that allowed it to be accepted and often hailed as a plausible expression of Australian national identity in its context?

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• Related to this is the more specific question: given that Sculthorpe’s works have been widely understood as landscape music and, initially, representations of Aboriginality, in what ways do his musical representations relate to existing, dominant conceptualisations of Aboriginality and Australian landscape within non-indigenous twentieth-century Australian culture?

• What characterises some of the reception of Sculthorpe’s music in this period and can this reception be related to trends and themes within Australian culture in the mid-twentieth century? Closely related to this, as Graeme Skinner has argued and as will be demonstrated below, there was pronounced institutional and critical support for Sculthorpe’s project of ‘Australianness’ in music in the 1960s onwards. What contextual factors may help elucidate why a classical music that was for the most part understood as an expression of Australian national identity would be so positively received and supported in this period?

• Finally, what were the biographical and contextual factors that may have had a bearing on Sculthorpe’s decision to become a composer of ‘truly Australian’ music and his continuation on such a course through the Irkanda period, after a childhood and adolescence in which he seemingly had so little interest in Australian culture or expressions of Australian place?

The periodization of Sculthorpe’s music, at least in the earlier parts of his career, is fairly well established. The Irkanda period is named after a set of works, Irkanda I (1955) to Irkanda IV (1961), and also incorporates other music composed in the same period, from the piano Sonatina (1954) to String Quartet No.6 (1965). Sculthorpe himself has distinguished his “Irkanda music” from his
“Sun music period.”¹⁶ Such periodization is also argued for in Nicholas Milton’s
DMA thesis on Sculthorpe’s string quartets,¹⁷ and is followed, usually fairly
informally and without major supporting arguments, in other sources. Michael
Hannan’s major book on Sculthorpe’s music, published in 1982 and based on
Hannan’s 1979 doctoral thesis, seems to have been written too early to have
adopted a strict schema of compositional periods; however Hannan does
outline a clear stylistic break between the Irkanda works and the subsequent
Sun Music, and he titles the chapter in which he begins discussing the Sun
Music works “New Materials and Influences.”¹⁸

The beginning of the Irkanda period is also the beginning of Sculthorpe’s first
acknowledged and widely performed works, and importantly, it is also the
point at which he began writing ‘Australian’ works, starting with the Sonatina
(1954). The period ends in January 1965 with the completion of String Quartet
No.6 by which point Sculthorpe had reached a significant level of national
prominence, and in the months following was signed to the prestigious British
publisher Faber Music and began achieving an increased level of prominence in
Britain. The details of this success will be outlined in Chapter 6. The works of
the Irkanda period thus constitute the music on which Sculthorpe’s early fame
is based and, as will be shown, the initial works on which his reception as a
composer of nationalist music is founded. In the years following, Sculthorpe’s
success and prominence only increased, and he also became well known in the
United States. The rationale behind a thesis that undertakes extensive study of
the genesis and musical procedures of the Irkanda works, Sculthorpe’s recorded
interpretations of them and their contemporary reception is that it is this
period that sees the origins and foundations of the creation and reception of his
oeuvre. Whilst such elements certainly shifted and developed in later years, the

¹⁶ Peter Sculthorpe, “String Quartet No.6,” undated manuscript, Composer file “Peter
Sculthorpe,” Australian Music Centre.
¹⁷ Nicholas Milton, “The String Quartets of Peter Sculthorpe: A Study in Stylistic
Synthesis ” (DMA diss., City University, 2004), 4-5.
¹⁸ Michael Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas 1929-1979 (St Lucia:
University of Queensland Press, 1982), 62.
period in which they originate and on which Sculthorpe’s rather meteoric rise is based holds important keys to understanding the character and cultural resonance of this prominent nationalist project. As will also be argued, there are so few extant sources from the 1950s explaining Sculthorpe’s work or interpretations that the origins of his decision to write nationalist works has been distorted and mythologized in most of the existing literature.

In terms of a basic conceptualization of musical style, the *Irkanda*-period music involves a moderately high level of dissonance with almost constant harmonic minor seconds, major sevenths or minor ninths. The harmony is often quartal / quintal or tertian with various added notes and superimposed intervals. Usually, tonal centres are perceptible but the music is highly chromatic and does not operate in terms of diatonic functional harmony. The most fundamental and pervasive melodic interval is the semitone, and after the *Sonatina* and *The Loneliness of Bunyil* (1954), pathos-inflected, often lamentational melodies are used in slow sections in contrast to repeated figures in faster sections. String works predominate, featuring extended techniques and *moto perpetuo* passages, often with atmospheric *tremolo* and various string timbres such as *sul tasto* and *sul ponticello*. There are also passages which in their limited complexity of pitch and emphasis on rhythm seem to be linked to representations of primitivism within transnational classical and entertainment genres such as film music. From 1959 and throughout the early 1960s, Sculthorpe referred to this set of qualities as “my Australian style.”

The subsequent *Sun Music* works (*Sun Music* I to IV and various other pieces) initially eschew melodic material in favour of an approach in the manner of European texturalism or Polish sonorism, although actually it seems this was mostly inspired by *musique concrète*,\(^9\) or, perhaps more realistically, electronic music generally. From *Sun Music III* (1967) and *Tabuh Tabuhan* (1968)

occasional texturalist passages are combined with the influence of Indonesian musics, especially Balinese. Within Sculthorpe’s oeuvre, however, Irkanda qualities continually recur, sometimes as occasional elements or as whole pieces (such as the Lament for Strings (1976)) and they are still audible in later major works such as Kakadu (1988).

The stylistic change into the Sun Music period, beginning in 1965, was partly motivated by Sculthorpe deciding that his Irkanda style was “too European” in its “expressionism” for his nationalist aims.20 Paradoxically, resisting this perceived ‘Europeanness’ involved taking his bearings initially from other European music and then from South-East Asian music, with the rationale that a geographically closer inspiration would make his music ‘more’ Australian (notably, however, local influences are not from the closest countries to Australia such as New Zealand or Papua New Guinea: the geographic rationale was also predicated on aesthetic selectivity). The idea that the Irkanda period music contains ‘European’ traces has been a theme in some Sculthorpe commentary since the mid-1960s, especially in the writings of Michael Hannan and Wilfrid Mellers, as will be outlined below. What is notable, however, is that in the 1950s and 1960s most of the Irkanda-period works were presented by Sculthorpe as unambiguously and unproblematically ‘Australian,’ and were mostly also received on such terms. Notable also here is the highly self-conscious and constructed nature of these discourses, and the notion that it is the resistance or avoidance of European influence that might guarantee cultural ‘Australianness.’ The European / Australian binary, applied successively to the Irkanda and then to later period works by Sculthorpe’s commentators, is a dominant construction in relation to existing understandings of Sculthorpe’s music, and will be analysed further below.

There is no formal literature review in this thesis; rather, analysis of existing literature will be conducted throughout the thesis, which proceeds

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20 Hannan, “Peter Sculthorpe,” 138; Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 367.
chronologically from Sculthorpe’s childhood and then through the *Irkanda* period. A brief discussion of some of the overall trends in the academic and journalistic commentary on Sculthorpe’s work is useful here, however, to identify some of the theoretical and historiographical issues encountered in this body of writing.

The majority of academic writing on Sculthorpe has been undertaken by his students, ex-students and colleagues and sometimes by assistants whom he has employed either as copyists or for general duties. Sculthorpe’s position as a lecturer at the University of Sydney from 1964 facilitated the growth of a substantial school of composers around him, and the majority of Australian composers who have adopted self-declared nationalism in relation to their work since the 1960s studied with him at Sydney, for example, Anne Boyd, Ross Edwards, Barry Conyngham, John Peterson, Paul Stanhope and Matthew Hindson. The major analytical treatments of Sculthorpe’s music in book form are by Michael Hannan (1982) and John Peterson (forthcoming), both ex-students and former copyist / assistants. This situation has had some marked advantages, as much of this writing is informed by a deep knowledge of Sculthorpe’s concerns, habits and compositional procedures, and is usually undertaken in a process that includes some consultation with Sculthorpe. However, because it has almost always been shaped Sculthorpe’s perspective as well by the perspectives of the writers who are often themselves composers, most of this writing is also primarily concerned with Sculthorpe’s compositional techniques and his interpretations of his own work. Other writing by composers such as Linda Kouvaras is similarly shaped by such concerns, and indeed a large proportion of academic writing about Australian classical music has been by composers. Of course, skill and training as a

---


22 I have not examined John Peterson’s forthcoming book, so it is excluded from these comments.

composer hardly preclude significant practice as a musicologist; however, in this body of work it is evident that the emphasis on the composerly interests of intention and technique has largely been at the expense of convincing analysis in relation to wider cultural spheres or analysis informed by contemporary theoretical trends in the humanities. An exception here is Graeme Skinner’s authorized biography of Sculthorpe, which is informed by wide cultural erudition; however, Skinner’s focus is largely biographical and he mostly does not engage with detailed musical analysis or cultural theory.

There are additionally a number of publications that tend to rely fairly uncritically on Sculthorpe’s own explanations of his works and then expand analysis along such lines to additional musical dimensions or further sections of the works: the locus of meaning is the composer’s interpretations and then the writer makes similar, personal interpretations along the same lines. In relation to New Music generally, Björn Heile has characterized this approach as:

bargain basement hermeneutics: study the composer’s so-called influences, his or her own pronouncements and look at the work with these things in mind – something will no doubt be found. As a result, the scholar becomes the composer’s spokesperson, dutifully explaining how the master would want their work to be understood – which, evidently, is the only way of correctly interpreting it.  

Most of the Honours and Masters theses on Sculthorpe’s music undertaken by students in the University of Sydney music department fall in this category, with a few notable exceptions including a remarkable Honours dissertation by

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25 For example Jana Skarecky, "Duality in the Music of Peter Sculthorpe" (MMus diss., University of Sydney, 1987). See also another which was not from Sydney University, Milton, "The String Quartets of Peter Sculthorpe."
Hugh de Ferranti. Other publications of the former type include some by writers who were not Sculthorpe’s students, such as Fiona Richards. The lack of contextual dimensions and interest in reception in these studies is perhaps partly due to the persistence of an older musicological paradigm that views the composer as an isolated, visionary figure, and thus a self-sufficient subject for analysis.

A significant trend in much of this writing is also an uncritical and essentialist understanding of national identity. Conversely, most of the writing on national identity in the humanities in the last thirty or so years emphasizes the constructed nature of nationalisms and tends to analyse their formation in relation to their cultural and historical contexts, and this is evident in the major texts in the field by writers such as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner. As Richard White famously stated with a more local reference in his seminal cultural history of Australia, *Inventing Australia* (1981):

There was no moment when Australia was seen ‘as it really was.’ There is no ‘real’ Australia waiting to be uncovered. A national identity is an invention. There is no point asking whether one version of this essential Australia is truer than another because they are all intellectual constructs, neat, tidy, comprehensible – and necessarily false. They have all been artificially imposed upon a diverse landscape and population, and a variety of untidy social relationships, attitudes and emotions. When we look at ideas about national identity we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve.

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26 Hugh de Ferranti, "Gagaku and the Works of Richard Meale and Peter Sculthorpe: A Study of the Significance of Non-Western Resources within the Western Compositional Tradition" (BMus (Hons) diss., University of Sydney, 1983).
By contrast, almost all of the writing on Sculthorpe discusses his music in relation to qualities that ‘are’ Australian: qualities that are not historicized and not contextualised; their non-indigenous origins and exclusionary frameworks not acknowledged. Phrases that recur are ‘the’ Australian experience and ‘the’ Australian landscape, despite the spectacularly diverse nature of Australian lives and landscapes.

Furthermore, almost all of the considerable amount of discussion on the relationship of Sculthorpe’s music to ‘the’ Australian landscape ignores the history of landscape music within the classical canon. Despite harmonic stasis being one of the major features of Sculthorpe’s music, there has not to my knowledge ever been any connection made between Sculthorpe’s music and the stasis of pastoral and landscape *topoi* in canonic classical repertoire, even though Sculthorpe’s and most of his audience’s high level of literacy in this repertoire. Perhaps the overwhelmingly nationalist preoccupations of Sculthorpe and many of his commentators took precedence over and maybe even rendered unwelcome the making of connections such as these. Much of the discussion, probably taking its bearings from Sculthorpe, has tended to outline the idea that drones and a small melodic compass reflect the ‘flatness’ of ‘the’ Australian landscape.

Similarly, most of this writing tends not to be informed by acknowledgement of the culturally inscribed nature of landscape, and discussions of landscape are usually also on an essentialist basis. A brief example outlines this: the dominant comparisons of Sculthorpe’s music with ‘the’ Australian landscape tend to include terms such as ‘loneliness’ and ‘emptiness,’ and many examples of the

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usage of these words in the literature are given below. Yet it is hard to imagine
that Indigenous Australians uniformly experience outback Australian
landscapes on such terms. Clearly, landscape is something constructed through
social and cultural frameworks and can thus be a highly divergent experience
from one person to another and across different time periods.

An interesting issue peripherally related to the preceding point is that
Sculthorpe, famously, didn’t visit the ‘outback’ until well after writing the
Irkanda period works in which he evoked it. In this respect, his impressions of
the outback and other remote Australian landscapes were entirely gleaned from
representations in various media circulating in the culture around him. Whilst
a personal experience of a particular landscape is surely not necessary for a
musical evocation to be hailed as sensitive and successful (Bizet never visited
Spain, nor did Debussy (bar the lone bullfight), and Ravel didn’t travel to
Greece, for example), what is more the issue here is that reading Sculthorpe’s
musical landscapes in relation to mid-century trends in the understandings of
Australian landscapes is justified, for not only is landscape generally culturally
inscribed, but in Sculthorpe’s case it has to be entirely so. Analysis of
Sculthorpe’s musical landscapes in this thesis will tend to emphasize
relationships between Sculthorpe’s works and dominant Australian landscape
evocations in other media.

A further, major issue in most of the literature on Sculthorpe is the culturally
nationalist historiography that has also shaped most of the dominant texts in
the field of musicology on Australian classical music since the 1960s. There are
several major exceptions to this, such as Gordon Kerry’s New Classical Music:
Composing Australia (2009) and Linda Kouvaras’s chapter “Australian
Composition since 1970: Diverse, Daring, Multi-Dimensional.”

32 Andrew

Gordon Kerry, New Classical Music: Composing Australia (Sydney: University of
NSW Press, 2009); Linda Kouvaras, "Australian Composition since 1970: Diverse,
Daring, Multi-Dimensional," in Australia: Exploring the Musical Landscape, ed. Caitlin
Rowley (Sydney: Australian Music Centre, 1998), 52-58.
McCredie’s 1969 history of Australian music in a series of brochures produced by the Federal Government to accompany recordings also tends to avoid this framework. It is further notable that this kind of historiography is similarly not evident in major recent writings about jazz and folk musics. However, there are a range of nationalist assumptions implicit in many sources on classical music that as late as 2013 remain the dominant texts in the field, and many of these were written from the 1960s to the 1980s. Such assumptions are also evident in some of the major and influential early journalistic criticism on Sculthorpe’s music, especially that by Roger Covell and Curt Prerauer.

This culturally nationalist historiography involves writers searching for and celebrating artworks and moments in which national distinctiveness is perceived to have been established. It also involves a corresponding understanding of previous Australian musical history as derivative of overseas styles and therefore aesthetically problematic. Music history is presented as teleological, and it is notable that the phrase ‘the coming of age’ of Australian music recurs multiple times in this literature, especially in relation to the music and events of the 1960s.

The major text of this kind and, at the time of writing, the only attempt at a monograph history of Australian classical music, is Roger Covell’s Australia’s Music: Themes of a New Society (1967). Whilst it is an extremely comprehensive and impressive piece of research characterized by lucid reasoning and insightful musical commentary, Covell’s overarching framework is evident in what he puts forward as the first of his two central themes, “the attempt to come to creative terms in music with a new country.” Following on

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33 McCredie, *Musical Composition in Australia: Including Select Bibliography and Discography*.
36 Ibid., 6.
from this, he searches for nationally ‘distinctive’ musical developments, and is
scathing about what he finds derivative. It is not a gentle book. For the most
part, he reserves heaviest criticism for Australian culture that is seen as ‘out of
date’ in comparison with international developments.\(^{37}\) His analysis of classical
music in nineteenth-century Australia is presented in terms of a fundamental
alienation:

The musicians... found extraordinary little correspondence between
the social and physical atmosphere of their new country and the
musical habits they brought with them.... custom and tradition
made musically inclined people virtually deaf to the sounds –
perhaps even harder to define than the special quality of light – of
this enigmatic continent.\(^{38}\)

The very construction of the book prioritises a teleological nationalist narrative.
Chapter 4 is titled “Jindyworobakism and More,”\(^{39}\) and discusses early non-
indigenous attempts at musical settings of Aboriginal songs, before moving on
to John Antill’s ballet Corroboree (1946) and then discussing Aboriginal music
and research into Aboriginal music more generally. This creates the
unfortunate impression that Aboriginal music is only of interest as an adjunct
and consequence of non-indigenous activity. Chapter 5 is titled “Australianism?
Grainger and Tate” and outlines Grainger’s music and philosophies with
prominent inclusion of its (Australian) nationalist elements and Grainger’s
views on Australianness. Covell then moves on to writer and composer Henry
Tate’s theories of the early 1920s that propose the development of nationalist
music out of birdcalls and bush sounds. There is a short chapter on music
institutions (The ABC and Musica Viva) and then Chapter 7, the longest
chapter in the book at nearly one hundred pages, is a detailed discussion of
most Australian composers of the twentieth century, up to Covell’s time of
writing. Chapter 7 culminates with nearly ten pages each on three avant-garde
composers of the 1960s, Richard Meale, Sculthorpe and Nigel Butterley,

\(^{37}\) See, for example, his discussion of Clive Douglas’s Corroboree, ibid., 71.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^{39}\) The Jindyworobak literary movement began in the 1930s and was an attempt to
create a nationalist literature by referring to Aboriginal culture and language and
focusing on landscapes of the interior of Australia.
composers whom Covell had done much to support critically in his journalism for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Covell’s history is serious, impressive, and in its role as the only comprehensive history of Australian classical music in book form it deserves its prominent place in the literature. There is also the impression, however, that to some degree it presents a backstory to the composers of the 1960s whom Covell is keenest to celebrate, with brief additional nods to Grainger and Antill’s *Corroboree*.

In most of Michael Hannan’s writings about Sculthorpe – which are also useful and insightful in many ways – earlier Australian music history is understood as problematically derivative:

> The lack of direction in Australian composition in this century has resulted from feelings of insecurity and inferiority about being a country which is as far removed from the great centres of western civilisation as one could possibly imagine.  

David Tunley agreed, albeit with a more moderate expression:

> Not only was it difficult for large-scale works to gain a hearing prior to the sixties, but what was heard was often marked by a conservatism that now seems oddly out of place in a young country, although seen in a historical context such conservatism might be cited as further evidence of a general law, quoted by sociologists and others, that the natural evolution of a transplanted culture tends to come to a standstill in its new environment.

Adrian Thomas, however, felt that the wave of early post-World War Two migration from European countries had added “a degree of sophistication to the sometimes immature and naïve culture which existed prior to their arrival.” Here, Thomas is operating under a similar framework to Covell in which national immaturity is seen as progressing to maturity. This is also

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highly evident in many other sources, and is often linked to an embrace of international musical modernism, as in Covell. For example, Curt Prerauer, writing in *The London Magazine* in 1965 was of the opinion that although “modern painting” had been produced since 1939, there had been “modern composing only since this current decade.”

For Australia has all these decades been living in a musical vacuum which even after the arrival of wireless and airmail seemed to favour rear- rather than avant-gardism. Composition in such a musically undeveloped country underwent a logical process: first, there was English music happening to be written in Sydney or Melbourne; then followed the Australian headline which didn’t make bad music better; later came a genuine striving for a national Australian idiom; the latter is bordered by John Antill’s *Corroboree* and Sculthorpe’s ‘Irkanda’ works. Then, with [Richard] Meale, music surprisingly jumps forward to international validity.43

James Murdoch even titled a 1973 article, “Under Peter Sculthorpe Our Music Has at Last Grown Up.”44 Murdoch elsewhere used the phrase “come of age”:

Of all the arts in Australia, creative music has taken the longest time to establish itself. It has been generally agreed upon that this began in 1946 with the performance of *Corroboree* by John Antill, but more realistically we much look to the extraordinary flowering of creative activity which occurred in Australia during the 1960s... Australian music has now ended a journey towards internationalism and has come of age musically....While Australian music has a sad history of conservatism, [it is] understandably due to its extreme isolation.45

In 2008 Elliott Gyger still viewed the 1960s in such terms, when he wrote once again about “the coming-of-age of Australian music in the 1960s”46

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45 Murdoch, *Australia’s Contemporary Composers*, xi-xii.
It was not only within Australian music history in the 1960s and onwards that nationalist narratives dominated. In relation to the 1960s in Australian cultural history generally, Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White outline the dominance of a “national project of delineating a distinctive Australian culture,” although they do also note that there were substantial texts being produced that fell outside such a framework, and discuss several of these particularly through the 1970s and 1980s. As they argue, however, it was in the 1960s that:

the standard histories of the various arts in Australia were being published, and they too emphasized what was distinctive: H.M. Green on literature (1961), Bernard Smith on painting (1962), Roger Covell on music (1967), J.M. Freeland on architecture (1968). Australia’s distinctiveness was being found... in its culture, both high and low. This trend, which understood culture essentially in national terms culminated in Geoffrey Serle’s influential bird’s eye view of high culture in Australia, From Deserts the Prophets Come (1973).47

If the dominant nationalist historiography of Australian classical music from the 1960s can therefore be linked to larger trends in Australian cultural history in the same period, it is interesting that it is also this period that sees Sculthorpe’s nationalist music supported and received so well. However, in no sense was cultural nationalism new in Australia in the 1960s. Indeed, Australia was colonized by the British in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, exactly the point at which nationalist thinking and national movements were emerging prominently in Europe. Seemingly from the very early stages of the colony, questions were being asked about what characteristics of social and cultural life would emerge in Australia, in implicit comparison with characteristics in other nations.48 Nationalism, in this sense, is an historically situated but transnational comparative strategy that hinges on attempts to understand and define local experience in distinction to culture and life elsewhere.

Australian cultural nationalisms since have been diverse and, inevitably, contested, and ideas of struggle and contestation are valuable frameworks through which to view the competing claims and interests inevitable when people attempt to imagine themselves as a community, to borrow and adapt Benedict Anderson’s well-known phrase.\textsuperscript{49} Many cultural histories point to a widespread emergence of nationalism in Australia in the 1870s,\textsuperscript{50} although the most celebrated cultural nationalisms of the nineteenth century have been the 1890s schools of the Heidelberg painters (for example, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin) and writers in the periodical \textit{The Bulletin} (such as Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson), with their emphasis on the experience of the ‘bush.’ These cultural expressions are similar to commentary surrounding Sculthorpe’s music in their presentation of Australian experience as oppositional to British. However, like Sculthorpe, both groups drew on trends in European culture to articulate images of the nation. For the painters, it was largely techniques from French Impressionism that allowed them, as they and as others later saw it, to depict the Australian bush ‘as it really was.’ This was conceptualised as a contrast with the work of previous painters who were deemed to have been unable to paint Australia realistically due to their dependence on techniques from previous ‘imported’ European styles. Correspondingly, the Heidelberg painters’ dependence on Impressionism was downplayed in discussions framing the art as ‘Australian.’\textsuperscript{51} Similarly, many of the Bulletin writers whose work is now so well known were influenced by French notions of bohemianism,\textsuperscript{52} as well as tropes presenting the opposition of


\textsuperscript{50} White, \textit{Inventing Australia}, 73-75, 85-86.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., Chapter 6, “Bohemians and the Bush”.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
urban and rural experience in English poetry. Notable here are the framing of the characteristics of Australian life in opposition to British, especially in terms of the search for ‘distinctive’ aspects of Australian art, the notion of previous Australian cultural expressions as inauthentic and the theme that the ‘real’ Australia is rural.

Later nationalisms include the hailing of Arthur Streeton’s pastoral paintings by conservative critics in the inter-war period, contemporary and largely oppositional inter-war modernisms by female painters such as Margaret Preston and Grace Cossington Smith, the retrospective creation and celebration of the ‘Australian Legend’ by ‘radical nationalists’ Russel Ward and Vance Palmer in the immediate post-World War Two period and the folk revival of the same period, connected to the radical nationalists in personnel and aims. There are of course, many others, and the variety, contested nature and historical specificity of these cultural nationalisms are readily apparent.

A major factor in Australian cultural identities before the 1960s, for the most part ignored in musicology on Australian classical music, is the importance of Australia’s position as part of the British Empire. This is despite studies of Empire being a major area of interest in Australian History. As Stephen Alomes argues, in many instances “nationalism has been about dedication to maintaining Australia’s role in the British Empire.” Neville Meaney, James Curran and Stuart Ward argue for the overwhelming importance of an identity

of Britishness before the 1960s. As Curran and Ward state “[b]eing British was shared with British peoples the world over, even as they recognized or relished their own distinctive local or regional variants of the imperial ideal. Those not of the British race were ‘foreigners.’ They further argue that it is:

not to say that Australians, hitherto, had been unable to distinguish themselves from their metropolitan (or indeed other settler-colonial) counterparts. This they obviously could and did. Nor is it to deny the capacity of colonial and later federal legislatures to insist on their rights of self-government, and even to defy the imperial parliament when the dictates of their own material interests so required. But when it came to articulating an idea of themselves as a people – as a racial and cultural entity with a shared history, language, material interests and destiny – they invariably reached for the rhetoric, ritual and symbolism of Britishness.

A telling example is provided by Peter Spearitt in his discussion of the authorship of the publication “Royalty and the Crown” by the nationalist Jindyworobak poet Rex Ingamells to commemorate the 1954 Royal tour of Australia by the Queen and Prince Philip. Ingamells “saw no disjunction between his commitment to celebrating the Australian environment and his belief in the Crown,” and was at the same time able to say that Australia was a new nation developing its own character.

If some of these arguments may be a slight exaggeration, in the sense that there were Republican movements throughout Australia’s history and that many large communities of Irish heritage were hardly interested in emphasizing connections with the Empire, Curran and Ward’s basic thesis seems to be correct for most non-indigenous Australians before the 1960s most of the time.

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60 Curran and Ward, The Unknown Nation, 13.
61 Ibid., 11-12.
63 See, for example, Rickard, Australia: A Cultural History, Chapter 5.
What these historians point to from the early 1960s onwards is correspondingly what was labelled at the time as a “New Nationalism,” a term initially used by Donald Horne in 1968 about Prime Minister John Gorton.\(^{64}\) They argue that this nationalism was largely a consequence of a reconfiguring of Australia’s identity due to the “unravelling of Greater Britain”: the de-colonisation of much of the Empire, Britain’s joining of the European Economic Community and a reconfiguring of British and Australian trade relationships, as well as the reorientation of Australia’s defence relationships after World War Two.\(^{65}\) Symbolically, this presented problems for Australia, for instance, it was now difficult to know what to do with Empire Day. More lastingly, anthems, currency and national holidays were all debated lengthily as a consequence of fairly sudden hollowing out of the symbolic basis of civic life in the trappings of Empire.\(^{66}\)

In Curran and Ward’s account, the New Nationalism was largely a top-down phenomenon, driven by politicians, intellectuals, journalists and artists.\(^{67}\) Tellingly, many of the conceptualisations and even descriptive phrases Curran and Ward cite as permeating the discourses of this new nationalism were also evident in the writings on Australian classical music referred to above. The dominant ideas included the notion of qualities that were ‘distinctively’ Australian, and the ‘coming of age’ of Australian culture (and Australia generally) together with the linked idea of cultural maturity, and the latter two were evident not only in the New Nationalist discussions from the early 1960s but also in the ‘radical nationalist’ movement of the 1950s mentioned above. Within these conceptualisations Australia was viewed as a ‘young country,’ and this hinged on “the belief that it was the destiny of settler colonies that they should one day achieve adulthood.” Curran and Ward quote James Belich, who noted that this belief incorporated “a certain embarrassment about Great

\(^{64}\) Curran and Ward, *The Unknown Nation*, 5.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 20-21.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{67}\) Ibid., 22.
Britonism... [as] a protracted adolescence, decades long, spent firmly tied to mother's apron strings – which is best forgotten.”

There are clear parallels with the views of pre-1960s music in Australian musicology as inauthentic, derivative, inferior and perhaps even a form of false consciousness. In Curran and Ward's account, moreover, the 1960s saw pronounced anxieties as to how cultural maturity was achieved and whether or not it already had been attained. They quote an article from the inaugural edition of the *Australian* in 1964:

> We Australians have always been proud – and perhaps a little self-conscious too – about describing our country as a 'young country'...
> But have we really grown up? It seems we have not... We are growing up. But we have manifestly not yet achieved maturity.\(^{69}\)

The anxiety about cultural maturity seems to have had particular consequences in relation to the 'high arts.' Some commentators were especially keen to leave behind the bush mythology of many previous nationalisms in favour of a greater ‘sophistication’ and intellectualism in the new national image.\(^{70}\) Such concerns were particularly evident in the debates around the content of the Australian pavilion at the 1968 Montreal Expo. Considerable discomfort was expressed at the adoption of existing national symbols of distinctiveness such as kangaroos and koalas. In the event, sheepdog trials, boomerang throwing and a wood-chipping competition were held in addition to a performance by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra of Peter Sculthorpe's *Sun Music IV* (1967).\(^{71}\)

It was this context of anxieties about fauna and the bush mythology as appropriate expressions of Australianness that saw a massive increase in government funding to the arts. Tim Rowse has argued that this was based on the idea that “the lives of Australian residents are pregnant with a national

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 13.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 18.
\(^{70}\) Ibid., 67, 68, 72.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 97-106.
culture which requires only the midwife of subsidy.”72 In terms of ‘high culture,’ Australia already had rich traditions of painting and literature (as Rowse points out, the least expensive artforms to fund) and it was deemed to be time to “make the (more expensive and risk-laden) performing arts Australian.”73 Admittedly it was also in this period that arts funding in many other nations was also increasing dramatically,74 however, Curran and Ward make a good case for the relevance of nationalist anxieties to arts funding in the local context. For example, it was announced in Parliament on the passing of Australian Film Development Corporation Bill in 1970 that:

The image abroad of Australia as a land of koala bears and gum trees no longer applies. The image we should try to establish in the eyes of our neighbours and friends is of an Australia that is vibrant and artistically and culturally creative... If we can create this image abroad we will have gone a long way towards achieving true and full nationhood.75

It is this context that forms the background to the highly favourable reception of Peter Sculthorpe’s nationalist music and his rise to fame as a result of the institutional support he received: anxieties about national identity in the wake of the ‘unravelling’ of the British Empire, specific concerns about cultural sophistication and maturity, an increase in funding to the performing arts and a desire on the part of some influential actors to shake off the old bush myths and build a new national self-image. Sculthorpe’s career started its ascendancy in the early 1960s, at just the point Curran and Ward argue these set of circumstances were beginning in Australian life. Sculthorpe’s fame and prominence only grew through the period of increased arts funding, and he was acclaimed by audiences and critics alike as articulating an appropriate and

72 Tim Rowse, Arguing the Arts: The Funding of the Arts in Australia (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1985), 73.
73 Ibid., 74.
75 Curran and Ward, The Unknown Nation, 117.
plausible sense of nation. Although, as will be shown, his conceptualization of landscape relies on the notion of a desolate outback and indeed many institutionally-supported art forms in this period engaged prominently with the old bush mythology, it seems likely that high culture expressions of some form of Australianess in classical music were answering the ‘void’ Curran and Ward describe in 1960s attempts to articulate a new sense of ‘mature’ nationhood. What was surely also important to the reception of Sculthorpe’s music in this context of anxieties of cultural ‘maturity’ was its degree of engagement with sounds characteristic of modernist idioms of the twentieth century – if not the ‘cutting-edge’ or ultra-modernism of serialism, futurism or the post-war avant-garde – the degree of dissonance and rhythmic irregularity was usually akin at least to Bartók’s. Sculthorpe’s music could be viewed as Australian, but up-to-date with the rest of the world.

Methodology and Structure

The culturally nationalist historiography that has permeated much of the commentary on Sculthorpe and his work has distorted accounts of Sculthorpe’s early career and the processes and decisions by which he came to write ‘Australian’ music. As noted above, there are very few extant sources concerning Sculthorpe’s thoughts and actions from the 1950s and partly as a consequence of this absence the narratives of the ‘birth’ of this significant oeuvre of nationalist music have been prone to a certain amount of mythologizing. Due to the lack of contemporary sources, accounts have been highly dependent on Sculthorpe’s later memories of the period, a situation which, as will be argued in Chapter 1, entails some problems. In attempting to construct a more critical history of this period it has therefore been necessary to examine the copious amounts of interview material and commentary on Sculthorpe and his music, and compare various accounts with each other and with the few remaining sources from the 1950s. It should be noted that Graeme Skinner’s remarkable 2007 biography and reception history of Sculthorpe’s

76 Ibid., 22.
work up to 1974 had already gone a long way to achieving such an aim,\(^77\) however, the focus in this thesis on a shorter period than Skinner addresses has allowed more detailed comparisons of the material, and there are thus new findings and interpretations that will be outlined in Chapters 1 and 2.

The first two chapters deal largely with biographical elements relevant to Sculthorpe’s music, and begin with his childhood and adolescence, then move on to his period of study in Melbourne and his life after he returned to Launceston and lived (mostly) there up to 1958. The latter Launceston period is when he began writing ‘Australian’ works. The overarching purpose of these chapters is to establish what may be known and what interpretations made about why Sculthorpe decided to devote his compositional energies to writing music that he felt would have an ‘Australian’ character. Further goals include outlining the cultural expressions and milieux Sculthorpe came into contact with that are likely to have had some influence on his musical style, aesthetics and his conceptualizations of music and culture. Here, as in other areas, Skinner has already done very valuable work, but there are a few areas where the increased focus on a shorter time period has allowed a deeper and wider discussion of contextual factors, such as the contemporary state of arguments about musical national identity in the Australian press.

Chapters 3 to 6 proceed chronologically through the \textit{Irkanda} period, and continue to address the issues outlined in relation to Chapters 1 and 2. However, much of the focus is now on musical analysis of most of the classical works Sculthorpe wrote through this period, both published and unpublished. Chapter 3 examines the two works of 1954, Sculthorpe’s initial ‘Australian’ works, the piano \textit{Sonatina} and \textit{The Loneliness of Bunjil} for string trio. Chapter 4 examines the violin works of 1954-55, the \textit{Variations for Violin}, the \textit{Sonata for Violin Alone} and \textit{Irkanda I}, as well as two works from 1959 and 1960 (\textit{Sonata for Cello Alone} and \textit{Sonata for Viola and Percussion}) that in most respects are

\(^{77}\) Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}.\footnote{ Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}.}
arrangements and adaptations of the outer movements of the *Sonata for Violin Alone*. Chapter 5 discusses Sculthorpe’s period of study at Oxford from 1959 and the works he wrote there, *Irkanda II* for string quartet, *Sun* for high voice and piano and *Irkanda III* for piano trio. Chapter 6 begins with an outline of Sculthorpe’s return to Australia and rise to national prominence in the early 1960s and the institutional support and promotion he received. The last works of the *Irkanda* period are also, more briefly, analysed, *Irkanda IV* for solo violin, strings and percussion, *The Fifth Continent* for speaker and small orchestra, the Piano Sonata and the String Quartet No.6.

Chapters 3 to 6 also outline overall trends and pertinent instances of reception in this period, although there is no intention of providing a comprehensive study of the reception of Sculthorpe’s music. The emphasis is rather on a range of interpretations that commentators made with the aim of discovering what it was that many found plausibly ‘Australian’ about his works.

The musical analysis in this thesis is conducted, again, with the aim of interpreting what characteristics commentators found ‘Australian.’ Sculthorpe’s own intentions and interpretations of his works, both contemporary and retrospective, are outlined, as well as what sort of interpretative guidance he was giving his audiences in the form of titles, program notes and public discussion. Sculthorpe’s music of the *Irkanda* period exhibits a range of features highly congruent with many of those Ralph Locke has outlined in his recent *Musical Exoticism* (2009).128 Locke, and others before him, have argued that within the classical music canon from the Baroque period onwards many of the works that sought to represent peoples and places exotic to the audience that the “work of art constructs as its mainstream” have tended to use a particular range of musical gestures.129 Those gestures relevant to Sculthorpe’s music will be discussed in Chapter 3. Locke also shows, however, that these exoticist

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129 Ibid., 37.
musical representations could often have features in common with various musical nationalisms, especially Polish and Spanish, and especially when such nationalisms were outside the musical French and German mainstream.\textsuperscript{80} He posits a relationship between the outsider on the “geographical and cultural edge,” and their reception within what was generally recognized as a European mainstream. Further, he quotes James Parakilas in labelling this an “autoexoticizing” process, the “rendering [of the composer] and his native land exotic.”\textsuperscript{81}

The process of considering the relationships of these ideas to Sculthorpe’s work is complex. As will be shown, the initial ‘Australian’ works of the 1950s were largely attempts at musical representations of ‘Aboriginality,’ with ‘Aboriginality’ adopted as a symbol of Australianness. I argue in Chapter 3 that these representations additionally imply the presence of outback landscapes. In these works, the exoticist gestures are fairly straightforward in that they substitute the primordial and very Other Aboriginal culture for the recently arrived non-indigenous colonisers’ relationship with the land. There is an additional claiming of the land in the presentation of Indigenous Australians as of the past, not the present and the frequent contemporary tropes of the landscape as empty and therefore available for colonization. The Indigenous are very straightforwardly exotic to the non-indigenous, at the same time as they are a stand-in for a connection to place that allowed a nationalist claiming of the land. Thus in the post-colonial Australian situation Aboriginal people were often symbols of Australia but simultaneously exotic and Other to non-indigenous Australians, and crucially outside the nation-space in most other respects, such as citizenship and the right to vote.

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\textsuperscript{80} Locke’s argument is somewhat more subtle than this as he doesn’t posit a single musical mainstream but recognizes that audiences also perceived national musical characteristics (French, German and Italian) within a general or overarching Western mainstream. Ibid., 72-74.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 76.
In later works from the Oxford period onwards much of Sculthorpe’s musical is based on that of the ‘Aboriginal’ representations but his discussions shift to focus mostly on landscape and place. Here, although landscape is presented as ‘the’ Australian landscape, the representations are mostly concerned with the outback and desert. Sculthorpe wrote these works in England in the context of recent English reception of the work of painters such as Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale. I posit that this constituted a metropolitan gaze with which Sculthorpe’s sense of his own nation entered into dialogue. This later work, therefore, was created in a situation where Sculthorpe was a colonial exotic, and it seems there is a slightly different process of “autoexoticization” taking place compared with the earlier works in terms of a more overt relationship with the metropole.

Sculthorpe’s music additionally adopts representational strategies that have been used in classical music and entertainment genres to portray specific exotics. The influence of the Jewish composer Ernest Bloch’s music on Sculthorpe’s work has been widely identified, and is evident from the early violin pieces onwards but becomes even more apparent in Irkanda IV. Bloch’s music connotes the Middle-Eastern desert in its adoption of features from earlier orientalist music such as minor seconds, augmented seconds, harmonic stasis and the scotch snap rhythmic pattern. Sculthorpe’s adoption of such stylistic features in his outback musical landscapes is likely connected to representations of the desert in Australian culture, especially travellers’ tales of the outback that circulated widely in the first half of the twentieth century. In many of these narratives, as Roslynn Haynes has observed:

The desert milieu is carefully delineated with reference to the exotic, especially the oriental. Camels, Afghans, the Marree mosque, date palms, oases and mirages feature prominently in this orientalising procedure, which claims kin with travellers’ tales of the Sahara and the Middle East... writers could nevertheless assume

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their readers’ familiarity with the longstanding Australian myth of the alien land, of Nature itself as the enemy, relentless and implacable.\textsuperscript{83}

Two of Sculthorpe’s early representations of Aboriginality, the \textit{Sonatina} and \textit{Irkanda I}, also incorporate sections that draw on wider musical representations of ‘primitivism.’ Especially in \textit{Irkanda I}, these involve a restriction in the complexity of pitch – with a limited range of pitches used – and prominent, strongly articulated use of rhythm. These musical qualities have been characteristics of classical music primitivisms, notably in John Antill’s \textit{Corroboree}, which Sculthorpe likely knew. They were also part of the vocabulary of primitivist representations in film music, especially, as Michael Pisani has shown, in depictions of Native Americans in contemporary films such as Westerns (a popular genre in mid-century Australia, which Sculthorpe is known to have seen).\textsuperscript{84} In Sculthorpe’s later \textit{Irkanda} work there are no such representationally unambiguous passages, but some of the faster passages with high degrees of harmonic stasis and repeating rhythmic patterns may be related to the earlier music, and can potentially be heard as primitivist, although to a less pronounced degree. Sculthorpe described some of these later works as “austere” landscapes, a quality which seems mostly to imply a lack of pastoral abundance but which also potentially holds some connotations of primitivism. Furthermore, at the time he was using this term, he was in England encountering the reception of earlier Australian painters, referred to above, which often involved a conceptualization of the Australian landscape as primitive and vital, and Australian experience itself as a kind of primitive in its perceived lack of complex civilization and encounter with a forbidding land.

Sculthorpe’s music and his statements about it engaged with existing Australian nationalist tropes and one of the aims of this thesis is to outline such

\textsuperscript{83} Roslynn D. Haynes, \textit{Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film} (Cambridge; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 147.

\textsuperscript{84} Michael Pisani, \textit{Imagining Native America in Music} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Chapter 9; Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 183.
connections. His audiences’ literacy in these themes was also part of the condition of the reception of his work. Here, a reading of the context of creation and reception can illuminate past conditions of such an oeuvre as Sculthorpe’s and the contemporary reactions to it, sometimes obvious to those at the time, sometimes not, but the cultural context is usually obscured to those generations later, and contextual readings are helpful in understanding earlier cultural phenomena such as these.

Sculthorpe’s work also adopts longstanding nationalist strategies evident in many European nationalisms from the eighteenth century and also in the subsequently wider international context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Musical representations of landscapes and of the cultures of people indigenous to a country are longstanding gestures within classical music, and were encountered by Sculthorpe in the work of many composers in his adolescence such as Grieg, Bloch, Sibelius and Dvořák. Moreover, Australian landscapes have been extremely prominent in Australian cultural history, and it is often claimed that landscape painting has been the most prominent genre in Australian art, and that landscape is often emphasized to the degree that it becomes almost a character in many Australian films and novels.\(^{85}\) It is thus argued that the making of connections between Sculthorpe’s music and these larger contexts is valuable and relevant, and such contextualization is an explicit aim of this thesis.

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Chapter 1
Childhood and Education in Launceston and Melbourne: A Critical History

The introduction began with a brief contrast between the young Sculthorpe’s reading material and cultural reference points in comparison with what I posited as my grandparents’ more typical set of interests for Australians of the period. It is notable that in the many hundreds of interviews Sculthorpe has given throughout his career he has almost never mentioned having had any interest in Australian art, writing or film during his childhood and adolescence. His declared tastes, as I will argue, have a pronounced European, and a pronounced high culture character. They are much more European and highbrow than common characterisations of Australian culture of the period as middlebrow and predominantly English-oriented would lead one to expect. In view of the extreme transition involved in moving from this state of affairs to Sculthorpe becoming the best known composer of an ‘Australian’ musical style, the three central tasks of this and the following chapter are:

1. to trace what can be known about how and why Sculthorpe came to move away from his teenage interests and devote his life to creating music he explicitly identified as having an ‘Australian’ character;²

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¹ Comments about music being played in Australia before 1960 (which seem due for some more questioning) are found in, amongst others, Larry Sitisky, "Australia: Emergence of New Music in Australia," Perspectives of New Music 4, no. 1 (1965): 176; Roger Covell, Australia’s Music: Themes of a New Society (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1967), 130-31. For literary tastes, see David Carter, "The Mystery of the Missing Middlebrow or the C(0)urse of Good Taste," in Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New World, ed. Judith Ryan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Committee on Australian Studies, 2004), 173-201.
2. to see what can be established about the cultural artefacts, experiences and milieux he came into contact with during his early years and to determine which of these seem to have been particularly important to his music and aesthetics.

These two chapters will also begin a project which continues over the thesis as a whole:

3. to outline available evidence about Sculthorpe’s strategies and thoughts concerning the overtly Australian aspects of his music in the period studied in this thesis, up to early 1965.

**The nature of memories and the public persona of the composer**

Sculthorpe has been interviewed many hundreds of times, starting from the very beginning of his career, as a brief glance through the Bibliography will attest, and at the time of writing interviews are continuing to appear. He has thus given many accounts of his early life, musical development and, especially since it is what he is best known for, how he came to write self-consciously ‘Australian’ music. There is some variation between these accounts, and they have additionally been given varying prominence in the commentary on his work. The question of how to interpret Sculthorpe and his various commentators’ different accounts of this period therefore arises.

It is well known amongst historians, especially oral historians, that memory is highly subject to change over time. As years pass and we have further experiences, and as our identities shift over the decades, we construct narratives that line up our pasts in a way that makes sense of who we believe we are in the present. Alistair Thomson has described this process:
How we make sense of experience, and what memories we choose to recall and relate (and thus remember), changes over time. Memory ‘hinges around a past-present relation, and involves a constant process of re-working and transforming remembered experience’... The stories that we remember will not be exact representations of our past, but will draw upon aspects of that past and mould them to fit current identities and aspirations. Thus our identities shape remembering; who we think we are now and what we want to become affects what we think we have been. Memories are ‘significant pasts’ that we compose to make a more comfortable sense of our life over time, and in which past and current identities are brought more into line.\(^3\)

In view of these operations of memory and identity, when a person recounts their past the most definitive versions can often be taken to be those chronologically closest to the events in question, at least in situations where there are no other complicating factors. In Sculthorspe’s discussions of his apparent development of a nationalist music and the genesis of the *Irkanda* period works, discussions in which he recounts the beginnings of an aesthetic and compositional language he went on to develop and change, his earlier statements will usually be significantly closer than later ones to how he was thinking during the events in question. In this thesis, therefore, most of Sculthorpe’s statements will be dated, and priority will usually be given to the earlier ones, which presumably suffered less distortion from being remembered in relation to his more recent compositional and aesthetic activity. As will be evident throughout the thesis, it is possible to observe how Sculthorpe’s accounts of the early periods of his compositional development were often coloured successively by a series of later preoccupations.

In Sculthorpe’s case there are further factors to be considered in addition to the issue of the nature of memory. As a freelance composer at the beginning of his career (the 1950s and early 1960s) Sculthorpe was dependent on the opinions of critics, arts bureaucrats and other art world figures for sufficient esteem and

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support in the shape of reviews, positions and commissions. Many people, in
this position, would feel some pressure to shape their public image in a way
that these critics and others would regard favourably. As Skinner has shown,
there are instances around this time in which it is likely Sculthorpe was not
entirely accurate in discussing his past, particularly in discussing the period this
chapter is concerned with, a period from which little documentary evidence
remains.4 As I will outline, it seems plausible that Sculthorpe was shaping his
statements with the views of particular critics in mind. Importantly, these early
years are also the period of Sculthorpe’s career that he and his interpreters
turned to in the construction of a narrative of the birth of Sculthorpe’s insights
into the importance and character of a ‘truly Australian’ musical style. As
outlined in the introduction, evidence from the period disrupts their existing
narrative and I will propose alternatives based on what seem to be a more
plausible set of developments.

Another observable tendency in Sculthorpe’s recounting of his past has been
the way in which strict verisimilitude has sometimes been adapted in the
service of what often seems to be a romantic artist image or a taste for certain
types of atmospheres and narratives. In this he is hardly alone among
composers and artists and indeed the general public; Berlioz is an excellent
element of someone who probably exceeded Sculthorpe in this respect. A
typical example is the composition of the melody that became the “Left Bank
Waltz.” Although Sculthorpe had previously dated it to 1957 as well as 1958,5 in
his 1998 autobiography Sun Music he describes having written it in 1958 whilst

4 See pages 154–55 as Skinner interprets Sculthorpe’s avowed development of total
serialism, Graeme Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer
(Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007).
5 Ibid., 204. Skinner doesn’t indicate when or where the dating of 1957 was made. He
gives 1957/58 on the works list of Sculthorpe’s website, put together in
consultation with the composer. Skinner is highly reliable and I speculate that the
information came from conversations with Sculthorpe, the dual year dating indicating
that Sculthorpe’s memory of the event could not be linked to a precisely datable event,
such as his voyage to Britain. This adds weight to the theory that the story of
composition on the train in Paris is fabricated. Graeme Skinner and Peggy Polias,
Hayes (1993), gives the date as 1958 Hayes, Peter Sculthorpe., 44.
terribly sick on trains that he hoped were taking him to Calais, but which kept returning to Paris.\textsuperscript{6} This transference of the place of composition much nearer to the place the melody is named for creates an engaging story and image, and seems likely to have been made not for defensive reasons or in response to criticism, but perhaps for his own enjoyment or the enjoyment of his readers and additionally to impress them. Interestingly, from Skinner's research into Sculthorpe's family background, it seems clear that Sculthorpe's mother was also fond of similarly engaging stories.\textsuperscript{7} In this context, Sculthorpe's apparent embroidering throws question marks over some of his other stories for which no corroborating evidence can be found, and presumably that will sometimes mean the most enjoyable and romantic ones.

Despite these fairly straightforward issues that interfere with the likelihood of absolute veracity in Sculthorpe's accounts of his early years, a large amount of the published work on Sculthorpe and his music has not taken an overtly critical approach to his statements or explicitly compared them, instead quoting him in what appears to be a fairly free fashion. The exceptions to this are Graeme Skinner's 2007 biography, as Skinner has clearly weighed extant evidence and made subtle interpretations in relation to it, Deborah Hayes's bibliobibliography of 1993, and, on a few issues, Hannan's major book on Sculthorpe's music.\textsuperscript{8}

In view of these issues, this chapter seeks to construct a critical history of the factors and processes in Sculthorpe's decision to imbue his music with 'Australianness', and to outline as much as it is currently possible to know about his thinking in relation to this in the early 'Irkanda' period of his career. Evidence from the period or chronologically close to it will be prioritized, and

\textsuperscript{6} Peter Sculthorpe, \textit{Sun Music: Journeys and Reflections from a Composer's Life} (Sydney: ABC Books, 1999), 41.


\textsuperscript{8} See for example pp. 154-55, and for a discussion of Sculthorpe's memories, pages 8 and 52, ibid. And see for instance the comment about Stravinsky in Hayes, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 15. Also Michael Hannan, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas 1929-1979} (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982).
Sculthorpe’s statements will be examined in terms of the context in which they were made and to whom they were addressed. In constructing this history, I am building on the significant work of other authors. Especially for the years of Sculthorpe’s youth, Skinner’s biography is likely to remain a definitive source since Skinner conducted extensive interviews with Sculthorpe and his friends, family members and other associates, and scrupulously examined extant sources. Skinner’s biography, however, whilst admirably critical, detailed and insightful, in its status as the authorized biography could not take an emphatically critical line against all of Sculthorpe’s problematic recollections. Here, I aim to build on Skinner’s and others’ work. By focusing more singularly on the path Sculthorpe took in deciding to become a composer of overtly ‘Australian’ music, and also by casting a critical eye on many of the problematic claims in the existing Sculthorpe literature, I am able to introduce some new and pertinent factors into the period of the 1940s to 1960s, and write an alternative history of Sculthorpe’s path to musical ‘Australianness.’

**Sculthorpe’s early interests and milieu**

Sculthorpe was born in Launceston in 1929, and lived mostly in the small village of St Leonards six kilometers away. He was schooled in Launceston which was a big enough town to have music teachers, concerts, society events, art shows, and a fairly decent bookshop by the 1940s. As for most Australians living in rural and semi-rural areas in the period, ABC radio was an influential and well-regarded source of musical interest; the first ABC station in Launceston began transmitting in 1935 when Sculthorpe was six.⁹ There were also occasional visits by ABC touring artists.¹⁰

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Music

Sculthorpe was exposed to a range of different styles of music through childhood, and the ones he has recalled in interviews and lectures are mostly highbrow and firmly in the classical canon, in addition to middlebrow musicals and popular songs such as “Somewhere over the Rainbow.”¹¹ The family owned gramophone records of Caruso, Tauber and Peter Dawson in what one would assume to be their customary repertoire of Italian arias, light opera, ballads and sentimental songs.¹² Sculthorpe’s early music teacher mostly had him playing from primers, but he says he sought out Mozart and Chopin and other ‘famous’ composers of his own volition. His early compositions imitated these composers as well as the music of the organ voluntaries he sometimes played in church.¹³ In the early 1940s his piano teacher played recordings of Beethoven and Schubert chamber music to him, he said.¹⁴ He was also quite strongly engaged with Hollywood movies and musicals in his early teens, and composed ‘operas’ in this period, one based on ideas from a Noel Coward musical and another inspired by the Scarlet Pimpernel.¹⁵ In his fourteenth year he learned to play a piano concerto from an unspecified Hollywood film.¹⁶

Sculthorpe’s musical tastes expanded around the time he was fifteen, when late in that year his mother bought him the Debussy Préludes. Several compositions of the successive few years are clearly influenced by them, especially in his penchant for augmented chords used colouristically rather than functionally.¹⁷ He has recounted hearing Mahler, Strauss, Bruckner and Debussy on Neville Cardus’s radio programs and at the age of fifteen Mahler was enough of an influence for him to buy the vocal score of Das Lied von der Erde and play the

¹¹ Ibid., 151. I am not seeking to make firm and well-defined distinctions between popular, middlebrow and highbrow culture but merely to characterise Sculthorpe’s interests in a general way in order to compare them with his later career path.
¹² Ibid., 43.
¹³ Ibid., 64, 66.
¹⁴ Ibid., 67.
¹⁵ Ibid., 71-72.
¹⁶ Ibid., 76.
¹⁷ Ibid., 77.
Abschied rather obsessively. In the 1970s he also recalled the “NBC Symphony Hour” to Michael Hannan, by which he presumably means Walter Damrosch’s Music Appreciation Hour. Through Cardus on the radio or the record collection of an older friend in Launceston, Alec Headlam, Sculthorpe also remembers hearing and finding important Delius’s Sea Drift, Bloch’s Schelomo, Debussy’s La Mer and Tippett’s Concerto for Double String Orchestra. His interest in the latter is confirmed in letter to his parents in 1960, in which he wrote of having very much admired Tippett’s music while still at school.

Sculthorpe has said he composed a “piece without tunes” in the mid 1940s, which according to Skinner “may or may not survive,” and Sculthorpe’s earliest public mention of this was in 1956. What is definitely in existence is a piece for Sprechstimme and atonal piano from 1945, “It’s dark down the street.” Skinner speculates that the idea of the former must have come from music textbooks such as Percy Scholes’s Oxford Companion to Music, and similarly Sculthorpe says the latter probably resulted from having read or heard about Schoenberg of whom he later said his knowledge was “mostly as this man being reviled in books.” Roger Covell has emphasised the difficulty for Australians in accessing early to mid-twentieth-century works of the European avant-gardes in the years before the 1960s, and Sculthorpe has done likewise. Conversely, this piece of Sculthorpe’s seems to suggest that works such as Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire may at least occasionally have been around on record or radio in Australia in the 1940s, unless it really is possible for a sixteen year old to write atonally without ever hearing atonal music or accessing atonal

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18 Ibid., 77-78.
19 Michael Hannan, ”The Piano Music of Peter Sculthorpe” (BMus(Hons) diss., University of Sydney, 1971), 3.
20 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 86.
21 Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 21 April 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
22 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 67.
23 Ibid.
scores. The most important point here is that the existence of this piece confirms that the teenage Sculthorpe was attracted to music of an avant-garde and perhaps controversial aura.

Quite often, from at least the 1980s or so, Sculthorpe would say that in his early youth he was influenced by English pastoral music of the early twentieth-century:

In my very early works in Tasmania, I was influenced by Delius and Vaughan Williams in particular – all that English pastoral music, which is natural when you live in that lush landscape. It was when I came to Melbourne, and when I started to drive outside Melbourne, that something else came into my music, something of the wilderness... [wilderness] didn’t really fit with our way of life: our comfortable way [in Tasmania]. We used to go to the Great Lakes and Lake St Clair, lakes accessible by car, but that was more to do with fly fishing.26

I’ll return to the theme of wilderness below. What is significant about the above and other similar comments made in this period is that there is little evidence for a pastoral influence in the compositions concerned. The only titles which hint at a pastoral inspiration before Sculthorpe moves to Melbourne are “Au Printemps” (ca. 1942), a “chanson” with words and music by Sculthorpe; “It’s Blossom Time” (ca. 1943), again with words and music by Sculthorpe; “Falling Leaves” for piano (1945) and “Winter Woodland” for piano (1945). The latter is not a good candidate on the basis of its title as it is a reworking of an earlier composition called “Prelude to a Puppet Show” (1945).27 However, titles, in Sculthorpe’s view, weren’t definitive on this point in this period of his life. In 1999 he wrote “when I used a less specific title, like Nocturne or Seascape, I’d always identify the place in Tasmania that inspired the work.” In this passage, he also equates such place-based music with music based on his own experience of life, in distinction to a kind of second-hand, derivative art; a


binary formulation opposing personal authenticity of experience against
derivative copying which becomes important in his thinking by at least the
early sixties. Here, his retrospective application of it is not necessarily
convincing because one of the place-based pieces he cites is *Aboriginal Legend*,
a work that was written after he went to Melbourne.\(^{28}\) To make a case firmly for
or against the influence of English pastoral compositions on Sculthorpe’s
juvenilia a detailed comparison with general aspects of English pastoral style(s)
would have to be conducted. From the evidence of the titles, and from initial
examination of some extant works, such an influence doesn’t seem very likely.

In the years Sculthorpe was studying in Melbourne the English pastoral
influence is much clearer, certainly in his titles (examined below) and in
cursory analysis of the works’ styles. Perhaps it is in this respect that Covell’s
well-known comment about the “overgrown pastoral style” of Australian music
before the 1960s and accusations of Australian over-engagement with English
repertoire and aesthetics\(^{29}\) are accurate characterizations of the Melbourne
milieu’s influence on Sculthorpe. This seems to be an instance of Sculthorpe
remembering something that occurred in one period of his life as having
happened in another period, an understandable complication after such a
distance of years. Similarly, he has remembered having access to Bloch scores
in his early youth, but at another point said the only scores he could access as a
teenager were by Debussy and Mahler.\(^{30}\) Clearly, Bloch, Delius and Mahler were
all important to him, but it is impossible to be precise about when Bloch and
Delius became so.

There are only a few pieces of evidence for any engagement with Australian
composition on Sculthorpe’s part during his youth. Firstly, in the early 1970s

\(^{29}\) Covell, *Australia’s Music*, 143.
\(^{30}\) Peter Sculthorpe and Robyn Hughes, "Peter Sculthorpe Full Interview Transcript,"
*Australian Biography Online*, accessed 28 March, 2010,
Music of Peter Sculthorpe," 3.
Sculthorpe commented to James Murdoch that his third piano teacher encouraged him to play some Australian works.\(^\text{31}\) Sculthorpe learned from her from the age of fourteen until he went to Melbourne in 1946, aged nearly seventeen. Aside from his own pieces, Australian works he did know well in this period were Frank Hutchens’s *Weeping Mist* (with a program based on a Fijian story about a chief who gave up his life for his people and was remembered by a particular flower) and Alfred Hill’s *False Triste*, as he was broadcast playing them on the local ABC station.\(^\text{32}\)

The other references to Australian music are to Roy Agnew’s piano works. In an undated set of notes for a lecture on his own piano music, Sculthorpe includes an annotation “[N]B Roy Agnew” in a subsection that begins “[B]y early teens, works showing some modernity, if not individuality” from a larger section headed “[B]eginnings as a Composer.”\(^\text{33}\) This is not only allusive, it is also subject to the question of whether something that happened in a particular time period was remembered as occurring another, in a similar way to Sculthorpe’s recollections discussed above concerning when he had composed pastoral music. Skinner dates Sculthorpe’s first acquaintance with Agnew’s scores to the Melbourne period in 1947, when Sculthorpe found them in the library of the Guild of Australian Composers.\(^\text{34}\) In view of recent reassessments of the modernism apparent in a range of Agnew’s pieces\(^\text{35}\), Sculthorpe’s interest in these works may be another pointer to his early attraction to aspects of avant-gardism.

Sculthorpe’s musical interests during his youth thus seem to have been a specific mix of classical music composers, musicals and songs, and the majority of the evidence for this has come from interviews with Sculthorpe over the

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\(^\text{32}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 90.

\(^\text{33}\) Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.

\(^\text{34}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 115.

years. Mahler, Delius and Bloch especially proved important for his later music. These interests were a product of his access to the music mentioned above, but what is also apparent is his agency in seeking some of it out. In the period when Sculthorpe regularly played the Abschied and composed some kind of attempt at a Schoenbergian style, his brother took up the ukulele and became a proficient imitator of George Formby.36 Clearly, Sculthorpe's personal inclinations and the values he took from his surroundings helped shape his sense of what music was important to him, and as for most people, this wasn’t determined by access alone.

Literature and art

Around the 1990s and afterward Sculthorpe said several times that while young he’d read Malory, Jane Austen, Dickens, Keats, Shelley, Thomas Gray and Wordsworth.37 Importantly for this study, this means that during childhood he encountered common tropes of the pastoral and Romantic nature representation. His mother read art magazines and he pinned posters from them on his walls.38 His interest in art is also apparent in his engagement with and facility in drawing as well as the titling of one of his pieces “Winter Woodland” after a woodcut by Paul Nash.39 More evidence is provided by one of Skinner’s interviews with a school friend of Sculthorpe’s, who recalled that they often discussed poetry, art and literature while outfielding in cricket.40

Sculthorpe’s aesthetic interests were nurtured and presumably sometimes sparked by several other adults who had impressive collections of books or records (such as Alec Headlam mentioned above) or particular interests themselves. His uncle Fred had received a bequest that resulted in a sizable

36 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 74.
39 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 68-69, and see 88 for a reproduction of one of Sculthorpe’s drawings.
40 Ibid., 61.
library containing translations of Baudelaire.\textsuperscript{41} Sculthorpe’s interest in Baudelaire is confirmed in a letter he wrote to his parents while studying at Oxford, where he mentions a talk being given by a Baudelaire authority whose work he had admired since his early teens.\textsuperscript{42}

The French teacher at Sculthorpe’s school, Wilfred Teniswood, also provided significant encouragement and stimulating perspectives in Sculthorpe’s fifteenth and sixteenth years. With him Sculthorpe read Verlaine and T.S. Eliot.\textsuperscript{43} On holiday, he met Leo Halpersohn who introduced Nietzsche and discussed Verlaine and Baudelaire, and Sculthorpe wrote a poem afterwards about people on a beach “discussing Freud perhaps.”\textsuperscript{44} Along with these European interests, Sculthorpe said he read Ruskin, Morris and Matthew Arnold as well as other writers in abridged form, and Skinner detects the influences of Arnold, the Brownings and Christina Rosetti in Sculthorpe’s own poems of the time.\textsuperscript{45} As stated at the outset, these are decidedly high culture interests, all English or European, and one might even conclude Sculthorpe was something of an aesthete in his late teens. The character of these interests does seem at odds with his later impulses to develop an art that he viewed as being in line with aspects of ‘the’ Australian character, and they are worlds apart from the way Sculthorpe was later to describe his ideas of what constituted Australian character and experience in relation to his later ‘Australian’ music. Furthermore, Skinner describes Sculthorpe’s mother, who had lived in Australia since age twelve, and whom the composer was very close to, as having identified herself as British, not Australian, throughout Sculthorpe’s childhood and early maturity.\textsuperscript{46} This was also how Sculthorpe described her as late as 1963.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 61.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Peter Sculthorpe to Jos and Edna Sculthorpe, 24 March 1959, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 58, 79-80.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 82.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 73, 87.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 25.
\end{itemize}
in a letter to the Sydney critics the Prerauers, at a time he was trying very hard to impress them.\textsuperscript{47}

A further area of interests, however, demonstrates that Sculthorpe was not solely preoccupied with the aestheticism that might be inferred from the high art tastes mentioned above. As well as mentioning many Hollywood films, from musicals to westerns in his correspondence with his family over the years, in his early teens his tastes ran to masculinist adventures and various manifestations of exoticism. He read the travel tales of writers such as Richard Burton and has described being very taken with Joseph Conrad’s \textit{Lord Jim}.\textsuperscript{48} He drew pictures of topless women that he titled “Bali” and “Java.”\textsuperscript{49} Such interests could be linked to Sculthorpe’s later fascination with cultural encounters and exotically imagined scenes of Bali and Mexico, as well as with a place that was conceptualised simultaneously as ‘home’ and forbiddingly foreign by many Australians of the time, the Australian outback.

The evidence outlined so far demonstrates that in the period up to his late teens Sculthorpe’s cultural enthusiasms consisted of European or English literature, art and music, some popular and middlebrow films and songs, with an additional taste for travel stories and similar genres that tended to frame their subjects as exotic. Sculthorpe did perform some Australian music, but evidence for much enthusiasm for specific Australian artworks is slim. Given his general high cultural literacy it seems fairly probable that he was aware of Australian painters and perhaps even had some sense of Australian literature; for instance a bookstore owner in Launceston saved Sculthorpe a copy of the Ern Malley edition of the Angry Penguins journal in 1944.\textsuperscript{50} It is notable, however, that even with such knowledge as inferred here, for the most part he

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 68-69.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 87.
is not on record as having mentioned any interests in Australian-authored culture in this period.

In Sculthorpe's later teens, he may again have encountered the pastoral and nature tropes he'd seen earlier in the work of writers like Wordsworth, but now in their classical forms in the study of Latin at school. Skinner names Latin as Sculthorpe's favourite subject. Martin Ball argues further significance for it, recounting the following scene:

[H]e would sit in the garden reading Vergil with his Latin teacher, living out Moeris' dreamy reminiscences from Eclogue IX: “Often in boyhood / I would sing the long summer’s day to sleep” – et in Arcadia ego indeed.

Ball doesn't give a source for this recollection, but in 1999 Sculthorpe did write about reading the Aeneid in the garden with his teacher. Whether or not he actually read the Eclogues, however, and whether he read them in the garden, it is significant that he chose to view his childhood through the lens of the pastoral. As will be discussed below, there is certainly evidence that once he moved to Melbourne Sculthorpe remembered his home in Tasmania in idyllic and pastoral terms, and in the Melbourne period he titled a movement from his 1950 Suite 'Eclogue,' a suite he described as “From the background music to an experimental documentary film on Tasmanian life” a film which itself was imaginary.

The biographical trope of isolation

One of the most frequently recurring themes in Sculthorpe and others' descriptions of this period of his life is that of isolation. Despite the presence of

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31 Ibid., 81.
33 Sculthorpe, Sun Music, 15.
34 Sculthorpe and Skinner, "Sculthorpe Work List".
35 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 137.
other children in the village, despite having a brother who was only three years his junior, despite the multitudes of pictures of Sculthorpe that have appeared in the social pages of Sydney newspapers over the years, Sculthorpe and his commentators have mostly been at pains to paint him as a lonely child growing up in isolation. In 1969 he wrote “as a child I was a somewhat lonely boy, living in the country. I didn’t seem to have many friends of my own age.” This is basically repeated by Hannan, Hayes and others with a range of different foci: creative, social and geographical. “He felt quite isolated from the larger world of music. He knew no composers,” and “[H]is childhood was marked by a fascinating combination of isolation – remote not only from the rest of the world, but separated from the rest of Australia by Bass Strait – and publicity, finding himself the beloved child prodigy in the island community.” The trope of the isolated Romantic artist is hard to miss, especially when many writers go on to claim the virtues of isolation in encouraging creativity and originality “[F]ar from disadvantaging the young musician, isolation became the foundation of Sculthorpe’s musical endeavors” and “there wasn’t much in the way of music in the village...so from very early on his compositions were remarkable for their originality.” As I will show, the idea of Sculthorpe’s isolation, its concomitant difficulties and creative advantages becomes a central theme in Sculthorpe’s biography and, importantly, is paralleled in his and others’ understandings of Australia’s cultural and geographical predicament. It is also, of course, how many other nations and regions throughout the last few hundred years have conceptualized themselves in relation to cultural centres, when they have felt to be on cultural peripheries.

56 Ibid., 45.
57 Sculthorpe, ”Sculthorpe on Sculthorpe,” 8.
59 Given the nature of the article, a newspaper profile, this assessment of his early works is most likely to have come from Sculthorpe. Jill Sykes, ”Sculthorpe at Fifty,” The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 April, 1979, 15.
Melbourne

Between 1946 and 1950 Sculthorpe lived in Melbourne, studying for and completing a Bachelor’s degree at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium, and returning to Tasmania in holiday breaks. Predictably, his range of interests widened during this time and his compositional style(s) developed. He has subsequently discussed some contact with Australian painting in this period, and he also encountered strategies of overt musical Australianness – particularly the construction of relationships with Aboriginal music – in the work of composers such as Antill and Penberthy. Notably, this seems to have had an apparent, if extremely limited impact in his own work.

A far more prominent direction in Sculthorpe’s Melbourne period was the move towards a musical style based much more on those of English pastoral composers such as Butterworth, Holst and Delius (if Delius can be considered so), and generally away from the more modernist works of his adolescence. Skinner dates this trend from about 1947, Sculthorpe’s second year in Melbourne.60 It is likely that it is based at least to some extent on increased contact with English music played in the Melbourne concert milieu. It also coincides with titling and indications around his pieces relating to specific or generalized impressions of Tasmania. These student works, therefore, seem to constitute a musical reimagining of his home in pastoral terms, prompted by feelings such as distance and nostalgia. Such affects were commonly part of pastoral representations in the European-derived cultural traditions of which Sculthorpe was a part, and were specifically available to him in the English music he was hearing and playing in Melbourne, as well as in the poetic texts this music often set.

60 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 104.
The Melbourne milieu

Several of Sculthorpe's teachers and professional associates had been trained at the Royal College of Music (Bernard Heinze, Dorian Le Gallienne, A.E.H. Nickson) and Heinze and Sculthorpe's piano teacher, Raymond Lambert, had studied in continental Europe (at the Schola Cantorum and Brussels Conservatoire, respectively). Melbournian conservatorium staff could thus draw on a slightly more cosmopolitan set of influences than indicated by Larry Sitsky's questionable characterization of pre-1960s Australian music education as "steeped in a sort of false tradition inherited from countless generations of retired English church organists who periodically descended on the country in swarms." In terms of the classical music played in Melbourne at the time, glancing through periodicals such as The Canon and Australian Musical News reveals Melbourne concerts and radio programs with a fairly wide range of late nineteenth and early-twentieth-century composers, along with other, earlier repertoire. These include Russian (Borodin, Glazunov, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Stravinsky), English (Vaughan Williams, Delius, Bridge, Elgar, Walton, Butterworth, Tippett), French / Belgian / Swiss (Saint-Saens, Franck, Chausson, Chabrier, Debussy, Ravel, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc), and Spanish composers (Turina, Granados, Falla) as well as a spread of Austro-Germans (Weber, Brahms, Mahler, R. Strauss, Bruckner and even Hindemith on a new music radio program) and also the Jewish-Swiss-American composer Ernest Bloch. Therefore, in addition to Baroque and Classical repertoire not mentioned here, what is evident is a solid mix of standard canonic Romantic music with more recent extended-tonality and modality. Importantly also, in

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61 Ibid., 94, 96, 106.
62 Sitsky, "Australia: Emergence of New Music in Australia," 176.
63 This list includes composers in concerts in Melbourne in the late 1940s and early 1950s and also subjects of articles in Australian Musical News and The Canon. These years were chosen as they are the period that saw Sculthorpe's reorientation towards establishing an Australian musical school or style, and this repertoire is thus a kind of background to that decision. The list is in no way definitive, some composers have been omitted, and it is also partial, as it uses information from two periodicals only. However, it is intended as a general guide to the type of music played in this place at this time.
relation to Sculthorpe’s later engagement with musical nationalism and exoticist representational traditions, this list includes composers of Spanish, Russian, Jewish and English nationalisms as well as those who worked within exoticist paradigms in French and Russian repertories.

More concretely, in the 1970s Sculthorpe told Hannan he had heard Walton, Britten, Constant Lambert, French music, Delius, Mahler and Bloch’s *Schelomo* in Melbourne.⁶⁴ As a bassist in the Conservatorium string orchestra he was involved in playing Howell’s *Elegy*, Miaskovsky’s *Sinfonietta*, Frank Bridge’s *Suite*, the Sibelius *Romance*, Vaughan Williams’s *Tallis Fantasia*, Holst’s *St Paul’s Suite* and the Barber *Adagio*.⁶⁵

In terms of what was viewed as the most ‘advanced’ modernist music, to use one of the characterisations of the time,⁶⁶ much has been made of composers’ difficulty in accessing it in Australia, as noted above. Bartók is certainly mentioned in the pages of *Australian Musical News* and is on the cover of the February, 1950 issue, which includes material reprinted from the British *Tempo* magazine.⁶⁷ In the early 1950s Heinze conducted the *Concerto for Orchestra* at a subscription concert but in the late 1940s Sculthorpe has indicated that was able to hear Bartók at the composer Felix Werder’s house, a “Bohemian centre” for young Melbourne composers.⁶⁸ He has also said he heard Schoenberg’s music there.⁶⁹ Skinner says Sculthorpe had only heard *Verklärte Nacht* before Melbourne (implying that Sculthorpe was therefore able to writeatonally in his teens in “It’s dark down the street” without having heard any atonal music), but

⁶⁵ Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 107-08.
⁶⁷ It may seem surprising that composers such as Bartok and Hindemith were regarded as “advanced” in this period. However, since there is such a wide range of different criteria one could use to determine what is “advanced” and what isn’t: dissonance level; textural or polyphonic complexity; associated polemics; or audience disapproval for instance, it seems most sensible simply to include composers who were described as such in the contemporary Australian literature.
that Werder had a good knowledge of Schoenberg’s music and other Second Viennese repertoire and made time to introduce younger composers to it.\textsuperscript{70} Werder’s father had in fact been a member of Schoenberg’s circle. Sculthorpe has said Werder encouraged his and George Dreyfus’s interest in serialism\textsuperscript{71} and Skinner describes a later Sculthorpe pastoral piece as “insufficiently modernist” for Werder.\textsuperscript{72} Hannan’s assertion that Sculthorpe was interested in Varèse but Werder unwilling to discuss Varèse’s music\textsuperscript{73} seems an improbable interest for Sculthorpe in this period and perhaps also a defensive attempt to sound the most modernist on Sculthorpe’s part, but whether Varèse’s work was known in Melbourne at this time would take more research to discover; certainly it had been written about in international periodicals.\textsuperscript{74} I speculate that Sculthorpe may have heard about Varèse later from Bernard Heinze, at the same time Heinze prompted Sculthorpe’s interest in \textit{musique concrète} after Heinze returned from travels to Paris and America in 1953.\textsuperscript{75}

**Musical Australianness: the 1950s context**

One of the main aims of this study is to contextualize Sculthorpe’s progression towards self-declared musical Australianness, and a central question is therefore the extent to which any models for such a direction were part of his environment and experience. This is particularly important in the period this thesis covers, the period before the mid-1960s, which was when Sculthorpe became recognized as the principal exemplar of what has variously been considered a philosophy, a school or a style. However, it is difficult to

\textsuperscript{70} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 102.


\textsuperscript{72} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 123.

\textsuperscript{73} Hannan, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas}, 6.

\textsuperscript{74} Hannan writes that Sculthorpe heard Varèse’s \textit{Ionisation} whilst a student in Melbourne and wrote several percussion works in response, but there is no record of any such pieces, see ibid., 46.

reconstruct what Sculthorpe’s attitudes to Australian music and musical
Australianness may have been in this period as only his musical scores and a
few notebooks survive, and almost no letters or other pertinent documents.
Sculthorpe does remember giving a talk on Australian music for “some society”
with J.A. Steele in 1949,76 but there has never been any indication of its
contents.

Sculthorpe was a member of a string orchestra at the Conservatorium that
rehearsed works by Alfred Hill and Margaret Sutherland in the presence of the
composers, and many years later Sculthorpe said he’d felt a sense of
significance at those rehearsals around the idea that Sutherland was an
Australian composer.77 His teacher J.A. Steele wrote pieces with titles such as
“Three Australian Sketches.”78 Whether or not Henry Tate’s theories on the
means to construct musical Australianness were generally known in Melbourne
in this period remains an open question, and certainly when some excerpts
from Tate’s writings were published in The Canon in 1951 the editor gave as his
purpose “calling attention to this fine Australian musician,” implying that
Tate’s work existed in at least some obscurity.79 Clive Douglas had been using
Aboriginal elements in his music since Kaditcha of 1938, and Douglas’s music
did receive a large number of ABC radio broadcasts in this period.80 Sculthorpe
certainly had contact with what seem to be overt gestures of Australianness in
fellow-student James Penberthy’s ballet Euroka in 1947, staged by the National
Theatre Ballet School. Euroka used a didgeridoo in its instrumentation and was
based on an adaptation of an Aboriginal myth. It is certain Sculthorpe attended
a performance, since Skinner describes him developing a crush on a particular
dancer in the ballet.81

76 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 129.
77 Ibid., 108.
78 Ibid., 98.
79 Henry Tate, "Australian Aboriginal Music," The Canon 5, no. 5 (December, 1951): 249.
80 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 286.
81 Ibid., 114-15.
The extent to which Sculthorpe, or for that matter other listeners would have perceived the use of a didgeridoo and Aboriginal mythology as gestures towards a sense of Australianness in the late 1940s is a question that needs to be addressed. As will be discussed below, Aboriginality was often deployed as a generalised marker of ‘Australianness’ in this period, although I have been unable to discover the extent to which *Euroka* was presented and received on consciously national terms. In the only substantial newspaper article I have found thus far – in the Women’s Supplement of *The Argus* – the idea of the work’s Australianness is mentioned in a single sentence right at the end, “[P]rimarily it will be of interest because it is so essentially Australian – created by Australians from an Australian theme, and presented by an all-Australian cast.” In the context, however, of a transnational musical culture in which folksong was used in the work of deliberately nationalist composers such as Grieg, and in which Dvořák in the United States had used African American and Native American melodies, the gesture is likely to have been fairly well understood as one that asserted national identity, despite the postcolonial complexities of the situation. This is made explicit in an article only a year later on an imminent performance of the suite of John Antill’s *Corroboree* in Melbourne in 1948 “[J]ust as Dvorak captured the spirit of Bohemia and the New World in his symphonies and quartets, so has Antill given us in *Corroboree*, a work which breathes the antique ceremonial of the natives of Australia.”

It is certainly apparent in the contemporary press that by the early 1950s large numbers of articles had started appearing that either refer to or centre on the issue of ‘Australianness’ in classical music, and it hardly seems coincidental that 1950 and 1951 were the years that the ballet production of John Antill’s *Corroboree* was touring nationally and garnering massive attention. However, the issue of nationally characteristic music was also being discussed to some

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extent immediately prior to this. In 1947 the editor of the classical music journal *The Canon*, Franz Holford, characterized it as an “insistent demand”:

At the moment we are aware of the intense interest shown in Australian compositions coupled with an insistent demand for a national flavour, and this creates, quite understandably to me at any rate, one of our present unrealizable desires.

Now let us be perfectly frank. With all the composers that Australia has produced I very much doubt if there has arisen a great voice which possesses the authentic Australian tang. This may be all to the good on the one hand, whilst on the other it does rather specify the lack of a national idiom.  

Holford went on to put forward the deterministic and soon to be oft-repeated argument that Australia was simply too young a country to find a national flavour in music. Despite his skeptical view on this issue, the editorial demonstrates that there was debate around musical national identity during Sculthorpe’s student years, and it seems likely that Sculthorpe, an inveterate reader of musical periodicals, would have encountered such discussion whilst at university. Clive Douglas wrote of calls for musical Australianness as a “cry” that was initially small (presumably when he encountered them in the late 1930s), but grew to a “shout” in the 1950s.

In terms of pieces, the best candidates for potential influence on Sculthorpe in this period are the Penberthy ballet mentioned above, and also the suite of *Corroboree*, performed in Sydney in 1946 under Goossens’ baton and reported nationally. Articles in 1946 and 1947 in *The Argus* mention the latter’s success and its performance in London, and perhaps this is what fanned flames of interest in Australian composers and national style that Holford refers to

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85 Ibid.
above. Most importantly, however, the Corroboree suite was performed in Melbourne in the Melbourne orchestra’s subscription series of 1948 and received enthusiastic press coverage. Sculthorpe, who throughout his life liked to keep up to date with anything notable in music, could scarcely have been unaware of it, and it seems reasonable to speculate that he probably attended. Furthermore, Bloch’s violin concerto, a piece he later noted was important to his music, a piece by one of his favourite composers, was played in the same concert. The only instance I’ve found of Sculthorpe discussing Corroboree in relation to himself is in a talk he gave when he opened a building at his old high school in Launceston, presumably in the 1980s or 1990s. In a section titled “Melbourne. mid 40s,” one point on which he intended to speak reads “[w]hile some res. on Ab music being done, unable to find any. J.A.’s Corroboree 1945.” As will be discussed in the next chapter, hard evidence for Sculthorpe’s research into Aboriginal music comes from 1951 rather than the 1940s, but the reference to Corroboree in the context of a discussion of his own interest in Aboriginal music is suggestive.

Whatever way(s) Sculthorpe perceived the use of Aboriginal mythology and Aboriginal musical materials (instrumentation, imitation, or quotation), examples such as Penberthy’s were of at least minor interest to him as compositional approaches. He wrote a piano piece Aboriginal Legend in 1947, although this didn’t relate to any actual legend or even a made-up one, he remembered later that he was interested in an “evocative title” for the toccata-like piece, which hasn’t survived except for a few sketches. He also set transcriptions of two indigenous melodies, “Maranoa Lullaby” and “Warrego

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89 L.E.T., ”Last of the 1948 Subscription Concerts, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Conducted by Eugene Goossens,” The Canon 2, no. 5 (December, 1948): 233.
90 Peter Sculthorpe, untitled and undated set of notes for a talk given at Launceston Church Grammar School, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia, 3.
91 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 115.
Lament” in his orchestration assignments of 1949. These examples demonstrate only minor interest but are further evidence that in this Melbourne period he was aware of the approach, and that he was receptive to it.

**Australian and other Art and Literature**

In letters Sculthorpe wrote to Rex Hobcroft in 1948 he enthuses about some of the same writers who had interested him in 1945, as well as others in a similar highbrow, European or modernist vein: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Joyce and Eliot. From the way he wrote about them, they were tastes he seemed to expect his friends Hobcroft and Wilfred Lehmann to share.

By at least 1978, however, Sculthorpe was telling Michael Hannan that Melbourne in this period had been intellectually and culturally disappointing to him. Hannan writes:

> Sculthorpe also realised that the high notions of art and philosophy that had been so important to him as a young man living in the isolation of Tasmania held no interest for his university contemporaries in Melbourne who were more concerned with everyday matters and, as far as knowledge was concerned, with facts rather than abstract ideas. Thus Peter Sculthorpe reacted against European art and philosophy as being inappropriate models for an Australian artist's response to his society.

This needs to be challenged, as the letter to Hobcroft suggests that this was not so much the case, as do Sculthorpe’s memories of discussions of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche with his counterpoint teacher A.E.H. Nickson, on whose recommendation he read *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Similarly Sculthorpe’s inclusion, at least at times, in Felix Werder’s circle, which he described as “a

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92 Ibid., 124.
93 Ibid., 120.
Bohemian focal point” seems to suggest contact with what he might have viewed as sophisticated discussion. Wilfred Lehmann likened the street on South Yarra where Sculthorpe roomed to Paris, and Sculthorpe called this period his “bohemian days.” In 1972 or just beforehand he told James Murdoch that as someone moving to Melbourne from a small country town he had found it enormously stimulating – a comment which could possibly have referred to selected spheres of life and not others, even if Murdoch does go on to detail aspects of the cultural environment. More definitively perhaps, in 1998 Sculthorpe was characterizing the Conservatorium environment and the contemporary students in very positive terms:

Bernard Heinze used to refer to those years as the ‘golden years’ because they were. The excitement in the place, the passion, the commitment, I was so lucky to be there at that time. And so many of my friends from that period went on to become distinguished in many, many different ways throughout the world.

On the available evidence then, Hannan’s statement seems to say more about Sculthorpe’s feelings about Australia in 1978 than it does about them in 1950. However, these kinds of assessments about Australian place and culture are likely very complicated, and the themes of Australia as a barren cultural as well as physical wilderness, and the yearning experienced by Australians for the cultures and atmospheres of Europe are important tropes in the historical representation of Australia and Australian landscapes. Sculthorpe’s ambivalent and contradictory statements about Melbourne will be discussed again in later analysis.

In addition to keeping up and extending some of his teenage highbrow and international interests, it is in Melbourne in this period that Sculthorpe seems to have taken a more substantial interest in Australian art, at least substantial

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96 Ibid., 119, 123 and 138.
97 Murdoch, Australia’s Contemporary Composers, 164.
98 Sculthorpe and Hughes, "Peter Sculthorpe Full Interview Transcript".
enough for him to mention it numerous times in later years, although without
tending to enthuse especially about it.99 His composition teacher, J.A. “Jimmy”
Steele had a large collection of paintings by the Heidelberg School artists, and
Sculthorpe goes so far as to say he spent as much time talking about the
paintings with Steele and also Bernard Heinze as he did about music.100 Hayes
links acquaintance with these paintings to a burgeoning interest in the
Australian landscape “[H]e found himself drawn to the landscape of mainland
Australia as depicted in Steele’s collection of Australian paintings, a landscape
of desert and harsh bushland quite unlike Tasmania.”101 This is inaccurate
because while the Heidelberg painters are often melancholy their subject
matter is definitely not the desert. Hayes seems to be drawing on a binary
construction of ‘lush’ Tasmania opposed to a ‘harsh’ mainland, a simplification
of the variation in landscapes in both regions as well as of the contents of the
Heidelberg artists’ work. It is, however, a telling distinction and a telling
exaggeration, in terms of the way mainland Australia has often been imagined
in Australian culture and how it has often been discussed in Sculthorpe
commentary.

If Sculthorpe didn’t express overt enthusiasm for these paintings in later years,
interestingly a couple of people chose to give him gifts of Australian art in his
youth: Steele gave him an Arthur Streeton drawing (it was, however, of
Durham) and sometime shortly after 1951, a friend gave him a book of Drysdale
pictures.102 If Hayes’s claims of strong significance for Steele’s Heidelberg
collection to Sculthorpe’s sense of Australian landscapes may therefore seem
exaggerated, the collection, and friends’ assumption of his interest in Australian
pictures, imply at least that Australian art made some impression on him.
Significantly, also, given the widespread claims surrounding the Heidelberg
painters as a school of national artists, it means Sculthorpe was encountering a

99 See for example Sculthorpe, Sun Music, 20., Hayes, Peter Sculthorpe, 13. and Graeme
101 Hayes, Peter Sculthorpe, 13.
body of works of art that had longstanding nationalist discourses associated with it.

**Landscapes: Pastoral and otherwise**

According to Skinner, Sculthorpe did travel outside Melbourne in his student days and into country Victoria accompanying tours of the National Ballet. 103 It therefore seems that it is in this Melbourne period that Sculthorpe had physical experience of some of the mainland landscape for the first time. Many years later, in 1993, he wrote “[I]t was when I was living in Melbourne that the notion of duality appeared in my work. Clearly I was torn between the landscapes of Tasmania and the Australian mainland.”104 There are, however, no obvious works or convincing evidence of any sort that could be related in any specific way to mainland Australia or its landscapes except, at a considerable stretch, the aforementioned orchestration exercises on Aboriginal melodies and the use of the ‘evocative title’ *Aboriginal Legend*.

The only other possible contender is the *Prelude* of Sculthorpe’s String Quartet No. 4, an unpublished student work composed in Melbourne in 1950. In his 1999 autobiography he says that it is in this piece that two types of landscape become apparent in his work, and he essentially identifies them as the ‘wilderness’ of the *Prelude* and the contrast of the melancholic pastoral landscape(s) of the other movements.105 Whether the ‘wilderness’ music is a reference to the Australian mainland is an interesting question, but Skinner rejects the relevance of mainland landscapes to Sculthorpe’s work of this period altogether: “his creative affair with the mainland, paradoxically, did not get underway until he had settled back into Launceston in 1951.”106 It seems unlikely any evidence will emerge outlining Sculthorpe’s interpretations at the time he actually wrote the *Prelude*, so all that remains are these much later

103 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 164.
memories and claims, and potential analysis of the *Prelude* in relation to his later landscape music. Such analysis falls outside of the scope of this study and is furthermore unlikely to be conclusive.

There is, however, substantial evidence for a shift to pastoral preoccupations in Sculthorpe’s Melbourne music, and also for connections between such pieces and his memories and experiences of Tasmanian landscapes. As already noted above, Sculthorpe has attributed influences on this music to the work of certain English pastoral composers, in 1990 he pointed to Delius (and also Bloch),\(^{107}\) in 1995 to Delius and Vaughan Williams and “all that English pastoral music”\(^{108}\) and in 1998 to Delius again.\(^{109}\) The presence of such repertoire in Australian classical music performance in the late 1940s is well established and further, specific opportunities Sculthorpe had to hear particular works of this type have been pointed out above. Additionally and importantly, Sculthorpe did excitedly mention borrowing Delius’s *Sea Drift* and *Paris* from Wilfred Lehmann in 1949, being moved by *Appalachia* in 1948,\(^{110}\) and then in 1958 he referred to *Appalachia* as “the work Wilf and I used to play all through our student days.”\(^{111}\) Delius’s importance to him in this period is therefore well established.

In 1948 Sculthorpe was staying in the village outside Launceston for the holidays and in a letter to Hobcroft said he’d become pantheistic “through my love of pastoral things, of old buildings, of country churches, of birds and trees.”\(^{112}\) He went on specifically to liken the Tasmanian village environment to how he imagined England “Mount Esk is wonderful now. Everything so English. Pastoral. Green, green... green.”\(^{113}\) Perhaps a little surprisingly for an eighteen year old he made a tour of country churches with a male friend, and it seems in

\(^{108}\) Toltz, "Peter Sculthorpe: An Interview," 12.
\(^{109}\) Sculthorpe and Hughes, "Peter Sculthorpe Full Interview Transcript".
\(^{110}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 110.
\(^{111}\) Ibid., 212.
\(^{112}\) Quoted in ibid., 110.
\(^{113}\) Quoted in ibid.
response composed a song to lyrics by the seventeenth-century English
dramatists Beaumont and Fletcher, “Aspatia’s Song” (1947). Skinner likens the
setting to “the sounds and moods of English music, Delius in particular.”\textsuperscript{114}
Skinner’s analysis of other works of this period proposes comparisons with
Stanford, Holst and Butterworth in some of Sculthorpe’s vocal music.\textsuperscript{115}

From 1948 to 1950 Sculthorpe’s pastoral orientations are often obvious in his
titles and subtitles, for instance “To Meadows” and “Pastorale” in the \textit{String
Quartet No. 3}, a piece he described in 1999 as being “inspired by my Tasmanian
surroundings,”\textsuperscript{116} although it was likely written in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{117} The \textit{String
Quartet No. 4} (1950) was subtitled “Recollections of holidays spent in a country
village in Tasmania...” (this is the piece Sculthorpe identified very much later as
incorporating ‘wilderness music’ in its Prelude).\textsuperscript{118} The \textit{Suite} (1950) for small
orchestra which was subtitled “from the background music to an experimental
documentary film on Tasmanian life” has already been mentioned: it notionally
included depictions of “country village life” and contained both an Aubade and
an Eclogue.\textsuperscript{119}

It is interesting to think of the seventeen and eighteen-year-old Peter
Sculthorpe, who went on to develop music often recognized as a moving
evocation of Australian outback landscapes, living away from his family in the
urban environment of Melbourne, missing his Tasmanian home, village and
countryside. He turns to the pastoral, a literary and musical mode that for
centuries has evoked and celebrated idyllic rurality in a fundamental
opposition to city and town life.\textsuperscript{120} As a set of conventions and a discourse, the
pastoral likely provided a mediation of his memories of Tasmania and the
experience of missing home, as Skinner perceptively wrote of this period,

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 110-11.
\textsuperscript{116} Sculthorpe, \textit{Sun Music}, 12.
\textsuperscript{117} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 133.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 137.
“homesickness was in danger of becoming a compositional malaise.” I speculate that the pastoral was a ready set of atmospheric conventions and affects through which Sculthorpe could experience his nostalgia for and love of the Tasmanian countryside, which then further fed his creativity in the music and poetry he wrote in this period. For instance, the archaism of titles such as “Pastorale” and “Eclogue” point to the mediation of his experiences through pastoral evocations of poets he’d read since childhood: Keats, Shelley, Mallory, Wordsworth, Virgil, Matthew Arnold and Thomas Gray as well as composers such as Delius and Vaughan Williams. Additionally, the typical pastoral affects of nostalgia, loss and distance are elements of Sculthorpe’s interest in old buildings and his use of subtitles and descriptions such as “Recollections.” The pastoral tradition he deals with here is the English one, with its focus on gardens and the countryside in distinction to American pastorals which are more typically those of wilderness. Other aspects of this tradition, specifically the “lonely melancholy” and Gothic elements of Thomas Gray’s poetry, resonate with the text of “Aspatia’s Song” (1947):

\begin{quote}
Lay a garland on my hearse  
Of the dismal yew;  
Maidens willow branches bear;  
Say, I died true...\end{quote}

This is also the case with Sculthorpe’s later description of his \textit{String Quartet No.4} (1950) as embodying “melancholy pastoral landscapes.”

Significantly, Sculthorpe composed this landscape music about Tasmania before he went on to develop his later, better-known landscape music based on his imaginings of outback Australia. At times he revisited Tasmania on the customary holidays of a university student visiting his home and family in holiday breaks, but he also instigated travel into the Tasmanian countryside himself, such as when he toured country churches with a friend. This view of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 137.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Gifford, \textit{Pastoral}, 32.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 49-50.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 110.
\end{itemize}
Tasmania through apparent homesickness and the pastoral tropes of nostalgia, distance, loss and melancholy has interesting aspects in common with Sculthorpe’s later landscape music. Firstly, although some of the ‘pastoral’ music was composed while in Tasmania, much of it was written in Melbourne. The landscapes it evoked were therefore necessarily constructed from memory and imagination and there was an element of distance and the sense of being displaced and not at home, whilst longing for an idyllic experience of home. That is, the pastoral, in Sculthorpe’s case and in many of its historical iterations, involves longing for an imagined and ideal (if sometimes melancholy) space and it is therefore necessarily predicated on a sense of unease in the other, opposing landscape, usually the urban one.

Similarly, as is well known, for the first three decades of his career Sculthorpe had not been to the outback landscapes he often wrote about, until he finally visited Kakadu in 1989. Sculthorpe’s outback was thus mostly a product of his imagination, as well as being based on existing historical tropes and characterisations of outback landscapes as ‘lonely,’ ‘harsh’ and ‘savage,’ in the same way as his experience of the pastoral was inflected through its historical representations. Furthermore, as I will argue, many of Sculthorpe’s representations of outback landscapes involve a sense of alienation: a non-indigenous sensibility is necessarily implied through characterisations such as ‘lonely’ and ‘harsh,’ characterisations that imply a profound sense of unease, and tend to be quite opposite to comparable Indigenous Australian readings of Australian landscapes. The non-indigenous experience presented here, unlike the Tasmanian pastoral, seems not to evoke an ideal place and an ideal relationship with nature, except in its negative, and in some senses Sculthorpe’s mainland landscapes are the opposite of the pastoral, since the non-indigenous are at home in the urban environment and alienated in what is to Sculthorpe that most representatively and nationally Australian place, the outback.

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However, when Aboriginal people are present in Sculthorpe’s imagined musical mainland, they too are presented as alien, strange, and often lamenting, and in terms of the pervasive trope of the emptiness of Australian landscape, simultaneously present and absent. The Aboriginal person, at home in the landscape in the past but absent in the presence has an ideal connection with the land, but one the non-Indigenous person cannot experience since the latter continually experiences the land as ‘savage.’ The most Australian place, that which should be home, is ultimately not experienced as home by non-indigenous Australians.

Conclusion

Through childhood and early maturity Sculthorpe was acquainted with the conceptual frameworks and cultural traditions that were to underpin his later project of developing an ‘Australian’ musical style. As an artistically inclined child and young adult growing up and studying music in the British Empire, Sculthorpe encountered music which in its representation of landscape and use of folk materials or idioms was understood as expressing various national identities (Vaughan Williams, Grieg, Sibelius). He encountered music in pastoral modes (Vaughan Williams, Delius, Butterworth, et al.) and music and poetry engaging in a range of nature and landscape representations (Wordsworth, Sibelius, et al). He also encountered and was attracted to modernism as a set of ideas and artistic strategies, and even if he only heard some of the central modernist musical works of the first half of the twentieth century he had certainly read about many modernist trends. He was attracted to exoticist discourses in Joseph Conrad. He was acquainted with various understandings of creativity and the social roles of composers and artists in the films he watched, and the magazines and music books he read. In this sense, he was in the process of becoming a participant in a transnational culture, transnational both musically and in terms of other cultural forms. Since Australia was a part of the British Empire in this period it is not surprising that English culture was prominent, but contact with American and European, and
as Sculthorpe has noted elsewhere, sometimes Asian art and culture was also an ordinary part of citizens’ lives.

As discussed in the Introduction, the pervasive culturally nationalist historiography of most previous writing on Australian music and culture has tended to emphasise any aspects of local culture that could be interpreted as nationally distinctive or independent. In the case of Sculthorpe, to redress this imbalance it is important to understand the transnational basis of his later nationalist compositional project, how the very assumptions and strategies that underpin his work – the idea of landscape music and the idea itself of creating nationally distinctive music – are themselves transnational. The instrumentation Sculthorpe uses and the social conventions at his concerts make him part of a larger international classical music tradition, and it seems to be the case that at least until the late-1960s he understood his actions as part of this larger tradition.

As noted, most of the artworks and artistic movements Sculthorpe was attracted to in this early period of his life were not Australian, and I have argued that the reorientation to what Sculthorpe came to characterize as ‘Australian’ qualities in his works was quite substantial. The notion of a national culture, however, and some examples of how this may be achieved, were matters of great interest in the Australian print media at this time and perhaps also on radio. By the end of Sculthorpe’s period of study in Melbourne he knew the work of the Heidelberg painters and I argue it is inconceivable that he had not heard about John Antill’s Corroboree which was broadcast on radio, performed in Melbourne and discussed a great deal in the press, especially when it was performed in London in 1947.126 Debates around what an Australian music should be go back at least as far as Henry Tate and Fritz Hart’s publications and exchanges on the issue in the 1910s and 1920s,127 but I

126 "Corroboree’ Has Its First BBC Broadcast."
have not yet been able to determine how widely known these were in Sculthorpe’s Melbourne. It is certain, however, that Sculthorpe came across nationalist artistic discourses around at least the Heidelberg paintings his teacher owned and it is likely also in relation to Corroboree and other works. Similarly, in relation to Corroboree it is hard to believe he would not have encountered the idea that representations of Aboriginality were able to signify Australianness. Whilst most of his music in his last two years in Melbourne was of a pastoral character he demonstrated at least a small amount of interest in Aboriginality in his two orchestration assignments setting Aboriginal melodies and in the Aboriginal Legend (1947).

In terms of Sculthorpe’s development as a composer through this period it is notable that his early attraction to avant-gardism was replaced by what he was much later to characterize as more conservative music in the final two years in Melbourne. As noted above, this music in pastoral idioms is on the surface highly divergent from the ‘Australian’ music he was to go on to write in the mid-1950s but there are some interesting continuities in terms of the largely melancholy affects of both, but also around the expression of a longing to be at home in a landscape. It is clear that Sculthorpe was misremembering the period in which he wrote pastoral music in relation to Tasmania, and that this period was not, as he remembered it, when he lived there as a child, but rather this type of composition took place when he appears to have been homesick studying in Melbourne. The idyll, therefore, was not expressed while it was experienced. This is, rather, the expression of a remembered, distant idyll (albeit one with melancholy overtones) and thus one much more in line with the history of the pastoral and its often characteristic nostalgia.

(Melbourne: Sydney J. Endacott, 1917). I am grateful to Graeme Skinner for drawing my attention to Fritz Hart’s article.

Peter Sculthorpe, Notes for a lecture on Sculthorpe’s piano music, undated, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia, 3.
Similarly, Sculthorpe remembered his move to Melbourne as the beginning of the serious engagement with the mainland landscape in his work, an idea Skinner has already opposed. It seems significant here that again Sculthorpe misremembers his creative engagement with landscape in terms of experiencing or being physically in a place, as opposed to what has been much more characteristic through his life, the imagining of atmospheres of particular places informed by other musical or artistic representations, sometimes in addition to his own recollections.
Chapter 2
Launceston from 1951: Sculthorpe’s decision to write ‘Australian’ music

The previous chapter outlined some of the artists and works the young Sculthorpe came into contact with which were fundamental to his later understandings of the possibility of nationalist music and the strategies and assumptions that might underlie such a project. As noted, within the context of the prevailing culturally nationalist writings that have shaped most of the discussion of Australian classical music since the second half of the twentieth century, it seems important to make the case for the transnational and especially European-derived dimensions of Sculthorpe’s ideas and work. In this chapter it will be shown that the prevailing nationalist historiography in Australia has led to substantial distortions in the writing of Sculthorpe’s biography by most of his commentators, with Skinner as the exception. Also, by looking in a more focused way at material from this period than Skinner was able in his monumental biography, and by reevaluating some of Sculthorpe and others’ later statements, new dimensions and insights into Sculthorpe’s work in the 1950s are revealed and, importantly, into his decision to write ‘Australian’ music.

As outlined in the last chapter, this decision, which Sculthorpe made sometime in the early to mid-1950s in Launceston, and the music he subsequently wrote, can be seen as forming a substantial breach with the content and sensibility of many of his early highbrow interests. At the same time, there are also more minor elements of continuity in terms of the modernist musical language of his early ‘Australian’ music compared with his earlier attraction to modernism, the senses of displacement and melancholy in his Tasmanian pastoral compositions compared with the ‘Australian’ evocations of landscape, and in terms of his incipient interests in Aboriginality discussed in the previous chapter.
In this chapter I seek to discover as much as possible about the contexts, factors and thought-processes Sculthorpe went through in the early 1950s as he made a decision to write ‘Australian’ music. In the existing literature there is so little actual evidence from the this period that most of the understandings of what Sculthorpe did at this point, and why he did it, are remembrances and projections back from later in his career (again, Skinner’s biography is the exception here). There are hardly any extant letters or documentation, only a few compositional sketches and very few articles or reviews in the press. Most of this chapter, therefore, will consist of interpretations of what in Sculthorpe’s memories and his biography seem to have been based around his and others’ later concerns, and what can likely be regarded as his 1950s thinking. I will outline and compare his later statements and memories of the 1950s with his contemporary recorded thoughts about his later work and aesthetics, and also with the kinds of pressures and expectations he was under in, particularly, the 1960s. These interpretations will be made in relation to research already done, as well as some new sources.

This chapter also outlines pertinent biographical elements, provides new analysis of some archival sources, some new interpretations of existing biographical material and commentary, and some new contextual information from primary sources on Australia’s musical culture in the period. Chapter 3, in contrast, will discuss this period again, focusing instead on the details of Sculthorpe’s compositions.

Launceston, 1950s

After finishing his degree in Melbourne at the end of 1950, Sculthorpe returned home to Launceston. With the exception of nine months living in Sydney in 1957, and a shorter period working on a musical revue in Canberra in 1956, he lived and worked in Launceston for most of the next seven years, until his departure for study at Oxford in August 1958. This relatively late period of study overseas – he was twenty-nine by the time he went – contrasts with those
of friends and contemporaries such as Rex Hobcroft and Wilfred Lehmann, who, if they studied or travelled overseas, tended to do it fairly soon after graduating.

It is difficult to know why Sculthorpe initially stayed in Australia, only to decide to go overseas so much later. It was most likely because, as Skinner observes, it seemed the fastest way to become financially self-supporting, and Sculthorpe told Rex Hobcroft in a letter in 1950, “I’m going home to earn money next year.” In the first few years in Launceston Sculthorpe taught music classes,² composed music for amateur theatre,³ and in 1952 joined his brother running a sporting goods and guns store.⁴ Throughout this period there are regular pictures of him at parties, often in various forms of fancy dress, in the social pages of the Launceston Examiner. Until 1954 he completed only a handful of classical pieces.

The idea of writing self-consciously Australian compositions began translating into pieces from at least 1954. From this date onwards and within the period this thesis is concerned with, the vast majority of Sculthorpe’s works refer to some aspect of Aboriginal mythology or language, or Australian landscape in their titles, program notes, texts or in comments on the scores. The Sonatina (1954) has a program associated with an Aboriginal myth in which a journey is made through the landscape, the title of The Loneliness of Bunjil (1954) refers to an Aboriginal story, the Sonata for Violin Alone (1955) was incorporated into the Sonata for Viola and Percussion (1960) which initially included the inscription “the city & the desert & the native in the desert” on its score.⁵ The four Irkanda works use an Aboriginal word for their titles that Sculthorpe translates as “a remote and lonely place,” and even the incomplete Prophecy

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¹ Graeme Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 141, 144.
² Ibid., 146.
³ Ibid., 148-49, 152, 172.
⁴ Ibid., 151.
⁵ Ibid., 245.
(1958) takes up the idea of wilderness in relation to a biblical story. Sun (1960) sets texts by D.H. Lawrence and is eventually incorporated into Irkanda IV (1961) and The Fifth Continent (1963). The latter work was characterized initially by Sculthorpe as “a kind of Australian saga” and sets portions of the text of D.H. Lawrence’s novel about Australia, Kangaroo (1923).6 The withdrawn Piano Sonata (1963) is made up of material from Sun, Irkanda II and Irkanda III, and the String Quartet No.6 is similarly a “compendium of his best work up to that time.”7

In comments printed in newspapers and music journals throughout this period Sculthorpe demonstrates a strong and consistent tendency to present his music as grounded in a relationship to local or national identity and place, even to claim authenticity for it on such a basis. Interestingly, this trend begins with a Tasmanian rather than a national focus. In 1953 Sculthorpe told the Launceston Examiner that his Ballet (1953), composed at the invitation of the National Theatre Ballet School but never performed, had a “Tasmanian background,” and Skinner notes that the style of the work bears similarities to Sculthorpe’s similarly Tasmania-oriented Overture of 1949.8 As such, there are aspects of a continuation with his previous student work – stylistically as well as in terms of the Tasmanian inspiration he indicates – but there may also be something new here in the public attribution of local relationship. In that it consists of two words, “Tasmanian background,” the evidence is slight, but this does seem to be the first time Sculthorpe took pains to indicate a sense of his work’s relationship to local place to the press. In view of similar statements he made about other pieces in subsequent years, and in the context of the massive contemporary press coverage and interest in Antill’s Corroboree as a statement of national identity, it is possible that this comment is a product of a shift in

6 Ibid., 281.
8 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 154.
Sculthorpe’s thinking about the importance of making music that is in some way an expression of the local.

Sculthorpe’s comments of this type in the immediately subsequent years are much more conclusive. They are also all related to generalised impressions and claims of national rather than more localised identity. When discussing his Sonatina (1954) with one of the Tasmanian newspapers he stated that it was “based on an aboriginal [sic] legend... [and] was, therefore, truly Australian in character.” The formulation “truly Australian” recurs the following year in The Canon, in a 1956 article Skinner says was based on material Sculthorpe had sent the editor. Here, Sculthorpe’s solo violin work Irkanda (later Irkanda I) was described as his “finest work to date” and “truly Australian.” In the same year, he sent a biographical note to Rex Hobcroft who was putting together a series of Australian concert music compositions in Perth. In this note, the one aesthetic goal Sculthorpe mentions is his “[A]mbition to write Australian music.” His later characterisations of his work tend also to accord with the statements just described, in a 1964 article Sculthorpe was quoted as saying he was “aggressively Australian” in this period, and in 1972 the formulation “aggressively Australian” is used again along with that of “banging the kerosene tin.” Commentators have since repeated both phrases when discussing this part of his career.

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9 Ibid., 166.
10 Ibid., 169.
12 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 178.
Tasmanian Aboriginal Music Research

By at least 1951 Sculthorpe had begun a project that demonstrates his substantial fascination with Indigenous Australian culture throughout the 1950s. The earliest extant indication of the project is a newspaper clipping from an unidentified source stating that his “spare-time occupation is research into Tasmanian aboriginal [sic] music.” Skinner dates the clipping to early 1951 based on the recital it was advertising.16 By July 1953 Sculthorpe was telling the local newspaper that he was studying for his doctorate in music, and “making a study of Tasmanian aboriginal [sic] music and ritual as part of his thesis.”17 As it turned out, a doctorate in composition was a possibility he had evidently discussed with Bernard Heinze in mid-1953, and Heinze had actually told him to wait another five or so years before embarking on it.18 Twice in late 1954 he again said he was studying for the doctorate in articles about the Sonatina’s acceptance for performance in the 1955 ISCM Festival.19 Sculthorpe then discussed the project sans doctorate in 1956 when he wrote to Rex Hobcroft that he was hoping he would soon be able to finish writing it up in Launceston in “monastic seclusion.”20 It is further mentioned as late as 1958 in an article about his departure to Oxford when the Australian Musical News reported that it was close to being ready for publication.21 Skinner notes that Sculthorpe did work on it up to 1958, “often in bursts of considerable intensity.”22

The common view concerning Tasmanian Aboriginal people in the 1950s was that they were ‘extinct,’ a ‘vanished race’ or a ‘dead race,’ and the latter phrase exemplifies Sculthorpe’s understanding as it occurs in a list of chapter sections in his notes. His research into Tasmanian Aboriginal music was therefore

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16 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 145.
18 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 145.
20 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 179.
21 Ibid., 198.
22 Ibid., 145.
conducted entirely from existing books and archives,23 and Skinner says Sculthorpe’s ambition was to “document every mention of it he could find in the Tasmanian historical record.”24 Sculthorpe made extensive notes out of existing books, some of which had been published in the nineteenth century, he also corresponded with people to find out about the contents of archives and ask advice, and, as mentioned, worked out chapter headings and a structure for the work, and then revised these into a different form several years later.25 The material and subject matter he focused on included song texts, musical examples of melodies and occasionally rhythms, lists of dances, the contexts in which music-making occurred, as well as colonists’ descriptions of music-making they’d witnessed. He focused mostly on Tasmanian material but also took notes about the mainland, as his chapter headings indicate he was intending to embark on some comparison of Tasmanian with mainland practices. Additionally, there is a vocabulary list taken from one of Sculthorpe’s main sources, Henry Ling-Roth’s Aborigines of Tasmania.26 Sculthorpe’s typed and handwritten notes are now in the archives of the National Library of Australia, along with some papers, pamphlets and even some rather awful poetry he had collected about ‘the last years’ of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and imaginings of their ‘plight.’27

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23 This approach has also been typical of his later engagement with music from different cultural traditions. I argue that his approach and attitudes in this respect are fairly typical of the time he emerged as a composer as in almost all cases he has tended to read books and listen to records rather than engage with practitioners from the traditions concerned.
24 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 145.
25 The notebook containing the lists of chapter titles includes one list that is in the same, very neat, handwriting as most of the surrounding material. There is also a second list on a facing page, in a rather messier version of Sculthorpe’s hand, and this second list includes the annotation “Nettl.” I infer that this is a reference to Bruno Nettl, Music in Primitive Culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956). It therefore seems likely that the first list dates from a fairly early stage of work on the project, and the other from some time after 1956.
27 Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
Sculthorpe wasn’t able to hear any Tasmanian Aboriginal music in this period, although he did get as far as finding a wax-cylinder in the archives of the Royal Society of Tasmania. The Launceston Examiner reported that the “[y]oung Launceston musician” had “pounced eagerly” on it, but that it was broken. They (or Sculthorpe) also mistakenly reported that the singer was Truganini, the purported “last of the Tasmanian aborigines,” whereas it was actually a recording of Fanny Cochrane-Smith. It is difficult to discern, however, whether Sculthorpe had heard any mainland Tasmanian Aboriginal music by this point. Skinner thinks it likely that the first mass-media vehicle through which Australians were able to hear Aboriginal music was Charles Chauvel’s film Uncivilised (1936). There were also corroborees performed as exotic and nationalist spectacles in various places in Australia, such as the one that John Antill heard at La Perouse in Sydney that led to his idea to compose Corroboree. This was presumably not as common in Tasmania since there were supposedly no Aboriginal people still there. There may have been Aboriginal music recorded in documentaries of the period, and there were certainly recordings that anthropologists had made, although how widely all of these things were disseminated is currently an open question. It is therefore possible that Sculthorpe was conducting his research having not heard any Aboriginal music at this point, and dealing only with the notations of songs referred to below.

Unfortunately, there is no direct contemporary evidence as to why Sculthorpe became so interested in Tasmanian Aboriginal music in this period. There is nothing in his or others’ contemporary accounts of any similar interests on his part, except the settings of two Aboriginal melodies as orchestration assignments while at university. In 1999 he explained the project as a

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28 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 145.
29 “Carena’s Column.”
31 A discussion to this effect was had by Linda Barwick, Graeme Skinner and Amanda Harris after a presentation in the Musicology Colloquium Series at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music: Amanda Harris, “Hearing Aboriginal Music Making in Non-Indigenous Accounts of the Bush from the mid- 20th century,” 16 October, 2013.
continuation of his work on a dictionary of Tasmanian Aboriginal words he had begun in his school days “one of my so-called missions in life was to save the language from being entirely lost” and said that he resumed it “in order to make my existence seem worthwhile” whilst in Tasmania, not working as a composer, and feeling isolated from the cultural life of the wider world.  

This may be another instance of his memories of one period of his life transferring to another period.

Although it was argued that Sculthorpe’s characterization of his isolation in Launceston is probably mostly retrospective and exaggerated, what is particularly interesting about this 1950s project is that there is no indication that he had any friends, mentors or acquaintances who shared his interest in Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. If such an interest does date from 1951 and not earlier, Antill’s Corroboree once again looms large as a potential catalyst. The ballet production was touring Australia in early 1951, and played in Launceston on 14, 16 and 17 April.  

As mentioned earlier, it attracted massive press attention. The fact that the second of Sculthorpe’s next recorded ‘art music’ works was a Ballet in 1953 perhaps adds weight to such an interpretation. Furthermore, contemporary reports indicate there was quite a vogue for Aboriginal-themed design around the time of Corroboree, often ascribed to its influence. Evidence that attests to the extent of Corroboree’s cultural reach includes the statement by Rex Reid, the choreographer of the 1950 production, that Sydney department store windows were decorated in Corroboree colours.  

In addition, an article from 1955 described Corroboree as:

that work which let loose a flood of enthusiasm for the ‘newly-discovered’ Australian idiom, which vented itself in a stream of

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33 “Corroboree Spectacular" Launceston Examiner 16 April 1951, 4.
Aboriginal Christmas cards, Aboriginal pottery, drawings and innumerable novelties...\textsuperscript{36}

Whatever catalysts might have been operating in the culture around him, Sculthorpe's pursuit of his own research implies significant personal engagement with the idea of Aboriginal culture, even if he did seem to hope it might lead to some worldly success in the form of a doctorate or publication. Much later, in the 1970s or early 1980s he told Michael Hannan that in the 1950s he also collected “anthropological data from various sources,” “artifacts, mostly weapons and implements,” and “photographs of various sacred grounds.”\textsuperscript{37} I have not come across any indication that such things survived in the large collection of art and artifacts from around the world that Sculthorpe has amassed through his life. As early as 1964, however, he did tell Kenneth Hince that once he had set out to compose deliberately Australian music he collected physical reminders of Australia around himself.\textsuperscript{38} This statement is reminiscent, perhaps, of Wilfrid Mellers’s later advice to Sculthorpe to “keep in touch with home” while in England by viewing Australian paintings and reading Australian literature.\textsuperscript{39}

Insofar as the \textit{ Examiner’s} phrase “spare time occupation” of 1951 is an accurate reporting of what Sculthorpe told their journalist, it seems that at least initially Sculthorpe may have conceptualized his research into Tasmanian Aboriginal music, language and culture as largely separate from his compositional activity. However, the project is highly relevant to his first ‘Australian’ compositions because he continued working on it throughout the period of their composition, and because those compositions use Aboriginal words and Aboriginal mythology in their titles and programs to create what Sculthorpe

\textsuperscript{36} “The Apra Foundation Library,” \textit{The Canon} 8, no. 6 (January, 1955): 257.
\textsuperscript{39} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 226.
was promoting at the time as a quality of ‘Australianness.’ It seems likely that
the project predates the compositional activity, since there is no evidence for
Sculthorpe writing musical works designed to have any specifically Australian
qualities in 1951. The historical significance of the contents of Sculthorpe’s
research is rather that it provides evidence of how Sculthorpe conceptualised
Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal history and to an extent Aboriginal people, in a
situation in which his attempts to depict them and their presence and absence
in Australia was conceived as a representation of Australianness. Sculthorpe’s
research will be discussed further in Chapter 4, as part of an interpretation of
his early ‘Australian’ works.

Serialism and Total Serialism

Sculthorpe’s accounts of how and why he started to write deliberately
‘Australian’ music are those he gave much later and they are difficult to assess,
especially as most became tied to what will be argued is an apocryphal story of
his compositional experiments in and subsequent rejection of total serialism. In
public statements in the mid-1960s (which will be quoted below), Sculthorpe
mostly characterized total serialism as an impasse or crisis that preceded and
necessitated his realization that a more authentic compositional direction
would involve expressions of ‘Australianness.’

Sculthorpe’s actual engagements with serialism and the music of the European
avant-garde seem to have been much more modest than his later accounts
indicate, at least up until the mid-1960s when he wrote a very short total serial
work *Haiku* (1964) as a demonstration for his students. His use of
*Sprechstimme* and atonality in “It’s dark down the street” (1945) was already
noted in the previous chapter and it demonstrates an early interest in
Schoenberg and a taste for musical radicalism. This was initially continued in
his first year in Melbourne, 1946, when he arranged to have a copy of Ernst
Krenek’s *Studies in Counterpoint* (1940) sent from London, and proceeded to

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40 Ibid., 255.
make some exploration of the serialism described in it. The only extant result from this period, *Monsieur Miroir*, utilizes an eight note series of which the four notes of the second half are an inversion, transposed, of the initial four.\textsuperscript{41}

In the majority of later accounts, however, Sculthorpe considerably exaggerated his engagement with serialism. Around 1971 he told Michael Hannan that in his student days in Melbourne he had written a total of seven pieces based on what he’d learned in Krenek, all for different instrumental ensembles, and then destroyed the manuscripts.\textsuperscript{42} Apart from the fact that destroying his manuscripts is highly uncharacteristic behavior in relation to the copious amounts of material he did keep, the story of his engagement with serialism mutated into various versions. When he spoke to Andrew McCredie sometime before 1969 the serialist works were “mostly for combinations of wind instruments with or without percussion” and he identified their titles as *Music I* to *Music VII*.\textsuperscript{43} Skinner pointedly describes these works as “elusive, and possibly at least partly illusory.”\textsuperscript{44}

In many other tellings, Sculthorpe said that his significant exploration of serialism continued (or began) not in Melbourne but rather in the early 1950s after he had returned home and was living in Launceston again. The first Launceston version is found in a 1962 letter to the Sydney critic Curt Prerauer, a proselytizing devotee of serialism himself who had worked with and adored Berg. Here and in other sources, at least eight years after the period in question, Sculthorpe actually describes himself inventing total serialism in Launceston in 1954, implying that this was independent of Stockhausen, Boulez, Goeyvaerts and Babbitt:

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{42} Michael Hannan, "The Piano Music of Peter Sculthorpe" (BMus(Hons) diss., University of Sydney, 1971), 4.
\textsuperscript{43} Andrew D. McCredie, *Musical Composition in Australia: Including Select Bibliography and Discography* (Canberra: Advisory Board, Commonwealth Assistance to Australian Composers, 1969), 20.
\textsuperscript{44} Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 154.
I began writing serially in my late ‘teens, & reaching a state of total serialisation in 1954 abandoned this manner for what now appears to be my own personal style... Oxford brought me into close contact with everything ‘avant-garde’, & convinced me that the way I had chosen was right for me...\(^{45}\)

There are multiple reasons why the story of Sculthorpe’s invention of total serialism is implausible. Firstly, at another point he actually said that he was taught to serialise rhythm later, in 1959 by the then director of the Royal Northern College of Music, Richard Hall. Skinner notes that it was Hall’s method that Sculthorpe used in *Haiku.*\(^{46}\) This seems rather to imply that Sculthorpe didn’t invent the method himself in the early 1950s.

There is also substantial evidence that Sculthorpe and other composers were under significant pressure to appear musically ‘up to date’ in the early 1960s. Sculthorpe’s letter, quoted above, was written to Prerauer shortly after the latter had published an article in the periodical *Nation* attacking Australian composers for writing in derivative and out of date styles. Prerauer described George Dreyfus and Richard Meale as “Australia’s first twelve-tone composers,” “real composers, with characteristic poignancy and vigour far removed from the infernal namby-pamby that tastes of innumerable ‘cuppas’... two contemporary composers!”\(^{47}\) In such a critical environment, it seems highly probable that Sculthorpe would have felt that the greater part of his music’s lack of engagement with serialism could be a serious problem for its positive reception. In fact, although the other Sydney critic who was to prove instrumental in Sculthorpe’s early success, Roger Covell, did not hold similar attitudes, Sculthorpe assumed he did, as can be seen from Covell’s 1963 response to a letter from Sculthorpe “[d]on’t, please, apologise to me for writing

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\(^{45}\) Quoted in ibid., 271.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 155, 225.

\(^{47}\) C.M. Prerauer, "At the Local," *Nation*, 20 October, 1962, 18.
tonally. I hope I’m not such an idiot to think that there is only one true faith and its name is serialism.”

Further examples include the following: at the 1963 Hobart Composer’s Seminar the head of the University of Sydney music department, Donald Peart, whom Sculthorpe was courting as a potential employer, told the Hobart *Mercury* that Australian music seemed more like something out of the 1890s than the 1960s and not only were Australian composers “out of touch” with the international scene but also in terms of any “contemporary feeling” they lagged behind Australian painting and literature. At the end of 1963 Sculthorpe told the Prerauers he thought that moving to Sydney would give his work the “edge” his music “needed.” Two years later his String Quartet No.6 was premiered, a work about which he later said his “career depended on [its] acceptance.” In the programme note he described the quite tonal piece as “freely atonal,” however, the critic Kenneth Hince saw through this, writing in his review that “freely tonal” might be a more appropriate description. Further, in some of Sculthorpe’s publisher’s promotional material of 1966 there is a phrase, “[h]is music still makes what he calls the right ‘with it’ noises.” These examples of the pressure Sculthorpe perceived he was under suggest that by saying he’d already invented total serialism he was able not only to sprint into the lead in the modernist race to be the most advanced but the story also allowed him to position the more ‘conservative’ works he had been writing as outside such modernist judgements. In addition, the story sounded impressive and noteworthy.

Surprisingly, there is one work from 1954 that I have discovered is actually serial, however as far as I’m aware this is the first time this piece, *The Loneliness*

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50 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 311.
51 Ibid., 366.
52 Ibid., 377.
of Bunjil, has been identified as such in print, and it seems Sculthorpe may have even concealed its serial basis from the 1960s onward. Bunjil is not a total serial work but rather the pitch is serialized and then certain row forms are associated with particular rhythmic patterns (these will be analysed in the next chapter). The rhythmic patterns usually last through the entirety of each row statement, and consequently have a motivic effect, serving to draw attention to the particular melodic content of each row by ensuring that each time it or its inversion reappears it has one of the same rhythms. This might lead one to conclude that Sculthorpe was taking a systematic approach to rhythm as well as to pitch and that perhaps this is the origin of his total-serialist claims. However, as noted, the result seems to be much more about the recognisability of recurrences of row forms, and the treatment of rhythm in Bunjil is nothing like the fairly standard Boulezian approach Sculthorpe uses in Haiku: the piece is definitely not total serial in the sense the term was understood in relation to 1950s European repertoire. Rather, in Bunjil P and I are given common rhythmic patterns and R and RI use different common patterns, so the rhythmic patterns are also a means to link the pairs of row forms that are easiest to hear as being aurally related, inversions being much easier to identify aurally in comparison with an interval pattern or melody and its (twenty-four note long) retrograde. The mostly lengthy rhythmic patterns go a long way to unifying the work and giving it coherence. Furthermore, in a piece consisting of three instrumental parts that are at all times treated contrapuntally (except for a single passage where the cello acts as a bass with one note per bar, mm. 37-42), the juxtaposition of parts with highly contrasting and characteristic rhythmic patterns increases the sense of their independence, as can be seen in Musical Example 2: 1.
Musical Example 2:1 Sculthorpe, *The Loneliness of Bunjil* mm. 85-88

If this is as close as Sculthorpe got to total serialism in the 1950s, again it is difficult to understand why he did not reveal to interviewers the serial nature of the piece or even his use of rhythmic patterns across different rows. Instead, it seems most probable that the story of a number of serialist pieces (*Music I to VII*) which he then supposedly destroyed was invented, for the reasons discussed above.54 It seems likely that in 1957 he did tell Bernard Heinze about *Bunjil* and how it was composed, since Heinze wrote an article for *Vogue* in which he described Sculthorpe as “a composer with a highly experimental, atonal style, stemming from Schoenberg.”55 In the 1950s therefore, it seems likely Sculthorpe was discussing the work’s basis straightforwardly. In 1961 he seemed mostly to be couching *Bunjil* in terms of its potential notoriety in his profile in *The Canon*, where it is described as “his controversial work *The Loneliness of Bunjil*... based upon a scale of twenty-four quarter-tones; it was first performed, very recently, in the Royal Festival Hall.”56 It is of course possible that the editor omitted any information about the work’s serialism in favour of the quarter-tones, but since Sculthorpe doesn’t reveal the serialism in any later interviews or letters, there’s also no reason to assume this.

There are a few further mysteries concerning *Bunjil*. The work is unusual in that unlike almost all of Sculthorpe’s other music it doesn’t seem to have been

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54 He discussed these works with Hannan, McCredie and others from 1969 onwards, and even now they appear on the works list on his website.


written for a commission, a competition, a planned performance or some other reason such as a colleague’s birthday. In addition, Sculthorpe has said that in 1964 he actually revised the piece for publication, thus revisiting his only lengthy serial work. (The original score is not extant, only sketches, so it is impossible to know for sure exactly what the first version was like. However, the sketches clearly outline all versions of the rows which appear in the work’s eventual publication, which makes it hard to imagine that much had been changed in terms of pitch). He seemed to insist on the idea of revision of the piece, writing on the score “1954, revised 1964,” but he also told Roger Covell he had revised the work for the first performance by the Haydn trio, which would have meant another revision in 1960 as well as the one in 1964.\(^{57}\) Despite this revisiting / revising of Bunjil, in this period Sculthorpe is not on record, as noted, telling anyone that it was serial. Perhaps, once he had begun telling people in 1962 that he had invented total serialism which had caused a crisis leading him to write ‘Australian’ music, he felt he was not able to reveal that Bunjil was serial for fear of being accused of less ‘advanced’ practice in its motivic use of rhythm. Perhaps he knew that it disturbed the narrative of serialism precipitating his realization that he really wanted to write ‘Australian’ music. It seems to me that there is no clear answer to the question of why Sculthorpe didn’t make the serial nature of Bunjil public. An interesting side issue, perhaps an exploration of possibilities at the time of the 1964 revision, is that on the 1950s sketches of rows, at some point (presumably) Sculthorpe has written over and changed the first ten pitches in the Prime form to become semitonal rather than quarter-tone. The other rows are left unchanged.

As Skinner notes, Sculthorpe’s story of his move to total serialism, and subsequent ‘crisis’ and rejection of it became “a standard plank in his autobiography.”\(^{58}\) Deborah Hayes perceptively describes it as “a parable for the

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\(^{57}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 254.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 271.
irrelevance of the post-Webern style to his own approach.” It has been very prominent in his interviews and autobiographical writings.

Why Australianness?

The 1962 letter to Curt Prerauer quoted above is the first recorded account of Sculthorpe’s turn to writing ‘Australian’ music as a response to his apocryphal total serialism instigated ‘crisis.’ Several others appeared over the next few years that are likely to have been shaped by the same critical pressures outlined above, and which additionally bear traces of responses to particular things Prerauer had recently written, calling into question their accuracy in terms of Sculthorpe’s 1950s motivations. These will now be outlined. The first is from the Australian Composers’ Seminar in Hobart in April 1963, and is based on Sculthorpe’s presentation on his own music:

He wondered where he was going until around 1950 he discovered Schoenberg and Webern, and he immediately rushed in pouring out these twelve note pieces which became increasingly more complex, more everything, and dissonant, until in 1954 he arrived at a state of total serialization, when every component of music was serialized and could be put down on graph paper and had nothing to do with music: in fact the next step was composing silences. He had one final fling in the quarter-tone world. He then played part of “The Loneliness of Bunjil”, a string trio written completely in quarter tones. This work had really been a kind of farewell to Europe and greeting to Australia.

After writing this he began to feel he had found a way; he began to tear music to the bone, using the device of repetition until perhaps it became boring – but the landscape at times was a little monotonous with that horizontal feeling of arid barrenness. He was unconsciously trying to do something about this Australian loneliness, about the horizontal feeling of Australia as opposed to European verticality.

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59 Hayes, Peter Sculthorpe, 22.
It is interesting here that quarter-tones are conflated, or at least equated with serialism. Further accounts of the ‘crisis’ show up in 1964, and evince fairly similar themes to those already quoted, even if the details vary. The first is from The Bulletin:

Sculthorpe’s Jindyworobak phase was primarily a way out of an impasse to which his previous development [total serialism] had led him ... After graduating from the Melbourne Conservatorium in 1951 he returned home to Launceston and began to work out a fresh approach to the process of composition.

It was at this point that Sculthorpe turned to specifically Australian themes. He recalls that he was “aggressively Australian” then, but adds that he did not set out to be a musical nationalist. His problem was a purely personal one – the need to find some source from which to draw sustenance while he set about developing his own way of writing music.61

The last example is from The Australian, also 1964, in a passage coming immediately after another account of the total serialism crisis:

[H]e spent a great deal of time in thinking out his position as a composer in Australia... as far as he was concerned, serialism was little more than a European vogue... he did not want to turn away completely from modern art (serialism) and take cover in a vague romantic reaction: but he did want to add something real and personal to Australian composition.62

The aspects that may be discounted as early 1960s responses to Prerauer and therefore probably not directly relevant to Sculthorpe’s 1950s practice are the total serialism crisis, the presence of repetition in Sculthorpe’s work and the formulation of contrasts between Australian horizontal grandeur versus European verticality. In a letter Prerauer wrote to Sculthorpe fairly early in their correspondence and predating the Hobart seminar by a matter of only six or so weeks, Prerauer used terms that Sculthorpe felt were relevant enough and

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61 Small, "Patrick White’s Opera: The Advent of Peter Sculthorpe."
62 Hince, "Composer's Search for an Australian Music."
presumably desirable enough to co-opt verbatim in his Hobart address. In the letter Prerauer said that he and his wife Marea:

have... tried to define what the ‘Australian idiom’ – were it ever to arise in music – ought to look like: Great Loneliness – the Cruelty of the Bush, the ‘horizontal grandeur’ of Australia – comparable with the “vertical grandeur” of the European Alps.63

Sculthorpe’s phrase in the Hobart talk, quoted above, was “[h]e was unconsciously trying to do something about this Australian loneliness, about the horizontal feeling of Australia as opposed to European verticality.”

Earlier in the same letter Prerauer said “you have as yet not been able to detach yourself from the old patterns and their chief nucleus, repetition,”64 a condemnation of what is clearly a retrogressive tendency from Prerauer’s point of view. A little later in the letter Prerauer moved on to discussing a different work, Irkanda I, by which stage he’d evidently changed his mind “[o]ne may also say, against my suggestion, that the ‘Australian’ impression of the piece is stressed by the hopelessness and loneliness of the expression as you obtain it by this very device of repetition.”65 Like the contrast between “horizontal” Australian and “vertical” European landscapes, Sculthorpe’s identification of repetition with ‘the’ Australian landscape only six weeks after receiving Prerauer’s letter is suggestive that he had found a positive way to present the high degree of repetition in his work, and a way to link such a quality with ‘the’ Australian landscape, a link he continued to make quite often in later years.

Aside from these couple of cases, whose closeness to Prerauer’s concerns and wording seem to betray their 1960s origins, the theme of Sculthorpe’s decision to write ‘Australian’ music is in three of these four accounts expressed in terms of personal uniqueness, self-expression and the idea of following an authentic

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63 Curt Prerauer to Peter Sculthorpe, 27 February 1963, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
personal path. “His problem was a purely personal one – the need to find some source from which to draw sustenance while he set about developing his own way of writing music,” “appears to be my own personal style... the way I had chosen was right for me” and “he did want to add something real and personal to Australian composition.” As a strategy for resisting Prerauer’s almost automatic condemnation of anything not composed serially, this is very useful, carrying as it does implications of expressive authenticity and progression toward an ‘Australian idiom,’ another of Prerauer’s ideals. It also carries the potential implication of individuality and thus originality, highly valued in western culture from Romanticism onwards. In the article which provoked Sculthorpe to initiate contact with Prerauer in 1962, “At the Local,” one of the principal themes had been Australian composers whom Prerauer felt were writing in derivative or “secondhand” styles, and he called this “composing from memory.” Prerauer then equated this phenomenon with Australia being out of date compared with Europe, and implicitly advocated “dodekaphonism” as a solution.66 For Sculthorpe, by being able to ‘be himself’ by being Australian and thus not ‘secondhand,’ it was possible theoretically to circumvent the critical pressure to compose serially. If Sculthorpe actually did choose to spin his work this way in response to Prerauer, however, it’s also important to note that the actual compositional direction of ‘Australianness’ was something Sculthorpe had already decided on long before.

Whether Sculthorpe equated authentic personal direction and potential originality with a compositional project focused on national identity in the earlier period of the 1950s is, however, difficult to discern. Such an equation is widespread in western culture and an important understanding in earlier European traditions of musical nationalism, but it may or may not be specifically relevant to any single composer’s understanding of their work. Sculthorpe did take up Prerauer’s phrase “secondhand” and used it several times in the subsequent years. In 1969 for instance he said “[o]n looking back

66 Prerauer, “At the Local,” 17-18.
this [serialist] music [in the early 1950s] was not unlike the poetry that I used to write, and the paintings that I used to paint; it was my second-hand experience of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern.\footnote{Peter Sculthorpe, "Sculthorpe on Sculthorpe," \textit{Music Now} 1, no. 1 (1969): 9.} And in a publication from 1966 he's quoted as saying that he felt of the 1954 \textit{Sonatina} that “for the first time he had produced something in no sense ‘second hand’.”\footnote{"Peter Sculthorpe: Australian Composer," 30.} The idea of personal experience certainly did seem to remain an important part of his later theoretical position on nationally distinctive art, as he made recurring statements along these lines throughout his career, and furthermore his students have emphasised that encouragement in finding a personally appropriate direction was a fundamental aspect of his composition teaching.\footnote{Lewis Cornwell, personal communication, 2012.} Evidence for the extent to which it was part of his thinking in the 1950s seems suggestive but this is ultimately likely to remain uncertain. One intriguing aspect of this position is that in writing music about outback landscapes Sculthorpe at this point didn’t feel the need to visit them; personal authenticity seems to have been bound up more with identity rather than a physical experience of place.

\textbf{Contextual Factors}

The first concrete evidence of any serious interest in the actual question of distinctively Australian music on Sculthorpe’s part is an article he kept from the \textit{ABC Weekly} of September 15, 1951, titled “What IS Australian Music?” It consists of excerpts of four interviews with prominent musicians working in Australia: the conductor and composer Eugene Goossens, the songwriter May Brahe, and composers Alfred Hill and John Antill. The introduction to the article implies that they have been asked whether there is a recognisable Australian idiom and whether Australian music has “come of age.” They answer variously, opining that there hasn’t been enough time to develop an Australian idiom, and what would you “want national music for anyway” (Brahe), that an idiom may be
built on Aboriginal music (Hill), that features of landscape may be expressed in music (Antill) and that there isn’t yet an idiom but perhaps one might be developed out of the “great beauty of the countryside” (Goossens). Goossens further adds that “the sources of Australian music are imported.”

It is highly significant that Sculthorpe kept this article throughout his life, and it is the earliest article I was able to find in his collection that does not contain specific references to himself or his work. It is likely that he also owned and kept copies of journals such as The Canon and Australian Musical News and that these also contain commentary he may have found relevant to his concerns, but this seems to be the first single article he bothered to collect.

In view of Sculthorpe’s future compositional directions, it is interesting to note that the article contains several statements about landscape music and atmosphere, two things which were to prove important to Sculthorpe in 1954 and 1955, “the great beauty of the countryside might evoke music with an Australian atmosphere” (Goossens), “[b]ut don’t imagine that anyone can just sit down and write an Australian composition,’ [Hill] warned, ‘[a] composer can only be Australian by imbibing the quality of the country.” And from Antill, “[i]t’s no use writing an opera about Ned Kelly... it might just be an Australian story set to imported music. It’s atmosphere that counts.” Sculthorpe’s two initial ‘Australian’ pieces, however, the Sonatina and The Loneliness of Bunjil, both draw on Aboriginal Australian mythology, a topic the article doesn’t touch on.

A further, minor comment from May Brahe does align with Sculthorpe’s later statements about Australianness being personally authentic and a potential route to originality, “if our composers do want to write Australian music her

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71 Sculthorpe asked his mother to forward his subscriptions of both journals to him when he was in Oxford. Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 211.
72 M.C., "What Is Australian Music?"
advice is ‘just to let it come... You must assimilate everything that comes your way... Make it your own then put it through your own particular mincing machine. What emerges will be really your own, not imitative but genuine!’"73

There is another indicator that may help explain Sculthorpe’s 1950s interest in creating musical Australianness after a childhood and adolescence so much more concerned with European and English culture. Skinner notes that Sculthorpe’s parents travelled to England in 1952, the first time that Sculthorpe’s English mother Edna had been back since her childhood. Until this point it seems she had retained, in Skinner’s words a “preference for all things British.” The trip to England made her realize, however, that she was now principally Australian and she ceased to assert the superiority of things English over things Australian.74 Sculthorpe was living with his family in 1952, and it is abundantly clear from his later letters and writings how close he was to his mother throughout his whole life, and how many cultural interests they shared and discussed with one another. It seems highly likely that Edna’s change of heart had an impact on her son’s sense of identity and cultural priorities. However, it is also important to note that Sculthorpe’s research into Tasmanian Aboriginal music predates this.

Some external events that year may also have served to help confirm Sculthorpe’s decision to write ‘Australian’ music. At the beginning of February 1954 a newly choreographed version of the ballet of Antill’s Corroboree was performed before Queen Elizabeth II in Sydney.75 The royal tour received blanket press coverage in Australia, and Corroboree, already received as a nationally distinctive and representatively Australian ballet, was an integral part of the presentation of Australian culture to the Queen, the ultimate representative of ‘Home’76 and the rest of the world’s opinions. Australia was

73 Ibid.
74 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 153.
75 Potter, "Corroboree". 12.
76 Until at least the 1960s, some Australians, even those who had not personally ever been to Britain, referred to it as 'Home.'
even symbolized by Aboriginal motifs on many of the banners placed on the arches and buildings the Queen passed.\textsuperscript{77} Although Britain’s relationship with the Dominions at this time has been contested and debated, the sense of an Australian nation presenting itself to the ultimate representative of Empire in \textit{Corroboree} is readily apparent and was, at the time, celebrated.\textsuperscript{78}

Another possible stimulus appeared in the May 1954 edition of \textit{The Canon}, the edition that appeared around the time of Sculthorpe’s birthday. In a strange, confused and contradictory article “Outback Music,” F.H. Palmer advises that those artists who blame Australia for its lack of inspiration are not contemplating “the land and its people” enough. “A composer who looks on Australia as uninspired and artistically barren should examine himself to see whether this is really a criticism of himself or of the land. If the unique beauties of the continent do not move him spiritually into creative urges, then no other continent will.” Further on in the article Palmer seems to take the opposite tack, arguing instead that art is actually international rather than national! However, by the article’s end composers are again being exhorted to seek inspiration from the beauties of the continent.\textsuperscript{79} The timing of the article and its subject matter are a little suggestive, given Sculthorpe’s immediate turn to writing music concerned with the outback, but whether it actually had any influence on him is impossible to know. Given the massive interest in Australianness generated by \textit{Corroboree} and other art forms, it would hardly have needed to, and perhaps is itself a result of such interest.

In terms of what Sculthorpe actually knew of the country he was seeking to represent musically, it is likely that he had come across many representations of the Australian outback through his youth (as discussed in the Introduction). They were common in newsreels and travel literature in the 1940s and 50s. One

\textsuperscript{77} Franklin, “Aboriginalia,” 201.
\textsuperscript{78} Even in the reception of \textit{Corroboree} in 1950 this sense of celebration of Australian achievement and distinctiveness is apparent, see for instance the triumphantly titled W Wagner, “An Australian Art Is Born,” \textit{The Canon} 4, no. 1 (August, 1950).
set of representations he actually owned was a book of Drysdale’s paintings which, as mentioned, he was given in or after 1951. It was one of a signed, limited edition of a thousand copies. Sculthorpe said much later that Drysdale’s work had been important to him in this period. He said this in 1964 after they had become very close friends, by which time there had possibly been some shift in emphasis in his memories. The book contains fifteen colour plates of Drysdale’s works of the early 1940s, including The Rabiteers and The Drover’s Wife and pictures of the outback in drought. The introductory essay, by Joseph Burke, identifies themes of loneliness, the elemental nature of the environment, its timelessness and the idea of an “epic struggle with nature.”

These kinds of themes, fairly common in representations of outback landscapes, have much in common with the ways Sculthorpe talked about his own musical landscape representations in the years to come. Again, the Drysdale book is not a demonstrable influence, rather it is one set of representations that Sculthorpe is known to have come into contact with at this time. Many others were circulating in the culture around him: paintings, postcards, travel magazines and films, as well as novels and journalism by writers such as Ion Idriess, Xavier Herbert and Ernestine Hill.

Sculthorpe’s direct personal knowledge of mainland Australia in this period was, however, very limited. Skinner describes him going on tours in mainland Victoria with the National Ballet when he was studying in Melbourne. It seems that he didn’t travel in NSW until 1956.

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81 Joseph Burke, The Paintings of Russell Drysdale (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1951).
82 Small, “Patrick White’s Opera: The Advent of Peter Sculthorpe.”
83 Burke, The Paintings of Russell Drysdale, 11-12.
84 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 164.
A Music Opposed to Europe?

As noted, it was in 1954 that Sculthorpe wrote his first ‘Australian’ pieces, the piano *Sonatina* and the string trio *The Loneliness of Bunjil*. Sculthorpe and Skinner now agree that the *Sonatina* was composed first, although in a 1965 Faber catalogue Sculthorpe dated *Bunjil* from 1953,\(^{85}\) and in 1963 he called *Bunjil* his “farewell to Europe and greeting to Australia,” dating it from 1954 but before the *Sonatina*.\(^{86}\) The chronology is important because although Sculthorpe relates both pieces to Aboriginal mythology, *Bunjil*, as noted, is completely microtonal and serial. *Bunjil*’s serial nature and its entirely contrapuntal texture mean that it is evidence of a compositional approach to ‘Australianness’ that is very different from those of the *Sonatina* and *Irkanda I*, the other major works of this early period (*Irkanda I* dates from 1955, the year after).

Sculthorpe’s story of his invention of total serialism in Launceston in 1954 (or sometimes earlier) not only allowed him to construct a bulwark against potential accusations that his music was retrogressive, as discussed earlier. It also led to the construction of a conceptual duality in his writings and those of some of his commentators that opposed simple and predominantly harmonic music which would be ‘appropriate to’ Australia, with what they characterized as contrapuntal and serial European complexity. This has been emphasized particularly in the writings of Michael Hannan who recounts the total serialism crisis and goes on to say of Sculthorpe’s turn to writing ‘Australian’ music at this point:

As this situation had arisen as a reaction to serialism, it was natural that the principles of his new music would, if nothing else, negate the fundamental precepts of serial practice. Thus he reasoned that the music’s essential qualities should be simplicity, a lack of any arbitrarily imposed order such as the order of the row, and an absence of any cerebral processes such as intervallic inversion and retrogression. Because of Krenek’s emphasis on counterpoint,

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\(^{85}\) Ibid., 161.

\(^{86}\) Adult Education Board of Tasmania, *Australian Composers’ Seminar*, 18.
Sculthorpe further decided to reinstate chordal textures and to reject techniques of contrapuntal imitation.\footnote{Hannan, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas}, 30.}

Hannan goes on to outline that Sculthorpe became engaged with Aaron Copland’s music as part of this move away from ‘Europeanness.’

What attracted Sculthorpe initially was the emotional effect of Copland’s style. Its leaness, sparseness and exposed dissonance seemed to the Australian to be antithetical to the fulsome of the Romantic composers and those twelve-tone composers he had heard.... It seemed to be un-European, a music which expressed the emotions of an American about America. Both were new countries with similar histories, both were vast land masses with immensely unpopulated areas. It was therefore easy to conclude that the stylistic characteristics of Copland’s \textit{Piano Sonata} were not inappropriate to an Australian music, that, in fact, these qualities might be developed, and in the process become more Australian.\footnote{Ibid., 30-31.}

It is difficult to discover whether or not Sculthorpe was influenced by Copland in the early to mid-1950s and especially whether he deliberately looked to Copland’s music as a ‘new world’ model, and this will be discussed further in the next chapter. There is certainly no contemporary evidence for this. As a narrative gesture within the culturally nationalist historiography of Australian music, however, the notion of Copland as an influence on Sculthorpe’s early work is powerful, making the point that as an Australian composer Sculthorpe could look somewhere other than Europe (and therefore transcend Australia’s colonial past) in order to write authentically Australian music. It positions Sculthorpe as a figure poised to do for Australia what Copland had done for North America: create an idiom that was to be recognized as ‘truly Australian.’

However, apart from the problematically essentialist and simplistic nature of a European / non-European musical duality, Sculthorpe frequently wrote contrapuntally and sometimes serially throughout the period this thesis covers. Even in 1963, on the strength of hearing and seeing scores of the \textit{Sonatina},
Irkanda I and Irkanda IV, Curt Prerauer described Sculthorpe’s early works as contrapuntal, although seemingly in some kind of attempt to keep them close to the serial fold “[a]t first he adopted the serial technique, but he has abandoned it in favour of something equally contrapuntal.”

Additionally, since Bunjil is serial and contrapuntal and written after the Sonatina, obviously the style of the Sonatina can hardly have been a reaction to Sculthorpe’s serial experiment. This complicates the narrative of Australian music positioned oppositionally to European music, and it complicates the narrative Sculthorpe, Covell, Hannan and others constructed of the birth of musical ‘Australianness’ in Sculthorpe’s hands in this period (a narrative that often includes a nod to Antill’s Corroboree and sometimes Henry Tate’s ideas as isolated precursors). Even if, after writing Bunjil in 1954 Sculthorpe had reacted by deciding that it was not how he wished to compose ‘Australian’ music, there are contrapuntal passages in quite a number of Sculthorpe’s immediately subsequent ‘Australian’ works, and he contemplated returning to serialism in the early to mid-1960s. Around that time, as shown in an article by his assistant Ian Cugley of 1967, Sculthorpe also thought serialism could provide a “basis” that would mitigate the need of “composers in this century [to] rethink the entire basis of their craft almost every time they have the temerity to set pencil to manuscript paper.” He told Cugley that after composing Irkanda IV (1961) “he felt that he would return before too long to serial technique.” So a year before characterizing serialism as “little more than a European vogue” he was thinking of writing serially, and then a year after that statement he actually did include the total serial piece Haiku, initially written as a teaching demonstration, as a section of Sun Music I. If this wasn’t the direction he actually followed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is notable that serialism was something he thought of returning to every few years until at least this point in his career. Furthermore, at no point did he withdraw Bunjil,
in fact it was performed in 1960, and then he revised it in 1964, presumably for entry into the 1965 ISCM Festival.\footnote{Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 362.}

It is not at all surprising, of course, that a young composer would be experimenting with a range of different musical approaches at such an early period in his career, and the different directions Sculthorpe seems to follow at various times surely bear out such an interpretation. For instance, it seems that *Bunjil* was an experiment in working with quarter-tones that Sculthorpe didn’t continue with, although as late as 1956 he told Rex Hobcroft that all his recent chamber works were microtonal and *Bunjil* was the best of them. In fact, there are no other predominantly microtonal works (there is a fairly sparing use of microtones in *Irkanda I* (1955)), so Sculthorpe’s statement to Hobcroft perhaps implies that in 1956 he didn’t think quarter-tone music was necessarily a direction he was finished with. And insofar as his comments in his letters to his family can be taken at face value (which they sometimes can’t), a few years later in 1959 it seems he conceptualized his work as having several discrete directions or styles, as he described *Irkanda II* (initially called *String Quartet No. 5*) as “in my Australian style.”\footnote{Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 25 May 1969, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.} The retrospective constructions of this period by Sculthorpe and others lead to a narrative simplicity that is not borne out by evidence from the time period.

Once again, it appears that a major element in Sculthorpe and others’ constructions of such narrative simplicity for the period of the 1950s and early 1960s involves the projection backwards of Sculthorpe’s conceptualisations of his own creative activity in later decades. In the mid-1960s and into the 1970s Sculthorpe frequently discussed his music in terms of aspects he considered to be oppositional to European music, and he actually initiated some musical directions based on this principle. Importantly, this was exactly the time period in which commentators such as Michael Hannan and Ian Cugley came to know
him, study with him and become his assistants. I interpret their discussion of Sculthorpe’s early music to have been shaped by the views and theories Sculthorpe held and articulated about his own activity in this later period, as well as by his own projections backward. In Hannan’s case, there was also the influence of the nationalist historiography of writers such as Manning Clarke and Donald Horne, whose work Hannan drew on and quoted in his 1979 PhD on Sculthorpe’s music.

Evidence for these later conceptual frameworks includes the following. In the mid-1960s, after achieving acclaim for a growing body of works but particularly for *Irkanda IV*, Sculthorpe felt pressure to demonstrate stylistic progress away from the *Irkanda* period works. As already noted, at this point he thought of returning to serialism, amongst other things. Hannan, whose first contact with Sculthorpe dates from 1967, says that Sculthorpe’s assessment of his mid-1960s works, in particular the String Quartet No.6 (1965) was that they were much too expressionistic, and hence too European. At this point Sculthorpe wrote the texturalist *Sun Music I* (1965), of which even he seems recently to have stopped denying its debts to the Polish Penderecki, although he limits them to “some of the techniques.” European influence continues, therefore, although as part of an attempt to move his music away from ‘European’ expressionism.

Sculthorpe’s next major direction, however, is his engagement with Asian music. Roger Covell observed that *Sun Music I* was influenced by *Noh* music in the original program note written with Sculthorpe’s approval, and Sculthorpe later confirmed this influence. Subsequently Sculthorpe’s engagement, now with Balinese music, intensified in *Sun Music III* (originally *Anniversary Music*)

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95 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 312-13, 537.
96 Michael Hannan, "The Music of Peter Sculthorpe" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 1979), v-vi, 1.
100 David Hush, "Interview with Peter Sculthorpe," *Quadrant* (December, 1979): 31.
(1967) and Tabuh Tabuhan (1968). In 1969, based on a talk given in 1968, and therefore quite contemporary with the music concerned, he wrote:

The thought had occurred to me that, instead of desperately looking to Europe for ideas, one should look to the Pacific and Asia. Our political and economic future is bound up with Asia, and for this reason there must be tremendous cultural interaction... We belong geographically to this area... For me, the East is revitalizing my own style and I hope that one day it will become a part of the Australian manner, the Australian style.¹⁰¹

In this talk he also projects this notion of “not looking to Europe” backwards onto his earlier music and thoughts. This is apparent in the same article, where he writes of his 1954 decision to write ‘Australian’ music in the Sonatina:

I had suddenly felt... well, really, what am I doing identifying myself with Europe, with a culture that I have no experience of, or background of feeling towards? Let me just be myself, let me just feel this country... everything that I am, and that is around me.¹⁰²

As noted, there is no evidence from the 1950s for any anti-European stance on Sculthorpe’s part. In 1958, it must be remembered, he chose to travel to study at Oxford, even saying at the time that the scholarship he received and thus his study overseas would likely “bring him closer to his ambition” of being “partly instrumental in the founding of an Australian school of thought in musical composition.”¹⁰³ The influences on Sculthorpe’s 1950s music, Bartok, Ernest Bloch and Mahler, are hardly anti-European. Sculthorpe’s work in this period, and indeed the nationalist gesture itself of creating a style of music based on local folk traditions and landscape depiction originates from a profoundly ‘old world’ basis, as does the very classical music tradition within which Sculthorpe worked.

¹⁰¹ Sculthorpe, "Sculthorpe on Sculthorpe," 12.
¹⁰² Ibid., 9.
¹⁰³ Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 198.
Isolation again

Finally, there is a continuity between the various periods Sculthorpe spent living in Launceston in terms of the way they have been characterized by him and others as ‘isolated.’ There are similar elements to the discussion of his childhood in this respect in comparison with the early 1950s Launceston period covered in this chapter, and also a later Launceston period in the early 1960s. In the previous chapter the larger tropes of creativity and artists’ lives that this idea of isolation seemed to refer to were outlined, and how closely these also fitted into ideas of particularly Australian creativity, isolated from British and European centres, forced to be original in the face of physical and cultural wilderness. The retrospective commentary on the 1950s period is even more pronounced in these terms than that pertaining to Sculthorpe’s childhood, as the following examples demonstrate. In 1969 Sculthorpe wrote “I had been totally isolated in Tasmania; I didn’t have anyone to talk to about music; I was just battling away and gradually settling into the comfort of business.”104 This, despite dinner guests in his family home at this time including internationally prominent musicians such as Isaac Stern and Paul Badura-Skoda.105 Skinner implies that this isolation had an aspect of loneliness that found its way into Sculthorpe’s work: when Sculthorpe glossed the title Irkanda as meaning “a remote and lonely place” in 1961, the title “seemed suggestive of the isolation he felt when the first [1955] (and last) [1961] of the Irkanda works was composed.”106 Skinner doesn’t give a source for this, however, to me the next quotation hints at least at part of how Sculthorpe’s retrospective view may have been formed: in 1977 David Marr wrote “[t]hey were sterile years. He sat in his cottage composing, but feeling ‘generally unloved and unwanted, and not at all like a composer.”107 In other words, in comparison with Sculthorpe’s childhood in which he had been periodically taken out of school to play on the local ABC

105 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 155, 157.
106 Ibid., 164.
radio station and was generally feted for his performance and creativity in the local community, and in comparison with his later massive national and international success, his quiet and relatively obscure life in the 1950s may seem lonely indeed, at least in terms of public attention. Was he drawing on his own experience, therefore, in the ‘lonely’ pieces of this period? If this is a loneliness whose dimension is mostly comparable with other periods of his life, especially later ones, then likely isolation and loneliness are probably retrospective constructions placed on the period by Sculthorpe and others. Sensitive as ever to wider understandings of creativity within western culture and those that equate isolation with originality, it seems Sculthorpe chose to understand his own work in this light. As he told Andrew Ford in 1993 “[i]n looking back, I’m rather glad I couldn’t get hold of music, because it forced me to find my own way... I found a direction fairly early, and I realised that it had to be through me – nobody was going to give me the key.”

Conclusion

It was in this period in Launceston in the early 1950s that Sculthorpe made the decision to write ‘truly Australian’ music, as demonstrated by his titles, program notes, and comments to the press. Such an impulse on his part seems to have been fairly consistent throughout the period, as there are only a few pieces from the 1950s, other than theatre works, that don’t have ‘Australian’ titles or programs. I have argued that Sculthorpe had already encountered examples of various strategies of making national music within the transnational classical music tradition he explored as a child in Launceston. It is possible further to infer that the discussion of the possibilities of ‘Australian’ music within print media (and perhaps on radio), as well as the example of John Antill’s Corroboree, influenced Sculthorpe to write ‘Australian’ music, and probably influenced him to do so in relation to representations of Aboriginality. As was noted at the time, people ascribed the proliferation of ‘Aboriginal’-style

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images and design to Corroboree’s influence, as the ballet toured Australian in 1950-51 and then was remounted again in 1954. Sculthorpe’s interest in Aboriginality, which led to him beginning to write a book or doctorate on Tasmanian Aboriginal music and culture, may also have originated partly in the excitement surrounding Corroboree.

1940s and 1950s Australia was also awash with images and ideas that must have influenced Sculthorpe’s sense of ‘the’ Australian landscape and especially the outback landscapes and notional mainland landscapes he imagined as inhabited by Aboriginal people in his works. That he didn’t physically visit these places himself until many decades afterwards takes this point about the source of his sense of outback landscapes beyond speculation. There were numerous characterisations of Australian landscapes as lonely, harsh, dry and even savage in Australian culture in this period, in novels, films and books by authors such as Ernestine Hill, Xavier Herbert and many others. Such characterisations and artistic representations also made up much of the content of a book Sculthorpe owned on Russell Drysdale. Interestingly, the images in this book, seventeen sketches and fifteen colour plates, include several of Drysdale’s best known paintings yet curiously omit his images of Aboriginal people. The author of the book’s essay on Drysdale, Joseph Burke, says of Drysdale’s images of non-indigenous Australians in the outback that they embody certain traits, “the ‘ability to carve an independent existence,’ ‘faith in themselves and in the land.’...These images... far from being caricatures, are heroic. They play their part... in an epic struggle with nature.”

Burke’s discussion of Drysdale’s work thus does not include the painter’s images of Aboriginal people in this sense of the ‘heroic.’ Burke’s essay and editorial decisions in the book therefore present a different sense of Australia than the one(s) Sculthorpe was representing, although there are commonalities with some of the qualities of landscape just noted. And perhaps it is not surprising that Aboriginal people are omitted from the Drysdale book, since it

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109 Burke, The Paintings of Russell Drysdale, 11.
is very clear that non-indigenous Australians in this period were much more comfortable in imagining Aboriginal people in their tribal, ancient and ‘timeless’ contexts such as ceremony than in terms of the types of contemporary, lived experience that Drysdale depicted.

The historiographical issues in interpreting Sculthorpe’s activity in this period are significant, all the more so because of the dearth of contemporary evidence. At issue is, firstly, the closeness of the ways Sculthorpe has remembered his thoughts and actions at this time in comparison with some of his later concerns. Such theories are therefore unlikely to have been part of his thinking in the 1950s, and this is particularly demonstrated by ideas that seem to have come from Curt and Marea Prerauer in the early 1960s such as the “horizontal grandeur” of Australia as opposed to “European verticality” and the question of the relevance of musical repetition to ‘the’ Australian landscape.

Secondly, there is the construction of the conceptual binary between European musical characteristics and Australian ones in Sculthorpe and others’ commentary on this period. This conceptualisation seems to have been bound up with and partly a consequence of Sculthorpe’s story that he had invented total serialism independently of Stockhausen and others, only to reject it in favour of his ‘Australian’ direction. However, the idea of an Australian musical style needing to grow out of an opposition to European music is not only extremely problematic in terms of the multitude of intertextual and gestural links with European-derived styles that all nationalist Australian classical music has so far exhibited, but additionally there is no evidence for any such thinking on Sculthorpe’s part in the 1950s, rather, in the music from that period the burgeoning styles in his work are very closely linked with European soundworlds indeed.

Moreover, the idea of Australian culture existing oppositionally to European culture in the 1950s is highly problematic. Some previous and contemporary cultural nationalisms set out to or were interpreted as establishing
characteristics distinct from European art, such as the 1950s folk revivalists’ resistance to American cultural influence, but many were still expressed within an understanding of Australia as part of the Empire. It is material to this discussion to consider how Australians understood themselves in terms of nationality and transnational links in the 1950s: there was clearly a range of different ways Australians related to and felt about England and even America. Some involved oppositional aspects, whereas for others, including, famously, Prime Minister Robert Menzies, a strong connection and identity with England was essential, as well as the sense that England was the mother country. As Neville Meaney argues, “[t]he evidence that Australians in this nationalist era thought of themselves as a British people is overwhelming.” It was actually in the 1960s rather than the 50s that the idea of breaking away from Britain into a new identity became much more widespread and institutionally supported in Australian society and culture, and this seems also to have been the case in Sculthorpe’s thinking and the thinking of those who commented on his work and helped develop his own sense of what he was doing, such as Prerauerau. The idea of Sculthorpe’s early work as oppositional to European music is therefore a clear-cut case of projection of Sculthorpe’s 1960s concerns backwards, a projection of the philosophies that interested him when he looked to Asian music as a local and oppositional alternative to European-derived music.

A more accurate way of representing Sculthorpe’s development in the 1950s is that his modernist interests and use of quarter-tones and serialism were concurrent with and often tied up in the way he sought to write ‘Australian’ music. After the example of Antill’s Corroboree, and as I’ll argue other influential ways of creating senses of the ‘primitive’ and exotic, it is probably no accident that Sculthorpe’s rejuvenated interest in a modernist soundworld (in

comparison with his ‘pastoral’ works of 1948-50) coincides with his
development of an ‘Australian’ musical style based partly on the
representations of various aspects of Aboriginality, as he saw them.
Furthermore, the use of both contrapuntal textures and interest in serial
processes continue in his work at least until 1965, contrary to the European
versus Australian binary developed later. Such a binary, which presumably is
something Sculthorpe’s own discussions of his work led Hannan to construct,
does not hold up. Mythology of the birth of musical ‘Australianness’ at
Sculthorpe’s hands has been considerably distorted and this is likely a result of
the nationalist desire to trace moments in Australian cultural history in which a
perceived divergence and independence from English and European norms can
be marked and celebrated. Sculthorpe’s musical and intellectual trajectory in
this period seems rather to have been messy, full of stops and starts and
changes of mind, and characteristically for a young composer searching for his
own idiom and means of expression, changes in direction and experimentation
with various styles and compositional techniques.
Chapter 3
The initial ‘Australian’ works: the Sonatina and The Loneliness of Bunjil

The remainder of this thesis will involve interpretations and arguments about the relationships Sculthorpe’s works have with extra-musical images, places, affects and ideas.1 It therefore seems important to consider what kind of general evidence there is for how Sculthorpe tends to work as a composer in this domain. His statements on how inspirations or extra-musical associations relate to his compositional processes have been varied and equivocal throughout his career, although he has emphasised the general importance of extra-musical ideas consistently over a long period. In 1969, for example, he wrote that he always had a program in mind when composing.2 This was reiterated in his 1999 autobiography “all my music would be based on a programme of some kind, an extra-musical idea or image... I may not necessarily divulge it, but an extra-musical idea is always an important part of my compositional process.”3 How this relates to specific musical formulations and the multiple different stages of the compositional process is more

1 The question of what is “extra-musical” to a piece of instrumental music has been contested, and hermeneutic theorists such as Lawrence Kramer argue that titles and program notes are ontologically part of the work. For example, Lawrence Kramer, Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900, California Studies in 19th-Century Music (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Naomi Cumming, "Encountering Mangrove: An Essay in Signification," Australasian Music Research 1 (1996): 193-229. While not subscribing to the idea of ‘the music itself’ here, I wish to use the term extra-musical as a convenient marker for elements other than sounds that are not straightforwardly communicated to audiences solely through the experience of hearing the music. In other words, I use the term as a convenience and with acknowledgement that the socially and culturally mediated experience of listening to music is much more complex than a term such as this implies.


ambiguous, as he told Joseph Toltz “[b]y the time I come to write the music down I’ve left the landscape. I’m out of it because the idea has come and my primary concern is to write it down... on the other hand I often have pictures of landscape around when I write.” 4 And in 1989 “I’m rarely inspired by a painting, but when I’m working I often think of a painting. When I was starting Eliza Fraser Sings I didn’t think of Sidney Nolan’s rainforest paintings but while I was writing it I did!” In the same interview, he said that the programs associated with each work tended not to determine form.5 Finally, his thoughts on the importance and function of titles in his compositional process, from 1998, are also instructive “I usually try to find a title before I begin a piece because you know a composer is a chooser, and getting from one bar to the next is hard enough. But if you can find a way to limit the choices, then you are going to be able to get there more easily.” 6

If this establishes fairly well the importance of programmatic or extra-musical elements in Sculthorpe’s working process, a substantial note of caution also needs to be sounded in terms of the relationship between Sculthorpe’s thoughts during the multiple different stages of the compositional process and his and others’ interpretations and discussions afterwards. Ultimately, it is difficult to recover such intentions with any certainty.7 In this thesis I am interested in discovering what evidence is available concerning the genesis of the works and Sculthorpe’s contemporary thoughts about their ‘Australian’ subject matter, but I also seek to make further, largely intertextual interpretations about potential meanings the works are able to carry. I will also

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increasingly draw aspects of the works’ reception into my analysis. I hope to
highlight some of the relationships between these perspectives, especially in
terms of interpreting what characteristics led commentators and audiences to
view Sculthorpe’s works as plausible evocations of ‘Australianness.’

Furthermore, sometimes Sculthorpe has adopted a fairly flexible approach to
the meanings of his pieces, and his accounts of such meanings have sometimes
changed over time, as the following example will show. He seems often to have
acted as creatively and poetically in constructing interpretations and
associations for his music after the writing of works as (presumably) during
them. Significantly, the way Sculthorpe talked about the implications that
certain types of musical material carried for him could change over time. The
story of Sculthorpe’s String Quartet No. 7 (1966) is particularly illustrative in
this respect, even if it is also a fairly extreme example of the degree of change
that may take place in his discussions of the implications of his musical
material and the associations and meanings a work may have. Sculthorpe began
writing the piece while staying in Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts. In May
1966 he wrote that work would be a set of three pieces for string quartet, “my
sort of homage to New England, the waterfront at Boston, Cape Cod & so on.”
However, as little as a day before completing the piece he had a change of
heart, writing that the pieces “seemed to be stopping and starting all the time,
so the day before the performance I made them into one piece, & called it
TEOTIHUACÁN, for string quartet. (More sort of Sun music).” The Mexican
title (“City of the Gods”) related to the Aztec Pyramids of the sun and moon.8
Later, after he had reused the same material in the initial Sun Music IV, a
commentator wrote that the music would work well in a documentary about
the paintings of Russell Drysdale, leading Sculthorpe to rename the piece Red
Landscape.9 At the initial performance (when it was still called Sun Music III),

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9 Ibid., 562.
Sculthorpe was linking the work with Australia, writing in the first program note “[t]hird in a series of powerful works, all blazingly Australian in origin, concerning the sun... the sun that lays waste the ancient desert, & the immense sun behind the sun, the dark sun, perhaps, of D.H. Lawrence...”

It seems likely that the musical spatialisation Sculthorpe considered appropriate to evoking New England waterfronts was translatable to a vision of ancient Mexico and then to outback Australia. As will be shown, however, Mexico and the Australian outback did have some connections in Sculthorpe’s mind, and further it is possible that he had actually composed very little of the work before he changed his mind about it the day before it was finished. The important issue here is that for Sculthorpe, similar sounds may evoke different places and affects, and, even if the composer were to be taken as the site of authority for the works’ interpretations, his compositional language has had some flexibility in terms of what he has been able to apply it to representationally. It seems important that this instability should be acknowledged in relation to any discussions of the genesis of Sculthorpe’s works that draws on statements he has made at points after the act of composition. As we will also see, for example, musical expressions of grief could very effectively turn into evocations of Australian outback landscapes.

‘Australianness’: 1954-1958

Close reading of Sculthorpe’s titles, sketches and the comments he made about his classical works written between 1954 and 1958 – the Sonatina (1954), The Loneliness of Bunjil (1954), Variations for Violin (1954), Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin (1955) and Irkanda I (1955) – reveal a set of interlinked representations of ‘Australianness’ by means of Aboriginal stories and certain ideas of Aboriginality and Australian landscapes. These will be outlined in detail in the following chapters. In summary, the Sonatina has as its program

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 450.
an Aboriginal myth of Yoonecara the “headman” traversing what must by implication be an Australian landscape, and then the dancing and celebration of his community on his return home, scenes that Sculthorpe represents musically. The Loneliness of Bunjil is named for an Aboriginal creation story that involves Bunjil creating the world and then populating it with humans. In terms of the Variations for Violin and the Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin, the questions around extra-musical references are complex and will be treated in detail later, however, certain aspects of the musical language of these pieces reappear in Irkanda, a work that has as its title an Aboriginal word meaning “scrub country.” In Irkanda Sculthorpe depicts birdsong, a (presumably Aboriginal) dance and uses musical effects of distance, and a year after its composition he reinterpreted the title as “Aboriginal Burial (Irkanda).”

It is clear that these works represent aspects of Aboriginality and Aboriginal mythology as Sculthorpe understood them, but, since Sculthorpe is best known as the creator of an Australian landscape music, the issue arises of the degree to which they are also landscape representations or evocations of imagined or generalized Australian places. In the discussions and titles of the works just described, there is certainly the potential for representation of landscapes and places in elements such as Irkanda’s meaning of “scrub country,” in the landscape Yoonecara traverses and in the land that Bunjil creates. However, what comes across most strongly in Sculthorpe’s descriptions of these works and on the extant sketch material are imaginings of Aboriginal people doing various things: travelling, dancing and performing burial rites, for example, and this is definitely not imagined in the 1950s present but rather in a mythical timeframe or in what anthropologists refer to as the ethnographic present, a dimension one culture, usually the West, imagines another in: unchanging, timeless and traditional. In a related manner, on his musical sketches for Bunjil, as will be shown below, Sculthorpe drew a sketch of a kangaroo in the style of Aboriginal design. Given the absence of explicit discussion of a kangaroo in the work’s program, this seems to imply an interest on Sculthorpe’s part and consequently an attempt to evoke in the piece an atmosphere of Aboriginality,
of aesthetics and experiences within some traditional pan-Aboriginal culture (since Sculthorpe was definitely not engaging with any sense of distinct Aboriginal nations). Much of the major focus of these works seems to be Sculthorpe’s rather distant sense of Aboriginal actions, Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal mythology, style, atmosphere and experience. His interest, however, was folkloric and focused on dimensions of Aboriginal culture such as symbolism and mythology, rather than anthropological (although the same cannot be said for his writing project on Tasmanian Aboriginal music discussed in the previous chapter).

There are also several reasons why certain landscapes and places are implied in Sculthorpe’s music at this time, if often rather more inchoately. In the case of *Irkanda* the place-based name, birdsong and sense of musical distance created by various violin articulations strongly imply landscape depictions. In the less explicit cases of the *Sonatina* and *Bunjil*, the works’ programs involve a series of events that presumably take place somewhere. It is conceivable that a composer might seek to represent the *Sonatina* program through an evocation of bodily motion only and with no sense of a backdrop or landscape. However, Sculthorpe drew several pictures in black and white on the sketches and on the original score of the *Sonatina* of a man looking out over a landscape. These will be discussed in more detail below but in all the drawings Sculthorpe seems to have been attempting to depict the landscape as vast, with mountains in the distance and sometimes smoke from a distant campfire. As Martin Thomas argues, in the late 1940s there was a “rage” for representations of Australia directed at town and city-dwellers focusing on “the wildness, the character and the rusticity of Australia, which... paid particular attention to the sparsely inhabited central and northern parts of the continent, the areas deemed most authentically ‘Aboriginal.’”  

Roslynn Haynes argues similarly:

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More than any other geographical region, the desert was associated with the Aborigines. This was the last stronghold to which they had been effectively driven by expansion of settlement from the coastal fringes, and since it remained the area most inimical to Europeans it was readily ceded to them until it began to acquire commercial value for mining or nuclear testing... This was used to condemn both the land and its indigenous people as being equally primitive and inimical to civilization.\textsuperscript{12}

It seems fruitful to suggest that in this period context Sculthorpe is representing hints of outback landscape in these pieces as part of his attempts to represent aspects of Aboriginal culture, and perhaps more than hints.

By the time he was speaking and writing about these works again in Oxford around 1960, Sculthorpe was more explicit about their connections with outback places and landscapes, especially in the case of \textit{Irkanda I} (1955). This corresponds with what will be argued in Chapter 5 is a general turn to discussions of landscape rather than ‘Aboriginality’ in relation to his music from the Oxford period onwards. In 1960 Sculthorpe translated the title of this work as “the huge silent scrub country of central Australia,”\textsuperscript{13} thereby characterizing the place it represented more specifically than he had around the time it was written. In 1961 he was glossing it as “a remote and lonely place,” a shift that placed more focus on the character of the place and framed the work as a representation of atmosphere and affect. Also in 1960, Sculthorpe’s friend Robert Henderson wrote a program note, presumably based on Sculthorpe’s descriptions, that said of the piece that it “seeks primarily to portray the lonely atmosphere of the Australian bush and desert where the aboriginals live,”\textsuperscript{14} uniting in this formulation Sculthorpe’s interests in landscape and, in the Aboriginal word of the title, its inhabitants.

\textsuperscript{12} Roslynn D. Haynes, \textit{Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film} (Cambridge; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 34.
\textsuperscript{13} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 165.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
These rather more specific glosses from 1959 onwards seem to have been
associations Sculthorpe developed with the work four or more years after its
composition, especially because his time in Oxford and contact with associates
such as Wilfrid Mellers prompted him to think and read more about Australia
than he had formerly. However, a short article on Sculthorpe in The Canon’s
“Australian Musicians” series in 1956 suggests that in the mid-1950s there may
have been some conflation on Sculthorpe’s part of landscape with the
Aboriginal culture and mythology: “Australian Aboriginal folklore has
influenced him, which may account for the harshness and sometimes dry
nature of his scores.” It is impossible to know whether the phrase is
Sculthorpe’s or the writer’s, although Skinner notes that the article was based
on material Sculthorpe sent the editor, Franz Holford, who reworked it. So it
may have been Sculthorpe who identified Aboriginal folklore as leading to “dry”
music, despite “dry” being a quality one would assume would be more
frequently associated with the outback rather than with Aboriginal people.
Even the phrase was Holford’s rather than Sculthorpe’s, this suggests that such
an association is not unreasonable for someone of the time to make, reinforcing
Martin Thomas’s and Haynes’s analyses above. Such a strong, sometimes
conflated association between the qualities that non-indigenous Australians
attributed to northern and central Australia – for example, dryness, harshness,
savagery – and how they also viewed the cultures, mythology and
characteristics of Indigenous Australians constitutes a powerful set of
imaginings about Australian national identity in the mid-twentieth century.

An ‘Australian’ style?

Many people regarded Sculthorpe as having developed a ‘distinctively’
Australian style in the period after the one examined in this thesis: from the
mid-1960s onwards. In that later period he certainly spoke frequently about his

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16 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 169.
intentions to do so and the musical means he’d developed that he felt were ‘Australian.’ In Sculthorpe and Hannan’s problematic accounts of Sculthorpe’s thoughts and work in the 1950s at the beginning of the *Irkanda* period Sculthorpe is said to have worked on developing “an Australian quality in his music.”7 However, as noted in the previous chapter, the nationalist basis of these accounts and the way they constituted projections backward of later ideas means it is necessary to review their assertions. It is more accurate to say that a set of stylistic attributes do eventually develop in the *Irkanda* period, insofar as Sculthorpe develops a set of representational strategies for a folkloric ‘Aboriginality’ and for what many in the period seem to have viewed as that most Australian place, the Red Centre or outback. Interestingly, many of these cohere in the *Sonata for Violin Alone* (1955) about which there is no record of Sculthorpe indicating any ‘Australian’ association.

There is a small amount of contemporary evidence relevant to the question of Sculthorpe’s intention to develop an ‘Australian’ style, although it is conclusive only in relation to the late 1950s and inconclusive with respect to the earlier period. Sculthorpe’s first recorded mention of an Australian style is in a letter to his parents dated 25 May 1959 about *Irkanda II* (1959) “it’s in my ‘Australian’ style.” It seems likely he was quite sincere about this idea, as in his notes for a talk at the Attingham Summer School the following year he wrote “[i]he Piano Sonatina… is probably the work in which I first found my own special style; I like to think of it as an ‘Australian style.’”8 This is a retrospective judgment back on the period of the mid-1950s, and is may well be informed by ideas he’d encountered later at Oxford, but it does seem to demonstrate that Sculthorpe saw his music in terms of its stylistic ‘Australianness’ at least by 1959 or 1960. The only evidence from the mid-1950s does not identify the idea of a style specifically, only hints at it. In a letter to Rex Hobcroft in 1956 Sculthorpe tells

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8 Peter Sculthorpe, “Attingham Park,” undated manuscript for talk given 13 August 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
of his “[a]mbition to write Australian music” a similar formulation to his “truly Australian music” of the previous couple of years.

In terms of Sculthorpe’s context, and the cues he was likely taking from the culture around him, there is much more on record. The issue of what made a piece of music ‘Australian’ was a vexed one in this period since, as discussed in Chapter 1, mid-century commentators were hoping an ‘Australian’ music would develop. By the 1960s and 1970s it was relatively common for writers to make a clear (and sometimes indignant) distinction between Australian style versus ‘merely’ Australian subject matter or the intention of Australianness. Earlier Australian composers who had attempted to write ‘Australian’ music in one way or another (other than Antill in Corroboree) were judged not to have succeeded on the grounds that their musical styles were thought to be too derivative of overseas and often ‘outdated’ music. As David Tunley wrote in 1978, “[w]hat Australian element has been present in our music lies, rather, in programmatic association, itself a powerful element but not one that by its presence alone should persuade us that a distinctively Australian style has been found.” James Murdoch criticized Clive Douglas, “[e]ven with his use of Aboriginal material, the influences that can be felt in Douglas’s music are many, but not noticeably that of an ‘Australian’ idiom.” Vincent Plush similarly dismissed Douglas as one of several composers trying “to give Aboriginal titles to their pastoral tone poems.”

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19 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 178.
21 James Murdoch, Australia’s Contemporary Composers (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1972), 76.
However, the notion of an appropriately Australian musical style was also discussed earlier, at least as far back as Henry Tate’s writing in 1917. In 1922 Fritz Hart speculated, in similar terms to the writers of the 1960s quoted above, “[i]f a gifted young Australian composer should steep himself in the idiom of Stravinsky or Scriabine [sic], and then proceed to interpret in terms of music his impressions of the bush, the result could not be of any value to Australian art... [or] possess genuine national qualities.” Holford, in a passage quoted in a previous chapter, had written of the hope of “a national flavour” and “the authentic Australian tang” in 1947. And in the article Sculthorpe collected in 1951, “What IS Australian Music?” two of the questions posed to the interviewees, “can we claim these compositions as Australian?” “Would any man recognise them as such?” imply ideas of recognizably and characteristically Australian styles. Also in the context of Corroboree’s rapturous reception in terms such as “An Australian Art is Born,” it seems quite plausible that Sculthorpe might have felt that not only was the subject matter he chose important to his “truly Australian” music, but that he should also attempt to develop it stylistically in musical terms his contemporaries would feel were somehow appropriately ‘Australian.’ In this respect, Hannan’s comment that Sculthorpe worked on developing “an Australian quality in his music” in the mid-1950s is probably accurate, although I would argue for ‘qualities’ plural rather than singular.

Sculthorpe’s style certainly changed considerably at the point he began writing ‘Australian’ works, from the Sonatina onwards, as most of Sculthorpe’s major commentators have noted. However, as argued in the previous chapter Sculthorpe was trying out various styles and techniques in the mid-1950s,

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including quarter-tone serialism, and his development was not a matter simply of building on the musical procedures he established in the first ‘Australian’ work the *Sonatina*. It may have been the *Sonatina’s* success in getting into the International Society of Contemporary Music Festival in early 1955 that encouraged him to develop some of its musical (and perhaps extra-musical) approaches in subsequent works, but as noted, his development was not a simple linear process dependent solely on an initial aesthetic ‘vision’.

Sculthorpe was also shaping the meanings of these ‘Australian’ pieces and communicating them to audiences by means of the multiple media that usually lie in constellation around the sounds of a classical music work: program notes, titles, illustrations, designs and even expression marks on the scores, as well as statements in interviews. While analysis of these elements forms a major part of the following discussion, an important aim is additionally to build an understanding of the likely set of musical features that were seen to express or evoke Australianness.

**The *Sonatina***

As noted, one of the salient aspects of the *Sonatina* is that its program is an Aboriginal legend. Sculthorpe found this in *Some Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines* by W.E. Thomas (1923).28 As also noted, in the same year he made it clear that he interpreted the existence of this program as imbuing the work with a sense of ‘Australianness,’ telling the press that the piece was “based on an aboriginal legend... [and] was, therefore, truly Australian in character.”29 The use of Aboriginality as a symbol of national identity has been widespread in settler societies from the late nineteenth century, as Nicholas Thomas outlines, “[T]he deep association between indigenous people and the

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29 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 166.
land provided strong and condensed reference points for a colonial culture that sought both to define itself as native and create national emblems.\textsuperscript{30}

Sculthorpe wrote on the original version of the score:

Yoonecara, the headman of his tribe, looks out across the lonely plain towards the land of his forefathers. He makes a journey there... This is the strange ‘country beyond the setting sun’, where he meets Byama, a Great Spirit, and his beautiful daughters...

Yoonecara returns to his tribe, and there is much rejoicing.\textsuperscript{31}

A newspaper article from late 1954 contains a further description of the program that has not yet been quoted in Sculthorpe literature. In this account Yoonecara “yearns” for the country of his forefathers, and an interpretation outlining specific programs for each of the three movements is recorded for the first time, significantly within less than a year of the composition of the piece. Presumably the journalist based this outline on conversations or information from Sculthorpe:

Peter Sculthorpe’s work is based on an aboriginal legend about a tribal headman who yearns to go back to the land of his forefathers.

The first movement depicts the perils he faces on the journey back; in the second he reaches his goal, and in the third he returns to his tribe.\textsuperscript{32}

Michael Hannan’s 1971 thesis on Sculthorpe’s piano music attributes a more detailed, although later, description to Sculthorpe:

In the composer’s interpretation of the legend, Yoonecara stands on a cliff and looks out over a vast plain towards the Land of the Setting Sun, beyond which he must pass (I, m.1-10). Then he moves across the plain (I, m.11-64) until he realises that physical movement is useless, that life fulfillment must be spiritual (I, m.65-68). He makes the journey into his mind (II, m.1-18) and joins with

\textsuperscript{30} Nicholas Thomas, Possessions: Indigenous Art / Colonial Culture, Interplay: Theory, Arts, Culture (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 12.

\textsuperscript{31} Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 158.

\textsuperscript{32} “L’ton Composer’s Work to Be Sent Overseas,” Launceston Examiner, 3 December, 1954, 5.
Byama (II, 19-24). After this, he returns to reality (II, m.25-34), and there is ritual rejoicing amongst his tribesmen (III, m.1-120).

In the version of the story that Sculthorpe looked at in W.H. Thomas’s *Some Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines*, quite a long sequence of adventures is recounted as Yoonecara makes his journey towards the land “beyond the setting sun.” He passes through hunting grounds, trees, a boggy marsh, a land of giant mosquitos, and travels “far across the treeless plains.”

Yoonecara is a Kamilaroi man, and the story therefore takes place on the Australian mainland. However, it is uncertain whether Sculthorpe knew of the Kamilaroi and where their lands were, and in view of the arguments presented above it is likely that he was mostly caught up in the idea of the outback and the poetic possibilities of the story rather than precise geographic detail. What is most significant here is that Yoonecara’s journey is described by W.H. Thomas at some length, and since Sculthorpe indicated that he represented that journey in the first movement of the work, it seems likely that he was imagining that movement as an Aboriginal man’s journey through a series of Australian landscapes, or, as Hannan wrote, “mov[ing] across the plain.”

As to what Sculthorpe imagined those landscapes to be like, in the version of the program on the original score he describes the land Yoonecara is to cross as “the lonely plain.” W.H. Thomas, however, doesn’t use the word “lonely” in his retelling of the Yoonecara story or in his introduction to the book containing it, so “lonely” is Sculthorpe’s characterization of the landscape. Thomas writes more often of silence. In “The Adventurous Journey of Yoonecara the Headman” he describes Yoonecara leaving a friendly group he’d visited and their “voices grew fainter and fainter until they were lost in the great silence.”

In the introduction, similarly, he describes “the boom of the white man’s gun [breaking] the stillness of their hunting grounds.” Tropes of the silence and

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35 Ibid., 41.
stillness of Australian landscape were widespread from the nineteenth century onwards, and became understood as a “quintessential feature of the bush,” marking it as uninhabited and available for colonization. There is no evidence that Sculthorpe, on the other hand, described the Sonatina or Australian landscapes in relation to silence until 1960 when he and Robert Henderson characterised the outback landscapes he had attempted to evoke in Irkanda I (1955) in such terms. What is most notable in this discussion is that at the time of writing the piece Sculthorpe describes the landscape the program takes place in as “lonely” and W.H. Thomas in the sources Sculthorpe read called it “silent.” These are two extremely common ways of characterizing central and northern Australia, “the outback,” in this period, although traces of them are not much evident in the Sonatina.

Sculthorpe’s sketches for the work are potentially telling in relation to the implied landscapes of the Sonatina. At the end of the sketch material now held in the National Library of Australia, there is a page with several lists of adjectives, as well as five drawings. The drawings, seen below in Figure 3: 1, are presumably of an Aboriginal man in a landscape. In terms of what is being represented in the music, these demonstrate that at least at some point in Sculthorpe’s imaginings of the piece landscape was important, as two drawings are solely landscape and the man is completely absent, and in another drawing the man is quite distant from the viewer, subsumed within a larger landscape. As can be seen, there is a clear attempt to create a sense of distance and vastness as Yoonecaara looks “out across the lonely plain towards the land of his forefathers,” with distant hills in several of the drawings and in one instance, smoke from a campfire.

36 Thomas, Possessions, 36.
**Figure 3: 1** Drawings on the final sketch page for the *Sonatina.*

On the first, manuscript version of the score there are two more drawings that are slightly more detailed versions of those on the sketches. Both show a figure holding a spear, both have smoke from a campfire, and one also shows a distant landscape and some birds, although in both instances the mountains or hills are much smaller or perhaps even more distant than in the originals. The main sketch, on the title page, is reproduced below. In this version the sense of space is enhanced by the falling away of the land on which Yoonecara stands in the right hand side of the picture and the presence, instead, of sky and birds in what seems to be part of the foreground.

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37 Peter Sculthorpe, *Pianoforte Sonatina* sketches, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
Although Sculthorpe described the plain as “lonely,” in these drawings there is smoke from what is presumably a campfire, so the plains are not entirely uninhabited, just sparsely so. Yoonecara is holding a spear, and is thus depicted in a manner extremely common in early to mid-twentieth-century representations of Aboriginal men: in a compilation of trademarks and symbols used in advertising and civic representations throughout Australian history the majority of Aboriginal men are drawn holding either a spear or a boomerang.38 Similarly the smoke brings to mind the traditional ways of life described by W.E. Thomas, rather than a fairly common contemporary reality in which many Aboriginal people worked on stations ‘owned’ by non-indigenous Australians. Since the program of the work is a myth, Aboriginality in the Sonatina is in a timeless, mythical dimension, and is thus congruent with the non-indigenous nationalist interest in a legendary past rather than contemporary reality.

Sculthorpe also wrote a series of terms (most of which are adjectives) on the final sketch page for the work. These are on the same page as five of the pictures and presumably they are verbal references to qualities he thought the piece should be imbued with. Given the way he would often draft expression

markings and other instructions to performers on these early sketches, some of these were conceptualized as potential expression marks, since four terms did become markings at the head of movements or sections in the final publication,\(^39\) along with a couple of other terms that don’t appear in the lists: in movement one “calm” became part of “slowly and calmly,” for movement two “remote” was used, and in movement three “hard,” “percussive” are inscribed at the beginning and “sharply” is written later above some staccato bass notes. On another page of the original sketches he seems to have had some early ideas for expression marks, and two more terms appear as proposals for the fast section of the first movement, “brittle” (crossed out) and “metallic,” as well as “broad” for the opening slow section of that movement. In summary, out of thirty-seven of the written terms, at one point or another Sculthorpe was concretely considering eight as expression marks. Of the others, most fit very plausibly with the work’s musical character, and must have been part of Sculthorpe’s planning. The list is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard</th>
<th>Robust</th>
<th>Wistful</th>
<th>Remote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brittle</td>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>Nostalgic</td>
<td>As from a distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arid</td>
<td>Rough</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gentle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percussive</td>
<td>Gruff</td>
<td></td>
<td>Static</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metallic</td>
<td>Sharp</td>
<td></td>
<td>Detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glitter</td>
<td>Harsh</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scintillate</td>
<td>Nimble</td>
<td></td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marked</td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td></td>
<td>Serene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exaggerated</td>
<td>Brutal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlesque</td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
<td>Broad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stamp</td>
<td>Agitated</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gentle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Still</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Motionless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^40\) Peter Sculthorpe, “Pianoforte Sonatina.” Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
As statements of Sculthorpe’s planning concerning the atmosphere and qualities he was seeking to evoke in the piece, this list is valuable. The terms appear on the page in roughly the five columns I’ve presented above, although “Gentle” and “Wide” are so close to the fourth column they perhaps relate to it rather than forming any kind of separate category. The smoke from one of Sculthorpe’s drawings on the sketches is positioned very closely to “Motionless” and “Pure” at the bottom of the fourth column, which presents the idea that the pictures were drawn on the sheet of paper first and the adjectives added after, at a slightly later stage of the compositional process.

It is clear that the words in the fourth and fifth columns have a common character that is rather opposed to those in the columns on the left. In order to understand which sections of the Sonatina the columns apply to, it is necessary to outline its overall form of three movements with tempi of (slow introduction) fast, slow, fast, corresponding to the sections of the program described by Hannan above. Further, it should be noted at this point that although this is a very slight piece, what follows is a substantial analysis since this piece established a number of musical characteristics that carried over into Sculthorpe’s later works, and it is worth examining how their origins relate to his early attempts to represent Aboriginality and outback atmospheres.

The Sonatina: The slow music

The fourth column of adjectives seems related to the music of the second movement, the “land beyond the setting sun.” This movement is marked “Very slowly: remote $\text{\textbullet} \textbf{} = c.80$ and consists of almost relentless quaver movement in one or the other hand in $\frac{3}{4}$. Certainly the almost constant, slow motion, fairly constant articulation, initial $mp$ and $p$ dynamics create an atmosphere that fits closely to Sculthorpe’s adjectives “calm,” “distant” and “serene.” This is the case despite the opening minor second dyads (which perhaps suggest Yoonecara
walking slowly\footnote{This is Dan Grimley’s interpretation.}) being the most perceptually dissonant music in the whole piece: here the minor seconds are exposed and bare in contrast to most of the other dissonant intervals in the work which are usually combined into chords with other, gentler intervals that tend to soften their effect.

**Musical Example 3: 1 Sculthorpe Sonatina, 2\textsuperscript{nd} mvt, mm. 1-9**

In the programmatic annotation on the original score of the piece Sculthorpe wrote of the second movement that Yoonecara reaches “the strange country beyond the setting sun” where he meets Byama, a Great Spirit, and his beautiful daughters,” and in terms of the manner Sculthorpe represents it musically the country is evidently ’strange’ to non-indigenous Australians but not to Yooonecara, as the music is the most resonant of the whole work. By 1969 Sculthorpe was likening the story to the Ulysses myth, which seems odd, since as will be shown, it is Byama’s country rather than that of Yoonecara’s “tribe” that is presented musically as ’home’.\footnote{Sculthorpe, "Sculthorpe on Sculthorpe," 9.} By 1971 in discussions with Michael Hannan, Sculthorpe was discussing the work with more emphasis on the spiritual dimensions available in the myth, saying “[h]e makes the journey into his mind (II, m.1-18) and joins with Byama (II, 19-24).”\footnote{Hannan, "The Piano Music of Peter Sculthorpe," 8.}
further elaborations along these lines, “Yoonecara this time makes the journey in his mind, in his race consciousness, and is joined spiritually with Byama.”

Skinner also makes a ‘spiritual’ interpretation, describing the quavers as “mystical” triplets and the backdrop, quite reasonably, as the “dreamtime landscape.” Whether a spiritual focus was Sculthorpe’s original intention is uncertain, of the extant material from 1954 only the adjective “pure” suggests anything along those lines. Certainly, however, the middle section of the movement seems to announce progression towards or the attainment of something beautiful as well as a sense of wonderment, or perhaps in terms of Sculthorpe’s adjectives, “vast,” “serene,” “gentle,” “tender” or “pure.” In this passage, shown below, the register expands in the bass direction down to, eventually, C three octaves below middle C, expanding the sense of spaciousness. The tonal centre settles on Ab (shown in the previous Musical Example 3:1) and importantly the acerbic minor second dyads disappear in favour of the repetition of fifths and octaves in the first few bars of the right hand of the example below, producing much more consonant sonorities and projecting a warm sound whose effect is heightened by its contrast with the recent dyads. The country is still somewhat ‘strange’ to the non-indigenous through the clashing bass A♭, however it is the resonant octaves that dominate and the registral distance between the A♭ and Ab harmonies soften the dissonance greatly. Sculthorpe was thinking about such a fifths / octaves-based sonority for this passage of the work early in the compositional process, and this can be seen in the similar passages of fifths and octaves that appear at this point in the sketches, but he initially tried out other pitches before deciding on Ab, for example Eb and B♭ then A and E with B. It seems significant that the sonority was always the basis of his planning, even if the pitches changed. The

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44 Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, 32.
45 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 159.
46 Peter Sculthorpe, *Pianoforte Sonatina* sketches, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia, page 13 of manuscript.
spacious, open sound is continued in the final version by the quartal / quintal chord (G – C – F) sounded five bars later, projecting fourths, fifths and the G repeated across three octaves. Perhaps it was in the sense projected by these sounds that Sculthorpe said in 1954 that Yoonecara “yearned to go back to the land of his forefathers,” whereas W.H. Thomas had written much more prosaically that he had “decided to visit the home of his ancestor.”

Sculthorpe may have been trying to draw out the drama of the myth when he related it to the newspaper, but the formulation “yearning” also accords interestingly with the pastoral tropes of longing for place in his previous music. However, although this is a spacious and perhaps, as Sculthorpe wrote, “pure” passage, there is little of yearning expressed in the rest of the piece, despite Sculthorpe having written “Wistful” and “Nostalgic” in the third column of adjectives.

In the final part of this example Sculthorpe presumably represents aspects of Yoonecara’s meeting with Byama, as the very low, slow bass melody with its small registral compass played $fff$ evokes seriousness and profundity and serves as the climax of the movement.

**Musical Example 3: 2 Sculthorpe Sonatina, 2\textsuperscript{nd} mvt, mm. 10-24**

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Sculthorpe also uses the words “static,” “still” and “motionless” amongst his set of adjectives for this movement, and the movement consists mostly of harmonically static passages: for example, the opening minor second dyads repeat unchanged throughout the first six bars, the Ab to Eb pattern is also repeated for four bars (the beginning of the example above), and the minor second dyads and opening music return in m.25, giving the music a ternary structure. The return of this opening music seems slightly odd and lacking dramatic progression after the foregoing climax, further reinforcing a sense of stasis.

The musical character of the slow introduction to the first movement consists of slow mid-high register chords in the right hand and low bass notes in the left, giving a sense of pedal point (see Musical Example 3: 3, below). It is a ‘mystic’ style that evokes Messiaen or even Scriabin, especially in the context of the description of Yoonecara looking over the plains contemplatively at the beginning of the written program and Sculthorpe’s later ‘spiritual’ interpretations. It also establishes the pervasively astringent (somewhat ‘arid’ and ‘strange’) harmony that will continue through most of the piece. The final four bars of this slow introduction are then repeated at the end of the first movement.
Musical Example 3: Sculthorpe *Sonatina*, 1st mvt, mm.1-4

The opening slow music corresponds readily with most of the characterisations in Sculthorpe’s fourth column of adjectives: “vast, distant, static, detached, calm, serene, broad, still, motionless, pure, wide,” although less so with “gentle” or “tender.” Like the second movement, this section also consists of a series of passages that mostly exhibit a high degree of underlying harmonic stasis lasting between two to four bars before moving on to a new static harmony. The combination of this harmonic stasis and the spacious register of the very opening with its large gap in the mid-low area evokes vastness very successfully. This is especially so in the first few bars where the voice crossings between A and B in the top and third-from-top voices and the G moving from fourth-from-top to second-from-top, project a harmony that is only changing slightly in each of its iterations.

The final idea of the first movement’s opening slow section, which is also the final idea of the first movement as a whole, is recalled in the second movement. As the climax towards the very low-register music which presumably corresponds to Yoonecara eventually reaching Byama, a figure that ascends and descends through three bass octaves is heard below the F – C – G chord mentioned earlier. The notes played here are all Gs, in contrast to the Es sounded in the corresponding passages in movement one. The recollection in the second movement of these resonant octaves at the very least links Yoonecara’s initial intention or “yearning” to visit “the land of his forefathers” with his eventual arrival, and furthermore the octaves are suitable to the kind
of ‘pure,’ ‘spiritual’ interpretation others have made in relation to both slow sections.

**Musical Example 3: 4** Sculthorpe *Sonatina*, 1\textsuperscript{st} mvt, mm.9-10

![Musical Example 3: 4](image_url)

**Musical Example 3: 5** Sculthorpe *Sonatina*, 2\textsuperscript{nd} mvt, mm.19-20

![Musical Example 3: 5](image_url)

**The Sonatina: The fast music**

The fast music in the first movement consists of fifty-four bars at a tempo of \( \frac{\text{bpm}}{} = \) c. 152 between the ten bars of the slow introduction and the four bars at the end of the movement where music of the slow introduction returns. All of the music of the third movement is also fast, at the same tempo as the fast part of the first movement.

Most of adjectives in the first two columns of Sculthorpe’s list describe this music very plausibly:

- Hard, Brittle Arid Percussive Metallic Glitter Scintillate Marked
- Exaggerated Burlesque Stamp
- Robust Severe Rough Gruff Sharp Harsh Nimble Alert Brutal
- Agitated
On an initial glance it seems likely that the first column applies to the fast main section of the first movement, since “brittle,” “glitter,” and “scintillate” seem appropriate to music that is mostly in the high and middle registers and includes prominent use of major second dyads as accompaniment as well as fifths and octaves. In a similar sense, the second column’s “robust,” “gruff,” and “brutal” seem more suited to the third movement with its use of a significantly lower register and parallel fourths and static minor second accompaniments. However, it is actually the third movement on which two of the words from the first column appear as expression marks, as noted above, “hard and percussive.”

It is therefore likely that the pair of columns together apply to both movements.

The inclusion of “arid” in these lists supports interpretations made above about some degree of conflation of Aboriginal people with outback landscapes, or at least an attempt on Sculthorpe’s part to represent Aboriginal people in what Martin Thomas called the “most authentically” Aboriginal places in mid-twentieth century non-indigenous imaginings, central and northern Australia. An atmosphere of ‘aridity’ is created in the work through the level of dissonance and astringency of the harmonies; there is nothing lush about Sculthorpe’s harmony in the piece except, to a small extent, the resonance of the “Byama” music. Similarly, some of the other terms sit interestingly in relation to the work’s declared representations: “brittle,” “metallic,” “glitter” and “scintillate” seem odd characteristics to ascribe either to a landscape or an Aboriginal person as typically represented in the 1940s or 1950s, and as will be shown, they seem mostly to be related to the percussiveness of the work.

Several of the other words in these lists imply a primitivist representation of Aboriginal people and culture. “Robust,” “severe,” “rough,” “gruff” and especially “brutal” fit closely with primitivist characterisations of Aboriginal

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people from the same period. 49 Interestingly, “savage,” a word that Sculthorpe used as an expression marking on the score of The Loneliness of Bunjil, is absent from the list. In relation to primitivism, the word lists are not the only contemporary material that prompt such a reading of the piece: in a newspaper article that was absent from Sculthorpe’s usually comprehensive archive and not discussed so far in any literature on his work, Sculthorpe is actually quoted as saying of the Sonatina in 1954, only months after writing it, “[t]he whole work is full of primitive rhythms.” 50 The issue of primitivism will be addressed in analysis below.

The fast music of the first movement corresponds programatically to Yoonecara journeying across the “lonely” plain (and it seems notable that “lonely” isn’t in Sculthorpe’s list of terms), and the music contracts substantially in register in relation to the preceding ‘mystical’ introduction. The music associated with Aboriginal people seems largely to be confined to the very middle register of the piano except in the last movement where, as noted, the bass register is opened out as well. Such variations in register also function as a substantial element of aural contrast through the work, but restricted register does largely conform to the music of Yoonecara and his people versus the larger space that represents Byama and the “spiritual.”

49 Thomas, Possessions, 97.
50 “L’ton Composer’s Work to Be Sent Overseas,” 5.
Sculthorpe’s word “burlesque” may seem surprising to a twenty-first century reader in the context of a representation of an Aboriginal man. However, the term may be applied readily to the fast music of the first movement, eight bars of which are seen above from m.11. The syncopation, light texture, and Kabalevsky-like simplicity of some of the melodies moving chromatically around the lower tetrachord of a scale give an effect of theatricality and clownishness. Other than in the use of the minor seconds, the Sonatina does not seem to relate to the character of Bartók’s Burlesques, and perhaps Sculthorpe meant something more in the line of European representations of folk milieux such as Bach’s description of his Peasant Cantata as the “Cantata Burlesque.” The music is additionally reminiscent of Prokofiev and some of the works of Les Six: Donald Peart described it as “a charming and unpretentious piece much in the manner of the lighter productions of Les Six,” and Ross Lee Finney found the work “quite as offensive... as Poulenc and Copland,” although presumably as a committed serialist he was taking offence aesthetically. However, perhaps in the sense that it’s a depiction of an

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51 Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 35.
Aboriginal man, its origins lie more in popular idioms (Sculthorpe’s brother was a proficient imitator or George Formby, as noted in Chapter 1). It is possible to hear it as carnivalesque and perhaps even comic, and as such it is potentially an offensively condescending representation of an Aboriginal man proceeding across the outback, although it has not to my knowledge received accusations along these lines before. It may have been, however, merely an attempt on Sculthorpe’s part to write theatrical-sounding music representing movement.

The fast movement of the work, and in fact the piece as a whole, also exhibits a fairly high degree of harmonic stasis. In a similar way to the examples shown immediately above and below, throughout most of the movement static accompaniment patterns project a single harmonic area for between four and six bars, usually in the music of one hand, while the other hand often has a melody or a short motif. While the presence of harmonic stasis in what may potentially be landscape music immediately brings to mind the question of musical spatialisation, the impression of the music overall is less of a figure against the backdrop of a landscape, but rather a figure in forward motion. This is particularly the case in the example below where momentum shifts from left hand articulations every crotchet with syncopations in the right hand, to articulations every quaver, creating a clear increase in momentum and sense of speed part way through the movement. It is also possible to hear this passage as the kind of music that would accompany filmed presentation of a person or people moving, especially running or walking. In this sense, Sculthorpe’s word “burlesque” again comes to mind, and the possibility of Sculthorpe having been influenced here by movie soundtracks from early to mid-century films showing figures running or walking humorously. This implied depiction of an Aboriginal man is troubling, although not unusual for its time, given the Australian historical context of cartoons in The Bulletin and other periodicals ridiculing Aboriginal people. And perhaps Sculthorpe’s words “nimble” and “alert” might provide an opening for a more charitable reading of this movement.
**Musical Example 3: 7** Sculthorpe *Sonatina* 1st mvt, mm. 19-29

Musical ‘Primitivism’

In terms of Sculthorpe’s characterization “primitive rhythms,” much of this first movement is certainly also syncopated, with dyad accompaniment patterns involving many articulations on weak rather than strong beats, and melodic fragments tending to begin on the second, weak beats of the 4/8 bars. These features are observable in the two preceding musical examples.

In 1969, Sculthorpe wrote of the *Sonatina* that “I attempted to exploit the very special percussive quality of the instrument. It is, in fact, a largely percussive work it is not lyrical.”53 Hannan argued that the minor second dyads in the second movement were “used in order to imitate a percussion instrument”54. Presumably this interpretation also applies to the major second dyads in the left hand in the foregoing musical example. Any percussive quality attributable to such figures is achieved largely with *staccato* articulation (*tenuto* in the second movement, but there each dyad is also followed by a rest), as well as in the degree of harmonic stasis implied in passages where they are repeated for a significant period of time, the stasis of the pitch thereby emphasizing the

54 Hannan, "The Piano Music of Peter Sculthorpe," 22.
perception of rhythm. In this sense the music of the first and third movements can be heard as having qualities like “glitter” and “metallic” and perhaps it was in Sculthorpe’s intention of imitating percussion that those descriptions originated. Moreover, Sculthorpe did actually give as his instruction on the third movement “Briskly: hard and percussive.” It is interesting to note how very distant a “glittering,” “metallic” percussiveness is from the timbral qualities of actual Aboriginal music, and there is a strong sense that Sculthorpe is drawing on sonic notions of percussiveness from the Western tradition in his representation of Aboriginality here, rather than Aboriginal ones.

Although most of the fast music does sound percussive and uses syncopation fairly consistently, conversely it also seems a fair way from other well-known evocations of the ‘primitive’ and this does bring forth the question of how to interpret Sculthorpe’s comment from 1954, “the whole work is full of primitive rhythms.” Compared with Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring and Antill’s Corroboree – the latter of which I argue may have been a direct influence here – there is in general less of a sense of consistent momentum, less of a sense of constant, repeating patterns (even if, in Stravinsky, those are irregular, they are repeated more times than we see here). There is also less articulation of rhythms in the bass register, although some of that register does come into play in the final movement. Revealingly, perhaps, the Sonatina embodies these qualities to a lesser degree than some of Sculthorpe’s later music, especially some of the orchestral pieces of the 1980s such as Kakadu (1988) and Earth Cry (1986) where the primitivist gestures are much more obvious. Also, in the works written in Oxford, the introduction of more frequent low-register bass parts and an increased degree of quartal / quintal harmonies combined with dissonance, especially in syncopated fast ostinato passages, corresponds with Sculthorpe’s contemporary notion of the ‘primitive’ qualities of Australian landscapes, and perhaps with residual representations of Aboriginal ‘primitivism.’

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55 "L’ton Composer’s Work to Be Sent Overseas," 5.
When looking at other parameters of the *Sonatina* there are elements in common with other well-known ‘primitivist’ works: firstly, the harmonic stasis, which in *The Rite of Spring*, Antill’s *Corroboree* and the *Sonatina* is a characteristic of many passages that are unconnected with landscape depiction. To what extent this stasis could be interpreted as a primitivist take on the harmonic stasis of pastoral topics is arguable. However, well-established and dominant cultural associations of the musics of ‘primitive’ peoples with an emphasis on rhythm and momentum combined with a reduced level of complexity in pitch compared with European traditions, make harmonic stasis a dominant element in musical discourses of the ‘primitive.’ This stasis in the *Sonatina* is probably at least part of Sculthorpe’s attempts to get a sense of ‘the primitive,’ as is, likewise, his stated imitation of percussion instruments.

The *Rite of Spring*, *Corroboree* and Sculthorpe’s *Sonatina* all have another common feature, pervasive use of dissonance. An aspect of this is of course the composers’ allegiances with modernism. However, Antill and Sculthorpe also wrote significantly less dissonant works at other points in their careers, Antill almost always so. In terms of the potential meaning of dissonance in the *Sonatina*, it is significant that the *Rite of Spring*’s dissonance level is pervasively noted along with its ‘savagery,’ and in contemporary films such as *Jedda* (1955) a strong association of dissonance and Aboriginality is presented.\(^56\) As I will show, 1950s reception of Sculthorpe’s music expressed in terms such as “Aboriginal-motif weird”\(^57\) and Sculthorpe’s (or his friend Robert Henderson’s) characterization of *Irkandja I* as evoking “the weird sounds of the night”\(^58\) leads to interpretation of the use of dissonance as a marker of the strangeness and otherness of the so-called ‘primitive’ in these works. As Nicholas Thomas observes in his influential monograph on representations of indigeneity in settler societies, within such societies:


\(^{57}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 171.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 165.
Primitivism is... something both more and less than primitivism in modernist art. There is general affinity in the sense that motifs and forms of ‘primitive’ art were drawn upon in a ‘modern art’ context that valued the primitive or at least regarded it as an object of special interest. Settler primitivism is not, however, necessarily the project of radical formal innovation stimulated by tribal art that we are familiar with from twentieth-century modernism. It was, rather, an effort to affirm a local relationship, not with a generic primitive culture, but a particular one... in settler art and design, the incorporation of forms, styles and motifs abstracted from these indigenous cultures might well proceed in the service of a native and / or national identity without reference to European avant-garde modernism.59

The Sonatina: the “rejoicing” third movement

The harmonic stasis and percussive rhythmic aspects also evident in the third movement seem connected there with a sense of dance-like motion, and Sculthorpe’s note on the score indicated that this was the point at which Yoonecara returned to his “tribe” and “there [was] much rejoicing.” Later, in 1971, he told Michael Hannan “there is ritual rejoicing amongst his tribesmen.”60 The idea of ritual would become important in Sculthorpe’s later work, however, there is no evidence from the 1950s of Sculthorpe linking the idea with his music. As in the first movement, the harmonic stasis does not give a strong impression of a spatial backdrop. Rather, most of the musical activity of this last movement suggests dance music, and the majority falls into three (and occasionally two) bar phrases that give a sense of whirling motion, an impression that the rondo form further emphasizes.

59 Thomas, Possessions, 12-13.
Musical Example 3: 8 Sculthorpe Sonatina 3\textsuperscript{rd} mvt, mm. 19-30

This dance-like motion originates from what may initially seem a surprising inspiration. In his 1999 autobiography and in an undated lecture on his piano music Sculthorpe revealed that the main theme of the third movement of the Sonatina was modeled on the main theme of the third movement of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto. The use of Beethoven’s theme is certainly interesting from the point of view of Sculthorpe’s professed disdain for Beethoven in the 1970s, although Sculthorpe much later called his transformation of Beethoven’s melody a “parody.”\textsuperscript{64} It is also very telling in relation to Sculthorpe’s later practice of using melodies from various sources in his music, the indigenous Australian melody “Djilile” in Kakadu (1988) and the Japanese “Ise-no-Umi” in Mangrove (1979), to cite just a couple of instances. Combined with the Balakirev correspondence discussed later, the use of borrowed melodies looks to be a characteristic procedure that much earlier in Sculthorpe’s compositional career than has previously been thought.

Here, there are obvious parallels between Beethoven’s source and Sculthorpe’s transformation in the Sonatina in that both occur in the third movement of

\textsuperscript{64} Sculthorpe, Sun Music, 161.
their respective works, both third movements are rondos, and in each case the theme is the main, recurring theme of each rondo form. Beethoven’s movement is very much in the character of a village dance, its rusticity emphasized by the simple harmonisation of the theme by alternating I and (essentially) V for two bars each, as well as the strong downbeats, accented melodically through the approach of falling intervals. The $\frac{6}{8}$ signature and simplicity of this passage connotes the pastoral, but very much in village-dance rather than shepherd mode. Presumably, it was this set of qualities that interested Sculthorpe in his choice of the theme for use in the section of his own work where the “tribe” rejoices at the return of Yoonecara. Dancing rustic European villagers have become dancing Aboriginal people in the Australian outback.

The rhythmic means by which Sculthorpe effects such a transformation involves the introduction of uneven metrical groupings and syncopation. He retains the characteristic falling perfect interval of Beethoven’s melody and the pattern of a repeated phrase of six crotchets length but has transformed Beethoven’s $\frac{6}{8}$ into $\frac{3}{8} + \frac{3}{8}$ and shifted the first note of the falling interval onto the downbeat. Importantly, in relation to stylistic transformation, he has then introduced a sense of syncopation by retaining for his next note the same duration from the lower fourth as Beethoven (a crotchet) but in a different metric position, now the final beat of the $\frac{3}{8}$ bar.

**Musical Example 3: 9** Beethoven *Violin Concerto*, 3rd mvt violin theme, mm. 1-7

\[\text{Musical Example Image} \]


Musical Example 3: 10 Sculthorpe Sonatina, 3rd mvt, mm. 1-8

Sculthorpe’s introduction of these irregular metrical groupings and syncopation is paralleled by similar strategies in his transformations of Beethoven’s pitches, and both types of transformations work effectively as primitivist, exoticist means of making the music ‘strange’ in comparison with European and English traditions. Their effect also seem aligned with the comments quoted above from early articles about Sculthorpe, “aboriginal motif weird” and “the weird sounds of the night,” even if those were characterisations of the early violin works. Moreover, quite a number of the kinds of musical elements Sculthorpe uses here have been identified by Ralph Locke as common strategies for representing ‘exotic’ cultures within the larger history of European classical music since the eighteenth century.62

In the passage quoted above in which Sculthorpe transformed Beethoven’s village dance music, the accompaniment has changed from Beethoven’s two bars each of I and V to become an oscillating parallel fourth. Locke identifies parallel fourths as one of a range of stylistic features typically used as signifiers

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of Otherness in Western music.\textsuperscript{63} Here, the fourths are also static (harmonic stasis being another of Locke’s exoticist style features) as they oscillate backwards and forwards up and down a tone, and in this mid-low register they produce a thick, slightly dissonant sonority. The bitonal context the fourths give to the melody in the right hand provides a further harmonic sense of strangeness. Again, in one sense this is modernist, but as noted above, representationally such passages can also serve to evoke exoticism and primitivism. As Carl Dahlhaus notes, when composers are representing exotic or folk cultures it is usually impossible to tell what people or locality they are referring to from the musical “technical devices” they use, “without a scenic or linguistic tag” such as a title or program note.\textsuperscript{64} In the context of Sculthorpe’s consistent identification of an Aboriginal myth with the piece and his statements that the association made the work “truly Australian”, I infer that this sense of harmonic ‘strangeness’ assisted the work’s listeners in hearing it as plausibly representing the non-indigenous cultural imaginaries of ‘Aboriginality’ and the unsettling outback.

Sculthorpe transforms Beethoven’s melody by compressing its register, changing Beethoven’s leaps up the tonic arpeggio into steps up a modal scale. In the first four bars Sculthorpe presents the pitches $A_b$, $B_b$, $C_b$, $D$ and $E_b$, which strongly imply a mode with a ‘gypsy’ fourth and a minor third, and importantly therefore, an augmented second between its third and fourth degrees. In the two answering phrases $D_b$ and $F$ are introduced (m.5) and in bars 7-8 $B^\#$ is a chromatic note that gives another augmented second down to $A_b$. Here Sculthorpe has created the impression of unusual modal flavours, and the main mode he is using ($A_b$, $B_b$, $C_b$, $D$, $E_b$, $F$) is actually the same mode Bartók uses in

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 48, 52.
one of the Romanian Dances, “Pe Loc.” Sculthorpe has included particularly exoticist gestures here through his use of the prominent augmented seconds and the ‘gypsy’ fourth. Locke classifies the use of “non-normative” modes, especially with chromatically altered notes, as one of the dominant means of evoking the ‘exotic’ in Western music.

As noted above, the percussive timbre of the piano that Sculthorpe achieves in the Sonatina is a long way from the sounds of actual Aboriginal music and percussion. Commentators have very occasionally felt that in a couple of aspects the music is, however, related to Aboriginal music. In notes for a compact disc released in 1990, Skinner, credited as writer and editor of information provided by Hannan and Sculthorpe stated that “[l]inking the music to its subject, the repetitive patterns Sculthorpe employs, especially in the faster music, are somewhat akin to those found in Aboriginal music.” To my knowledge Hannan has not written anything along these lines elsewhere, so this idea may be Sculthorpe’s, perhaps influenced by Mellers. In 1991 Mellers wrote the following, in an article he presumably discussed with Sculthorpe beforehand, since that had been their pattern in relation to other writings:

> Although the Piano Sonatina wasn’t a conscious attempt to create a literate aboriginal [sic] music, its sounds and structures come out as aboriginal in that the work functions not by development, like a Western sonata, but by juxtaposition of tersely delineated structures.

In a rather similar manner, Mellers later wrote of that Irkanda I “[m]elodically the technique follows Aboriginal music in being based on incremental repetition.” These musical qualities, however, seem much more closely and

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65 I’m grateful to Lewis Cornwell for identifying this.
67 Peter Sculthorpe, Piano Music, Team of Pianists, Move MD3031.
convincingly connected to representational traditions in classical music than to Aboriginal music itself (and “tersely delineated structures” may be found in music as diverse as Messiaen’s and Bartók’s). As already discussed, it is not even known whether Sculthorpe had heard Aboriginal music by the 1950s. Moreover, his evocations of Aboriginal dance in music in the Sonatina and Irkanda I are mostly in line with more generalized primitivist and exoticist evocations, and again very far away from Aboriginal music in sound or effect.

Plausibly ‘Australian’?: The Musical Language of the Sonatina

Several musical features discussed in relation to the Sonatina so far are elements which persisted in Sculthorpe’s immediately subsequent works and which seem to have become part of how he has been perceived as developing an ‘Australian’ music. As noted above, much of the musical analysis in this and the following chapters is intended to form the basis of interpretations as to what Sculthorpe and his commentators perceived as ‘Australian’ about his works, and to see how Sculthorpe’s compositional use of certain kinds of musical language developed in this early period. Hannan has conducted thorough analyses of the published pieces of this period in his Honours thesis and his 1982 book on Sculthorpe’s music,70 and in the latter was particularly focused on how the features of Sculthorpe’s music in this period had formed into a recognizable, or ‘mature’ style by the composition of Irkanda IV in 1961.71 Whilst most of Hannan’s points are very perceptive and sound and Hannan has analysed the main features of Sculthorpe’s style very usefully and effectively, here the focus is more on what it was, exactly, about this style that people accepted as musically ‘Australian.’ Furthermore, I disagree with Hannan on some points and have new observations to contribute, and the unpublished material will be examined in much greater detail.

70 Hannan, "The Piano Music of Peter Sculthorpe."; Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas.
71 See Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, chapter 3.
The high degree of harmonic stasis of the work has already been mentioned. Overall, the *Sonatina* is made up of passages of between two and eight bars length that repeat either a pedal point, a dyad, or a chord throughout, usually with melodic activity in one or more parts around them. The majority of these passages are between four and eight bars long, and such passages frequently return, thereby increasing a sense of stasis through a number of (basically unrelated) harmonic regions, each articulated by the statement of one or two repeated pitch groups, either as simultaneities or as arpeggios.

Hannan argues for the importance of the interval of a major seventh in Sculthorpe’s harmonic thinking, and views the opening chord G – B – F# – A#, shown again in the example below, as a third which has had a major seventh added to each of its intervals. He further says that Sculthorpe regards the chord as a crucial element in the development of his own style, noting “he proceeded...in the music since, to formulate a harmonic system in which chords constructed from major sevenths at various intervals are of fundamental significance.” 72 It will be shown that other examples of chords which seem to have been formed through a principle of superimposing intervals are evident in the *Irkanda* period works. Sculthorpe similarly analyses the chord as “two pairs of major sevenths superimposed at the interval of a third.” 73 However, as can be seen in the example below, and as Hannan acknowledges, once the E♭ in the bass arrives a quaver later, the chord sounds like a decorated E♭ triad with an enharmonically notated B♭ (A#), meaning that the chord Sculthorpe talks about with the major sevenths over the interval of a third – heard only fleetingly – is superseded by a definite triadic flavour. This interpretation seems confirmed by the E♭ – now notated as D♯ – in the right hand of the next chord. After such a strong E♭ bass as the previous pitch, it seems impossible that anyone would hear this as a D♯ (especially since it is not acting as any kind of

leading note or harmonic tendency-tone in relation to what comes after) and this seems to be an example of confusing or obscuring notational choices.

**Musical Example 3: 11** Sculthorpe *Sonatina* 1st mvt, mm. 1-4

Triadic sounds continue in the rest of the opening slow passage, but the first sonority on F in the example below may also be analysed as the superimposition of F-C and Ab-Eb. Although seventh chords do always inherently consist of a pair of fifths a third away from each other, the interpretation of construction by superimposing intervals is strengthened by the chord voicing and also by the addition of the E♭ major seventh above F, conflicting with the Eb. The opening section ends in mm.9-10 with the Eb tonal centre again articulated and a very high triadic group: a chordal minor third (F♯ = G♭), fifth (A♯ = B♭) and a superimposed major seventh above that fifth (Gx = A). There are other examples of triadically-based chords, many of which can also be understood as superimposed intervals, throughout the piece.

**Musical Examples 3: 12 and 3:13** Sculthorpe *Sonatina* 1st mvt, m.5 and mm. 9-10
This colouring of triads aurally with added notes and / or superimposed intervals presumably relates to Skinner’s interpretation that “nowhere, by a clear policy of exclusion, is there a single diatonic common chord.” Skinner also argues that the “pared down harmonic palette of the work is governed by a scale of gauged dissonance.”

It seems likely that Skinner is talking about the section on “Tension-Degrees of Chords” in the book Sculthorpe was almost definitely looking at around this time in relation to his serial composition in *The Loneliness of Bunjil*, Ernst Krenek’s *Studies in Counterpoint*. Sculthorpe had, as mentioned, obtained this book while he was a student in Melbourne.

Krenek classifies all chords – non-triadic and triadic – according to whether they contain consonances, mild dissonances (major seconds and minor sevenths) or sharp dissonances (minor seconds and major sevenths). He regards tritones and perfect fourths as ambiguous and says their quality depends on the intervals they’re combined with. Chords may then also be classified according to the number of mild or sharp dissonances they contain. According to such a schema, Sculthorpe does use a range of different dissonance levels in the *Sonatina*, and interestingly although he uses minor seconds, major sevenths and minor ninths frequently, he rarely uses more than one “sharp” dissonance in any single chord, except in the third movement where he will often use two “sharp” dissonances at a time. Interestingly, this has the effect of locating his work in terms of its harmonic style as much less intensely dissonant than music by composers such as Varèse, Boulez or Stockhausen, or even Stravinsky in *The Rite of Spring*, but chordally more congruent with, for example, Bartok and Hindemith. Use of dissonance is, however, almost pervasive in the piece, with only a very few passages eschewing dissonant harmony. I interpret this degree of dissonance as an element that has assisted the piece in being received as a convincing representation of the strangeness of the ‘primitive’ Aboriginal people and the

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74 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 159.
dry, ’harsh’ central Australian landscape, but without so much dissonance as to prevent mainstream listeners understanding the work’s programmatic gestures.

Other than altered triads and added note chords, another major tendency in the *Sonatina* is, as Hannan observed, the use of major sevenths harmonically. As he also says, when chords do not contain a major seventh, they very often contain a minor ninth or minor second instead. In this sense, in the bitonal section at the beginning of the third movement quoted above on page 148 the fourths can be seen to be related to the melodic material in the right hand through these relationships A – Ab and E – Eb.

A further category of harmonic sonorities in the *Sonatina* are what are frequently characterized as ‘bare’ fourths and fifths, and they play a fairly prominent role in the work. Parallel fourths have already been discussed, as has the arpeggiation of fifths and octaves from the second movement as Yoonecara approaches Byama (see Musical Example 3: 2, p.133). Other accompanying figures also project and emphasise fourths and fifths, as in the left hand in the passage shown below, and again this is bitonal in terms of the main pitches, the Bb–F in the left hand, against the main notes of the melody D–G in the right hand.

**Musical Example 3: 14** Sculthorpe *Sonatina*, 1st mvt, mm. 24–29

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76 Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, 37.
There is a degree of quartal and quintal thinking in the work but what is more strongly apparent is an overall predilection for the sound of fourths and fifths, as these intervals are often isolated and projected as a separate layer in the harmony and texture (as above). However, the sketches for the Sonatina do contain a couple of instances of unequivocally quartal thinking that do not end up in the final work. Towards the end of what seems to be an incomplete set of sketches for the work, there is an early version of the opening of the first movement containing a passage which was ultimately replaced by the chord on F given above in Musical Example 3: 12 and then two further bars emphasizing E♭. In the original version, however, shown in the second system of the example below, the final two quavers of the first bar demonstrate Sculthorpe using what are clearly quartally-based chords over a chromatic (mid-register) bass line.

**Musical Example 3: 15** Sculthorpe, sketches for *Sonatina*[^7]

These sketches for mm. 1-6 of the first movement are also telling in terms of whether Sculthorpe was initially thinking triadically in the opening passage of the work, analysed above as a decorated E♭ triad. As mentioned, bars 3 to 4 were replaced with a small section that emphasized E♭ in the bass, and two

[^7]: Peter Sculthorpe, *Pianoforte Sonatina* sketches, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia, page 19 of manuscript.
bars of a chord on F with an added seventh and superimposed fifth (mm. 5-6), referred to earlier. The changes into the final version involve quite a degree of simplification but significantly also emphasis of the triadic nature of the opening passage by the continuation of the sense of an E♭ tonal centre through the bass movement in mm.3-4. Given that the original version instead involved movement to G and then a chromatic descent, the initial E♭ pedal and sense of an E♭ tonal centre are much more fleeting. It seems likely that Sculthorpe wasn’t consciously working in E♭ when he was first sketching the piece, but, whether he was conscious of it or not, his instincts led him to a tonally clearer and more triadic basis as he worked towards the final version of the passage, shown below.

**Musical Example 3: 16 Sculthorpe *Sonatina*, 1st mvt mm.1-4**

The second appearance of the opening material in the final piece also complicates a triadic interpretation. Here, the opening chord of the right hand (Sculthorpe and Hannan’s third with the two major sevenths G – B – F♯ – A♯) returns without an E♭ bass but rather with a new pedal note of C (m.7, see below). As Hannan notes, the restatement of material with a new bass note was to become one of Sculthorpe’s frequent practices.78 Again, here the sense of the upper notes as pitches of an E♭ chord and hence their triadic basis is undermined. However, the feeling of E♭ as a possible tonal centre persists, and

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78 Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, 36.
the passage with the C bass has at once a more floating and a more tense quality about it – it is harmonically unstable, in other words – until it is resolved by the \( E_b \) octaves that come in m.9. When the passage returns at the end of the movement the bass note is also C, but it resolves onto emphatic \( E_b \) octaves in exactly the same way as the passage below. As just stated, it seems that Sculthorpe was probably not consciously thinking triadically but his ear led him to this very clear basis of \( E_b \) in both passages.

**Musical Example 3: 17 Sculthorpe *Sonatina* 1\(^{st} \) mvt, mm. 5-12**

Two further, very common sonorities in this work have already been referred to above: dyads of minor seconds and (less often) major seconds. They occur in passages in all three movements and tend to function as static harmonic backgrounds or accompaniments.

**Musical Example 3: 18 Sculthorpe *Sonatina* 1\(^{st} \) mvt, mm.13-23**
Musical Example 3: 19 Sculthorpe *Sonatina* 3rd mvt, mm. 25-30

Minor seconds are not only prominent harmonically in the *Sonatina*, they are also the most prominent interval melodically in the work and as such their use is the beginning of one of the most aurally characteristic features of Sculthorpe’s music. Here, they carry less pathos than in the subsequent string-dominated compositions as they are not as often used descending and metrically or agogically accented. However, they are a prominent enough feature for Hannan to have constructed a chart outlining how frequently they are combined melodically with other intervals, and to spend three pages of his Honours thesis analyzing their use. The main melody of the first movement is typical, both in its use of the semitone as an isolated two-note melodic figure, and to fill in larger intervals.

Musical Example 3: 20 Sculthorpe *Sonatina* 1st mvt, mm.24-27

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Hannan also identified a prominently recurring melodic combination in the piece of a minor second with either an augmented fourth or perfect fifth, and this grouping also recurs in later works. In addition, the use of semitones to alter a fleeting modal flavour and introduce chromaticism into nearly all the passages in the work has already been noted in the example of the melody beginning the third movement (Musical Example 3: 10, p.148).

A final key aspect of the melodic character of the piece is that most melodies have a fairly small compass: usually within a fourth or fifth up from a tonal centre and down to a lower 7 or 6. The major exception is the melody that eventually attains a larger span at the beginning and towards the end of the second movement.

Rhythmically, as noted, use of mixed meters and syncopation are prominent features, although there is less syncopation in the middle movement. Although these kinds of rhythmic approaches are features of well known musically primitivist works such as The Rite of Spring and Corroboree, Sculthorpe’s use of changing meters and additive rhythms actually dates quite far back into his juvenilia and persists through most of his pastoral works of the Melbourne years. In that sense, the changing meters of the Sonatina are not a development of Sculthorpe’s style coming into this ‘Australian’ period.

In summary, features of Sculthorpe’s musical style in the Sonatina, many of which were likely important to its reception as plausibly ‘Australian’ are:

- a high degree of harmonic stasis;
- harmony that includes dissonant major seventh, minor second and minor ninth intervals, but mostly only one of these “sharp” intervals per sonority;

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80 Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 36.
• chords that can be analysed as added-note tertian but which often seem
to have been constructed out of superimpositions of a particular interval
type
• ‘bare’ perfect fourths and fifths and some quartally / quintally-based
harmony
• dyads of minor and major seconds;
• frequent melodic use of minor seconds;
• most often a small melodic compass;
• if an harmonic or modal flavour is established, it is usually then
undermined by fairly rapid introduction of chromaticism;
• mixed meters;
• syncopation; and
• emphasis on the percussive aspects of the piano.

The majority of these correspond to stylistic features that have been widely
used to represent and evoke exoticism within European classical music over a
long period of time,\(^8\) or have been features of ‘primitivist’ works. Sculthorpe
and his audiences, literate in the history of classical music, would undoubtedly
have had conscious or unconscious understandings of what these musical
features are able to connote especially in a context in which Sculthorpe
provided textual cues such as a musical program and comments to family,
friends and the press. Pieces such as the *Sonatina* have been received by at least
a proportion of his audiences as a credible representation of Aboriginality
located in some outback place, and thus of ‘Australianness’.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) See Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections*.

\(^9\) Notionally, of course, audiences may resist a composer’s interpretation of their work
and find other meanings in it, or deem it to be a failed representation.
Influences: Bartók and Copland?

While Sculthorpe’s work uses modes of communication and representation of the exotic and primitive built on a wide history of musical discourses within the Western classical tradition, the question also arises of whether there were any composers who exerted a particularly strong influence on him in this period. In relation to some of the chord construction, the folkloric aspects of the work, the occasional fleeting sense of mode quickly turning chromatic, the syncopation and changing meters, Bartók certainly comes to mind. Sculthorpe did identify Bartók as one of several composers important to him in a 1956 letter to Rex Hobcroft, saying that his favourite composers were “Mahler & Delius... together with Bartók and Sculthorpe.” As Skinner points out, Mellers also heard reminiscences of Bartók’s Mikrokosmos in the work. Much later Sculthorpe asserted that “[i]t betrays influences of Bartók and Copland.” Kabalevsky, Poulenc and other members of Les Six were additionally mentioned above, and in informal discussions I’ve heard listeners also mention Prokofiev.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in Hannan’s writing it was Copland who was featured as a prominent influence, and the advantages of such an influence in the construction of a nationalist narrative of Australian music history are clear. Hannan compares the piece’s harmony, especially the opening chord, with the opening of Copland’s Piano Sonata (1941) and outlines a fairly plausible thesis of influence based on common usage of chords constructed around major 7ths and 3rds, and progressions using common tones and false relations. Aurally, there is some correspondence between the opening of Sculthorpe’s Sonatina and Copland’s Sonata: both use some triadically based chords with added notes of similar dissonance levels so there is a roughly

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84 Ibid., 160.
85 Peter Sculthorpe, Notes for a lecture on Sculthorpe’s piano music, undated, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
similar sense of chord colour, but importantly also the register, the number of notes in play in the texture, and the duration each chord is held are fairly comparable:

**Musical Example 3: 21** Copland *Piano Sonata*, 1st mvt, mm 1-3

![Molto moderato \( \text{\textit{f marc.}} \)](image)

**Musical Example 3: 22** Sculthorpe *Sonatina*, 1st mvt, mm 1-2

![Slowly and calmly \( \text{\textit{mp}} \)](image)

This general correspondence doesn't, however, solve the question of Copland's influence one way or another. As with so many other instances in this period of Sculthorpe's life, his later accounts of influences and ideas he was concerned with are possibly accurate but ultimately not verifiable. Certainly when Sculthorpe was being mentored by Wilfrid Mellers in Oxford in the late 1950s Mellers was preoccupied with Copland's music and writing *Music in a New Fount Land* (1964), and Sculthorpe actually met Copland in this period and Copland took quite a liking to him (even if Sculthorpe's fellow students of an avant-gardist bent were contemptuous of Copland).\(^7\) It is possible Sculthorpe's

\(^7\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 215-16.
engagement with Copland came later, under Mellers’s influence. Mellers himself, however, seems to have credited the Copland influence on the *Sonatina*, describing it as using “falsely related minor and major 3rds in the manner of Copland.”

**The Loneliness of Bunjil**

There is little on record concerning the composition of *The Loneliness of Bunjil* apart from four pages of sketches. As noted, Skinner and Sculthorpe now date the work from 1954, after the *Sonatina*. Unlike the *Sonatina*, Sculthorpe has not to my knowledge ever outlined any detailed program for the work, although in 1969 he did say that all his works had a program behind them, even if “[s]ometimes, in some works, I don’t want to give the idea away, but certainly it will have been very important to me in the writing of it.” Sculthorpe’s preface on the sketches is “In the very beginning, Bunjil the Great Spirit of the Aborigines made the world & all things in it except man. But he became lonely…” From markings on the first page of the sketches it looks like Sculthorpe had initially thought to use an Aboriginal word or phrase as the title, which is especially interesting given that beginning just a year after *Bunjil* he was to title several of his works with the Aboriginal word “Irkanda.” On the sketch for a title page Sculthorpe leaves a space, then writes an asterisk, and lower down another identical asterisk and the words “Aboriginal for” with a blank space after. Then the words and asterisks are crossed out and in another pen is written “The Loneliness of Bunjil.” This point is important in terms of positing that Sculthorpe was working with a generalized range of strategies and theories in this period of the mid-1950s about how his music might be related.

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to Aboriginal inspirations, and how those inspirations should be communicated to listeners.

In terms of the title and the preface, Sculthorpe’s source is uncertain. I have not been able to find this particular Bunjil story in any books of Aboriginal mythology other than one published much later than the composition of the piece. The only other sources I was able to discover dating before 1954 were printed in the Melbourne newspaper *The Argus*. In 1947 the Bunjil story was published in an illustrated format and with illustrations clearly intended for children, under a superman cartoon. In 1952, the same text was printed with only minor adjustments and with two of the illustrations from 1947. The beginning of the 1952 version is as follows:

Long ago the black men used to tell this story of how men first came to the earth.
They said that when Bunjil the great spirit made the world and all the things in it he remained unhappy because he was lonely.
So one day he gathered the finest clay in all the earth and from it he fashioned the form of a man.
When Bunjil saw that his work was of great beauty he was happy...

This text clearly contains the kernel that Sculthorpe puts on his score, “In the very beginning, Bunjil the Great Spirit of the Aborigines made the world & all things in it except man. But he became lonely...” However, it seems that Sculthorpe did not set out to follow the legend programmatically in the piece in any obvious sense. As may be observed in the structural diagram below, the music of *The Loneliness of Bunjil* is in a single movement marked “Slowly. ♩ = c. 60” and proceeds mostly in crotchets at that tempo except for twenty bars marked “Savagely. ♩ = c. 116,” with a dynamic of *fff*. As noted, the work is

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quarter-tone and serial with a contrapunntal texture throughout, and it also contains two canons, one of which makes up most of the faster section. The form is ternary, the opening material returning at m.73, Fig. 7, and the canons and the faster and louder material constitute the middle section. The basic dramatic and formal contour of the work therefore does not seem to follow the implications of the program, in which Bunjil is lonely, creates man, and then is not lonely, since the return of the opening material at the end and the return also to the initial stately pace preclude the idea of the whole work acting as a formal illustration of the creation story in which Bunjil – and mankind – end in a state different to that in which they started. It is conceivable, however, that the “savage” canon ffff could have been intended as an embodiment of a creation process. The rest of the story as published in the newspapers is also quite different from the musical sense Sculthorpe creates at any point in the piece as Bunjil and the people he creates are described as dancing happily several times.

**Figure 3: 3** Structural analysis of Sculthorpe *The Loneliness of Bunjil*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>mm. 1-21</th>
<th>21 bars</th>
<th>Opening, “Slowly. ( \frac{3}{4} = c.60 )”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 23-32</td>
<td>10 bars</td>
<td>Canon (2 voice, cello is dux)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 33-52</td>
<td>20 bars</td>
<td>“with more emotion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bass has one note / bar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|    | mm. 53-72 | 20 bars  | \( \frac{7}{4} \) “Savagely. \( \frac{7}{4} = c.116 \)” |
| B  |           |          | Canon (3 voice, cello is dux)               |

Although the work does not obviously follow the events of the story there are other ways Sculthorpe connected it with his impressions of a pan-Aboriginal culture. The *Sonatina* had included mention of Byama, a “Great-Spirit” or “All-Father” originally appearing in stories from the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi people of NSW, but here the subject is Bunjil, again an equivalent All-Father named by Aboriginal groups in Victoria, and this again suggests that Sculthorpe was picking any Aboriginal story that interests him rather than having any
conceptualization of specific, accurate geographical regions. Furthermore, despite the fact that there is no kangaroo mentioned in relation to any versions of the Bunjil creation story I’ve been able to find, Sculthorpe has drawn a stylized picture of a wallaby or kangaroo on his third page of sketches amongst note rows and lists of string articulations. This is coloured dark with a pen, and is accompanied by what looks like a drawing of a bone or a stick and what is perhaps a stylized sun but may just be a doodle. In a similar way to the Sonatina, here Sculthorpe seems to be focusing on atmospheres and visual styles within Aboriginal culture, and certainly in the books of Aboriginal stories published in the first half of the twentieth century there were often pictures that illustrated the stories or, often, that just showed Aboriginal people or Aboriginal objects. Presumably such pictures were often included because the books were usually intended for children, as was the case in the source Sculthorpe consulted for the Sonatina story, W.H. Thomas’s Myths and Legends of the Australian Aborigines. As noted in relation to the Sonatina, it is interesting that here Sculthorpe is giving visual and textual cues that seem to be communications about how he’d like his works interpreted. The original score of Bunjil is no longer extant so it is not known whether Sculthorpe included drawings on it, but as outlined above the original score of the Sonatina and its sketches contained drawings relating to the program, and also the score of the now withdrawn Piano Sonata (1963) has Aboriginal-style designs on its cover.

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The idea of loneliness, the principal affect Sculthorpe points to in the title of *Bunjil*, raises some interesting questions here. While it is one of the major aspects of the story as Sculthorpe seems to have encountered it, and indeed the emotion on which events hinge, it does also recall Sculthorpe’s introduction of the description “lonely” to the country that Yoonecara must cross in the *Sonatina*. In the case of *Bunjil*, although the idea of loneliness is derived from the pre-existing story, it presumably also attracted Sculthorpe since he did choose that story over other potential alternatives. Skinner argues that Sculthorpe’s “regular use of the words ‘lonely’ and ‘loneliness’ in describing his music over the coming years was a conscious act of identification with what Ernestine Hill described as the ‘Great Australian Loneliness,’” implying that Sculthorpe set out to represent something in this period that was a well-known non-indigenous experience and characterization of central and northern Australia. Whether his intention was self-conscious, the idea of loneliness certainly becomes prominent in his work, and the tone of lamentation that enters the *Variations for Violin* in 1954, the same year as *Bunjil*, and Sculthorpe’s subsequent string works, becomes intertwined with evocations of loneliness in the later *Irkanda* period. The non-indigenous myth of Aboriginal people as a lonely, dying race is also potentially interconnected with these representations and will be discussed in relation to subsequent works. In *Bunjil*, however, it is the loneliness of a creator that instigates Aboriginal people’s

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95 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 162.
beginning, rather than something being projected by non-indigenous Australians onto their supposed end.

Perhaps slow, quarter-tone music played by a string trio can evoke what Sculthorpe felt was an appropriate loneliness. He also uses a variety of characteristic string articulations, especially tremolo played on the fingerboard. As the work progresses toward the second, $fff$ canon, Sculthorpe includes the marking “with more emotion,” (m. 38) and then, as noted, the canon is marked “Savagely” and seven bars into it a cello line has “with great emotion.” It also seems likely that for Sculthorpe and his intended audiences, raised on tonal music, the dissonance of quarter-tone intervals might conjure a searing, troubling outback landscape with the right cues from titles and program notes. This is to some extent interpreting from later developments, since Sculthorpe’s slowly-evolving, dissonant cluster chords in *Sun Music I* of 1965 have been interpreted similarly. *Bunjil* has received little commentary and Sculthorpe has not discussed the piece much in public, so his interpretations and listeners’ reactions are difficult to establish. In the few recorded reactions, Andrew McCredie described *Bunjil* as like Sculthorpe’s “static ‘sound picture’ style” of the *Irkanda* and *Sun Music* works, and said “a solo violin melody is breathed in across an arid background of tremolando viola sul tastò,”96 McCredie thus follows Sculthorpe’s lead in hearing it as related to a commonly acknowledged attribute of the Australian outback, “arid.” Covell felt it was “not without impressive moments, [but] seems unduly static and lacking in variety for its substance and length (not quite ten minutes).”97

It does seem then that *Bunjil* has a similarly illustrative intent to the *Sonatina*, centred on representations of Aboriginality and ideas of Aboriginal culture and

experience, and conceptualized within Martin Thomas’s “most authentically Aboriginal places,” central and northern Australia. If that is the case, it is certainly interesting that these two pieces written within the year 1954 are so different: Sculthorpe’s attempt at ‘primitive’ rhythms in the Sonatina along with what Hannan describes as the piece’s non-contrapuntal, harmonic and lean character, provides a dramatic contrast with the utterly contrapuntal, quarter-tone, serial Bunjil, especially if they are two ways of trying to achieve the same kind of evocation.

It is not known what piqued Sculthorpe’s interest in quarter-tone music, but his occasional avant-garde ambitions are outlined above and the impulse is probably similar here. Presumably also, he felt quarter-tones could effectively evoke Aboriginal Australia. Skinner has determined that Sculthorpe had a work by Alois Hába to look at,98 and this is confirmed by Sculthorpe’s use of the same quarter-tone symbols as Hába, symbols that have been used only relatively rarely in quarter-tone repertoire around the world since the 1940s.

**Figure 3: 5** Quarter-tone symbols used by Sculthorpe and Hába

| Quarter tone sharp | Quarter tone flat |

Hannan makes some particularly perceptive comments about Bunjil. Although he is incorrect when he says “there is no attempt to serialise pitches,” and was probably taking Sculthorpe on trust on that point, he does note how “thoroughly contrapuntal” the work is and how through so much of it Sculthorpe has kept the counterpoint to two parts only. The work therefore retains a very linear as opposed to harmonic sense and also avoids any necessity on Sculthorpe’s part of having to work out how to write convincing quarter-

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tone harmony. Furthermore, as will be shown below, this texture also directs the ear to the repetition of the series in its various forms as well as to the characteristic rhythmic motifs through which Sculthorpe articulates each of those forms, a point of which Hannan is unaware.

In addition, the original score is not extant, and the published version dates from 1964. Sculthorpe has carefully written “1954, revised 1964” at the end of the published score, whereas he usually doesn’t indicate revisions. Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter, on the Prime form of the row on the sketches the first five quarter-tones have been written over at some point and made into semitones.

**Figure 3: 6 Sculthorpe The Loneliness of Bunjil Prime row form from sketches**

It seems surprising that the work would have needed revision because it follows only the versions of the row that Sculthorpe sets out in the sketches, the four main forms: prime, retrograde, inversion and retrograde inversion, as well as two transpositions: the prime up five semitones and the retrograde inversion up five semitones. Every single pitch in the piece can be explained in relation to these forms, albeit with greater and lesser degrees of reordering at various points throughout the work and occasional repetition of one or more bars. The sketches presumably do date from 1954 because in 1956 Sculthorpe is on record telling Rex Hobcroft about his quarter-tone piece and he does give its name as *The Loneliness of Bunjil*, whereas in the sketches, as mentioned above, Sculthorpe drafts a space for the title and an asterisk, and then an asterisk underneath as a key and the words “ Aboriginal for “ and another space, and this

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is then crossed out and replaced with “The Loneliness of Bunjil” in a different pen. It would therefore seem that this change of mind about the title had to happen before 1956. Furthermore, the Bunjil sketches are on similar paper to those for the Sonatina.

As it is only now that Bunjil is being identified as serial within the commentary on Sculthorpe’s work it seems useful to give an analysis of the serial construction of the piece. The overall form is ternary with an extended opening section, as shown above. Sculthorpe uses a twenty-four note series in which every second note is a quarter-tone and therefore in which no intervals between adjacent notes can be semitones or multiples of semitones, as shown in the example below. It also appears that several of the procedures recommended by Ernst Krenek in Studies in Counterpoint – a book, as noted earlier, that Sculthorpe owned – are used very prominently in The Loneliness of Bunjil.

Musical Example 3: 23 Sculthorpe The Loneliness of Bunjil row

Prime ¹⁰⁰

As noted, Sculthorpe uses the standard row forms of prime, inversion, retrograde and retrograde inversion. Interestingly, he does not follow Krenek in labeling the prime form “Original” in his sketches, rather, he notes “B.S.,” short for “Basic Set,” the more standard Schoenbergian designation in English, used for example in the 1951 publication of Style and Idea.¹⁰¹ Many of Sculthorpe’s procedures are derived from Krenek, however. Firstly, other than in the canon sections, there is always a different row in each instrumental part and the row

¹⁰⁰ I have notated the quarter-tones using one of the more common recent conventions because Hába and Sculthorpe’s method is generally outdated and quite difficult to read.
forms are thus deployed contrapuntally against each other, as Krenek recommends\textsuperscript{102} (this may be observed in the analytical diagram in Appendix A). Such dispersal of the rows is an occasional, but not standard, Second Viennese practice, suggesting the likelihood in Sculthorpe’s case of an origin with Krenek. Secondly, Krenek recommends the writing of canons at the octave or unison, and Sculthorpe writes two of these in \textit{Bunjil}.	extsuperscript{103} Lastly, in Krenek’s examples showing how to compose using different row forms in the various parts, he keeps common rhythmic patterns between parts which are related to each other by inversion. That is, when the pairs prime and inversion, or retrograde and retrograde inversion are used against each other Krenek usually gives them the same rhythmic motifs which are usually several bars long and therefore this leads to rhythmic imitation.\textsuperscript{104} Sculthorpe adapts this idea quite interestingly and, as may be seen in the analytical diagram, tends to deploy prime forms contrapuntally against retrogrades, and inversions against retrograde inversions, so in \textit{Bunjil} there is not usually the sense of rhythmic imitation, but rather an aurally recognizable relationship between a statement of the prime form and the statement of the inversion in the same rhythm which tends to occur one or two bars after, for example, the statement of the prime has ended.

The rhythms Sculthorpe uses and the characteristic articulations he gives them are shown below. It is notable that they are highly contrasting and thus readily aurally recognizable, and that their attacks tend to come at divergent points when placed against each other contrapuntally.

\textsuperscript{102} Krenek, \textit{Studies in Counterpoint}, 11-18.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 9-10.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 12-14.
**Musical Example 3: 24** Sculthorpe *The Loneliness of Bunjil* rhythmic patterns

Rhythm No. 1, articulates Prime and Inversion.  
First appears violin m. 1, usually stated twice

![Score Image](image1)

Rhythm No. 2, articulates Retrograde and Retrograde Inversion.  
First appears in viola, m. 1

![Score Image](image2)

Rhythm No. 3, articulates Retrograde only, including canon mm. 23-32  
First appears in viola, m. 11. Some variation but always repeated at least once.

![Score Image](image3)

Rhythm No. 4, a rhythmic motif that appears three times, m. 7, m. 33, m. 79  
First appears in cello, m. 7, played twice each time.

![Score Image](image4)

Rhythm No. 5, articulates the 3 voice Canon with Prime transposed 5 semitones  
First appears in cello, m. 53. N.B. **fff** “Savagely”

![Score Image](image5)
Sonatina success

After entering the piano Sonatina in an ABC-APRA competition in 1954 and not meeting with any success, Sculthorpe then sent the piece to the Melbourne branch of the International Society for Contemporary Music. The ISCM were seeking pieces for Australia to enter in the international competition in 1955. Sculthorpe sent the Sonatina to them in late 1954, and somewhere around February to April 1955 was informed that the piece had been selected by the International Jury to be performed at the Festival later that year in Baden-Baden.\(^{105}\) He was later to say that this success:

was one of the really important events in my career; I had been totally isolated in Tasmania; I didn’t have anyone to talk to about music; I was just battling away and gradually settling into the comfort of business. Then, suddenly, this event took place and I became convinced that my years of study had not been in vain, and that I should continue to write music.\(^{106}\)

Sculthorpe has described this event in similar terms a number of times, and its importance to him is very apparent. Perhaps the success of the Sonatina even inclined him to continue writing more within its stylistic ambit rather than pursue what he had done in the serial, quarter-tone Bunjil.

Conclusion

In the Sonatina Sculthorpe established several aspects of a musical style that was to carry over into his later ‘Australian’ works, but which, as will be shown in the next chapter, were soon combined with other characteristic sounds in his string music. In the Sonatina he seems to have specifically evolved these sounds as a musical representation of Aboriginality conflated with a sense of outback

\(^{105}\) Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 160, 166.
landscape, in a cultural context in which non-indigenous Australians often associated the two, and ascribed some common qualities to them. Sculthorpe drew on musical features from longstanding exoticist representational traditions in the *Sonatina*, and these are particularly apparent in his transformation of Beethoven’s rustic *Violin Concerto* theme in a musical depiction of Aboriginal people celebrating.

As another musical representation of Aboriginality, the serial, quarter-tone *Bunjil* is dramatically different. Written soon after the *Sonatina*, it demonstrates that Sculthorpe was searching for effective musical strategies in this period of his career, and that his progression to an ‘Australian’ style was, contrary to existing accounts, not a process that began in a spirit of certainty in the *Sonatina* because of the alienation from ‘European’ music and culture in his ‘Australian’ circumstances, but was rather a hesitant and uncertain process, characteristic of most young composers.
Chapter 4

In late 1954 and into 1955 Sculthorpe composed works for the solo violin at the request of his friend, the violinist Wilfred Lehmann. These were the Variations for Violin (1954), the Sonata for Violin Alone (1955) and Irkanda (1955), and they were the last concert music works Sculthorpe wrote before travelling to study at Oxford in 1958. In these works Sculthorpe built on some of the stylistic elements of the Sonatina and also developed new musical features, many of which persisted through the Irkanda series and the first period of his compositional oeuvre, forming the dominant style he worked in until Sun Music of 1965. Several of these features capitalized on the particular tone colours and effects available on the violin, and since the majority of the Irkanda period works are for various combinations of string instruments, several of these timbral and textural effects permeated the Irkanda series and most of the works of this period. Many also appear in Sculthorpe’s subsequent music. Hannan argues that it was Sculthorpe’s attempts to work with new and interesting effects on the violin that had a fortuitous effect on his musical language, especially in terms of harmonic stasis derived from open string pedal points and the use of tonal centres based on the instrument’s open strings. To some extent this is certainly the case, however, I argue that Sculthorpe’s use of harmonic stasis dates back to the Sonatina, and furthermore there are quite a number of instances in these works where the harmonic stasis is unrelated to anything that is a result of the disposition of the violin’s four strings. What is new in these works is, as Hannan notes, an interest in developing a range of string techniques and the timbral opportunities strings provide, as well as a

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1 Michael Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas 1929-1979 (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 42.
2 Ibid., 44.
range of melodic gestures that seemed to have been influenced by the more orientalist-sounding of Ernest Bloch’s works, in particular Schelomo (1916).

The Variations for Violin\(^3\) (or Variations)\(^4\) was a single movement work written for Wilfred Lehmann in the latter part of 1954, and it was performed by Lehmann in late 1954 in Melbourne. In early 1955 Sculthorpe used the Variations as the middle movement of the three movement Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin which is now listed on Sculthorpe’s works list as the Sonata for Violin Alone. This Sonata was then performed by Lehmann at another concert in Melbourne in late March, 1955.\(^5\) Later, at Oxford, Sculthorpe reused material from the first and third movements of the Sonata for Violin Alone to make up most of the Sonata for Cello Alone (1959).\(^6\) The Sonata for Violin Alone is now withdrawn, unlike the Sonata for Cello Alone which was eventually performed in 1980 and published by Faber in 2002, although Deborah Hayes listed it as withdrawn in 1993.\(^7\) Sculthorpe subsequently used most of the material from the cello sonata in the Sonata for Viola and Percussion (1960),\(^8\) a work that has been well received and has remained in his catalogue. As far as I can ascertain, most of the material from the Variations was not reused, the only exception being that in 1969 Sculthorpe based aspects of the slow movements of his String Quartet No.8 on a sequence from it.\(^9\)

\(^3\) Graeme Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 162.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 162.
\(^7\) Ibid., 225; Deborah Hayes, Peter Sculthorpe: A Bio-Bibliography, Bio-Bibliographies in Music (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1993), 44.
\(^8\) Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 224-25.
\(^9\) Ibid., 532.
Figure 4: Re-use of music between the Sonata for Violin Alone, Sonata for Cello Alone and Sonata for Viola and Percussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Consists of</th>
<th>Became</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variations for Violin</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>II of Sonata for Violin Alone</td>
<td>I and III became Sonata for Cello Alone and Sonata for Viola and Percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata for Violin Alone</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>I and III are new, II is Variations for Violin</td>
<td>I and III became Sonata for Cello Alone and Sonata for Viola and Percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata for Cello Alone</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>I and III of Sonata for Violin Alone</td>
<td>Sonata for Viola and Percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonata for Viola and Percussion</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>I and III of Sonata for Violin Alone = Sonata for Cello Alone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no evidence from the 1950s that Sculthorpe specifically connected the Variations or the Sonata for Violin Alone to any extra-musical ideas, or that he gave any indications that the works were representations of Australian themes or places. However, as noted, aspects of the works’ styles form a continuity with some elements of the style of the Sonatina and more substantially with the subsequent ‘Australian’-oriented Irkanda I, and there are thus similarities in style and affect with Sculthorpe’s representations of ‘Australianness’ from the same period, and with what he later identified as his ‘Australian’ style. Furthermore, in the violin sonata Sculthorpe adopted several elements that have explicit exoticist and even orientalist associations: as noted, aspects of the melodic style and string writing of Ernest Bloch in works like Schelomo, as well as a quotation from Balakirev’s Islamey: an Orientalist Fantasy. Whether Sculthorpe was thinking of these early violin works as self-conscious expressions of ‘Australianness’ when he wrote them is unclear. It is notable, however, that when two movements of this music appeared only slightly transformed as the Sonata for Viola and Percussion it was received on highly nationalist terms by multiple reviewers in the 1960s in the context of only a few such suggestions from Sculthorpe in program notes.

Since most of the Sonata for Cello Alone and the Sonata for Viola and Percussion consist of music from the 1955 Sonata for Violin Alone, all three
works will be discussed in this chapter, in addition to *Irkanda I* of the same year. There are issues around the dating of the extant versions of *Irkanda* and minor issues in relation to the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, since as Skinner notes, Sculthorpe was very much in the habit of “tidying up” his compositions when returning to them after a few years,\(^{10}\) a habit Sculthorpe himself obliquely refers to in the 1980 program note of the *Sonata for Cello Alone* where he writes “I have resisted the temptation to revise the original score.”\(^{11}\) In the case of the violin sonata, however, it seems fairly likely that the manuscript in the National Library of Australia labeled *Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin* does date from 1955. Skinner does not record any instances of the piece being played after Lehmann performed it in Melbourne in 1955, and the manuscript in the National Library may even have been the one Lehmann originally performed from as it contains violin fingering marks and occasional tempo and expressive clarifications (there’s no record of Sculthorpe having played the violin, so presumably these were Lehmann’s). Although it is possible Sculthorpe could have reworked it in Oxford when he drew on it for the cello and viola and percussion pieces, there’s also no reason to assume he did so, and I will assume it dates from 1955. Similarly, the manuscript in the National Library labeled *Sonata for Solo ‘Cello* is likely to be the 1959 original.

**Variations for Violin**

The *Variations for Violin* was renamed “Five Aspects of a Slow Theme” when it became the middle movement of the *Sonata*. I have not seen an original, separate movement, and the following discussion is based on the manuscript of the second movement of the *Sonata for Violin* in the National Library of Australia.

The following analysis demonstrates that many of the musical features that had been used through classical music history to connote exoticism, and which

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{11}\) Hayes, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 45.
appeared in the *Sonatina*, persist in Sculthorpe’s writing in the *Variations*. In particular, harmonic stasis is a very prominent element through these violin works. The ways Sculthorpe composes harmonic stasis are varied, from open string pedal points and the use of open strings in cross-string arpeggios, to a stasis achieved by a limited range of pitch elements such as lengthy oscillations between two or three chords or a repeated short ostinato against a highly chromatic melodic line.

Other exoticist style features include the very high prevalence of melodic movement by semitone, prominent melodic augmented seconds, a high degree of chromaticism usually within the context of implied tonal centres, only fleeting senses of modes, and the use of fourths and fifths harmonically. Sculthorpe maintains a similar level of dissonance to the *Sonatina* in this piece, with some use of dyads of major seconds and major sevenths. As in the *Sonatina*, I argue that this level of dissonance can be heard as both an aspect of Sculthorpe’s return to a more modernist aesthetic than the pastoral works of his adolescence (perhaps with Bartók as an explicit model) and at the same time as a musical language that connotes strangeness and otherness: a mid-twentieth-century take on musical exoticism.

The movement title “Five Aspects of a Slow Theme” refers to the opening twelve bars of the movement, above which Sculthorpe has written “S.T.” (clearly: slow theme). He has also used roman numerals written above the staff to indicate each of the “Five Aspects.” As this copy of the original is difficult to read, I have copied mm. 3-12, shown below it.
Musical Example 4:1 Sculthorpe, *Sonata for Violin Alone* 2nd mvt, mm.1-12
The highly chromatic nature of the theme is immediately apparent, and it is especially chromatic in its relationship with the accompanying ostinato. Similarly to the *Sonatina*, there is a preponderance of melodic semitones, a trend borne out in the rest of the movement as well. In contrast with the *Sonatina*, however, in the “slow theme” these semitones are often approached by fairly large leaps. One element that becomes particularly prominent in these violin works and subsequently in most of Sculthorpe’s oeuvre is that of the descending semitone onto a tonal centre or a harmonically stable pitch; the descent onto the final D from Eb at the end of the opening section, shown above, is highly characteristic, especially as it is approached by a leap. In later years Sculthorpe was to discuss the use of the descending semitone from Ab to G in, especially, his String Quartet No. 6 as an unconscious derivation from The Abschied of Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde,* and here Mahler’s melodic style is a possible influence although as will be discussed below, such semitone figures utterly permeate the melodic language of Ernest Bloch’s *Schelomo* as well. Within the context of the many centuries-old classical music traditions in which descending melodic semitones were often used to connote pathos, and

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with the often pathos-laden styles of both Bloch and Mahler as likely influences here, the introduction of this element into Sculthorpe’s musical style in these violin pieces can be read as carrying similar connotations.

The augmented second that is such a prominent feature of the ostinato occurs again in the work when the passage shown above closes the movement, and the figure also returns in various guises throughout, as can be seen in the analytical table below (mm.21-22, 26-28, 46-48 and 236-49). As noted in the last chapter, at various points in the Sonatina this interval was also used, usually as part of a fleeting modal flavouring. Here the modal sense is constant but with, as noted, a high degree of chromaticism inflecting it in the upper part.

**Figure 4: 2 Structural analysis of Sculthorpe, *Sonata for Violin Alone*, mvt 2.**

Roman numerals in the “Bars” column replicate Sculthorpe’s markings on the score indicating the “Five Aspects.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Tempo, meter</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-12; I</td>
<td>Slowly, ( \frac{4}{4} )</td>
<td>“Slow Theme” accompanied by ostinato on D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-25</td>
<td>Without hurrying, changing meters</td>
<td>New theme, 4ths related to slow theme, <em>sul G.</em> Includes brief quotation of ostinato D-C#-B♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-31</td>
<td>Briskly, ( \frac{4}{4} )</td>
<td>Ostinato with second bar varied, against open string A and E pedal points, then M2 dyads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parallel 6ths, then Sinuous chromatic <em>tremolo</em> passage, mostly semitones and small intervals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>Briskly, then Slower</td>
<td>Ostinato with second bar varied, against open string A and E pedal points, then fig. around G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-71; II</td>
<td>At a steady pace ( \frac{3}{8} )</td>
<td>Slow theme varied, includes M2 dyads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72-93</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Moto perpetuo</em> section with cross-string figures then movement by semitones and small intervals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94-109</td>
<td>“with feeling” ( \frac{3}{8} )</td>
<td>New melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110-35; III</td>
<td>Rather slowly, changing meters</td>
<td>Melodically: semitones, wide leaps, occasional 3rds, second statement transposed up a 3(^{rd})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136-75; IV</td>
<td>At a steady pace</td>
<td>Quadruple stop chords including open strings then parallel 4ths moving mostly by semitone, then alternating M7 and m9 intervals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176-91</td>
<td>Without hurrying, changing meters</td>
<td>Theme from m.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192-215, V</td>
<td>Briskly, then changing meters</td>
<td>Two then three 6 chord pairs alternating in 3rd relations (AM, CM, EbM), followed by a repeated quartal chord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>216-35</td>
<td>then</td>
<td>Arpeggio figures across open strings, at m.224 the opening ostinato in bottom voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>236-49</td>
<td>Slowly and calmly, ( \frac{3}{4} )</td>
<td>“S.T.” Opening section repeated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two short recurrences of the ostinato figure through the movement feature one of the characteristic textures Sculthorpe developed in these violin works: melodic movement, usually played arco, against plucked open strings. These two passages, mm. 26-28 and mm. 46-48, one repeating the other, correspond to the beginnings of the sections marked “Briskly” on the structural diagram above. Interestingly, although this is a texture that becomes highly characteristic of the Irkanda period works and has received considerable comment from Sculthorpe and Hannan, it is in a slow guise that Sculthorpe tends to use it later, as opposed to its fast, “Briskly,” expression here.

**Musical Example 4: 3 Sculthorpe Sonata for Violin Alone, 2nd mvt, mm. 24-29**
The major second dyads in the final bar of the above example are a feature that was already noted as characteristic of the *Sonatina*, and Sculthorpe continued to use them sporadically through the violin works of 1954 and 1955.

Open strings also appear as pedal points in the violin sonata and in the other sonatas derived from it in short passages of quadruple stop chords. As in the other movements of the *Sonata*, the top string is stopped to produce changing pitches. In later iterations, such as the opening four bars of the first movement, sometimes the bottom string is also stopped.

**Musical Example 4: 4 Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 2nd mvt, mm. 169-74**

Since it is not uncommon in standard violin repertoire for four-note chords to have notes stopped or fingered on all four strings, and thus not to use open strings, it seems likely that the choice to use open strings here was a specific decision on Sculthorpe’s part and not an attempt to make the passage easier to play, especially since he was working with a violinist of Lehmann’s calibre. However, Lehmann was mostly not with him during the piece’s composition.¹³

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¹³ Lehmann may have visited Sculthorpe in Launceston, or vice versa, but Lehmann was for the most part staying in Melbourne. Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 162.
A further development away from the language of the *Sonatina* is the presence of a large number of *moto perpetuo* passages of figuration in the violin works. Some of these involve open strings in arpeggio-like passages that may or may not have a sense of a melody in one part. The following passage brings back the ostinato figure against an arpeggio of open strings. Sculthorpe often uses these types of passages towards the ends of movements to build texture, momentum and a climactic sense. The harmonic stasis of these passages is notable, and here it is again largely generated by the use of open strings.

**Musical Example 4: 5** Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 2nd mvt, mm. 223-25

![Musical Example 4: 5 Sculthorpe Sonata for Violin Alone, 2nd mvt, mm. 223-25](image)

A predilection for the sounds of “bare” or “open” fourths and fifths was noted in the analysis of the *Sonatina*. This continues in the violin works and in relation to fifths is intensified, sometimes recalling the pastoral topic. Harmonically, unlike in the *Sonatina* there are only a very few tertian chords in these violin pieces until *Irkanda*. Instead, Sculthorpe utilizes the sounds of open strings in passages such as the one shown above. There is only one such passage in the *Variations* but similar passages occur in the outer movements of the *Sonata for Violin Alone* – becoming the *Sonata for Cello Alone* and the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* – and then in *Irkanda* Sculthorpe combines fifth-based movement,
clearly derived from open strings, with tertian harmony, as will be shown below.

In the *Variations* Sculthorpe includes another passage of parallel fourths such as occurred as accompaniment in the opening of the final movement of the *Sonatina*. Here it is built around chromatic neighbor-note figures and is the main element in the texture rather than serving as accompaniment.

**Musical Example 4: 6** Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 2\(^{nd}\) mvt, mm. 141-52

![Musical Example 4: 6 Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 2\(^{nd}\) mvt, mm. 141-52](image)

The use of major sevenths and minor ninths as harmonic intervals is a prominent feature of the violin works as a whole. They appear in the quadruple stop chords shown above and in other passages of similar chords, as well as occasionally in the other two and three-note simultaneities through the piece. In the passage of parallel fourths above, there are several two-bar interruptions of a figure of an oscillating major seventh with a minor ninth forming a voice exchange, seen above at the end of the second system going into the third. This
static, oscillating sonority is a demonstration of the level of dissonance
Sculthorpe works with in these pieces, although there are also occasional
passages that are significantly less dissonant.

Another oscillating figure involves movement backwards and forwards between
initially two $\frac{6}{8}$ chords, A major and C major, and then between three such
chords, Eb major, C major and A major. The chord progression is somewhat
reminiscent of Bartók, but in this case it goes on for eleven bars with occasional
interpolations, including the quartal chord shown in the second and third bars
of this excerpt. As is the case in a similar passage of oscillating chords in
Irkanda, to be discussed below, it seems the percussive repeating rhythm is a
significant element of its design, and the rhythmic patterns of the chords and
the accents they’re given recurs, as can be seen. The limited number of chords
and the repeated pattern creates a rhythmic effect, and is analogous to
Sculthorpe’s ‘primitivist’ reductions in pitch and emphasis on rhythm in the
Sonatina and in what was later described as the “savage tribal dance” in Irkanda
I.
Musical Example 4: 7 Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 2\textsuperscript{nd} mvt, mm. 199-207

In addition to the *moto perpetuo* passages of arpeggio figuration discussed above, there is another type of *moto perpetuo* passage that enters Sculthorpe’s violin writing in the *Variations*. Here the figuration consists of fast, constant movement in semitones and (almost always) other small, chromatic intervals. The addition of tremolo is notable and tremolo effects appear through Sculthorpe’s subsequent string works, often creating a wash of moving sound.
The final figure to be discussed in relation to the *Variations* is an ascending gesture that appears several times in all of these works although only once, transformed, in *Irkanda*. The gesture involves an ascent in even rhythmic values through two or more octaves articulating intervals of a semitone and either a perfect fourth, augmented fourth, diminished fifth or perfect fifth. In all its various guises this therefore means that the intervals of the semitone, either a perfect fourth or fifth, and the tritone are emphasized. Interestingly, the gesture also appears at the beginning of Bloch’s *Schelomo*, and as noted in Chapter 1, Sculthorpe did say that both Bloch and that particular piece were important to him in his adolescence. Such common features between *Schelomo* and Sculthorpe’s violin works invite the idea that *Schelomo* was a direct influence on what has been interpreted as Sculthorpe’s ‘Australian’ musical language.
Musical Example 4: 9 Sculthorpe Sonata for Violin Alone, 2nd mvt, mm. 17-20

Musical Example 4: 10 Sculthorpe Sonata for Violin Alone, 2nd mvt, mm. 78-80

Musical Example 4: 11 Ernest Bloch Schelomo, 1st mvt, mm.1-4, solo violoncello part

This is, of course, the same combination of intervals Hannan noted was frequently used in the Sonatina; however, most instances in the Sonatina were in a single octave and used melodically. The exception occurs in the final two bars of the second movement, mm.33-34, where the gesture appears as a descending duplet figure.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 36.
Musical Example 4: 12 Sculthorpe Sonatina, 2nd mvt, mm. 30-34

It seems likely that Sculthorpe wasn’t entirely happy with the music of this variations movement since the work was withdrawn and the music was not reused elsewhere. However, as indicated, it is notable how many musical ideas are evident in this piece – if in incipient form – that he subsequently used to much better effect in the outer movements of the sonata and then in the Sonata for Cello Alone, the Sonata for Viola and Percussion and Irkanda I.

The Sonata for Violin Alone

Figure 4: 3 Identification of the outer movements of Sculthorpe’s Sonata for Violin Alone followed in this thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current position in NLA m.s.</th>
<th>Initial expression mark</th>
<th>Date written at end of m.s.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I, Prelude</td>
<td>“with vigour: briskly”</td>
<td>Feb.-March. 1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III, Postlude</td>
<td>“with great virility and emotion”</td>
<td>Feb. 1955</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The movements of the Sonata for Violin Alone as listed on its title page are 1. Prelude, 2. Five Aspects of a Slow Theme and 3. Postlude. The ordering of the movements has been identified differently by different writers. In the manuscript in the National Library of Australia the third movement in the folder containing this work has the expression mark “with great virility & emotion” written above the staff at the beginning. Hannan, however, identifies the movement with that expression marking as the first movement, the “Prelude,” not the “Postlude.”\(^{15}\) Skinner seems to follow Hannan’s identification,

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 41.
as there is a passage he discusses as being from the third movement\textsuperscript{16} that Sculthorpe calls a “quasi-Mahlerian melody”\textsuperscript{17} and Hannan also identifies as from the third movement.\textsuperscript{18} However, Skinner says that the third movement, the “Postlude” was composed after the \textit{Variations} but before the “Prelude,” presumably because at the end of one movement Sculthorpe has written “Feb. 1955” and at the end of the other “Feb-March. 1955.”\textsuperscript{19} In terms of the “quasi-Mahlerian melody” Skinner’s identification of the movements matches Hannan’s, and in terms of the dating it matches mine.

\textbf{The Sonata for Violin Alone, 3\textsuperscript{rd} movement}

As Skinner notes, it is the third movement, “with great virility and emotion” which was composed second out of the three, in February 1955. The movement in structured in a series of small, contrasting sections, like all of Sculthorpe’s pieces of this period except \textit{Bunjil}. This movement has a more compact and regular structure than the somewhat sprawling \textit{Variations}, with fewer sections and also with main materials that return more frequently, albeit sometimes varied to a greater or lesser extent. Three notable sections of this movement will be discussed here initially, and then its overall style will be analysed in conjunction with that of the first movement along with the music’s use in the \textit{Sonata for Viola and Percussion} and \textit{Sonata for Cello Alone}. At the beginning of this discussion it should be noted that there are very few differences between the \textit{Sonata for Cello Alone} and the \textit{Sonata for Viola and Percussion}: as will be shown below there is merely the obvious elements of transposition and the addition of a percussion part, and there are a couple of short transitional passages that are added and a few chords and articulations which have been changed. Several of the small adjustments will be pointed out in the following discussion.

\textsuperscript{16} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 162.
\textsuperscript{17} Hayes, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 45.
\textsuperscript{18} Hannan, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas}, 43.
\textsuperscript{19} Peter Sculthorpe, \textit{Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin} manuscript, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
Figure 4: 4 Structural analysis of Sculthorpe, *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 3\(^{rd}\) mvt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>mm.1-4</th>
<th>Trill and chromatic ascent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>5-16</td>
<td>“martial figure” with striking on body of instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>17-32</td>
<td>Melody, disintegrates into semitones at end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>33-64</td>
<td>Balakirev’s <em>Islamey</em> in two rhythmic guises, <em>sul A &amp; sul E</em>; then 61-64 transition passage of quad stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>65-76</td>
<td>“martial figure” with striking on body of instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B'</td>
<td>77-102</td>
<td>77-86 “A” melody, stated twice, varied slightly, &amp; at end of each statement 5ths figuration, mostly open strings: 87-88 and 99-102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A'</td>
<td>103-12</td>
<td>“martial figure” rhythmically augmented no percuss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>113-46</td>
<td>Figuration: <em>moto perpetuo</em> passage based on STs and descents; 127-46 5ths figuration and aspects of 4ths and STs, as in <em>Variations</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>147-64</td>
<td>Melody</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost all of this third movement of the *Sonata for Violin Alone* was used in the cello and viola sonatas, there are only 34 bars out of 164 that do not appear in the later works (mm. 31-32, 73-76 and 103-26). The program notes that Sculthorpe wrote for the later pieces are therefore potentially relevant to this early work since they discuss the same music. However, as will be shown, it seems Sculthorpe’s thoughts about some of the material changed.

In 1980 Sculthorpe wrote a program note for the *Sonata for Cello Alone*, the latter part of which reads:

The ‘cello sonata is in one movement. It could be said that it is a set of three variations upon three ideas – the first a quasi-Mahlerian melody accompanied by plucked open strings, the second a rapidly repeated rhythmic figure, and the third a martial-like motif punctuated by percussive sounds. I have resisted the temptation to revise the original score.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\) Hayes, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 45.
*Islamey*

The “quasi-Mahlerian melody,” as noted, appears in the first movement so will be discussed later. The “rapidly repeating rhythmic figure” Sculthorpe refers to corresponds with section C of the analytical diagram above, and its first iteration is shown in the musical example below. The passage is very closely related to the opening of Balakirev’s piano work *Islamey: an Oriental Fantasy for Piano* (1869/1902). Sculthorpe studied *Islamey* with his piano teacher when he was a student in Melbourne.

**Musical Example 4: 13** Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 3rd mvt, mm. 33-39

![Musical Example 4: 13](image)

**Musical Example 4: 14** Balakirev *Islamey: an Oriental Fantasy* mm. 1-4

![Musical Example 4: 14](image)

The appearance of a passage of music so closely related to *Islamey*, whether it was a conscious or unconscious gesture on Sculthorpe’s part, adds another intertextual association of orientalism, exoticism and the middle-eastern desert to Sculthorpe’s work in this period, since such associations tend to be widely

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21 I am grateful to David Larkin for identifying this.
22 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 118.
held in relation to Balakirev’s piece, and Balakirev certainly invites them with his subtitle. Instead of retaining the typically exoticist augmented second as it appears in Islamey in the first bar between 6 and raised 7 in relation to the Bb tonic, Sculthorpe adds an equally ‘exotic’ diminished third in his bar four, from the b 2, A b above the Sonata section’s tonic G, to the raised 7th (F#) in the previous and subsequent bars. Perhaps also Islamey provides a stylistic, exoticist model for Sculthorpe’s use of the augmented second interval in the opening ostinato of the second movement, although such associations were more broadly known in the 1950s, as I have already argued in relation to the history of exoticist musical representations in classical music, and they were also well-known in movie soundtracks and popular idioms. These kinds of melodic patterns are also very much in evidence in Ernest Bloch’s music, to be discussed below.

The “Islamey” passage of the Sonata also introduces harmonic stasis that is achieved in a different manner from the use of open string textures. It is a moto perpetuo context, similar to some of the other passages in the second movement: as Sculthorpe described it, a “repeated rhythmic figure.” However, unlike the open string sections of the second movement this harmonic stasis is not as intimately connected with violin technique and physicality, and this demonstrates that Sculthorpe is using harmonic stasis in the piece in a way that is not just a fortuitous result of experiments with the violin’s physical disposition.

“A martial-like motif,” or a dotted motif

The other passage of music from the third movement that Sculthorpe discusses in the 1980 program note for the Sonata for Cello Alone, quoted above, is what he refers to as a “martial-like motif punctuated by percussive sounds.” The passage in which this figure first appears in The Sonata for Violin Alone is shown in the example below.
Musical Example 4: 14 Sculthorpe Sonata for Violin Alone, 3rd mvt, mm. 5-12

The percussive sounds Sculthorpe refers to are produced by the player using his or her hand to hit the body of the instrument, and this is notated, as is usual, with the symbol x and a note-stem. This technique is retained exactly in the Sonata for Cello Alone although the passage is transposed down an octave and the second of the lower-neighbour-note figures is transformed by the addition of an upwards leap both times it is stated (above: mm. 6 and 9). The passage is reproduced below, mm. 81-86 (“Tempo 1”).

Musical Example 4: 15 Sculthorpe Sonata for Cello Alone, mm. 78-87
There is some continuity here with Sculthorpe’s interest in percussiveness in the *Sonatina*. Furthermore, this passage supports the idea that he is deliberately exploring violin techniques and possibilities in these violin works of 1954-55. In the reception of the violin sonata after it was played in 1955 the impressions critics had also tended to foreground the range of violin techniques. Dorian Le Gallienne wrote that “[t]he violin work draws many attractive and unexpected sounds from the instrument,” although John Sinclair viewed this negatively, “one might perhaps ask for less tricks and more substance.”

This passage is also likely to have been the origin of Sculthorpe’s idea to add a percussion part in the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, as the cellist for whom Sculthorpe originally composed the cello sonata didn’t like the percussive sounds and consequently did not play the work, which wasn’t performed in the cello version until 1980. When the “martial” passage first occurs in the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* the percussive sounds have indeed been transferred to the percussion part, and the new side drum pattern is significantly more martial-sounding, as it is literally a martial pattern, than the original taps in the cello and violin sonatas. “Risoluto” certainly seems to reinforce the martial character.

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23 Ibid., 163.
24 Ibid., 225.
Musical Example 4: 16 Sculthorpe Sonata for Viola and Percussion, mm. 87-100

This example it is also notable for the chords that come after the martial figure which are less dissonant in the cello and viola sonatas than they are in the violin work: the major seventh and minor ninth of the violin sonata (G# F# A) have become a much gentler F# A# D A in the cello piece (notated G♭ B♭ D A in the viola and percussion sonata), a chord containing only one “sharp” dissonance. The degree of dissonance in the Irkanda-period works as a whole waxes and wanes, with, for example, less overall dissonance in Irkanda IV (1961) but then a higher level in String Quartet No.6 (1965).

The first record of Sculthorpe describing this passage as “martial” dates from its first Australian performance in Sydney in 1964, four years after he had written the piece. Sculthorpe’s program note read;

The work was written with feelings of longing for Australia and also with feelings of apprehension towards Asia. It is in one continuous movement. Formal growth is through a succession of architectonic blocks based on a martial figure heard at the outset, and an expressive melody for viola.²⁵

²⁵ Hayes, Peter Sculthorpe, 45. Hayes dates the program note from 1962, but since Skinner says the concert happens in Sydney in 1964, that is the only plausible date for the note. Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 354-56.
The figure does not sound martial in the two earlier works, the violin and cello sonatas, both of which lack the martial side drum pattern. In this respect it is notable that Sculthorpe’s “martial” interpretation only dates from after the composition of the viola and percussion work. The motif in its earlier forms is notable rather for its highly static character – constantly returning to the same E♭ pitch, in the violin sonata with only lower neighbour-note decorations – and the introduction of the percussive tapping on the instrument’s body for short sections of the overall work. Sculthorpe, however, obviously thought it martial enough in the cello sonata to describe it in those terms in 1980. Probably the most interesting clue contemporary with the original composition of the passage in 1955 is the expression mark that heads up the piece, “with great virility and emotion,” which is followed by a mere four bar introductory section before the motif in question is heard. Written for Sculthorpe’s close friend, Wilfred Lehmann, marked to be played with “virility” and later described as “martial,” at the very least these references invite masculinist interpretations of this passage of music.

In Sculthorpe and Robert Henderson’s draft script for a talk they gave for the BBC in August 1960, in a section that seems to have been written by Sculthorpe for reasons discussed in the next chapter, there is a formulation that dates much closer to the writing of the martial side drum pattern in the viola and percussion work. The text of this section of the draft is as follows:

The final work, The Sonata for Viola & Percussion, attempts a synthesis of all these above. The more cosomopop a. [Illegible] title page, the composer P.S. has written: “Sydney 1958, & Mahler, Brisbane St., the city & the desert & the native in the desert.”

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26 Peter Sculthorpe, “BBC Talk,” ascribed to “late 50s” on the manuscript but the actual date of composition is August 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia, 4.
Here, it seems that Sculthorpe is calling the martial pattern “cosmopolitan” and the other music “native Australian.” This is supported in his much later statements in a 1993 article on duality, a concept through which Sculthorpe often later interpreted his work, in which he described the “martial figure” as “a forceful rhythmic figure... [that] is clearly railing against Europe; but my annoyance is erased by Mahlerian yearning [the character of the other idea]. The work is a demonstration of the complex relationship many of us have with Europe.”

Sculthorpe was later also to retrospectively discuss his incomplete work Prophecy, written in Launceston and Oxford in 1958 in similar terms, saying that the work had consisted of two sections and “without realising it” one had posited the idea of the wilderness as a source of Australian creativity, and the other formed a contrast in terms of its old world / European references: “a rather complex tango-like rhythm...like some half-remembered dance music gone awry.”

(It is interesting that to a young Australian the tango was marked as an Old World gesture, not New World Argentinian.) Given that Wilfrid Mellers’s later description of some of Irkanda IV as containing “parodistic hints of urban tangoid musics,” this interpretation could well have been Mellers’s. If this is the case, it is also likely that Mellers interpreted two streams in Sculthorpe’s music when they met in England, old world European and new world Australian, and consequently these informed Sculthorpe’s composition of the Sonata for Viola and Percussion in which the “martial music” of the piece is intended to be ‘European.’ In respect of the earlier violin and cello versions, however, such an interpretation seems to be a projection backwards.

Similarly, it seems very unlikely the original dotted figure connoted “railing against Europe” when Sculthorpe wrote the music in 1955. As discussed in the previous chapter, the anti-European cultural stance was much more in line with Sculthorpe’s thinking in the late-1960s rather than the mid-1950s, and

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28 Sculthorpe, Sun Music, 45.
when Sculthorpe made the “railing against Europe” comment in 1993 it was clearly a very long time after the composition of the work. Also, in the interim, ideas that the Irkanda period pieces were in several respects still retaining some European characteristics had become a theme in some Sculthorpe commentary, and this was especially the case during and after Sculthorpe’s anti-European philosophies had developed in the mid to late-1960s. As noted in Chapter 2, at the end of the Irkanda period Sculthorpe was looking back on his music as too expressionistic and “too European” in terms of his future compositional direction. Hannan wrote in 1982 of the music around the time of the Sonata for Viola and Percussion that “the need to create an Australian style for his music resulted in conflict with his European-influenced attitudes, which, though unresolved, produced a personal style of considerable uniqueness and consistency.”

Traces of perceived ‘Europeanness’ in Sculthorpe’s music were producing a problem for the narrative of Sculthorpe’s 1950s and 1960s Australianness, and it is interesting that Hannan’s strategy in resolving them is to turn, a little defensively perhaps, to ideas of originality and personal authenticity. Sculthorpe’s thinking, after the period of his more emphatically anti-European philosophy, moved to the notion of a duality between Europe and Australia, and mainland Australia and Tasmania, a conceptualization he started applying to intrepreadions of his work from 1972.

Wilfrid Mellers interpreted Irkanda IV and the Irkanda period works in a similarly ‘European’ way, but in a teleological rather than dualistic framework, writing that in Irkanda IV that “it is a relinquishment of Europe. Several European ghosts, Bloch and Bartok among them, are laid to rest, while Mahler’s threnody for the old world is obliquely recalled.” He then discussed the “urban tangoid musics” as quoted above. As will be seen, the passage of Irkanda

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30 Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 47.
IV that Mellers refers to here is actually an arrangement of the “martial motif” and its martial drum pattern from the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*.

Others heard ‘Europe’ in the viola and percussion sonata too. Roderick Biss, who worked for Sculthorpe’s later publisher Faber, had written on promotional material that “[i]n view of the composer’s self-imposed mission to forge an Australian musical language, this work does, at first hearing, strike the listener as being remarkably European.”33 Contrastingly, however, in 1969 Andrew McCredie was willing to hear works as far back as the *Sonatina* and *Bunjil* as having successfully disengaged with Europe, writing that in them Sculthorpe had “rejected any imitation of European styles in favour of an aggressive but eloquent Australianism.”34

Evident here is quite a substantial amount of confusion as commentators try to attribute ‘Australianness’ and ‘Europeanness’ to material in Sculthorpe’s early compositions and Sculthorpe, retrospectively, joins in. The instability of such binaries is abundantly evident. However, the question of how Sculthorpe varied the motif musically is more interesting, as (perhaps in a later version of the score) it takes on a funeral march *topos* which, as will be discussed, is typical of a trend that seems to have facilitated interpretations of the loneliness of ‘the’ Australian bush in his works. This kind of musical expression, however, then contributed to the soul-searching in the mid-1960s mentioned above as to whether the whole *Irkanda* idiom was too expressionistic and therefore too European for Sculthorpe’s overall ‘Australian’ aesthetic goals. Despite Sculthorpe’s positive reception as the creator of an Australian idiom in music, there have been elements of anxiety through the endeavor.

Sculthorpe’s compositional use of the martial drum pattern and “martial motif” throughout the piece involves both integration and transformation. The new

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33 Roderick Biss, “Peter Sculthorpe” undated Faber promotional material, typed photocopy, Peter Sculthorpe file, Australian Music Centre.
34 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 162.
six bar percussion introduction Sculthorpe wrote for the entire piece picks up
the martial percussion music accompanying the melodic motif, and the piece
begins with the dotted rhythm so characteristic of it. Martial drum sounds thus
become a characteristic element through various sections of the work. Hannan
felt that the new martial drum pattern “destroys the character of the original
melody.”

The figure does not always appear in a martial guise, however. What is most
evident in the music of the Sonata for Viola and Percussion is the amount of
variation the “martial figure” – and many other elements of the work – receive
when they are restated. Indeed in 1993 Sculthorpe called the work “a double set
of variations.” The figure first appears at m.89 as quoted above. It then returns
at m.157 articulated with harmonics (as had also been the case in the cello
sonata) and with the martial figure played on the tom-tom, sounding similar to
the side drum at m.89. The next return at m.205, shown in the example below,
is much slower than the previous “Risoluto = ca. 104,” as the marking is now
“Poco Lento = ca.96.” The character of the motif has changed considerably,
not least because it is transposed a fifth below its initial statement and is
different tonally and in terms of tessitura. The military martial sense in the
percussion is eschewed completely now in favour of a more funeral march-like
character, with soft sticks on tom-tom leading into tam-tam brushes on the rim
and punctuations with the bass drum. Where these latter occur, with more
recurrences of the initial motif at m.211 (Fig.21) and m.217 there is more
substantial variation. The first statement in this passage (Fig.21) introduces
plucked open string chords as punctuating elements with the percussion just
described.

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35 Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 45.
The second statement is even more significant: continuing the same slow tempo it is now marked “Alla marcia funebre.” The dotted figure is harmonized by a wide-register chord and then by romantic-sounding parallel sixths, and a climactic sense and thickening of the texture are created by an $f f$ dynamic and a roll on the tom-tom. This is all repeated at m.227. The chords and in fact all the pitches are derived from the *Sonata for Cello Alone*, but the percussion texture is obviously new and the dynamics and expression markings are notched up (the cello sonata is $f$ and “with much expression” then “intensely”). I have not seen an original manuscript for this work, and the published version dates from 1979 so these alterations may date from 1960 or from much later. Certainly the 1979 version includes adjustments to the percussion parts away from the
version in the earlier sketches.\textsuperscript{37} Some of the aspects of this passage as it stands in the 1979 edition are more in line with developments in Sculthorpe’s musical language from 1961 and the composition of \textit{Irkanda IV}, written in response to the death of his father and described as “a ritual lamentation” in a later program note: the passage in the \textit{Sonata} that is marked “Alla marcia funebre” is one such instance.\textsuperscript{38} Additionally, as noted, some of the music in \textit{Irkanda IV} is actually derived from the “martial” passage of the \textit{Sonata for Viola and Percussion}. Like the sonata, \textit{Irkanda IV} combines a percussion part with strings (here, string ensemble plus solo violin), and from m.79 (Fig.7) a slightly altered but clearly recognizable version of the “martial motif” is accompanied by the viola and percussion piece’s original martial tom-tom rhythm (shown in the example below from “Deciso”). Skinner notes that later Sculthorpe took to describing the second, accompanied statement of this passage in \textit{Irkanda IV} (m.89) as “Quasi marcia funebre.”\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{Musical Example 4: 18} Sculthorpe \textit{Irkanda IV}, mm. 76-86

\begin{music}
\begin{verbatim}
poco rall. ---- Deciso [i.e.72]
\end{verbatim}
\end{music}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{37} Peter Sculthorpe, sketches labeled “V & P” (in later hand), Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia. The first page of these sketches does not seem to relate to the \textit{Sonata for Viola and Percussion}, however the subsequent five pages do.
\textsuperscript{38} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 256.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 257.
What seems to have happened is that the 1960 “cosmopolitan” martial intentions at some points in the work morph and develop into the grief-oriented aspects of Sculthorpe’s *Irkanda* style, partly as part of the variation process, but more explicitly in *Irkanda IV* itself, with a funeral march topos whose pathos seemed at least to some of his listeners to evoke a loneliness they felt was appropriate to ‘the’ Australian landscape, or perhaps an Australian cultural condition. Sculthorpe, after all, was translating *Irkanda* as “a remote and lonely place” in the 1960s, and with such clues, this is certainly how several critics seem to have heard it. Roger Covell said of Sculthorpe’s music generally in 1967 that it “does seem... to convey in often satisfactory and often moving terms the loneliness and sadness induced in many sensitive observers by some of the typical elements of the Australian landscape.”

Covell had a similar response to the 1964 Sydney premiere of the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, writing of “the lonely human agony of the viola” and Martin Long said the work “creates an almost palpable atmosphere of spacious loneliness.”

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41 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 353.
'Australian' Comments

The notes for a talk Sculthorpe gave at the first performance of the Sonata for Viola and Percussion in August 1960 at the Attingham School mention Mahler, Launceston and “the city,” similarly to the draft of the BBC talk of the same month quoted above:

> It was completed about a month ago & there is no dedication; instead, at the beginning of the work, I’ve written ‘In retrospect: Sydney 1958, & Mahler; Brisbane St [Launceston]; the city & the desert & the native in the desert’

The description of the note on the original score of the Sonata for Viola and Percussion dates from Sculthorpe’s time in Oxford. Since the music was almost entirely written in 1955 it seems strange that Sculthorpe is remembering “Sydney 1958,” but perhaps this is a later memory, associated with Mahler, that seemed appropriate (the Mahler reference will be discussed below). Skinner makes no mention of Sculthorpe travelling to Sydney in 1958, so if Sculthorpe did so his activities are unrecorded. “Brisbane St” refers to the main street of Launceston, where Sculthorpe certainly spent much time and had many associations, both at the time the music was originally composed in 1955 as well as earlier and later.

The Australian references in these notes and comments present similar issues. Sculthorpe’s statement in the 1964 program note that “[t]he work was written with feelings of longing for Australia and also with feelings of apprehension towards Asia” seems anomalous in respect to him actually having written the music when he was in Launceston in 1955, but perhaps he is referring to the addition of the percussion part. However, as discussed above, it was enough of a textual reference to Australia for a number of critics in 1964 and the few years afterwards to hear the work in highly nationalist terms (and for devoted

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43 Peter Sculthorpe, manuscript of talk given at Attingham Summer School, undated, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia. At the top of the manuscript “Attingham Park” is written in Sculthorpe’s later hand. The talk was given on 13 August, 1960, ibid., 245.
followers of Sculthorpe’s ostensible rival, the composer Richard Meale to dub it the “Asian Threat Concerto”). 43 It is hard to imagine Sculthorpe having any particular reason to feel apprehensive towards Asia in 1955, whereas by 1964 he had been teaching several Asian musics in the ethnomusicology class at the University of Sydney for a year, and was on the verge of incorporating Asian influences in his own music. “The city” presumably relates to his 1960 score inscription, “Sydney, 1958.”

“The desert, & the native in the desert” is the most difficult to interpret. Perhaps the 1960 addition of the percussion layer was imagined by Sculthorpe as allowing the music to evoke the idea of the desert and an Aboriginal person in the desert. At various points in the piece the percussion forms a static background behind a melody and thus the percussion assists in allowing the piece to be heard in terms of a figure in an often rather timbrally dry percussion landscape. This is potentially also the case in the earlier versions in which, as discussed below, the expressive melody is accompanied by dry pizzicato chords. Again, these were the terms in which Roger Covell for instance heard the viola and percussion work in 1964, writing of “the dry gasps and desert glare of its percussion encircling the lonely human agony of the viola… a rigorously static work, unmistakably subjective in its quasi-Bartókian self-laceration. The sound is parched…”44 A couple of decades later, John Noble wrote that the piece is “a work reflecting some of the composer’s Sun Music ideas with echoes of Australia’s lonely shimmering spaces.”45

A “quasi-Mahlerian melody” and Landscape Music

The stasis of the passages just described – both harmonic stasis and unpitched percussion used texturally – creates a sense of musical spatialisation in

43 Ibid., 356.
44 Ibid., 353.
common with musical landscape topics from the classical musical canon. In
combination with hints from program notes this sense of musical space allowed
commentators quoted above to hear representations of landscapes, especially of
outback Australian landscapes when articulated in the ‘dry’ timbres of certain
percussion instruments and pizzicato strings.

A musically similar example in terms of texture and stasis and one which
Hannan argued was particularly consequential in terms of Sculthorpe’s ongoing
compositional practice, is a passage in the first movement of the Sonata for
Violin Alone that Sculthorpe described in 1980 as a “quasi-Mahlerian melody
accompanied by plucked open strings” and in 1964 as “an expressive melody for
viola.” As will be shown later, the passage is very similar to some of the most
characteristic music of Irkanda I, Irkanda II, Irkanda IV and String Quartet
No.6, and therefore this is one of the dominant textures in Sculthorpe’s Irkanda
period. Hannan wrote in 1982 that “Sculthorpe’s mature personal idiom is
represented by this passage of eight measures more than by any other passage
of music from this early period.” An important aspect missing from the
existing discussion of the character of this significant idiom in Sculthorpe’s
work is its potential to evoke landscape.

In the solo string works such textures involve melodies set against various
open-string pedal points, usually with two strings deployed as pedals at a time.
In the ensemble works the melodies are against mostly static dissonant chords,
sometimes with just a little movement in the bass or voicings, and often with
bass notes stemming from open strings of the lower instruments in the
ensembles. In the solo works, Hannan analyses these passages as forming
appoggiaturas against a basic chord articulated by the open strings: in the

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46 See examples discussed in Julian Johnson, Webern and the Transformation of Nature
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially 64-65; Daniel M. Grimley,
"The Tone Poems: Genre, Landscape and Structural Perspective," in The Cambridge
Companion to Sibelius, ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge
University Press, 2004), 105-06.
47 Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 44.
example from the first movement of the *Sonata for Violin Alone* shown below that chord is triadic on G and the 5th above the bass, D, is consonant with it, as are B and B♭. The other pitches, such as F♯, A and C♯ can be heard as embellishments or appoggiaturas of the chord notes48 and eventually resolve to them, but the rhythmic dispersal of the embellishments in relation to the consonances, and the lengthy duration and emphasis on especially the chromatic pitches have more in common with Mahler, Hannan implies, than traditional appoggiatura usage. In 1989 Sculthorpe described similar procedures in Mahler's music, “[t]he melody is often out of step with the harmony, like gigantic suspensions: the melody is about to resolve to where the harmony is and at that point the harmony moves.”49

**Musical Example 4: 19** Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 1st mvt, mm. 21-30

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48 Ibid., 43.
Sculthorpe clearly associated some aspect(s) of these pieces with Mahler as early as 1960 when he said he wrote “Mahler” on the score to the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*. As noted already, there is good evidence for the importance of Mahler’s work to him in his early development. Another record of substantial discussion of influence from Mahler is Hannan’s 1979 PhD which was the basis of his 1982 book *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, on which the above analysis is based. Interestingly, it was in the 1980 cello sonata program note that Sculthorpe first described this melody as “quasi-Mahlerian” whereas in 1964 he called it “an expressive melody for viola.”

Perhaps the idea of the Mahlerian connection came from Hannan, or at the very least was reignited by Hannan. Hannan argues that Sculthorpe’s style here:

> is most influenced by Gustav Mahler’s extensive use of appoggiatura, but, unlike Mahler, who uses the gamut of chromatic triadic harmony as the framework for his melodic appoggiatura, Sculthorpe limits his framework to one chord.\(^9\)

Certainly there are similarities between some of Mahler’s melodies and Sculthorpe’s here: chromatic and often dissonant appoggiaturas, large leaps giving a sometimes swooping quality and frequent semitones. Also, as Sculthorpe was later to note, his work shares “long-held funereal pedal points”

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\(^9\) Hayes, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 45.

\(^{9}\) Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, 43.
(The Abschied) and “a dependence on tam-tam punctuation” with Mahler’s. In these respects, there are some sonic resonances of Mahler in Sculthorpe’s work, and that is most the case in Mahler’s pathos-laden passages, or in his recollections of funeral marches. In many other respects, however, Sculthorpe’s music sounds very unlike Mahler’s. Despite the melodic resemblances just described, Mahler’s highly contrapuntal textures and usually much more rapid harmonic rhythm than Sculthorpe’s present a pronounced aural contrast with the static harmonic background of similar sections in Sculthorpe’s work.

Sculthorpe does say in relation to some of the comparisons “[i]t is possible that in hindsight I am being somewhat fanciful.” It is most likely that Mahler’s music was highly influential for Sculthorpe but that other aspects of the latter’s style have aurally masked some of the Mahlerian connections. Importantly it was the influence of aspects of Mahler’s melodic style against the harmonic stasis already observed in Sculthorpe’s music that contributed to the texture of a pathos-laden melody able to sound as a human voice or subjectivity against a spacious background, with the potential for this to be heard as landscape.

Before analyzing the above melody from the first movement in relation to other models and connotations, it should be noted that it is a version of one of the melodies in the third movement, which, as noted, was composed before the first. Within the structure of the third movement, ABCAB’A’DB, this melody, shown below, is the main material of each of the “B” sections, and follows on immediately from the statement of the so-called “martial” figure.

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53 Ibid., 112.
Musical Example 4: 20 Sculthorpe Sonata for Violin Alone, 3rd mvt, mm. 17-22

This melody was the basis for the “Mahlerian” one, and as such it also consists mostly of semitone movement and large leaps. Texturally, it is given very different treatment, however. At no point in the violin, cello or viola sonatas does this melody have any kind of pitched accompaniment, let alone a static one, and in the Sonata for Viola and Percussion it is initially accompanied by the martial semiquaver drum pattern (mm.105-20, shown below). Afterwards, when it is stated in emphatic pizzicato firstly it has no percussion accompaniment (mm.173-84) and then is only accompanied very soft bass drum roll (mm.185-204). The presence of this melody in both the “cosmopolitan” and “Mahlerian” sections undermines Sculthorpe’s presentation of a binary opposition between them, at least in relation to earlier versions of the music.

Musical Example 4: 21 Sculthorpe Sonata for Viola and Percussion, mm. 101-14
Musical Example 4: 22 Sculthorpe *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, mm. 173-79

What Sculthorpe referred to as his “Mahlerian” melody is, conversely, always given a potentially more expressive *arco* articulation, and accompanied with highly static textures. In the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* the melody is firstly stated with very little percussion (mm.27-36), and as in the violin and cello sonatas the sense of a background texture is created solely by the plucked open strings. In subsequent statements it is accompanied by fairly texturalist percussion of metallic tam-tam and cymbals, as well as spare bass drum and tom-tom articulations which, rather unusually for Sculthorpe, are unsyncopated and emphasise the first and third beats of the bar (mm.49-60, shown below). Although these are in ¾ their steady, almost inexorable character has a little of the aspect of a funeral march. The third time the melody occurs, mm.253-64 (Fig.25††), there is hardly any open string pizzicato, and the percussion part involves what Sculthorpe sees as his signature percussion sound, the tam-tam played on the rim.
Musical Example 4: 23 Sculthorpe Sonata for Viola and Percussion, mm. 49-56

The emotionally bleak, exoticist “quasi-Mahlerian” melody here against static, dry pizzicato or percussion background presents a musical picture of a human subjectivity in a dry landscape. Perhaps Sculthorpe did mean something like this when he wrote “the desert & the native in the desert” in relation to the Sonata for Viola and Percussion in 1960. As already noted, his listeners in Sydney in 1964 and in later years, with the brief suggestion “a yearning for Australia” in the program notes and in the context of Sculthorpe’s oeuvre as a whole, received this work in terms of ‘Australianness’ and the outback. Some of the responses to the work have already been quoted; from the point of view of landscape depiction it is notable commentators responded with ideas of “desert glare” and “shimmering spaces” – clearly the static percussion – surrounding the “lonely human agony of the viola.” Does this mean that the human subjectivity in the piece is, in Sculthorpe’s uncomfortable but not atypical 1960s formulation, “the native”? If so, here a typically non-indigenous response to the
Australian outback – that it is lonely and provokes agony – is projected onto Indigenous Australians who are in reality, of course, at home in the outback landscape in ways most non-indigenous Australians are not, despite the colonialist dispossession that has taken place. The issue of dispossession will be discussed further below.

**Bloch’s *Schelomo***

The pathos-laden character of the “quasi-Mahlerian” melody has already been noted, even if, as argued above, the funeral march connotations don’t enter Sculthorpe’s language in the violin works of the mid-1950s and are connected rather to developments from 1960 or, more likely, *Irkanda IV* in 1961. Although the aspects of Sculthorpe’s melodic style which have some recollections of Mahler have been outlined, these melodies share perhaps even more of a closeness with those of Ernest Bloch. Sculthorpe and Hannan both felt Bloch to be an influence on Sculthorpe’s work in this period, and Roger Covell and Wilfrid Mellers also heard Bloch’s influence.  

An ascending passage emphasizing fourths, fifths, tritones and semitones from the opening of *Schelomo* was discussed above and seems to have made its way, deliberately or otherwise, into several points in all three movements of the *Sonata for Violin Alone* and thus into the cello and viola sonatas as well (m.13, for example, in the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*). However, the features of Bloch’s language that seem closest to Sculthorpe’s include the utter pervasiveness of melodic semitonal movement within a context of largely *arco* expressive solo string writing. The opening of *Schelomo* features many passages that demonstrate this. The passage already quoted above, the cello solo at the very opening of the work, begins with several upper neighbour-note patterns, almost all of which are semitones. As Hannan observes, Sculthorpe tends not to write rhapsodically like this until some of the music in *Irkanda IV* (1961) but the melodic movement in short sections of chromatic scales and the emphasis on

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the sound of the semitone are already present in the 1950s. Notably, also, the
dominant melodic gesture opening the Sonata for Viola and Percussion is a
much more drawn-out semitone upper-neighbour figure, to be discussed
below.

Musical Example 4: 24 Ernest Bloch Schelomo, 1st mvt, mm.1-4, solo
violoncello part

Towards the beginning of Schelomo Bloch also writes motifs that emphasise the
augmented second, here acting as leading note and b♭ to temporarily tonicized
pitches (over a G pedal point overall). Augmented intervals have been
described as characteristic of Bloch’s ‘oriental’ and ‘quasi-Hebraic’ style in
Schelomo and other similar works.55

Musical Example 4: 25 Ernest Bloch Schelomo, 1st mvt, mm.16-19, violas

It seems that around the time of Hannan’s PhD in the late 1970s Hannan,
Sculthorpe, or both together, connected Sculthorpe’s adoption of aspects of
Bloch’s style to the idea or evocation of a biblical wilderness as a means to
evoke Australian landscape. In 1978 Hannan wrote:

accessed 27 October, 2013,
a love of Ernest Bloch was probably sparked off by his depiction of
the Biblical wilderness which reminded Sculthorpe of the terrifying
unpopulated landscapes of Australia.\textsuperscript{56}

The use of the word “probably” hints that this was likely Hannan’s
interpretation, but Sculthorpe clearly agreed with it, telling Deborah Hayes in
1980 that he “equated Bloch’s biblical wilderness with the Australian wilderness
and loneliness.”\textsuperscript{57}

The association of the idea of biblical wilderness with some sort of sense of
Australian wilderness was not new when Hannan discussed it, nor when
Sculthorpe, if he did, composed in relation to it in the mid-1950s. Similar
comparisons are implicit in John Antill’s oratorio, \textit{The Song of Hagar to Adam}
\textit{the Patriot} (1958) even if commentators like Covell describe that work as
“pastoral” and similar to the “lesser English choral tradition.”\textsuperscript{58} Meredith Lake
argues that certain early-nineteenth-century settlers to Australia brought a
Protestant conceptualization of the biblical wilderness that “informed their
understanding of and response to their new surrounds,” and some described
the Australian places they were in as wilderness “in ways directly informed by
scriptural images and ideas.”\textsuperscript{59} As I’ll argue shortly, I interpret Sculthorpe’s
influence from Bloch’s music as largely facilitating an evocation of deserts and
an exoticist framing of place, but some of the biblical narratives in relation to
wilderness are also potentially significant given their history within wider
Australian responses to landscape. Specifically, Lake shows that the locating of
the wilderness in the Christian tradition as a site of exile and then sometimes as
a promised land was part of the conceptual frameworks with which some
Australians in the nineteenth century interpreted their new home, as indeed
did those in other settler societies such as the United States, although usually

\textsuperscript{56} Michael Hannan, ”Peter Sculthorpe,” in \textit{Australian Composition in the Twentieth
Century}, ed. Frank Callaway and David Tunley (Melbourne: Oxford University Press,
1978), 137.

\textsuperscript{57} Quoted in Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 145.

\textsuperscript{58} Covell, \textit{Australia’s Music}, 154.

\textsuperscript{59} Meredith Lake, ”Protestant Christianity and the Colonial Environment: Australia as a
in differing ways.\textsuperscript{60} At this time in Australia, of course, colonization was taking place on the edges of the country and not in the desert interior, but nonetheless these understandings of biblical wilderness were framing devices brought from British Protestant traditions.

In works such as \textit{Schelomo} (subtitled “Hebraic Rhapsody”), \textit{Voice in the Wilderness} (1936) and the \textit{Israel Symphony} of 1916 (especially movement 1, “Prayer in the Desert”) Ernest Bloch is evoking ideas of biblical wilderness. Klara Moricz argues that in his planning for earlier works such as \textit{Jezebel} Bloch had opposed orientalist musical clichés in his depiction of the pagan Jezebel and Baal with diatonic and pentatonic music for the good, wholesome Hebrews. In \textit{Schelomo}, however, Bloch actually used the orientalist language in his portrait of Solomon. Moricz further argues that it has been through Bloch’s Jewish-themed music that the characteristics of the oriental style became “tokens of a generalized Jewish expression in music.”\textsuperscript{61} Bloch himself described the music of his portrait of Jezebel – chromatic, using augmented seconds, and often with repeated movement back to the same pitch as “seductive, languishing, voluptuous and perfidious,”\textsuperscript{62} and yet it was largely this style that he subsequently used to represent Jewishness generally and the experience of wilderness. Moricz further interprets Bloch’s interest in the biblical ‘barbaric’ as analogous to the contemporary primitivism of Stravinsky’s \textit{Rite of Spring}, and stemming from an understanding of the Jewish people as a tribe with “savage rites and a savage God.”\textsuperscript{63}

\textit{Schelomo} certainly sounds very different from the \textit{Rite of Spring}, but this set of allusions Moricz argues for to the exotic, the oriental and to some extent the primitive, accord significantly with the themes implied in Sculthorpe’s

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 114.
discussions around his *Irkanda* period works. Augmented seconds, semitonal movement and sinuous chromaticism imply the Middle East and the desert in Bloch, coupled with larger leaps in *Voice in the Wilderness*, and Sculthorpe’s use of such musical features translates very strongly to evocations of an Australian desert or outback. Such musical associations aren’t limited to Sculthorpe’s works either, the English film composer John Barry’s score for *Walkabout* (1971), for example, featured similar chromaticism and augmented seconds in its desert scenes.\(^64\)

**Sonata for Violin Alone, 1\(^{st}\) movement**

The first movement was the last movement of the sonata to be written, and evidently Sculthorpe finished it just a few minutes before Wilfred Lehmann went on stage to premiere the work on 28 March, 1955.\(^65\) The movement opens with a passage that became the opening of the *Sonata for Cello Alone* and the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* (in the latter case the passage occurs immediately after the “martial” solo percussion introduction). This consists of quadruple stop chords discussed above and then, importantly, a drawn-out upper-neighbour-note semitone figure, shown below. The ascending fourths / augmented fourths / semitones figure, similar to the 3\(^{rd}\) bar of Schelomo, follows.

**Musical Example 4: 26** Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone, 1\(^{st}\) mvt, mm. 1-8*

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\(^{64}\) Nicholas Roeg, *Walkabout* (United States: 20\(^{th}\) Century Fox, 1971, film).

\(^{65}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 162.
These features all fit into the representational and stylistic parameters already discussed, but what is particularly notable is that the passage becomes the opening of the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* and thus, after the martial percussion introduction, sets the tone of the work.

Most of the other important passages of the work have been discussed, and additionally there is a short two-part figure that is used in the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* with a highly characteristic major seventh dyad appended onto one note in the second phrase, shown in the example below. There is also, towards the end of the movement, a short climactic passage of cross-string arpeggios.

**Musical Example 4: 27** Sculthorpe *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 1st mvt, mm. 33-36

The final aspect of the movement worth noting is that Sculthorpe was experimenting with an arch form. Certainly a lot of his approaches to sectionalisation in this period are reminiscent of Bartók’s work.


**Figure 4: 5** Structural analysis of Sculthorpe, *Sonata for Violin Alone*, 1st mvt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>mm. 1-7</th>
<th>Quadruple stops, semitone neighbour figure, <em>Schelomo</em> ascent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>8-20</td>
<td>High register melody “intensely”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td><em>quasi-Mahlerian theme</em> “slowly and calmly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>31-42</td>
<td>Suggestions of two-part texture followed by plucked open string chords over arco melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>43-58</td>
<td><em>quasi-Mahlerian theme</em> “broadly and with great emotion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>59-86</td>
<td>Opening semitone neighbour fig and A-section high melody, cross-string arp, quadruple stop chords</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the foregoing discussion, prominent musical features of the *Sonata for Violin Alone* include:

- A high degree of harmonic stasis;
- Emphasis on melodic semitones, including semitone neighbour-notes;
- Expressive melodies that include large melodic leaps, often to semitones;
- Melodic augmented seconds;
- Occasional fleeting modal qualities;
- Dissonant dyads of minor seconds, major seconds, major sevenths and minor ninths;
- The use of those intervals in chords, creating harmonic dissonance;
- Prominent use of harmonic fourths and fifths;
- ‘Primitivist’ passages of very limited pitch material and emphasis on rhythm;
- atmospheric *tremolo* and *sul ponticello* passages;
- *moto perpetuo* passages;
- Bloch’s ascending figure of a perfect fourth or fifth with a tritone and semitone;
- Melodies against open string *pizzicato* accompaniment which can be heard as dry-timbred harmonically static textures evoking landscape; and
• Some percussive tapping on the body of the violin.

These qualities are highly continuous with Sculthorpe’s subsequent *Irkanda* music. The exoticist elements of Ernest Bloch’s musical language and their associations with the middle eastern desert; the astringent, dissonant harmonies; washes of ‘strange’ tremolo and string timbres; ‘primitivist’ passages of reduced pitch content articulated rhythmically and the pathos-inflected melodies were able to suggest ‘the’ characteristic Australian landscape of the outback in its contemporary non-indigenous cultural formulations as arid, lonely, spacious, Aboriginal and Other.

**The Sonata for Violin Alone into the Sonata for Cello Alone and the Sonata for Viola and Percussion**

The reuse of material from the outer movements of the *Sonata for Violin Alone* in the *Sonata for Cello Alone* is likely the result of Sculthorpe writing the latter work in the week or two before its deadline of 30 April 1959.\(^66\) Similarly, the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* was written very close to the deadline for a competition run by the Australian Musical Association on 14 July 1960, and Sculthorpe wrote to his parents on the due date saying “I’ve sort of hashed-up some music for the competition, & I’m quite pleased with it.”\(^67\) The piece was then revised for its 1964 Sydney performance.\(^68\)

The majority of the material of the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* comes from the previous two works, aside from a few brief passages and excepting the addition of the percussion part. The way Sculthorpe worked out the necessary transpositions to accommodate the different string instruments is interesting because it varies from passage to passage and thus the tonal relations between the various sections change from work to work. In some instances the transpositions from the violin work to the cello work are down a twelfth, as

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\(^66\) Ibid., 224-25.
\(^67\) Ibid., 242.
\(^68\) Ibid., 351.
might be expected, but actually these are in the minority, and are usually in order to retain workings with open strings. In most other cases, the material is transposed down an octave, and there are also short passages at other intervals, for example mm.53-61 of the Sonata for Cello, the Islamey material, is down two octaves and a minor third from the original passage in the violin sonata. Most of the material from the cello sonata goes into the viola work up an octave, except for the “quasi-Mahlerian melody” which is transposed up by only a fourth to take advantage of the lower open string C on the viola compared with the cello iteration where it uses only the second lowest string, G. Appendix B contains a diagram showing the relationships and derivations of material in the three works.

One of the new passages in the Sonata for Viola and Percussion is especially worth noting, as it is very closely related to the main melody of Irkanda I. It is sounded very near the beginning of the viola sonata, after the quadruple stop chords, the semitone upper-neighbour figure and at the culmination of the Schelomo-like ascent in fourths and semitones. It is shown below, beginning under the marking “a tempo.” The subsequent example, most of the main melody from Irkanda I itself, also shows the melody in question beginning “a tempo.”

Musical Example 4: 28 Sculthorpe Sonata for Viola and Percussion, mm. 13-19
Musical Example 4: 29 Sculthorpe *Irkanda I*, mm. 5-11

The piece *Irkanda I* was, of course, written five years before the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*. There is a twenty-nine page set of sketches in the National Library of Australia that contains the melody in its *Irkanda I* guise and also several times transposed onto $A_b$ an octave lower than the pitch it appears on in the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, this transposition therefore suggesting a link with Sculthorpe’s eventual transfer of the melody into the viola and percussion work. A number of aspects of the dating of these sketches will be discussed below in the section on *Irkanda I*, however, what is interesting about the melody in the sketches is that it is a transposition of the *Irkanda I* version but it is not in the viola and percussion guise. This reinforces the interpretation that the version of the melody as it appears in the published 1977 version of *Irkanda I*° is likely to be earlier than that in the viola sonata, and also that therefore the *Irkanda I* sketches can likely be dated before the 1960 composition of the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*. There is an outside possibility that Sculthorpe changed the melody later in the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, sometime before the 1977 version but that seems less likely.

The history of the *Irkanda I* melody seems to be that it was used in *Irkanda I*, then in 1958 Sculthorpe intended to base part of a violin and cello duo on it, in 1959 it was used in *Irkanda II* (see page 265) and then it was finally stated once, transformed, in the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*. The sketches for the violin and cello duo most likely date from 1958 when Sculthorpe was in Oxford and he

met Eldon Fox, the Australian cellist for whom he wrote the *Sonata for Cello Alone* in 1959. The proposed duo was to be for Fox and Wilfred Lehmann.  

It was not completed, and in June or July 1960, around the time of writing the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, Sculthorpe wrote to his parents saying he was intending to work the material into another duo, this time a sonata for violin and cello, which did not eventuate since he turned his attention to the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*. It is clear that in the folder labeled (in what does not to me look to be Sculthorpe’s hand) “Irkanda I and Earlier violin ms & sketches,” the (presumably) 1958 sketches survive.

A couple of other features of the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* are worth noting briefly, including the single (known) instance of Sculthorpe attempting to imitate any specific details of Aboriginal music in his ‘Australian’ works before he started using Aboriginal melodies in 1974. In the notes for the talk he gave at the first performance of the work at the Attingham Summer School, Sculthorpe detailed the instruments in the percussion ‘section,’ and finished his list with “Australian aboriginal music sticks, tonight, snare drum sticks.” The idea that Sculthorpe was intending to imitate clapsticks in this piece has not been referred to in previous Sculthorpe literature, perhaps because the published edition of the piece does not call for “Aboriginal music sticks” or “clapsticks” in either the list of instruments at the front of the score, or within the music. Rather, there is an indication in m.57, nearly at the end of the second statement of the “quasi-Mahlerian melody, “Sticks (hard stick R.H.): strike soft stick on handle.” Throughout the next section, the *Islamey* material in tremolo, “Sticks” are given a repeated rhythmic pattern (shown below). The “Sticks” return once in m.79, and then again in the varied restatement of the

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70 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 211.

71 Ibid., 242.


73 Peter Sculthorpe, manuscript of talk given at Attingham Summer School, undated, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia. At the top of the manuscript “Attingham Park” is written in Sculthorpe’s later hand. The talk was given on 13 August, 1960, Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 245.
Islamey music at m.125 (Fig. 124), more sparsely than formerly. They return only once more, again fairly sparsely, in the penultimate section of the movement “Quasi cadenza” (mm.277–78, Fig 28). It is interesting that there is no record of anyone explicitly hearing or identifying this as an aspect of ‘Aboriginal’ music, despite the apparent clarity of Sculthorpe’s indicated connection with clapsticks. Perhaps this is because the sound of Sculthorpe’s “Sticks” is generally more high-pitched and less resonant than actual clapsticks usually sound.

Musical Example 4: 30 Sculthorpe Sonata for Viola and Percussion, mm. 61-65

The writing for percussion in the Sonata for Viola and Percussion is more closely connected to twentieth-century avant-garde traditions than anything Sculthorpe’s music had been associated with since the quarter-tone Bunjil, which is hardly surprising since he wrote it when he was in Oxford after he had been getting to know a wider range of music than formerly. Notably, at the time he wrote the Sonata for Viola and Percussion he was also discussing some of Varèse’s music in his (unfinished) thesis. In a manner somewhat similar to Varèse’s Ionisation (1931) Sculthorpe utilises a range of drums and cymbals that were fairly standard in European-derived classical music by 1960, and it is a selection that gives a good range of different registers and timbres (the instrument listing of the 1979 edition is Tam-tam, Large cymbal, Chinese cymbal, Triangle, Bass drum, Side drum, Tom-tom, Bongos). As will have been

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75 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 233.
apparent in the examples above, percussion is sometimes used to generate rhythmic interest and patterning and at other points it works more prominently to create specific textures and timbres. As in *Ionisation*, there are sections where the percussion projects metallic timbres (m.15 the *Irkanda* melody, for instance) and other points at which it surrounds the viola lines with much drier wooden and skin timbres (for example most of the *Islamey* passages).

Finally, the form of the work is, like most of Sculthorpe’s others, highly sectionalized, and it similarly involves a certain amount of variation on many of the sections’ returns.

**Figure 4: 7 Structural analysis of Sculthorpe, *Sonata for Viola and Percussion***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>1-26</th>
<th>1-6 Percussion introduction, martial rhythms 7-26 chords, ST upper nn fig, Schelomo ascent, <em>Irkanda</em> melody</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>27-60 Fig 3(^4)</td>
<td>27-36 “quasi-Mahlerian melody” 37-48 Two part passage 49-60 “quasi-Mahlerian melody”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>71-88 Fig 6</td>
<td><em>Islamey</em> material followed by cross-string <em>moto perpetuo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>89-104 Fig 9(^2)</td>
<td>Dotted neighbour figure + martial percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>105-24 Fig 10(^4)</td>
<td>Original version of Mahlerian melody from violin sonata, III: <em>arco</em> with martial percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B(^1)</td>
<td>125-56 Fig 12(^4)</td>
<td><em>Islamey</em> with more repeated notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C(^1)</td>
<td>157-72 Fig 16(^4)</td>
<td>Dotted neighbour figure (+ harmonics) + martial percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a(^1)</td>
<td>173-204 Fig 17(^2)</td>
<td>Original version of Mahlerian melody, <em>pizz</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C^2</strong></td>
<td>205-36 Fig 20^4</td>
<td>Dotted neighbor figure (firstly on B♭, then with pizz. chords, then <em>Alla marcia funebre</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C^3</strong></td>
<td>237-52 Fig 24^4</td>
<td>Percussion interlude, picks up on C motifs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A^1</strong></td>
<td>253-64 Fig 25^2</td>
<td>“quasi-Mahlerian melody” transposed, accomp. With tam-tam roll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Quasi cadenza”</td>
<td>265-84</td>
<td><em>Moto perpetuo</em> 5ths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coda</strong></td>
<td>285-304 Fig 28^4</td>
<td><em>Risoluto</em>, eventually featuring semitones and finishing A♭–G.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Irkanda I*

As noted, *Irkanda I* was composed for Wilfred Lehmann in 1955, after the *Sonata for Violin Alone*. Lehmann performed it on 30 June 1955 in Melbourne.\(^\text{76}\)

The piece was initially called *Irkanda* until 1959 when Sculthorpe began composing other works in the *Irkanda* series, at which point it became *Irkanda I*. In 1956 Sculthorpe described it in the *Canon* as “his finest composition to date”\(^\text{77}\) and told Rex Hobcroft it was his “best work”\(^\text{78}\) so, although there wasn’t a lot of competition for such a designation at this point in Sculthorpe’s career, it seems he was fairly happy with the piece.

The question of the relationships between various versions of the work is complex and probably ultimately unresolvable. Skinner has argued that there was a version of the work in manuscript that was likely a revision of the original 1955 piece, and that this autograph dated from the late 1950s or early 1960s, when Sculthorpe was at Oxford or back in Launceston after that.\(^\text{79}\) Skinner speculates that the “editing” of previous works Sculthorpe told his parents he was doing in Oxford in March 1960 probably included adjustments to *Irkanda I*,

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\(^\text{76}\) Sculthorpe and Skinner, "Sculthorpe Work List".


\(^\text{78}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 178.

\(^\text{79}\) Sculthorpe and Skinner, "Sculthorpe Work List".
and interestingly if that is the case these revisions took place after Lehmann performed the work in Birmingham in February 1960 and it had received a review saying it “holds together remarkably well as a musical structure.” A version from 1958 that may still exist which pre-dates these edits is a copy Sculthorpe sent to David Oistrakh, who said he would place the work in the Moscow Conservatoire Library, so perhaps this version might be recovered some day. In the meantime, it is known that Lehmann continued to play the work for a number of years, performing it in Lisbon in 1956, in England in 1958 and 1960, and later as well, so Sculthorpe’s revisions took place within a context of providing Lehmann with occasional updates, and during this time the work was recorded and broadcast, for example on the BBC in 1960. In 1970 Lehmann actually re-edited the work himself, writing to Sculthorpe “I love playing it again. Every detail of bowing and fingering has been worked out completely.” The following year he then recorded a “newly revised version.” Finally, there is the Faber published score of 1977, and this latter version is the edition from which musical examples will be taken in the following discussion.

It is certain, therefore, that details will vary between the 1955 original and the 1977 publication. To what extent that is the case is, however, uncertain, although importantly it is possible that in their resemblance to some of Messiaen’s works the birdsong sections (Ab on the structural diagram below on page 238) date from Sculthorpe’s period in Oxford and not from the 1950s.

There is a set of sketches in the National Library of Australia which are in most substantive ways fairly close to the 1977 published score. It is not possible to date these sketches definitively, but there is a set of annotations on them that

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80 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 233, 237.
81 Ibid., 196. Attempts by the Sydney Conservatorium Library in 2014 to acquire a copy of the work from Moscow have so far gone unanswered.
82 Ibid., 170, 215, 233.
83 Ibid., 233.
84 Ibid., 583.
suggest at least some were written in Launceston in the mid-1950s, even if other passages of music in this collection of pages seem to date from 1958 or 1960 in Oxford. The annotations in question consist of a list of alcoholic drinks “2 doz. ale, 2 Penfolds Sweet, 2 Penfolds Dry, 1 bottle Whisky” and delivery and payment instructions: “Deliver Mrs. Lionel Green 43 David” and “Charge ABC c/o Miss Madge Elliot, 3 Berean St.”86 There is a David Street and a Berean Street in Launceston and “Charge ABC c/o Madge Elliot” seems likely to relate to Sculthorpe’s activity as a member of the Launceston ABC Subscribers’ Committee, in which he hosted receptions for the visiting ABC “celebrity artists.” He held this position from 1951 to 1957.87 The birdsong passages do not feature on this page.

Musically, the sketches consist of several versions of the *Irkanda I* melody beginning on *Ab* (one version is quoted on page 237, below). None of the *Ab* versions include any quarter-tones. Much of the rest of the twenty-nine pages of sketch material consists of music that found its way into or is related to *Irkanda I*. A minority of these are in early forms that had some way to go until they became the versions in the final score. There are additionally several passages I cannot identify in relation to any particular piece. What is most significant here is that the majority of this material is in a form not so far different from the final piece, but it is clear that when Sculthorpe made these sketches he was also working on the piece’s structure. The pages which are fairly close to the final version are numbered, and on one of these he has decided on an order for the various pages / sections, shown below, which he would presumably follow when making the full copy of the score.88 After receiving a review in February 1960 praising the structure of the work, it seems unlikely he would have revised the piece so extensively, especially its structure,

86 Ibid.
88 The second page in the sketches as they are currently ordered in the folder in the National Library, labeled “4” in the top right hand corner in Sculthorpe’s hand.
suggested that these are not the “edits” of March 1960 and that they date before then.

Figure 4: 8 Sculthorpe, sketches for Irkanda I, p.2 (labeled “4”)

If this is a late 1950s or early 1960 revision of the piece the sketches seem to demonstrate that it has changed significantly from earlier versions, seemingly gaining both a new structure and new materials, for why else would Sculthorpe write out most of the sections of the piece again in these sketches unless he was changing them significantly away from a previous version he was working from? This suggests that most of the Irkanda I material here is from the mid-1950s or that Irkanda I of the late-1950s differed very significantly from that of 1955. What is most probable is that the current version of Irkanda I was substantially in place at least by February, 1960, for the reasons outlined above.

The meanings of Irkanda

“Irkanda” is an Aboriginal word that Sculthorpe sourced from the book Aboriginal Words and Their Meanings, compiled by Joah H. Sugden. In this respect Sculthorpe’s use of this word as a signifier of ‘Aboriginality’ conforms to the reductive conflation of Aboriginal nations and languages common in much non-indigenous culture of the period, as Sculthorpe has never identified a more precise origin than “aboriginal”. The definition given in Sugden’s book is “scrub country” and Skinner has determined that Sugden heard the word at a railway halt itself called “Irkanda” on the North Coast Line of Queensland. In late 1956 Sculthorpe gave the title of the work as Aboriginal Burial (Irkanda) and as late
as 1960 also called it *Irkanda* “an aboriginal burial rite.” He was subsequently
told (incorrectly: there are regional variations) that Aboriginal people did not
practice burial before colonization, and in May 1959 in a letter to his parents he
translated the word in relation to *Irkanda II* as “an austere and lonely place.”

By 1960 he had also started giving the title’s meaning as “the huge silent scrub-
country of Central Australia.” By 1961 he had moved to defining it as “a remote
and lonely place,” and this latter is the definition that, as Skinner notes, he has
generally continued to use.\(^9\) In a similar way to his public discussion of his use
of the Aboriginal story in relation to the *Sonatina*, Sculthorpe also described
*Irkanda I* as “truly Australian” to *The Canon* in 1956.\(^1\)

As noted in the previous chapter, from the sketches for *The Loneliness of Bunjil*
it is apparent that at some point in the process of composition Sculthorpe had
intended to use an Aboriginal word as the title of that piece. However, at the
time of drawing up a provisional title page amongst the sketches he hadn’t yet
decided on a word to use. Presumably, therefore, it was around 1954 or 1955
that he was searching in Sugden’s book for something appropriate and by 1955
he must have hit on “Irkanda,” and adopted the strategy of naming a piece with
an Aboriginal word for the violin work rather than the string trio.

That Sculthorpe was translating *Irkanda* to mean an Aboriginal burial rite in
1956 and 1960 provides an interesting pointer to the lamentational character of
sections of the work. There is a possibility that the notion of the burial rite was
something Sculthorpe thought of only after the piece’s composition in 1955, but
this gloss is fairly contemporary with the composition of the work and is in line
with the other ‘Aboriginal’ references he was outlining at the same time. By
1956 he clearly felt that *Irkanda I* had enough of a lamenting character to
associate it with death and burial. Furthermore, the idea of a burial rite also

\(^8\) Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 25 May 1959, Papers of Peter
Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.


\(^1\) “Australian Musicians: Peter Sculthorpe,” 228.
implies a sense of Aboriginal ritual and although Sculthorpe did not discuss the idea of ritual in relation to his music until much later, he has associated one of the recurring sections of the piece with the idea of “Dance; the rhythmic harmonic.” As will be shown, that section is in many ways similar to the dance section of the *Sonatina*, with an even greater ‘primitivist’ reduction in the range of pitches used and consequently a stronger emphasis on rhythm.

There is no extant evidence for any specific discussion of landscape in relation to *Irkanda I* on Sculthorpe’s part before 1960: although he chose the title “scrub country” there’s no further discussion of landscape on record. As noted earlier, in the 1956 article in *The Canon* the information on his music was “Australian aboriginal folklore has influenced him, which may account for the harshness and dry nature of his scores.” Along similar lines, in the same year he told the *Australian Musical Examiner* that the work had an “Australian Aboriginal background.” It seems Sculthorpe initially intended another representation of Aboriginality, seemingly this time in terms of his impressions of Aboriginal ceremony. However, what is apparent in the published music is the degree to which the work is simultaneously an outback landscape, with birdsong, spatialising gestures and the potential loneliness that can be heard in the lamentational main melody – although as noted, some of these features may date from as late as 1960. The ‘strange’ atmospheric string sounds, similar to those in the *Sonata for Violin Alone* can be heard as both the otherness of Aboriginality and the alienation experienced by the non-indigenous in the landscape. In this sense, Sculthorpe may have been mostly focused on the “Australian Aboriginal background” to the *Sonatina, Bunjil* and *Irkanda I* in the mid-1950s, but bound up in this at least to an extent was the idea of the outback, the place Aboriginal people were understood to be, described by Martin Thomas as “the areas deemed most authentically Aboriginal.”

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92 Ibid.
After 1960 Sculthorpe and many other people, including reviewers, discussed the work very much in relation to landscape, and Sculthorpe’s glosses of the title from this point onward explicitly link the concerns of Aboriginality and landscape, and this is consistent with a shift to landscape and away from Aboriginality in Sculthorpe’s thinking about his work in Oxford. “Scrub country” is a clear pointer to a remote, mainland Australia, and the later Oxford-period gloss “the huge, silent scrub country of Central Australia” makes this specific. The latter phrase is taken from a draft of a script that Sculthorpe and his friend Robert Henderson prepared to deliver on BBC radio in 1960. It is difficult to know which parts of the talk come from Sculthorpe and which from Henderson, and there are some details such as references to Patrick White’s *Voss* which Sculthorpe hadn’t read (although this doesn’t preclude Sculthorpe’s authorship of the section). However, as I’ll argue in the next chapter, it is clear Sculthorpe was drafting the end of the manuscript in his own hand, so some of it at least is directly by him and this is especially the case for the material on *Irkanda I* towards the end of it. Cleary, also, he had initially to discuss his thoughts and inspirations with Robert Henderson before Henderson could publicly explicate them. At least one of the texts about *Irkanda I* from 1960 seems to be by Robert Henderson because in Sculthorpe’s notes for the talk he gave at the Attingham Summer School later that year he clearly quoted Henderson at the end of his discussion of *Irkanda I*, saying “I could not add to Roberts Henderson’s words on this work. Thus – .” Here, Sculthorpe may be referring either to the BBC talk or to a program note that was printed for a Commonwealth Week concert in Birmingham on 6 February. The program

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95 Peter Sculthorpe, “BBC Talk,” ascribed to “late 50s” on the manuscript but the actual date of composition is August 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.


97 Peter Sculthorpe, manuscript of talk given at Attingham Summer School, undated, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia. At the top of the manuscript “Attingham Park” is written in Sculthorpe’s later hand. The talk was given on 13 August, 1960, ibid., 245.

98 Ibid., 165.
note unites the ideas of Aboriginality and landscape in the formulation that the work “seeks primarily to portray the lonely atmosphere of the wild Australian bush and desert where the aboriginals live.”

This phrase seems to be the key to understanding how Sculthorpe viewed the work around 1960. Other passages of the BBC talk further elucidate how Sculthorpe (and Henderson) seemed to imagine that place.

Firstly, they describe it as empty, often terrifyingly so, and there are many elaborations on this theme throughout the talk in an effort to convey this emptiness. In the next chapter, the closeness of such formulations to the British reception of Australian artists and writers in the 1950s and 1960s will be outlined, and its influence on Sculthorpe’s thinking discussed. In the talk there is reference to “a sense of endless space... of emptiness... immense vastness... unexplored territories & of their terror.” At this point Voss is mentioned, then “this sense of endless space, of endless unknown, that runs through all Australian art.” Then Irkanda I is mentioned specifically, and as already outlined this is immediately before the section that is definitely by Sculthorpe:

Already there has been introduced the mystery of space, of endless unexplored and uninhabited land, the seemingly boundless nothingness that is the country of Irkanda I the work for solo violin. Irkanda is the name of the huge, silent scrub-country of Central Australia, silent except for the sudden call of birds screaming far in the distance. But this seemingly empty landscape is alive with legend & mystery, for everywhere there is evidence of ancient cultures, rock paintings, strange ritual carvings that call up these forgotten people.

At this point the talk moves on to Sculthorpe’s comparison of Mexico with Australia. Sculthorpe had been discussing D.H. Lawrence’s ideas about Mexico and Australia with Wilfrid Mellers in 1960, and the idea of a land inspired with ancient remnants of an earlier civilization may partly have come from their thinking about Mexico. However, given Sculthorpe’s focus on

99 Ibid.
Aboriginality in the mid-1950s works, this notion of landscape is highly relevant to *Irkanda I*. Earlier in the talk the Australian land (and art) was described similarly as “an emptiness that is filled with the spirit of a people whose history begins with the beginnings of time but whose history can never be known.”

The relationship of the Australian landscape and Aboriginal people as it is presented in these formulations is complex (‘the’ Australian landscape here is obviously the outback landscape). In Sculthorpe’s earlier works Aboriginal people had been present in the land, the outback Australian place, which was where they were imagined as acting. There is also Sculthorpe’s 1960s description on the score of the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, “the native in the desert.” In this sense, despite all this discussion of emptiness, Sculthorpe is imagining an inhabited past for this “unexplored and uninhabited land.” Aboriginal people are simultaneously a “forgotten people” and absent in the land Sculthorpe imagines, but the Australia, in his “truly Australian” works seems to have to be imagined through the means of the history or mythology and stories of these ‘ahistorical’ people (“whose history begins with the beginning of time but whose history can never be known”). As noted earlier, the ethnographic present is a relevant concept here, but it is not the actual present in which, in Sculthorpe’s imagination, Aboriginal people are absent despite living on in spirit and in the encounters that non-indigenous people may have with artefacts (the “evidence of ancient cultures”) that “call up these forgotten people.”

This forgetting of actual Aboriginal people, who live in Australia in the outback, country and cities in the 1950s and 1960s while all this is being thought and felt, is clearly a necessary condition for their symbolic adoption as the past of the colonized land. Experiencing the land as empty was necessary for the fiction of Terra Nullius through which Australia was invaded and colonized. The

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100 Peter Sculthorpe, “BBC Talk,” ascribed to “late 50s” on the manuscript but the actual date of composition is August 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
emptiness of the land has been a theme in multiple Australian experiences of landscape, from explorer diaries to fiction to film, but this landscape is not, of course, actually empty, it is merely empty of what is familiar to the immigrant and to the twentieth-century urban Australian. This constant discussion of emptiness, experienced as an absence and also as strangeness, seems to point to the fact that on some symbolic level non-indigenous Australians have not successfully made Australia their home, they do not yet ‘belong’ as Indigenous Australians do: the places that are culturally the most Australian are strange and empty and yet filled with Indigenous, “ancient” strangeness. Perhaps one of the most compelling phrases in the discussion of Irkanda I in the BBC talk is “this seemingly empty landscape is alive” which can be related to the phrase from earlier in the talk “an emptiness filled with the spirit of a people.” The non-indigenous experience of landscape has become at once an encounter with a forbidding, alien place that is hard to survive, but it is simultaneously an encounter with a willfully “forgotten” and therefore ultimately unknowable people, and in this sense it is not surprising that many non-indigenous twentieth-century artworks with Aboriginal people or culture as their subject conflate the landscape with Aboriginality, as Sculthorpe has done in his early Irkanda period works, and present both as strange, alien, difficult, vast, ancient and forbidding.

One of the factors in Sculthorpe’s understandings of Aboriginal culture was the project on Tasmanian Aboriginal music and culture he’d worked on in the early 1950s, discussed in Chapter 2. As noted then, the general assumption of non-indigenous Tasmanians in this period was that Tasmanian Aboriginal people had ‘died out,’ and Sculthorpe, like his fellow citizens, was operating within this conceptual framework. This view, although demonstrating a willful ignorance of the lives and concerns of living Aboriginal people, is clearly coherent with

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the most of the burgeoning representations, appropriations and understandings of Aboriginal culture by non-indigenous Australians in the wake of John Antill’s *Corroboree* from the early 1950s. In this sense it is clear that Sculthorpe applied the Tasmanian notion of Aboriginal culture as existing solely in the past to his new musical representations of mainland Aboriginality.

Within Sculthorpe’s papers in the National Library of Australia are his notes and the articles he collected for the ‘Aboriginal’ project, along with a group of typed poems. All of the poems are about the ‘last’ Aboriginal person or people, or the deaths of Aboriginal people in the wake of colonisation. Although the paper is not the same as that Sculthorpe used for his own typed notes that does not preclude his interest in the poems contemporary with his work on this project, as he worked on it sporadically over a number of years. There are some mistakes in the copies where the typist has crossed out words which were mistakes with “xxxxx,” so it seems likely these pages were merely notes to enable someone to keep copies of the poems. The source from which Sculthorpe accessed them is uncertain, however, three of poems were published in Australian newspapers in the nineteenth century. The “Lament of the Last Aboriginie [sic]” as it was called in Sculthorpe’s papers was originally published as the “Lament of the Last Aboriginal” in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and credited to “BETA,” with an additional note that it was written in Newtown on February 5, 1859.102 “Lanny’s Ghost” is about William Lane, also known as King Billy, thought of as the last ‘full-blooded’ Tasmanian Aboriginal man. That poem was published in the Hobart *Mercury* in 1869.103 “The Tasmanian Aborigines’ Lament and Remorse” was published as “The Tasmanian Aborigines Lament and Remonstrance,” the title by which it’s usually known, in 1847.104 The remaining two poems are “Lanny’s Friend” and “The Late King Billy.”

Given the titles of the poems, the lamenting tone of two of them is not surprising, and they contain lines such as “The fall of every tree / Is but another link destroyed / A widening of that gaping void / Between the past and me.”\textsuperscript{105}

In this respect they are very similar to the spate of ‘Indian laments’ sung by touring family singer groups in the United States in the 1840s, and also to the contemporary development of ‘Indian’ parlour songs in that country. Many of these songs focused on a Native American subject yearning for a lost homeland, which is also a major theme in the transplanted Australian context of some of the poems Sculthorpe collected. As Michael Pisani notes, such texts only proliferated once actual Indians had been moved outside the nation-space.\textsuperscript{106}

Given the constant travel between North America and Australia in the nineteenth century, especially after the opening up of the goldfields in the 1850s in Australia, it seems highly possible that these ‘lamenting’ tropes became one way of understanding the experience of Australia’s indigenous people, and reflecting on the local effects of colonization. In Pisani’s view, these texts afford a distancing between the dominant culture and the dispossessed indigenous, and are related to tropes of the ‘vanishing’ Indian,\textsuperscript{107} and the idea of a vanishing race. In this relic of social Darwinism, it was thought to be sad but inevitable that indigenous people would ‘die out’ in the face of the racially superior colonisers, and whilst this could take a melancholy tone, the notion that this was the natural order of things abrogated the colonist from too much concern or scrutiny. This idea certainly had currency in Australia, and by the 1930s when fewer and fewer Aboriginal people were visible to urban non-indigenous Australians, “[t]his disappearance, while occasionally noted, was not interrogated; rather, the original owners of the land were depicted as melting away, without resistance, in the face of oncoming civilisation.”\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{105} BETA “Lament of the Last Aboriginal,” 5.

\textsuperscript{106} Michael Pisani, \textit{Imagining Native America in Music} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 11-15. I am adopting Pisani’s use of the term “Indian.”

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 99.

The themes of the poems reinforce my interpretation of the narrative of a rich Aboriginal past contrasted with Aboriginal absence in the present as being both a facilitator and result of the understanding of Australia as colonized, empty and available (however uneasily) for non-indigenous possession. The tone of lament is similar, however, to developments in Sculthorpe’s musical language from Irkanda I onwards. There was no sense of yearning or lamentation in the musical language of the Sonatina, despite Sculthorpe’s characterisation of the landscape as “lonely” in his note to the score of that work. And although the “Mahlerian” melody of the Sonata for Violin Alone and the Sonata for Viola and Percussion has a sense of pathos, it does not have the searingly lamenting quality of the main theme of Irkanda I. The latter melody retains the pathos of the former in its chromaticism, slow tempo and frequent descending semitones. A much more lamenting tone is added, however, by the quarter-tones and the sense of continual descent, interrupted only occasionally by upward leaps. The Irkanda I melody additionally concludes with a final Bloch-like descending semitone onto the tonic. The melody begins at “a tempo,” below.

Musical Example 4: 31 Sculthorpe Irkanda I, mm. 5-24

Even if the transposition of this melody on D is a late 1950s or 1960 development and Sculthorpe was perhaps thinking of it initially on Ab as it
appeared in the set of sketches described above, it is in most respects the same melody, except for the lack of quarter-tones and some slight rhythmic adjustments. The Ab version is also rhythmically very similar with the same pattern of longer and shorter notes, even if their exact relative length sometimes varies.

**Musical Example 4: 32** Sculthorpe sketches for *Irkanda I*, p.1

![Musical Example 4](image)

Whether Sculthorpe consciously conceived of this melody in relation to tropes of ‘the last Aborigine’ or of a lamenting Aboriginal person or people is, of course, uncertain and perhaps even unlikely. The emotional tone of the melody is also congruent with the non-indigenous Australian trope of the loneliness of landscape and with a tradition of viewing the Australian landscape as desolate, and Sculthorpe’s music has very often been heard that way. It is still, however, possible to argue for a ‘vanishing race’ trope in interpreting *Irkanda I* and subsequent Sculthorpe works of the period since, as argued above, this idea is strongly implicated in the conceptualization of Australian landscape as empty. Certainly, parts of Australia readily project a sense of vastness and have often been sparsely settled by non-indigenous people, but it seems to have been much rarer in Australian history that the outback and desert was experienced
as, for example, sublime instead of empty or, from Sculthorpe and Henderson’s BBC talk, in terms of “the endless space, of the endless unknown.” Additionally, a contemporary 1960s association of Aboriginality with ‘sadness’ is confirmed in a 1962 article by Sculthorpe’s friend Max Oldaker, in which he characterizes Sculthorpe’s music as “a conception of the desolate open spaces, of the sounds and sights therein and the immense fortissimo of the great silence.” He implicitly contrasts this with Antill’s Corroboree, which he deems “still all blackness and sadness. After Antill, there seems to be little more to be said of Australian native music which may only be moonshine after all, despite the certain barbaric charm of the dance rituals.”

Reception of Irkanda I has tended to be in terms of its strangeness, which is usually related to its ‘Aboriginal’ aspects or to landscape, and also to loneliness, and to some extent to the ‘primitive.’ This will be outlined further below, but firstly it is useful to outline the existing structure of the work, since most sections will be analysed briefly. As with most of Sculthorpe’s other pieces, Irkanda I is starkly sectionalized.

**Figure 4: 9 Structural analysis of Sculthorpe Irkanda I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introductory gesture</th>
<th>mm.1-6</th>
<th>Oscillating major seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aa</td>
<td>7-24</td>
<td>Lamentational melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>25-36</td>
<td>Birdsong harmonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figuration</td>
<td>37-52</td>
<td><em>moto perpetuo</em>, narrow intervals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A¹</td>
<td>53-70</td>
<td>Lamentational melody 8ve higher with <em>pizz.</em> open strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>71-86</td>
<td>Melody based on 5ths <em>Moderato</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>87-106</td>
<td><em>Pesante</em> chords “Dance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>107-18</td>
<td>Melody based on 5ths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A²</td>
<td>119-28</td>
<td>Melody in <em>moto perpetuo</em> tremolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A¹</td>
<td>129-136</td>
<td>Lamentational melody with <em>pizz</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B¹</td>
<td>137-60</td>
<td>Melody in 5ths <em>pont.</em> quaver tremolo, transition, then semiquaver <em>moto perpetuo</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>161-80</th>
<th>Pesante chords “Dance”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figuration</td>
<td>181-198</td>
<td>2nds and 3rds to larger intervals (197-8 parallel 5ths transition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C(^1)</td>
<td>199-230</td>
<td>Pesante chords “Dance,” more dissonant, now triple and quadruple stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ab</td>
<td>231-36</td>
<td>Birdsong harmonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A(^3)</td>
<td>237-56</td>
<td>Lamentational melody in harmonics, then molto calmo sul G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The opening gesture of *Irkanda I* is primarily a spatialising one. Sculthorpe brings back the major second dyads he had used at various points in the *Sonatina* and the *Sonata for Violin Alone* and oscillates between them in quintuplets, a semitone away from each other, before opening up another semitone above and into a chord. In the extant sketches this gesture lasts eight bars, instead of the final version which is six bars long.\(^\text{10}\)

**Musical Example 4: 33** Sculthorpe *Irkanda I*, mm.1-8

The monophonic lamentational melody which follows was quoted above, it is marked “lontano” and thus to some extent follows the tone of the spatialising, distant introduction. The second time the melody appears, at m.46 it is an octave higher and now has pizzicato accompaniment on the open strings D and A, becoming G, D and A for the last statement of the opening phrase in m.58. This is similar (albeit much more sparse) accompaniment to that given to the

\(^{10}\) Peter Sculthorpe, “Irkanda I and Earlier violin ms & sketches,” Peter Sculthorpe Papers, National Library of Australia, 7.
“Mahlerian” melody of the Sonata for Violin Alone, and the dry pizzicato timbre alludes gently to the notion of a dry landscape. Interestingly, knowledge of the landscape textures of Sculthorpe’s other works such as the Sonata for Viola and Percussion can lead to a reading of the unaccompanied statements of the Irkanda I melody as a lamenting voice sounding against silence and stillness.

Musical Example 4: 34 Sculthorpe Irkanda I, lamentational melody, mm. 46-55

Whilst this texture is similar to those already used in the three string sonatas discussed earlier in the chapter, there are also some quite new effects in Irkanda I. One of these is particularly significant in relation to Sculthorpe’s programmatic intentions, as it involves birdsong imitations in harmonics on the upper strings, shown below. Sculthorpe used different styles of birdsong in many of his later landscape pieces, including Kakadu and several string quartets. If the elements of harmonic stasis in the piece can be interpreted as creating a sense of space, the presence of birds transforms any sense of abstract space into an earthly landscape. As noted, these may date later, from 1959 or 1960 (Sculthorpe used birdsounds in Irkanda II in 1959, to be discussed below).

Musical Example 4: 35 Sculthorpe Irkanda I, mm. 25-36
Many years later, in 1993, Sculthorpe cast his use of birdsong in this piece as the fulfillment of an aspect of the writings of the Melbourne composer and critic Henry Tate, who in 1917 and 1924 had published two pamphlets outlining possibilities for establishing a distinctively national Australian style of music.\textsuperscript{11}\footnote{Henry Tate, Australian Music Resources: Some Suggestions (Melbourne: Sydney J. Endacott, 1917); Henry Tate, Australian Musical Possibilities (Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler, 1924).} Sculthorpe wrote in a 1993 program note for Irkanda I, “my use of bird-song stems from suggestions in the writings of Henry Tate.”\textsuperscript{12}\footnote{Peter Sculthorpe, Program note to Irkanda I, Australian Chamber Orchestra 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Orchestra series program 2, Eugene Goossens Hall, ABC Centre, 21 July, 1993.} By the time Sculthorpe wrote this note Roger Covell had implicitly constructed a historiography of musical Australianness in his seminal 1967 publication Australia’s Music: Themes of a New Society.\textsuperscript{13}\footnote{Covell, Australia’s Music.} Covell’s chapters were constructed such that Tate and the composer Percy Grainger were discussed early in the book in relation to their potential “Australianism.” This, combined with Covell’s dismissive discussion of most composers of the 1930s to 1950s, led to a sense that Grainger and Tate were precursors to several composers who came to prominence in the 1960s whom Covell discusses favourably, including Sculthorpe. Yet Covell does not evaluate the extent to which the writings and theories of Tate and Grainger were known in the mid-twentieth century. Tate’s writings may not have been widely known enough to have been an impetus to Sculthorpe at all.

In the second last appearance of the main, lamentational melody in Irkanda I, the plucked strings are gone and the melody is played in the birdsong harmonics, uniting two of the sections and aspects of the piece but also
seeming to place both birds and a notional human subject in an ever-receding space, although the statement in harmonics also works well as a gesture of summation by uniting the melody with the sound of harmonics. The very final statement of the melody, occurring just after this, ends the piece. At this point it is stated at its original pitch and played “molto calmo”, sul G.

The lamentational melody with the static *pizzicato* background discussed above can suggest a human subjectivity within a landscape, and, as noted, the birdsong is similarly able to represent creatures in a landscape. It is significant, then, that in the sketches for the work the following notes appear. These notes are on one of the pages that Sculthorpe had marked to be transferred into the work as he was working out its structure, so they date from whenever the larger structure of *Irkanda* and most of the material was worked out. It is clear that, as he often did, Sculthorpe was drafting the instructions to appear on the score.

( + bird-song)

There are two tempi only in this work.
1. Remote V.S. Remote. (\( \frac{3}{4} \) = about) for the lyr-melodic, bird-calls.
2. At a mod. speed (\( \frac{3}{4} \) = ) Dance; the harmonic rhythmic-harmonic

On the 1977 published version the tempi have become Poco Lento \( \frac{3}{4} \) = c.96 for the “song” and “bird-song” sections, and \( \frac{3}{4} \) = 88 for the Moderato, “rhythmic” sections. Importantly, however, these annotations also give more of a sense of Sculthorpe’s fairly early interpretations regarding two types of material in the work. The descriptions “Song” and “bird-song” seem to firm up an interpretation of Sculthorpe’s intentions in terms of human and avian expressions sounding within the musical space he has created. These sections are further united by appearing in the same tempo.

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144 Peter Sculthorpe, “Irkanda I and Earlier violin M.S. + sketches,” Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia, 18 (in Sculthorpe’s structural schema 8 and 9 are written on this page).
Sculthorpe’s notes here further suggest that he links these two sections formally and in a kind of opposition to the “rhythmic-harmonic” material. In the program note from February 1960, part of which was quoted earlier, he went on to say “[t]here are two principal themes. The first is marked ‘very slowly, remote. Song and bird song.’ This is heard after a short introduction. The second... is marked ‘Dance; the rhythmic and rhythmic harmonic.’”\textsuperscript{15}

The “rhythmic-harmonic” sections are marked \textit{Moderato} in the 1977 edition, and correspond to the passages marked “B” and “C” in the structural diagram above. Rhythmically, the C sections are the most pronounced and this is emphasized by the instruction to play \textit{pesante} and \textit{staccato}. Each section consists of a very limited number of chords that are alternated freely: C at m. 87 is identical to that at m. 161, and in each instance an six bar phrase which utilizes only four dyads is succeeded by a ten bar section alternating freely between a different set of four dyads.

\textbf{Musical Example 4: 36} The two sets of four dyads used in Sculthorpe \textit{Irkanda I}, mm. 87-102 and 161-76

\textbf{Musical Example 4: 37} Sculthorpe \textit{Irkanda I}, mm. 87-101

\textsuperscript{15} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 165.
Notable here is the harmonic language which consists of the intervals of fifths and thirds and then sevenths and seconds. In each set of dyads there is also an exploitation of cross relations, and the second set involves a fair level of dissonance with its minor seconds and major sevenths. The extreme limitation on number of chords and the *pesante staccato* playing style emphasise the repetition of the various rhythmic patterns which also involve some syncopation. In these respects, the *pesante* passages are developments of the oscillations between two or three chords or dyads in the *Sonata for Violin Alone*. In his structural diagram in the sketches, Sculthorpe labeled these sections “perc,” presumably short for percussive. Within existing classical music traditions, this is a strongly primitivist passage of music, and in a context in which Sculthorpe was thinking of it as percussive and in which he, in the program note from 1960 called it “Dance” and described the work as an Aboriginal burial, it seems most likely he was imagining aspects of Aboriginal dance and ceremony in a burial ritual. This is supported by the program note from 1960, apparently written by Robert Henderson, which talks of “the savage tribal dance.”¹⁶ In that sense these passages in *Irkanda I* can be viewed as a similar evocation to the third movement of the *Sonatina*.

The two final C sections at m.199 and m.213 take the dyads into fuller chords of triple and then quadruple stops. The passages are clearly related to the earlier versions in the limited number of the chords involved, in the basic style of the rhythmic patterns and the *pesante* expression marking. The triple stop passage lasts from mm.199-210 and consists of only three chords, again freely alternated. The final passage of this type, from mm.213-22 also uses just three chords and is

¹⁶ Peter Sculthorpe, “Irkanda I for solo violin,” publicity material. Annotated “from the programme issued by the BBC, during Commonwealth Weeks. 6/2/60.” Note originally by Robert Henderson, see ibid. Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
marked *con fuoco, fff*. Again, the chords and part of one of the passages are shown below. All of the chords are based on fifths, and all have a high level of dissonance with the inclusion of one or more minor ninths or major sevenths. This is another passage of dissonant primitivism, and the clearly audible emphasis on fifths adds an element of the folk-like and pastoral. In the light of Sculthorpe’s earlier transformation of Beethoven’s violin concerto theme into a ‘primitive’ Aboriginal environment, it seems once again that Aboriginal people are being interpreted as in terms of rustic folk tropes, and simultaneously strange and other.

Musical Example 4: 38 The two sets of three chords used in Sculthorpe *Irkanda I*, mm. 199-210 and 213-22

![Musical Example 4: 38](image)

Musical Example 4: 39 Sculthorpe *Irkanda I*, mm. 213-17

![Musical Example 4: 39](image)

The other *Moderato* sections of the piece are designated “B” in the diagram above. Their melody involves numerous semitones and once again is based on fifths. The fifths basis is particularly clear in Sculthorpe’s sketches which see a version consisting of the grace note fifths written instead as straight parallel fifth dyads above a written out version the same as the final.197 Most of the melodic semitones are not shown in the example below but come in the following phrase.

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Musical Example 4: 40 Sculthorpe *Irkanda* I, mm. 71-74

The final passages of *Irkanda* I to be discussed are in a *moto perpetuo* format. In two of these, the lamentational melody and the passage based on fifths just discussed are transformed into *tremolo moto perpetuo* quavers. The lamenting melody, m. 119, is marked *misterioso* and the fifths passage is to be played *sul ponticello*. In this respect they are similar to some of the *moto perpetuo* passages in the three string sonatas, especially for example the *Sonata for Cello Alone* in which the *Islamey* passage is reproduced in *tremolo sul ponticello* and is actually marked “remote.” The effect of these passages is at once to give a distant kind of sound and to sense of strangeness, described in the 1960 program note as “mysterious effects of quiet tremolando and sudden contrasts of tone.”

The reception of *Irkanda* I

Many reviewers and commentators heard the work in terms of alien, desolate, forbidding and primitive landscape and ‘Aboriginality.’ Early accounts emphasise Aboriginality, in line with Sculthorpe’s earliest glosses, but there are also specific mentions or implications of landscape. The *Australasian Sporting Goods and Toy Retailer*, in an article on the Launceston gun shop Sculthorpe owned with his brother, described it as “unequivocally aboriginal motif-weird, and as divorced from the orthodox western conception, as the primitive aboriginal tribal laws and customs are from the observance of social protocol at a vice regal reception... an uncannily out-of-this-world composition,” noting also that it “added its shade of colour to those who, in their turn, go to make up the picture of the Tasmanian sports trade.”

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118 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 165.
writer had heard the tape, as had the author of “Carena’s Column” who said “Peter Sculthorpe has painted a vivid picture of sunburnt country and native mysticism,” presumably invoking Dorothy MacKellar.

Later, Mellers saw Irkanda I as “Sculthorpe’s forlorn evocation of the self in the wilderness,” seemingly hearing the human subjectivity implied by the expressive melody surrounded by ‘strange’ and arid landscape evocations. Romolo Costantino, reviewing in the Sydney Morning Herald in 1965 emphasised conversely the alien nature of the landscape it evoked. Struck by its “simplicity combined with powerful atmosphere” he said “Irkanda I is a completely Australian work; the undisturbed, primeval land is like a silent presence summoned by the music, which is free of all sophisticated influences. The composer has shut himself off from tonality and there is a wordless searching as if language has not yet been invented; the music is an intuitive and beautifully shaped artistic human portrait of a non-human environment.” Hannan noted that it was the birdsong that “populate[d] the lonely landscape,” whereas Curt Prerauer focused on technical elements and loneliness “this is a most wonderful study in the technique of the semitone... excellent as it is, and taut. One may also say, against my suggestion, that the ‘Australian’ impression of the piece is stressed by the hopelessness & loneliness of the expression as you obtain it by this very device of repetition.”

**Shifting interpretations**

More than a decade after composition Sculthorpe’s public interpretations of this work seems to have shifted. In conversations with Andrew McCredie

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120 Ibid., 170.
123 Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 76.
sometime before 1969 he said he composed *Irkanda I* in Canberra in 1955.\(^{125}\) In 1993 he elaborated “[t]he opening melody follows a three hundred and sixty degree contour of the hills around Canberra, where most of the work was written.”\(^{126}\) This statement certainly emphasizes the idea of landscape depiction over and above any ‘Aboriginal’ inspirations. As to whether Sculthorpe was even in Canberra in 1955, however, Hannan says “curiously the composer’s first substantial contact with the Australian continental landscape was on a journey by road from Canberra to Melbourne in 1956,”\(^{127}\) that is, a year after the composition of *Irkanda I*. Sculthorpe was indeed impressed by what he saw on the 1956 trip, writing to his parents “a wonderful drive with a beautiful moon!... It was actually a wonderful experience for me, to be able to see so much of this marvelous country by sun and by moon.”\(^{128}\) Skinner indicates that Sculthorpe did indeed travel to Sydney in 1955,\(^{129}\) but doubts he made it to Canberra.\(^{130}\) The 1955 trip to Canberra and the idea of a melody following the contour of the region’s landscape are therefore likely to be apocryphal.

What is particularly interesting about this story is that Sculthorpe was concerned, perhaps as early as 1969 but certainly in the 1990s, to convince his audiences of a very strong relationship between the piece and Australian mainland landscape, but a different type of relationship to the one that the piece actually seems to have. In 1998 Sculthorpe even said that it was perhaps because he was living in the mainland landscape that in this work he was able to develop a stronger connection to such a place:


\(^{127}\) Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, 10.

\(^{128}\) Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 25 November 1956, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.

\(^{129}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 163.

\(^{130}\) Graeme Skinner, personal communication, 2011.
when I wrote *Irkanda I* for solo violin, I was living in Canberra, working at the Playhouse there. And I certainly thought that I would trace the 360 degree graph of the landscape around me, and then write music that followed the contour of the landscape... it’s a very faithful reproduction of the landscape. That’s the first time that I did it, and I think it’s significant that it’s also the first time that I lived on mainland Australian outside Melbourne, and that I was more in touch with the landscape.\(^{131}\)

As discussed previously, one of the most characteristic aspects of Sculthorpe’s work through most of his career is precisely that it is based on his imaginings of outback landscapes, imaginings of sights and atmospheres that he gleaned from the multiple representations in the culture around him. In this sense, also, Sculthorpe’s knowledge of the outback landscape was quite characteristic of the relationships many urban Australians continue to have with it.

**Theatre Music, and then to Oxford**

Sculthorpe’s trip from Canberra to Melbourne in 1956 stemmed from his involvement in theatrical productions. It seems that around this time he attempted to make a living through composing and arranging for the theatre. This becomes explicit in 1957 when he moved to Sydney in pursuit of projects, which meant he was no longer working in the shop with his brother.\(^{132}\) Sculthorpe had been writing for theatre since his student years and once back in Launceston seems to have been involved in productions there and in Hobart fairly regularly, and these increased to a fair number through 1956 and 1957, also in Sydney and Canberra.\(^{133}\) Eventually, however, the lack of time to spend on ‘art music’ composition and the possibility of a scholarship through the University of Melbourne to ‘go abroad’ saw his return to Launceston in late 1957

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\(^{132}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 181.

\(^{133}\) See ibid., Chapter 5.
and the firming up of applications and plans that eventually led to his gaining a scholarship and departing to study in Oxford in 1958.\footnote{See ibid., 193-94, 199.}

The subject matter of the theatrical projects ranged from revues to Shakespeare, but one observable trend in 1956 and 1957 is that Sculthorpe and some of his collaborators were exploring possibilities for a number of projects with Australian themes. He was involved with the Canberra Repertory Theatre through a Tasmanian contact in 1956, and ideas circulated amongst the group to stage Mary Durack’s \textit{The Way of the Whirlwind}.\footnote{Ibid., 174.} Sculthorpe had also discussed staging a play from a children’s book of Aboriginal stories with another colleague,\footnote{Peter Sculthorpe to Edna, Jos and Roger Sculthorpe, 23 October 1956, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.} and he was involved in discussions in Sydney in 1957, firstly for a proposed play about the visit of actress Lola Montez to the Victorian Goldfields, and then later about the possibility of staging \textit{The Sentimental Bloke}.\footnote{Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 180, 185.} Australian themes were present in other media he worked in too: he wrote the soundtrack to a short film about a character in the outback who meets a man from outer space, and composed a song called “Kookaburra” for a purported children’s opera.\footnote{Ibid., 195.} All of these postdate Sculthorpe’s compositional turn to musical Australianness in the early to mid-50s, but the interest in national themes on the part of some members of the theatrical community demonstrates how in tune such a direction was with wider nationalist preoccupations circulating in Australian culture.

The kinds of perceptions Sculthorpe and others had of the Australia they were promoting were, however, highly ambivalent. This is an important aspect of understandings of Australian nation, landscape and national character. In Sculthorpe’s individual case, however, two recorded instances stand out. Firstly in a letter he wrote to Rex Hobcroft in 1956 about his inclusion in the festival of
Australian music Hobcroft was organizing in Perth, Sculthorpe wrote “[i]f I’m too late, or if you can’t do any good for me, then don’t worry; being an Australian composer I’m used to missing out!”\(^\text{139}\) The extent to which Sculthorpe actually believed this, or whether he was adopting a pose based on attitudes of other Australian artists of the time doesn’t much matter: the statement is revealing in that it presents an understanding of Australian creativity and the plight of Australian artists, one that was frequently apparent in the contemporary culture. Secondly, while in Sydney in 1957 Sculthorpe reported home to his parents “[c]oming here has shown me how little opening there is for one’s music in Australia... Here I get the same old story nearly every day – you’re far too talented to be in Australia!”\(^\text{140}\) Again, whether this is an exaggeration is not so much the point as the idea that people would be likely to say such a thing, the idea that anyone talented shouldn’t, and couldn’t afford to, work in Australia.

From 1954, which seems to have been the beginning of compositional ‘Australianess’ in Sculthorpe’s work, until August 1958 when he left to study at Oxford, the music he composed included theatrical works, and songs or pieces related to theatrical works, the Aboriginal-inspired and landscape related *Sonatina*, *Bunjil* and *Irkanda I*, and the violin pieces for Wilfred Lehmann that preceded *Irkanda I* and seem to have had a similar set of inspirations, if much less explicitly stated. There is a high degree of consistency within Sculthorpe’s inspirations and compositional ambitions. It seems significant that out of all of his ‘art music’ compositions of the period to 1958, there is only one work that has never been discussed in relation to Sculthorpe’s attempts to evoke ‘Aboriginal’ atmospheres or ‘typically Australian’ landscapes, and I have not discovered any information concerning the nature of this work at all beyond the following prosaic details. The piece is called *Olympic Overture* and Sculthorpe entered it into the Olympic Overture Competition run in relation to

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 178.

\(^{140}\) Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 16 May 1957, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. The work is now lost and little is known about it, except that it was, within the specifications of the competition, for full orchestra.141 In a letter to his family that same year he wrote of being disappointed about not winning the competition but “[a]t least now I’ve got another movement of my Symphony.”142 However, no other movements or material related to the Symphony have ever come to light.

A final report in the press after Sculthorpe left for Oxford provides a fascinating insight into the extent of Sculthorpe’s ambitions in 1958. It also shows that his intention to write ‘distinctively Australian’ music, present at least by 1954 and evident in music composed through 1955, had continued or re-emerged in 1958. The scholarship mentioned is the Lizette Bentwich Scholarship from the University of Melbourne that enabled him to study at Oxford:

Peter Sculthorpe’s ambition is to be partly instrumental in the founding of an Australian school of thought in musical composition...He feels [the scholarship] brings him closer to his ambition.143

Here, a young Australian of the 1950s states that in order to create an Australian school of composition, it will be beneficial to go and study at Oxford. No doubt his period of study actually was helpful to Sculthorpe, in many ways. However, the attitude expressed here is highly telling in relation to the ways many Australians viewed their national artistic and intellectual culture in this period. It is also far removed from Hannan and Sculthorpe’s retrospective characterisations of Sculthorpe’s vision in this period that it was necessary for an Australian composer to “reject” Europe and take their bearings more locally.

141 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 169.
142 Peter Sculthorpe to Edna, Jos and Roger Sculthorpe, 23 October 1956, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
143 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 198.
Chapter 5

Sculthorpe seems to have intended to study composition at Oxford and obtain a doctorate, but doctorates in music were scarce then (Oxford had awarded only two – neither in composition – since 1946) and those in composition took much longer than the period allowed for by Sculthorpe’s scholarship. There was therefore a period of uncertainty after Sculthorpe arrived in Oxford while decisions were made about what he would be allowed to do.¹ In the end, he did take composition lessons with faculty members Edmund Rubbra and Egon Wellesz, and the latter was also Sculthorpe’s tutor in his D.Phil thesis. The thesis was never completed and Sculthorpe returned to Australia to be with his dying father in late 1960.

Throughout the period of nearly two and half years at Oxford Sculthorpe met with frequent incredulity on the part of academics and students as to why someone achieving success as a composer would wish to pursue academic study at a doctoral level. Sculthorpe persisted with study at Oxford because he seemed to have been set on getting an academic job back in Australia,² and his reasons for this are evident in passages such as the following from a letter to his parents in which he writes about being tempted into writing film music:

Nobody wants money more than I, yet I want so many other things as well; Oxford will give me all this & will help me to be a name in the world of music, & not just another wealthy ‘hack’ composer.... Wellesz has never had a great deal of money but he’s always lived reasonably well and very happily, & he is one of the ‘grand old men’ of music, sincere, respected, happily married etc.³

² Most of the first two paragraphs are based on Skinner’s research ibid., Chapter 6.
³ Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 9 June 1959, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
At no point during the period he was living in England does Sculthorpe seem to have been tempted to stay and make a career there, although once he arrived back in Australia in 1961 he talked about it frequently. In his Oxford correspondence with his parents he expresses sentiments along the following lines, “[a]ll the time I think of earning my living, through music, in Australia.”4 Even if such sentiments were partly stated to reassure his distant family of his return and his focus on being financially independent, there doesn’t seem to be evidence for serious thoughts at this time of staying in England.

Implicit already in the discussion above is a factor that separates our understanding of this period of Sculthorpe’s life from those hitherto: the existence of substantially more contemporary documentation of his experiences and thoughts. He wrote frequently to his family from Oxford, and there is also a little more press coverage of his activities. Graeme Skinner’s biography has documented much of this material, and additionally, as for earlier periods, Skinner interviewed some of Sculthorpe’s friends and associates. Several sections of this chapter, therefore, draw heavily on Skinner’s book, because such accounts are vital to an understanding of the specifics of Sculthorpe’s attempts to compose ‘Australian’ music in this period. However, this chapter will also draw on documentary evidence that Skinner chose not to include in his already monumental book, and will also outline some new interpretations of Sculthorpe’s activity and more findings from musical analysis.

As one would expect, postgraduate study at Oxford widened Sculthorpe’s knowledge of music, especially contemporary music. On December 9, 1958 he wrote to his parents “[i]n a few months I’ve assimilated a whole world of music.”5 Fairly soon after arriving, he attended a lecture on electronic music. It

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4 Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 9 December 1958, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia. Similar statements are found in letters written on 1 November 1958 and 21 April 1960, for example.

5 Ibid.
may have been through the speaker, Australian Marc Wilkinson, that
Sculthorpe got to know Varèse’s music, as Wilkinson had been one of Varèse’s
students. Later, he told Michael Hannan he also got to know Messiaen’s music
and saw copies of the avant-garde periodical *Die Reihe* at this time. Wilfrid
Mellers introduced him to the music of Ives, Cowell and Partch in 1959. John
Cage came to Oxford, and apparently stayed at Sculthorpe’s house. Sculthorpe
also attended the lectures and events of the Oxford University Contemporary
Music Club (OUCMC), whose members were mostly interested in the
contemporary European avant-garde, to the extent that when Copland visited,
some avoided him. In 1960 the English serialist composer Elisabeth Lutyens
spoke to the club and Sculthorpe wrote a report for the student magazine. Skinner outlines other encounters with twentieth-century music and the
theorizing around it.

One anecdote seems to indicate that Sculthorpe presented himself as a
composer of deliberately ‘Australian’ music from fairly early in his time at
Oxford. The first time he met Edmund Rubbra, on entering Rubbra’s office for a
composition lesson, Rubbra welcomed him “Ah! ... Australia’s Bartók!”
delivered in an amusing way.” Clearly, Bartók’s success in developing what
was widely recognized as distinctively Hungarian avant-garde music made him
a potential model for the musical aspirations of other nationalist composers,
and in this case, Bartók’s project provided a gently teasing point of comparison
with Sculthorpe’s ambitions. It was only a few years earlier, for instance, that
Xenakis had spoken of his desire to become a “Greek Bartók,” an ambition

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7 Michael Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas 1929-1979* (St Lucia:
University of Queensland Press, 1982), 11.
9 Ibid., 220.
10 Ibid., 212-15.
11 Ibid., 238.
12 Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 15 November 1958, Papers of Peter
Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
obviously abandoned once he began writing texturalist works such as Metastaseis (1954).

The Oxford works

Apart from a waltz, later the “Left Bank Waltz,” that Skinner speculates may have been inspired by listening to the orchestra playing waltzes on the ship from Australia to Europe, the first extant work from the Oxford period is a setting of an excerpt of Isaiah 34 for voices and piano called Prophecy (1958). The work had been conceived in Launceston and completed to bring to a composition lesson with Rubbra. As outlined earlier, in his 1999 autobiography, Sculthorpe stated that “without realising it” the piece had been based on the idea of wilderness as a source of Australian creativity (section two, ‘The Blossoming’) and this was contrasted with a section of “a rather complex tango-like rhythm...like some half-remembered dance music gone awry” (section one ‘The Laying Waste’). As discussed, it is possible this interpretation was Mellers’s, especially since Sculthorpe said he hadn’t “reali[zed] it” at the time of writing the piece. I was unable to find Prophecy in the Sculthorpe papers at the National Library of Australia, so cannot comment further other than to say this work may have dealt with ideas about Australia but these sound rather retrospectively appended.

Sculthorpe wrote two entirely new works at Oxford and reused them in all of his subsequent Irkanda period music, and he also reworked several earlier pieces into new pieces at Oxford, as discussed in the previous chapter. He spoke of almost all of his Oxford works in relation to the kind of themes he’d already discussed around most of the Launceston pieces: ideas of Australian landscape and Aboriginality but now with much more emphasis on landscape and very much less on Aboriginality. Irkanda II (1959) was an entirely new work

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14 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 204.
15 This is based on ibid., 215.
16 Peter Sculthorpe, Sun Music: Journeys and Reflections from a Composer's Life (Sydney: ABC Books, 1999), 45.
that at one stage he had thought of calling String Quartet No.5, but renamed. The *Sonata for Cello Alone* (1959), as already discussed, was a reworking of the outer movements of the *Sonata for Violin Alone* (1955). The piano trio, *Irkanda III* (1960) reworked *Irkanda II*, and the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion* (1960) reworked the *Sonata for Cello Alone*. Finally, the new song cycle *Sun* (1960), in a passage that has not been made public until now, was described by Sculthorpe in the months after its composition as related to Mexico, “the country that comes closest to Australia in its many aspects,” a phrase that was then crossed out on the document concerned.\(^7\) Parts of *Sun* and parts *Irkanda II* and *Irkanda III* were later used in the *Irkanda IV* (1961), the Piano Sonata (1963) and the String Quartet No.6 (1965).\(^8\) Sculthorpe spoke of all of these latter works as representative of Australia in some way, and the potential links and implications from the reuse of the song cycle material and *Irkanda II* will be explored below.

**Irkanda II**

Sculthorpe wrote *Irkanda II* in early 1959 to enter into a competition run by the Australian Music Association, an organization based at Australian House in London that was formed to offer support to Australian musicians in England. The competition specified that only “British subjects resident in Australia for five years” may enter;\(^9\) at this stage most Australians were British subjects. From available evidence the piece seems to have been written in two months, confirmed in an annotation on the score “Feb / March 1959.” On receiving the news that he had won the competition some two months after completing the piece, Sculthorpe wrote to his parents:

> I could have called it String Quartet No 5, but it’s in my ‘Australian’ style, I suddenly decided to use the much-loved (by me) Australian Aboriginal word, ‘Irkanda,’ meaning ‘scrub country,’ an austere

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\(^7\) Peter Sculthorpe, BBC Talk, ascribed to “late 50s” but actual date of composition is August 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.


\(^9\) Ibid., 221.
[Sculthorpe’s emphasis] & lonely place. Incidentally, for luck I used ‘Yoonecara’ as my pseudonym [for the competition]; Yoonecara is the aboriginal head-man in my piano sonatina.20

To Sculthorpe then, this music held the possibility of evoking what he saw as ‘Australianness.’ Furthermore, it is clear that he communicated that possibility, and more concretely proposed ways his audiences might receive the work through the title he gave it and in its program notes. The use of the word \textit{Irkanda} and his frequent explanations of it around this time as a burial rite and “the huge silent scrub-country of Central Australia” have already been noted. What is also clear in relation to this work is that it is likely that he wrote a program note for the first performance that outlined similar associations. I have not come across such a note nor have I seen any references to it anywhere, but Skinner notes that in a review in the \textit{Oxford Times} the writer “relayed Sculthorpe’s aim ‘to express in terms of music the background of Australian life in the Out-back’.” It seems most likely that a reviewer would know about such an aim through program notes distributed at the concert. It is also interesting to note, given Sculthorpe’s later description of the work as “violently percussive” and his expressed intention in the \textit{Sonatina} several years earlier to write “primitive rhythms,” that the same reviewer also said that it “has an often effective austerity of expression and a generous degree of sharp rhythmic contrasts... always vital and never dull,”21 with a “slight weakness of structural discipline.”22 Another review at the time noted that Sculthorpe had a “remarkable gift for evoking the atmosphere of his own country... It is interesting and inspiring to hear a work with an idiom of obviously Australian origin.” Skinner notes that Sculthorpe was delighted with this latter review until he discovered it was written by a friend of his, presumably one with whom he had discussed his aesthetic.23 The fact that Sculthorpe was disappointed that this latter review was a result of insider knowledge supports my interpretation

20 Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 25 May 1959, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
of the existence and content of a program note written in 1960 that the other reviewer had read, since the reference to Australianness in that review did not upset Sculthorpe.

Sculthorpe’s reactions to the work once he’d finished writing it were very positive, and that remained the case when he heard it a year later at its first performance in late February 1960. He wrote to his father after completing it “I’m very pleased with the music... it was my best, a sincere work, and I’m very proud of it.” And after the first performance “I was really thrilled and quite moved by my own music; it was, I think, one occasion when something I’ve written came very close, in performance, to my original idea.”

*Irkanda II* has a significant set of elements in common with Sculthorpe’s previous *Irkanda* music, especially the string pieces, and is thus, as he says, a continuation of his “Australian style.” The majority of the work consists of static, perversively dissonant harmonies, often in homophonic textures. It thus has the potential to connote landscape, some sense of primitivism, and exoticism, depending on the listener. The contrapuntal sections will be discussed below, but even these sometimes have a pedal point or a few harmonic notes held against them. Most of the chords in the work are held for at least three or more bars, but more usually they persist for six or even up to twelve bars (for example, Fig.5 mm.95-106), often at the tempo “very slowly.” In this sense, *Irkanda II* is a particularly important work in Sculthorpe’s compositional history, for it is in this work that he takes the harmonically static textures he has used in solo string music into the type of ensemble texture which was to become highly characteristic of most of his oeuvre, particularly music connoting landscape, in the *Irkanda* period and also way beyond. Many

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24 Ibid., 233.
25 Peter Sculthorpe to Jos Sculthorpe, 6 April 1959, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
years later he said that he had attempted to “consolidate” his “musical style” in the piece.  

In terms of Krenek’s classification of levels of dissonance according to how many ‘mild’ or ‘sharp’ dissonances chords contain, the harmony in *Irkanda II* tends to project a moderately high level of dissonance, as in Sculthorpe’s previous music. Chords are built around tertian, quartal or quintal harmony, with added dissonances of minor ninths, major sevenths or minor seconds, and many chords frequently contain two or even more of these ‘sharp’ dissonances. Additionally, there are a few sections where harmonic semitone dyads sound against activity in other parts, for example, the second half of what I have labeled “Melody 1,” shown below. This passage, with the dyads mostly omitted, was used later in *Irkanda III*, the Piano Sonata and String Quartet No.6.

**Musical Example 5: i** Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* mm.19-24

Hannan argues that most of the *Irkanda II* chords are the “same genus” as the chord consisting of two major thirds a major seventh apart that occurs at the opening of the *Sonatina*,  

and almost every chord in *Irkanda II* contains either a major seventh, a minor ninth or less often that interval voiced closer, as a minor second. Even more clearly than in his previous music, Sculthorpe is working with chords made up of superimposition of various intervals and triads, usually at a dissonant interval from each other. In contrast to Hannan’s

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27 Ibid., 222.
28 Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, 44.
discussion of chords in *Irkanda IV*, however, where he finds that many of the bottom notes of major seventh intervals fall by semitone to effect resolution,\(^{29}\) there is rarely any sense of harmonic resolution in *Irkanda II*, the chords, rather, tend to be merely stated and allowed to sound, after which there is often a change of section to music with a new, usually unrelated tonal centre. There are a couple of exceptions to this, such as the passage mm.89-92 in which the two chords shown first in the example below oscillate back and forth, and the B♭ in the second-lowest voice resolves onto the fifth of the next chord, A. Although the second chord here could be heard as triadic, Sculthorpe voices it in such a way that the superimposed fifths are emphasized, and the majority of the chords in *Irkanda II* have a fifth, or sometimes a fourth, as their bottom, bass interval.

Some other examples of the superimposition principle are as follows. Each of the second pair of chords is stated for a four bar passage and between these passages is interspersed another, related chord. In this case the chord notes are arpeggiated in the piece. The first chord adds a minor ninth to the bottom note of its bottom tritone, and a major seventh to the top note, again using the principle of added dissonances but producing a third, not a fourth as the top interval of the chord. However, when the chord recurs several bars later both of the notes of the bottom tritones have minor ninths added above them, producing a pair of superimposed tritones a minor ninth apart (the repetition of the upper interval an octave higher seems to indicate this reading rather than seeing it as minor ninths a tritone apart).

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 56.
Musical Example 5: Reduction of selected chords in *Irkanda II*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm.89-92</th>
<th>mm.181-85, 193-97, 221-37</th>
<th>mm.243-50</th>
<th>mm.274-76</th>
<th>mm.365-66</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semitone resolving down</td>
<td>superimposed tritones (2nd chord)</td>
<td>quartal / quintal</td>
<td>sevenths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shown here also in the third column is an example of superimposed fifths a major seventh apart (E-B, Eb-Bb inverted), taking the “Sonatina” superimposition principle onto another interval type, now with a more complicated chord construction with a further fifth added (seen as either another fifth onto the bottom quintal formation, or a minor ninth above the bass E). This is stated as a repeated static sonority for eight bars, mm.243-50, Fig.16, and is one of a number of similarly constructed chords through the work.

The fourth column demonstrates a strategy that occurs twice in the work where a melody with a particular tonal centre is accompanied by a static, dissonant chord that does not imply the same tonal centre. Here a melody in the treble circulates around D against the chord shown above, the harmony providing a dissonant background. The final example here is the penultimate homophonic harmony of the piece, and clearly it is intended to provide a climactic dissonance, played *fff* and *al tallone* with added accents in a short repeated rhythmic pattern. The juxtaposed major sevenths and voicing that emphasizes the minor second project some of the most dissonant harmony of the whole work.
In a 1962 article by Sculthorpe’s friend Max Oldaker, the quartet is described as “a violently percussive experiment in dissonance.” Presumably Oldaker hadn’t heard the quartet, and Skinner assumes that the phrase is Sculthorpe’s own (Skinner also dates the comment from 1961, presumably published in an article Oldaker wrote for the Launceston Examiner that I haven’t been able to obtain). Later, in a 1968 talk Sculthorpe said of Irkanda III – which, as will be shown later, consists largely of material from Irkanda II – it was “a very violent and aggressive piece, indeed, a rather nasty piece I think.” This seems a rather odd comment to make since by the time he said this he had written the well-received String Quartet No.6 (1965), whose second movement is based almost entirely on Irkanda III.

Irkanda II does have percussive sections, but they are not of the type of the Sonata for Violin Alone which involved tapping on the body of the instrument, nor are they like the “savage tribal dance” music of Irkanda I where a small number of percussively articulated chords are stated in a free order. Rather, the percussive elements in Irkanda II consist of static chords repeated homophonically with percussive rhythms and often loud, emphatic articulation. There are many such passages in the work that project both static harmonies and this strong sense of rhythm, and in this respect are more similar to other primitivist musical representations than anything in Sculthorpe’s previous work. A good example is from Fig.22, mm.305-11, in which the bottom three parts are played fff with down bow attacks in rhythmic unison.

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31 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 223.
Musical Example 5: 3 Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* mm.305-11

The semitone is the most pervasive melodic interval in the piece, although, as has often been observed about Sculthorpe’s music, there is frequent use of the minor third here as well. Melody 1, shown below, states A♭ to G six times, and consists of several other semitone pairs as well. The implied harmonic stasis is a major part of the way this melody is perceived, although in each of its iterations through the piece the A♭-G pairs are stated in a range of different octaves.

Musical Example 5: 4 Sculthorpe, *Irkanda II*, Melody 1, always stated “Briskly” (A on diagram below)

Musical Example 5: 5 Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* mm.13-18, first violin

Many of the melodies are highly chromatic and involve diminished intervals either between adjacent pitches or over larger spans, and this can be seen in the melodies quoted below. Some also give modal hints, as was previously noted
for those of the *Sonatina* and other earlier pieces. The main theme of first (and most of the subsequent) canons in *Irkanda II* is similar to some of the modal music of the *Sonatina*, whether one hears the Eb as a note of an unusual mode, or as a chromatic upper neighbour-note to the D. The initial stepwise ascent in this melody opens up a diminished fifth, and the other canon theme, also shown below, begins with a stepwise diminished fourth, again with Phrygian implications and the sense of a chromatic upper neighbour-note. The repetition of the Ab in the second melody, however, makes it more likely to be perceived as a note of a mode, despite the chromatic ending of the theme.

**Musical Example 5: 6** Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* Canon theme 1, stated both “Very slowly” and “Briskly” (B on structural analysis below)

![Musical Example 5: 6](image1)

**Musical Example 5: 7** Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* Canon theme 2, stated both “Very slowly” and “Briskly” (C on structural analysis below)

![Musical Example 5: 7](image2)

Other themes in the work retain the lamentational character noted in the main melody of *Irkanda I*. “Melody 2,” shown below is in fact so similar to the *Irkanda I* theme as to be reasonably called a derivative of it.

**Musical Example 5: 8** Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* Melody 2, usually stated “Very slowly” (E on diagram below)

![Musical Example 5: 8](image3)
The final element *Irkanda II* shares with Sculthorpe’s previous ‘Australian’ string pieces is an approach to articulation and instrumental interjections in the style of *Irkanda I*’s “weird sounds of the night.” The atmospheric strangeness they lend the work seems likely to have been involved in their successful ‘Australian’ reception, especially as they and similar techniques were subsequently used in later *Irkanda* works. There is plentiful use of *tremolo* in *Irkanda II*, as well as some *sul tasto* and *sul ponticello*, interjections of isolated *pizzicato* chords, some harmonics and a couple of passages *al tallone*. There is also one quotation of birdsong from *Irkanda I*, shown below, as well as other very occasional bird-like suggestions.

**Musical Example 5: 9** Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* birdsong mm.146-50
Musical Example 5:10 Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* birdsong-like figures, second violin mm.274-75

In its fairly high level of dissonance built on harmonic minor seconds and major sevenths, quartal and quintal harmony, extremely high degree of harmonic stasis, pervasive use of melodic semitones, fleeting hints of modality, occasional lamenting qualities, and washes of tremolo and other atmospheric sounds, *Irkanda II* is consistent with the musical language Sculthorpe established in previous ‘Australian’ works. New aspects of the work include a much more sprawling and extensive structure than in previous pieces, one which, as noted above, a reviewer didn’t find entirely satisfactory, saying that it lacked “strong structural discipline.” While consisting of many more sections than previous Sculthorpe works, as usual delineated by texture, melody and (usually) different meters, *Irkanda II* also falls into larger sections that cohere through consistent tempi.

The structure of *Irkanda II* is given in the diagram below, with a summary beforehand to show how the various sections fall within the overall alternation between music to be played “Very slowly” and “Briskly.” As in many of the previous ‘Australian’ works as well as in much of his subsequent music, Sculthorpe uses two highly contrasting tempi here, and actually marks them as Tempo I (corresponding to Very Slowly) and Tempo II (Briskly) on the score. Sculthorpe includes climactic passages towards the end, and rounds off the

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33 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 234.
piece by bring the A melody back in two-part counterpoint against the first
canon theme, B.

**Figure 5: 1** Brief outline of *Irkanda II* structure showing sectionalizing by tempi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very slowly</td>
<td>Opening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briskly</td>
<td>A B C D A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very slowly</td>
<td>B E B E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briskly</td>
<td>D A F B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very slowly</td>
<td>C G F A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briskly</td>
<td>B E A+B Close</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5: 2** Structural analysis of Sculthorpe *Irkanda II*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening</th>
<th>mm.1-10</th>
<th>Very slowly</th>
<th>Irkanda IV material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melody 1 A</td>
<td>Fig. 1</td>
<td>Briskly</td>
<td>11-24 over E-F bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-44</td>
<td>¾</td>
<td>25-32 static, no melody: A-B♭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dyad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33-33 over D-G-E chord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canon on canon theme 1 B</td>
<td>Fig. 3</td>
<td>Briskly</td>
<td>45-58 Canon theme 1 (opens stepwise up dim5) stated on A, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45-66</td>
<td>¾</td>
<td>part at 8ve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>59-66 F-G bass oscillation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fugl section</td>
<td>Fig. 4</td>
<td>Briskly</td>
<td>Canon theme 2 (opens stepwise up dim4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>using canon theme 2 C</td>
<td>67-88</td>
<td>¾</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody A³⁴</td>
<td>89-94</td>
<td>Briskly</td>
<td>Over oscillating quartal and triadic chords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td>¾</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody 1 A</td>
<td>Fig. 5</td>
<td>Briskly</td>
<td>Over E-F bass and E-A-F-B chord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95-112</td>
<td>¾</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canon on canon theme 1 B</td>
<td>Fig. 6</td>
<td>Very slowly</td>
<td>Canon theme 1 stated on D#, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>113-20</td>
<td>¾</td>
<td>part, at 8ve, G# pedal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody 2 E</td>
<td>Fig. 7</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>D tonal centre over D♭-F-A chord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>121-30</td>
<td>slowly ¾</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>then mixed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³⁴ Melody A and Melody B are labeled on a different schema to Melodies 1 and 2 because they are brief and less consequential
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening material</th>
<th>Fig.8 131-41</th>
<th>Very slowly $\frac{4}{4}$</th>
<th>Harmonics added</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melody 2 E</td>
<td>Fig.9 141-50</td>
<td>Very slowly mixed meter</td>
<td>Over D- Db-F-A chord 149-50 Ikanda I birdsong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening material 2\textsuperscript{nd} phrase</td>
<td>Fig.10 151-54</td>
<td>Very slowly $\frac{4}{4}$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canon on canon theme 1 B</td>
<td>155-63</td>
<td>Accel.</td>
<td>At the 8ve on D#, 4 part, G# pedal 161-63 C 8ves with dissonances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody 2 in 2 part c.pt. E</td>
<td>Fig.11 164-74</td>
<td>Very slowly, mixed meter</td>
<td>Melody 2 down a 5\textsuperscript{th} c.f. previous 4 bar transition: static chord</td>
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<td>Melody A and static chords D</td>
<td>Fig.12 125-97</td>
<td>Briskly $\frac{6}{4}$ and $\frac{8}{4}$</td>
<td>2 chords, each stated twice x 6 bars</td>
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<td>Melody 1 varied in 2 part c.pt A</td>
<td>Fig.13 198-214</td>
<td>Briskly $\frac{8}{4}$</td>
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<td>Static chords</td>
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<td>2 chords, alternating, each stated for 6 bars at a time</td>
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<td>Melody B F</td>
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<td>Melody 1 varied A</td>
<td>Fig.23 315-22</td>
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<td>Canon on canon theme 1 B</td>
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<td>Melody 2 over static chords E</td>
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As well as the increase in chordal complexity that the additional voices of the string quartet allowed, the other significant development to Sculthorpe’s ‘Australian’ language in *Irkanda II* is the introduction of contrapuntal sections, including several canons and one fugal section. As discussed, Hannan argued that the principally chordal style at the beginning of Copland’s Piano Sonata, in opposition to ‘European’ counterpoint and serialism, was important in Sculthorpe’s development of a style “appropriate to Australia” in the *Sonatina*. However, Hannan himself has also noted the importance of canon in many of Sculthorpe’s works,35 a technique that rests clearly in the ‘European’ side of the musical Old World / New World duality that Hannan constructed and which I seek to challenge. Hannan sees the canons in String Quartet No.6, *Sun Music I*, *Sun Music IV* and other works as interruptions that function as contrasts to otherwise harmonic textures.36 There are five canonic sections in *Irkanda II* and three further sections in two-part counterpoint (mm. 164-70, mm. 199-214, and mm. 367-78). Altogether this adds up to 133 bars out of the total 382 bars of the

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36 See ibid., 54-55, 208, note 10.
piece, that is, about 35% of the overall work consists of contrapuntal textures, most of which are canonic. As in the entirely contrapuntal *Bunjil*, these are no mere textural interruptions, rather, they are major parts of the composition, even if they do provide desirable textural contrast in the long piece.

While composing this work Sculthorpe had initially felt he was writing his String Quartet No.5, and it was only later in the compositional process that he decided it was to be *Irkanda II*, after which point the Aboriginal title and his explanations around the translation of that title carried potential implications for listeners of Aboriginality and Australian landscape or place. What Sculthorpe may have been thinking or intending in relation to the work’s ‘Australianness’ whilst he was actually composing it is unresolvable, as is the question of what he *initially* intended the counterpoint sections to represent or evoke, if anything. One possible explanation here is that there is of course a distinguished tradition of string quartet writing with contrapuntal sections or movements, and whether or not Sculthorpe was thinking ‘Australia’ in the writing of the work, to draw on a contrapuntal texture is not an unusual strategy for a young composer writing a string quartet. Skinner notes that Sculthorpe very much enjoyed writing fugue and counterpoint assignments at University and that this left him with an “enduring love” of the discipline involved.37 Additionally, counterpoint has an aura of technical difficulty, and if done well, could possibly provide an advantage in a composition competition.

One aspect of the canonic sections of *Irkanda II* that might support this idea, especially in opposition to those in *Irkanda IV*, is evidence for the possibility of fugal thinking on Sculthorpe’s part. One of the first statements of the canon in *Irkanda II* introduces the theme monophonically in a complete statement on E, as in a fugue, shown below in Musical Example 5: 11. This is followed by an answer in the fugal manner, with the same theme stated a fourth below on B (m.73), followed by another entry on E (m.73) after a crotchet, in a kind of

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stretto. A further entry comes in on F♯ (m.79) after the subject on E has been stated completely. The initial pitching of the answering phrase a fifth up (here, down a fourth) is classic fugal treatment, although one would not usually expect a stretto so early. Also, in a classic fugue the statement on F♯ would not perhaps appear so soon, and this continuation of movement up by another fifth is a little reminiscent of the cycle of fifths statements in the fugue in Bartók’s well-known *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1936). The sinuous chromatic theme also recalls Bartók’s in some aspects, although, Bartók’s utilises all chromatic pitches in the opening span of a perfect fifth, unlike Sculthorpe’s which sounds more like a mode, as discussed. There is thus a slight reminder of Bartók in Sculthorpe’s work, but if Bartók’s piece was any kind of model Sculthorpe has deviated from and adapted it to a high degree.

**Musical Example 5: 11** Sculthorpe *Irkanda II*, mm. 63-80
A comparison of this treatment with Sculthorpe's adaptation of the same material in *Irkanda IV*, which Sculthorpe's commentators have always called a canon,\(^3\) highlights the fugal nature of the thinking in *Irkanda II*. In *Irkanda IV* there is no initial monophonic statement and the first answering material comes after a crotchet (m.29), the reduced time span between statements much more characteristic of a canon. Entries follow each other at a fifth below then a second up (subdominant then dominant), intervals that are not classically fugal. In transforming the material into the new piece, Sculthorpe stripped it of its initial fugal characteristics.

**Musical Example 5: 12** Sculthorpe *Irkanda IV*, mm.28–38

\(^3\) See, for example, Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, 55.
Wilfrid Mellers and the metropolitan gaze

It was in May 1959 that Sculthorpe first met Wilfrid Mellers. Sculthorpe has frequently emphasized the importance of Mellers to his musical development, and most of the substantial Sculthorpe literature mentions Mellers at one point or another. In 1999 Sculthorpe wrote that Mellers “was to exert a particularly strong influence upon me. Indeed, he became the best composition teacher that I ever had, although, at the time, I don’t think that either of us realised he was teaching me.”

Mellers was working on his book about American music at this time, *Music in a New Found Land* (1964) and introduced Sculthorpe to works by quite a number of American composers. As Skinner says, he was “fascinated that an Australian should have entered his orbit.” Mellers was familiar with the work of several major Australian writers, and clearly able to discuss Sculthorpe’s ‘Australian’ aesthetics in a helpful way. He also recommended that Sculthorpe read Australian literature and follow Australian

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painting as a way of “keeping in touch with home” compositionally. Importantly, Mellers was one of the sources of Sculthorpe’s interest in D.H. Lawrence, and recommended Lawrence’s novel about Australia, Kangaroo, although Sculthorpe doesn’t seem to have read it until the next year.  

Sculthorpe does discuss Australian painting in the talk he wrote with Robert Henderson for BBC broadcast in 1960 and compares its subject matter with that of his own work, but he doesn’t seem to have followed Mellers’s advice in relation to novels because he’d decided at about this time that for the most part he didn’t have time to read them, and as Skinner points out, he didn’t read Voss when it won the W.H. Smith Prize.  

Mellers was also instrumental in Sculthorpe’s next Oxford work, the song cycle Sun (1960). For a start, he actually requested that Sculthorpe write the piece for him and his wife Peggy, a singer, to perform. Evidently their discussions about Australia and D.H. Lawrence had led Mellers to point Sculthorpe to Lawrence’s writing about the sun in his poetry. The poems of the short cycle of three songs Sculthorpe composed are “Sun in Me,” “Tropic” and “Desire Goes Down to the Sea.” The text of “Sun in Me” alludes to the sun as a godlike force within a person, and then parallels this firstly with “a sun in heaven,” then with distant space “the sun of immense distances,” and culminates in “the sun within the atom / which is god within the atom.” The second text contrasts a dark sun with the white, godlike sun of the first poem. The dark sun is geographically situated by the title, “Tropic.” Lawrence’s imagery in this poem is very similar to that of his novel about Mexico, The Plumed Serpent (1924). The poem describes a dark sun “of black void heat,” “of the torrid mid-day’s horrific darkness” and in the poem the narrator is transformed into one of the

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 232.
“Sunblack men / ... As frictional, as perilous, explosive as brimstone.” “Behold my hair twisting and going black. / ...Negroid.”

The final poem is the brief “Desire Goes Down to the Sea,” which in terms of the sun and the metaphysical implications it has for Lawrence, is mostly about its absence: “I have no desire anymore / towards woman or man, bird, beast or creature or thing,” etcetera.

As noted above, Sculthorpe made the connection between Mexico and Sun explicit in a draft of a radio script he’d prepared with Robert Henderson for a BBC program in August 1960. The manuscript is in Sculthorpe’s hand and on the first two and a half pages there are just occasional crossings out and corrections, as if perhaps he’s copying it from another source. This seems supported by the fact that the crossings out are always of words used a little later in the text. On the bottom of the third page and into the fourth, however, there are more frequent crossings out, and they are not of words that reappear elsewhere. I interpret this to mean that in the final sections of this manuscript Sculthorpe was actually drafting and composing the text himself on the spot. The whole of the passage about Sun is crossed out, and there are further crossings out within the passage, presumably made when he was drafting it, before he decided to get rid of the whole thing. I reproduce it here without the overall crossing out but retaining the internal ones:

Perhaps the country that comes closest to Australia in its many aspects is Mexico, a land of vast plains & strange ancient deities, the country of the D.H. Lawrence song-cycle Sun. It can be no coincidence that the country of the composer’s D.H. Lawrence song-cycle Sun.

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46 Peter Sculthorpe, “BBC Talk,” ascribed to “late 50s” on the manuscript but the actual date of composition is August 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
47 Ibid.
So, Sculthorpe wrote this passage and then decided against it. He did not replace it with any other information on Sun, at least not anything in this draft of the talk. There may of course have been later versions. In this draft, the text goes on immediately to a paragraph about the Sonata for Viola and Percussion (1960) that has the same sort of frequent crossings out as the Sun passage. Then it finishes with the beginning of another paragraph “[a]gain, there is a.” The text stops there.

It is inconceivable that Mellers’s interest in Lawrence would not have involved knowledge of Lawrence’s novel about Mexico, The Plumed Serpent, and he may also have known Lawrence’s essays about New Mexico and Mexico. This seems reasonable because Lawrence wrote Kangaroo and The Plumed Serpent on the same trip, and the time he spent in Australia was a several month stop on the way to America, specifically New Mexico, where he spent several years. For Mellers, who was a Lawrence enthusiast now writing a book about American music, Lawrence’s writing about the ‘new worlds’ of America and Australia must have been of great interest, and we know he knew Kangaroo since he recommended it to Sculthorpe. It also seems likely that Mellers is the source of Sculthorpe’s idea that the poem “Tropic” is connected with [New] Mexico, since the poem doesn’t mention Mexico or the Americas at all. Given that Sculthorpe actually wrote the setting for Mellers and his wife, and that Sculthorpe stayed with them and had contact with them at various stages of its composition, it also seems highly likely that Mellers would have discussed some of Lawrence’s ideas with Sculthorpe as well as interpretations of the three poems in the setting.

Similarly, it seems likely that since Mellers had been encouraging Sculthorpe in his writing of ‘Australian’ music, the link between Mexico and Australia came from their conversations. In the interview draft Sculthorpe says Mexico is “the country that comes closest to Australia,” and there are some interesting

48 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 237, 240.
parallels between Lawrence’s writing about Mexico / New Mexico and the ways Sculthorpe discussed his notions of Australia in relation to his early works. The sources for the following comparisons are Lawrence’s writings, an article about *The Plumed Serpent*49 and Graham Hough’s book about Lawrence’s work, *The Dark Sun: A Study of D.H. Lawrence* (1956), which Mellers may even have read. Certainly when Sculthorpe discusses Lawrence he often mentions “the so-called dark sun of D.H. Lawrence.”50

Lawrence’s relationship with America and Mexico involves him seeking, and finding, a source of spiritual renewal for what he feels has been lost in Europe and in modern, western cultures.51 He casts Native Americans in a primitivist light in order to achieve this, and imbues the very landscape with a ‘primitive’ energy, for example “a powerful heart...secretly beating, the heart of the earth” whilst also presenting the “peasants” as part of nature.52 However, as in so many cultural encounters where one figure is casting the other in an exoticist frame Lawrence presents this ambivalently, and in *The Plumed Serpent* the European character exploring Lawrence’s interests and encounters in Mexico, Kate, is fearful and experiences night as “horrible, horrible” and the sun as “dark and sinister.” Mexicans are both “children” and “demons,”53 and like so many westeners, what Lawrence wants from them is for them to be ancient, not modern, a vehicle for his hoped-for connection to ‘timeless’ spirituality. He sees sun, landscape and people as part of the spiritual renewal he seeks, but a renewal that is frightening and alien. In an essay he wrote during his time in New Mexico, he outlined some of his feelings:

I don’t want to live again the tribal mysteries my blood has lived long since. I don’t want to know as I have known, in the tribal exclusiveness. But every drop of me trembles still to the old sound, every thread in my body trembles to the frenzy of the old mystery...

49 Smith, “Völkisch Organicism.”
50 Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 58.
52 Smith, “Völkisch Organicism.”
53 Much of this discussion is based on sections of ibid.
But I stand on the far edge of their firelight, and am neither denied
or accepted. My way is my own, old red father; I can’t cluster at the
drum anymore.\textsuperscript{54}

There are clear parallels with Sculthorpe’s conceptualization of the Australian
outback and its inhabitants, Aboriginal people in a ‘tribal’ guise. Firstly, Mexico
and New Mexico are desert landscapes, paralleling the outback, popularly
described as ‘harsh,’ ‘dry’ and ‘lonely’ in this period. Sculthorpe describes both
as “vast.” Both are populated by dark-skinned indigenous peoples whom in
both instances are seen as savage: obviously savagery is a popular association
with the Aztecs, and Sculthorpe, or Robert Henderson with Sculthorpe’s
approval, described \textit{Irkanda I} as depicting a “savage tribal dance” in a 1960
program note. While Lawrence characterized Native Americans as primitive,
Sculthorpe told the press that the rhythms in his \textit{Sonatina} were “primitive” and
marked some of the “dance” sections of \textit{Irkanda I pesante}. Lawrence is centrally
concerned with Native American rituals (transferred to Aztec in \textit{The Plumed
Serpent}) in his writing about Mexico, and Sculthorpe evokes the idea of ritual in
his translation of “Irkanda” as “an Aboriginal burial rite” in 1956 and 1960.
These aspects of closeness between Sculthorpe’s conceptualisations of Mexico
and Australia seem likely to be the background to his (crossed-out) statement
“[p]erhaps the country that comes closest to Australia in its many aspects is
Mexico, a land of vast plains & strange ancient deities.” Also, as noted earlier,
Sculthorpe was able to talk about the music of String Quartet No.7 (1966) in
relation to the Australian landscape, even though he’d originally written the
piece about Mexico. He was also working on other Mexican and Aztec-related
works in connection with Australia in the mid-1960s, for example in 1966 he
said of a work he was planning, \textit{Sun Music II} for chamber ensemble and chorus,
that he was thinking of “[a] kind of Australian-Aztec piece; savage and blood-
red.”\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} Hough, \textit{The Dark Sun: A Study of D. H. Lawrence}, 121.
\textsuperscript{55} Skinner, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe}, 430.
There are, however, differences in the ways that Sculthorpe was characterizing Aboriginal people and Australia in his earlier, 1950s works in comparison with the kind of primitivist renewal in Lawrence’s and Mellers’s understandings of Mexico. The theme of renewal of the tired and decaying culture of Europe that was so widespread in early twentieth-century primitivisms is only very rarely apparent in any commentary on Australian representations of Aboriginality that I have encountered. Nicholas Thomas’s theory, quoted in Chapter 3, that primitivist representations of indigenous people in settler societies have more to do with national identity than modernism seems relevant here. Sculthorpe and others’ representations of Aboriginal culture and people seem to have been motivated by the desire to use indigenous Australians as symbols of Australianness rather than to effect a cultural renewal and find a source of elemental vigour to refresh a surfeit of civilization and complex culture in Australia. On the contrary, as is argued elsewhere in this thesis, it is precisely the lack of a sense of worthy civilization in comparison to Europe and the metropole that has formed a dominant conceptualization of Australia and a source of significant cultural anxiety through most of the twentieth century and arguably, into the present. In mid-century British views of Australia that Sculthorpe was soon to encounter, it is not Indigenous culture but rather the idea of the lack of civilization as a facet of ‘the’ Australian experience that may provide renewal and contact with something elemental in relation to the culture of Europe and the metropole, and the relational binary is constructed between non-indigenous Australian culture and wider western culture, not between Australian Indigenous and non-indigenous culture. It is important to note that before Russell Drysdale’s paintings, there were very few representations of Aboriginal people in twentieth-century outback landscapes,⁵⁶ for example those by Hans Heysen, and as discussed above, the book on Drysdale’s paintings that Sculthorpe owned in the early 1950s excluded the paintings with Aboriginal subjects. However, in the same period, there were numerous representations of Aboriginality as a symbol of national identity. At

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times these representational strategies would overlap and cohere, and Aboriginal people could often become symbols for the harshness and ‘primitive’ force of the outback landscape itself. Also, the view of Australian isolation as a source of cultural strength was certainly not just a British one but may be found in characterisations such as A.D. Hope’s “from deserts, prophets come.” Conversely, in Sculthorpe’s contemporary statements about his 1950s works he seems mostly concerned with a set of non-indigenous understandings of the land (exotic, lonely, isolated) that the ‘vanished’ Aboriginal people had inhabited, and with Aboriginality which was, as he often said, ‘truly Australian.’ Whilst primitivism for Sculthorpe seems to have been part of a strategy to represent Australianness, neither his early discussions of Aboriginal people nor (the much rarer ones) of landscape carry any sense of primitivist cultural renewal. His earlier work seemed, rather, mostly focused on loneliness, the exotic and a sense of atmospheric strangeness he associated with Aboriginality and the ‘Aboriginal place,’ the outback. The idea of a potential for ‘primitivist renewal’ available in non-indigenous and Indigenous Australia is something that only develops in Sculthorpe’s thinking from Oxford onwards.

It is in Mellers’s and Lawrence’s understandings of Mexico and Australia that the nature of the land itself along with the lack of ‘civilization’ are framed as this source of primitivist renewal, as well as, for Lawrence in Mexico, the indigenous people. In a 1965 article in the New Statesman about Australian music and culture, Mellers argues that:

In the last 15 years, Australia has become a creative ‘presence’ to be reckoned with... Writer [Patrick White] and painters are all concerned with physical and spiritual isolation. Haunted by the immensity of the Australian deserts... White’s prose makes us feel as if we’ve never felt before. Achieving this minimal identity in the emptiness that is Australia...concerned with the dissolving moment of consciousness we’re left with when the accretions of civilization have worn away. We have so much to discard before we can discover unaccommodated man; in Australia he’s peeping through the window, squatting on the doorstep... Now that artists of the
world are seeking a rootlessness, Australia’s lack of an indigenous
tradition has become almost a virtue.\textsuperscript{57}

This is, of course, the perspective of a non-Australian, and Mellers wrote the
article just after his first visit to Australia. Elsewhere in the piece he says:

After only a few week’s stay in Australia one is woundingly aware of
the frailty of civilization: not merely because the deserts are so vast
and the huddles of humans so small, but because the buildings
themselves seem so rootless and mutable.\textsuperscript{58}

Here Mellers seems thrilled by a sense of wilderness encroaching and it is this
perception of the “frailty” of all civilization and the importance of wilderness
that he is positing as a source of an internationally significant Australian
creativity, a point he makes explicit many years later in his book \textit{Singing in the
Wilderness}.\textsuperscript{59}

In meeting Mellers and others in England, Sculthorpe was encountering what
seems useful to view as a metropolitan gaze. Annegret Fauser has argued that
Copland and other American composers encountered a “French gaze” while
studying with Nadia Boulanger in Paris:

Copland’s European experience should be interpreted as the
learning of a set of cultural practices that he appropriated in
response to external nationalist identifications of culture. Indeed,
Copland’s developing identity as an American musician reflects not
only his own national self-image but also the transformative effects
of the French gaze. Thus Copland’s American identity was not
immanent but was constructed in dialogue with French culture and
its understandings of American cultural practice.\textsuperscript{60}

Sculthorpe already had a “national self-image” when he arrived in Oxford but as
Fauser suggests in Copland’s case, the experience of living in England and
presenting himself as a nationalist Australian composer seems to have involved

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Wilfrid Mellers, \textit{Singing in the Wilderness : Music and Ecology in the Twentieth
\textsuperscript{60} Annegret Fauser, “Aaron Copland, Nadia Boulanger, and the Making of an
a dialogue with the impressions of Australia and its culture held by the non-
Australians he met, and these shaped his ongoing understandings of himself
and his country. It has already been noted that Sculthorpe’s earlier
understandings of Aboriginal people and the outback were drawn not from
direct experience, but from representations in Australian culture. The distance
implicit in such a view seems, therefore, likely to have been compounded by
the understandings of others in Oxford. Mellers was particularly important to
Sculthorpe, as confirmed by Sculthorpe’s close associates⁶¹ and in the statement
from Sculthorpe quoted above that Mellers "was to exert a particularly strong
influence upon me." Hannan wrote that "Mellers helped Sculthorpe gain
confidence in his own individual vision so that he was able to continue the
pattern of composition which had been disrupted several years before, after
Irkanda I, rather than to attempt to imitate fashionable European styles of the
time."⁶² The implication of Australianness as a source of originality in Hannan’s
statement is an idea that Sculthorpe himself would use, not only in his letters
to the critic Curt Prerauer discussed earlier, but also in his notorious statement
to the Times in 1965 that "Europe is the past. Australia, Indonesia and the South
Pacific the future."⁶³ The framing of Australianness as successful within a
modernist cultural progression is notable here, although this is clearly an idea
that is peripheral in relation to mainstreams of modernist thinking within
European culture.

In a similar way to some of the tropes Fauser has noted in relation to Copland,
most biographical accounts of Sculthorpe’s time in Oxford emphasise an
“awakening to a national consciousness through experiencing his difference
within the context of an unfamiliar cultural environment."⁶⁴ Roger Covell, for
example, wrote that Sculthorpe’s “residence at Oxford sharpened instead of
lessening his awareness of things Australian and his feeling that,

⁶¹ Anne Boyd, personal communication, 2012.
⁶² Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 11.
⁶³ Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 423.
⁶⁴ Fauser, "Aaron Copland," 528.
temperamentally, he did not belong in Europe.\textsuperscript{65} Similarly, David Marr argued that “Oxford did what it has done for generations of young colonials: it showed him he was not a European. In particular, Oxford taught him his ideas on music were not the same as his European contemporaries.”\textsuperscript{66} However, Fauser argues that such accounts ascribe too great a degree of agency to the composer, and minimize the sense of a dialogue between the outsider and those resident in the cultural centre. What is clear in Sculthorpe’s case is that Mellers’s ideas about Australia and the ‘New World,’ as well as the text of D.H. Lawrence’s Kangaroo, shaped Sculthorpe’s discussions of his representations of Australia over the years to come. Sculthorpe’s engagement with Kangaroo will be discussed below and in relation to his piece The Fifth Continent in the next chapter.

It has already been noted that Sculthorpe’s discussions of his works while he was in Oxford seem to shift to a considerable degree to landscape and away from Indigenous representation, and it seems that Mellers and the metropolitan gaze are likely to have been an influence on this. As shown above, Mellers was to cast Australian experience in a vast landscape in a primitivist framework only a few years later. An important and related aspect of the metropolitan gaze Sculthorpe encountered had been shaped by the reception of Australian painters in exhibitions in Britain in the 1950s, and Mellers’s and Robert Henderson and Sculthorpe’s discussions of Australian art have already been noted above. Stephen Alomes characterizes this reception:

It could seem like a new exotic in the avant-garde of the day, the work of the wild men of the colonial bush. Critics pursued the British reception of Australian art first expressed in Joseph Burke’s 1951 monograph on Drysdale, with its images of ‘an epic struggle with nature’ and ‘an elemental landscape,’ ‘primitive, timeless and without remorse.’ It was as if these painters were untutored

colonial minds, rough-hewn frontier individualists expressing the
spirit of a jardin exotique without the benefit of European
influences. In fact, their work was the product of the meeting of
modernism with national myth and the landscape of the interior.

In Sculthorpe and Henderson’s script for their BBC talk in 1960, Australian art
is described in similar terms “[t]heir work is characterized by freshness and
vigour... the curious feeling of timelessness that seems to stretch back from the
youthfulness of the initial experience... Australia has no Middle Ages, & no
Renaissance; it has no artistic heritage as we know it in Europe.” It thus seems
that these specific ideas had a prominent role in shaping Sculthorpe’s
conceptualisation of the possibilities of Australian music, and they also must
have shaped the English reception of his music while he was in Britain.
Furthermore, the London exhibitions of Australian art were reported
enthusiastically back in Australia, and Alomes argues that the British
exhibitions and their reception led to enhanced awareness of the arts generally
in Australia. It is therefore also likely that these British ideas about the land
and the character of Australian creativity across several art forms would have
had some influence on later reception in Australia as well. As will be shown in
relation to some of Sculthorpe’s later formulations, he adopted these ideas and
perhaps they even framed his own experience. After initially being disappointed
by the landscape and architecture of Oxford, several months after arriving he
had changed his mind enough to write to his parents that he had come to find
Oxford beautiful, “although to me it is a beauty of decay.” The idea of colonial
vigour and freshness was to shape Sculthorpe’s thinking for years to come.

More specifically in relation to Sun that Sculthorpe was to compose for Mellers
and his wife Peggy, Hannan argues that Mellers “discovered... as Sculthorpe was

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67 Stephen Alomes, When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists
to Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 82.
68 Peter Sculthorpe, “BBC Talk,” ascribed to “late 50s” on the manuscript but the actual
date of composition is August 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of
Australia.
69 Alomes, When London Calls, 76.
70 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 207.
describing the Australian experience, the importance to him of the sun, and
was able to parallel this with D.H. Lawrence’s sun obsession.”71 Interestingly, at
the same time there were campaigns in Britain to instigate migration to
Australia that led to a popular preoccupation with “sunny Australia” in the
British media, so the contemporary association of Australia with sun goes wider
than just Mellers’s and Sculthorpe’s thinking.72 Presumably such campaigns
focused on that other twentieth-century Australian landscape trope, the beach.

Sun

In view of the contemporary British understandings of Australia, its culture and
youthful “freshness and vigour,” and of the discussions of Lawrence’s poetry
that Sculthorpe and Mellers must have had, it is possible to posit
interpretations of Sculthorpe’s composition of Sun. The dark sun D.H.
Lawrence writes of in “Tropic” is hostile whilst it is also life-giving and, as noted
above, the narrator turns into one of the “Sunblack men,” a process which, in a
sense, exoticises the self as it becomes like the Other, a process that must
surely have been fraught and frightening as imagined by Lawrence, and this
interpretation is reinforced by similar themes in his writing on Mexico outlined
above. Some parallels with Australian landscape and Aboriginal people in the
poems were also noted above, and the notion of the Australian landscape as, in
Stephen Alomes’s characterisations of British understandings, “elemental,”
“primitive, timeless and without remorse”73 reinforced and morphed
Sculthorpe’s sense of these things in his earlier music. Now, however, D.H.
Lawrence’s sun is the vehicle for these themes.

Sculthorpe uses the low registers of the piano and the low tessitura of the high
voice in “Tropic” to create dark timbres, obviously paralleling the themes of
darkness in the poem. This is evident especially in the opening introductory

71 Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 11.
72 Alomes, When London Calls, 76.
73 Ibid., 82.
bars where the bass is in octaves oscillating a minor third at a slow tempo. Later in the song (mm.15-24) this bass pattern returns and is extended into a pattern up to the G♭ above the E♭ shown.

**Musical Example 5: 13** Sculthorpe, *Sun* “Tropic” mm.1-3

The chords in the piece, similar to some Sculthorpe had used previously, are also of fairly dark harmonic colours, especially as the focus is on the more complex end of his earlier harmonic vocabulary. The main chords through the piece are given below, with some in their original accompaniment patterns to demonstrate how Sculthorpe emphasizes and separates certain parts of the chords rhythmically. As was the case in relation to the harmonies of previous pieces, some of these sonorities can be heard as built on triads, however, it is also apparent from their voicing and rhythmic disposition that they can also be viewed as superimpositions of simpler chord types. In general, many of the harmonies in *Sun* are more complex than the majority of those in Sculthorpe’s previous works, as they often superimpose more intervals than previously, creating for example, more complex quintal formations such as that shown in the final bar of the example below, or because they superimpose chords containing more pitches than Sculthorpe mostly uses in his previous works, such as the first chord below in which he superimposes two triads. The overall sound of “Tropic” is thus darker and richer than most of his previous music, and there is something approaching a sense of elemental strength in the very
low bass part of the piano, which for almost the entire song is at the register shown in the example above, or often lower.

It is notable that these harmonies are only an intensification of aspects of Sculthorpe’s previous style, especially that of *Irkanda II*, and the continuity with earlier work, as is the case with some of the poetic themes of the piece, is evident. Similarly there is still a considerable degree of harmonic stasis where most chords last for three or more bars, but it is not to as great a degree as in, for example, passages of *Irkanda II*, where a single chord can last up to ten or twelve bars. “Tropic” certainly gives less of an impression of austerity or astringency than *Irkanda II*, and it is possible to interpret the work as an evocation of darkness and the elemental ‘primitive’ in Lawrence.

**Musical Example 5: 14** Sculthorpe, *Sun* “Tropic” main harmonies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triad with M7 superimpositions G♭-F, B♭-A, D-C#</th>
<th>basically A-E-B♭</th>
<th>Two M3s a M7 apart</th>
<th>quartal/quintal</th>
<th>A-E-B♭ quintal</th>
<th>D-A-E-C#-G# quintal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 3-6, 11-14, 47-50</td>
<td>7-10, 33-36 &amp; see 4th chord</td>
<td>25-28</td>
<td>29-32, 39-41</td>
<td>51-54</td>
<td>57-60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The melodic style of “Tropic,” as well as the other two *Sun* songs is saturated with semitone movement, especially semitone neighbour-notes. This aspect of its style is therefore also highly continuous with Sculthorpe’s earlier exoticist works. The stylistic developments that are evident in comparison with previous instrumental pieces are the rhythmic suppleness and use of a larger range of rhythmic values in all of the *Sun* melodies. Most of the settings also involve a
significant degree of melodic stasis, with passages that articulate a single note for sometimes up to two or three bars. There is also utilisation of new accompaniment patterns, which Sculthorpe then subsequently uses in later pieces, especially, obviously, the many Irkanda works that are derived from Sun in which he usually retains these accompaniment patterns even when the work is scored for strings.

The full text of the third song, “Desire Goes Down to the Sea” is as follows:

I have no desire any more
towards woman or man, bird, beast, creature or thing.

All day long I feel the tide rocking, rocking
though it strikes no shore
in me.

Only mid-ocean. --- 74

Sculthorpe described the song-cycle to his parents as “emotionally exhausting, beyond emotion, in a way,”75 and given the above text, it seems most likely that it was “Desire Goes Down to the Sea” that he was referring to. The theme of absence of desire is interpreted by Sculthorpe with a considerable degree of harmonic stasis, and the opening chord, shown below, is repeated for seven bars at the opening of the song and then a further four at the very end, comprising eleven bars of the song’s overall twenty. The chord itself is relatively sparse and less dissonant in comparison with much of the rest of the work, being a simple quartal / quintal formation A-D-E. As with most of the other music of the song, it is substantially higher in register than “Tropic,” highlighting the dark timbres of “Tropic”. Passages of “Desire goes down to the sea” do, however, include the very low ‘elemental’ bass part, in common with the other two songs. “Desire goes down to the sea” also contains overt word painting, with motion in the piano right hand (shown in the example below)

74 Lawrence, The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence, 454.
75 Peter Sculthorpe to Edna and Jos Sculthorpe, 26 June 1960, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
back and forth between octaves producing rocking motion, presumably related to the ocean evoked in the poem, and the “rocking, rocking” of the tide. The harmonic stasis evokes mostly a sense of emotional stasis but also allows a spatial backdrop in which the rocking waves are able to be perceived.

**Musical Example 5: 15** Sculthorpe, *Sun* “Desire goes down to the sea” mm.4-6

The other two chords of the song are firstly, E-B-G-Bb-D-F# (mm.9-12) which when analysed according to the principle of thirds with major seventh intervals superimposed can be viewed as as E-G-B-D and the sevenths B- Bb and G-F#.

Secondly, the most complex chord of the song comes at mm.13-15 (shown below), G- Eb-Ab-C-F#-B, consistent with the quartal sound in other parts of the song with three pairs of fourths (G-C, Eb-Ab, F#-B) but also consistent in terms of the major sevenths now a fourth away from each other (G- F# and C-B). This chord comes just before the text “though it strikes no shore / in me” and forms a break with and highlights the move of the subsequent text away from the previous sentiments of lack of desire and the rocking tide.
Musical Example 5: 16 Sculthorpe, *Sun* “Desire goes down to the sea” mm.13-15

The surviving manuscript of the first song “Sun in Me” is problematic in terms of making interpretations of the musical meanings of the song, because Sculthorpe was unhappy with the setting. He describes this in 1999 “I felt that I’d completely failed to mirror [the text]... I decided to rewrite the song when I had time.” 76 Skinner describes Sculthorpe having quite substantial difficulty composing the “troublesome third song,” to the extent that he tried to convince Mellers to make do with only the two songs he had already completed. 77 He did later rewrite part of “Sun in Me” in circumstances that will be discussed later, in which the rewritten melody becomes part of *Irkanda IV*. 78 The last page of “Sun in Me” is missing from the rest of the manuscript in the Sculthorpe’s papers in the National Library of Australia, presumably because he used it when writing *Irkanda IV*.

Sculthorpe describes the setting he was unsatisfied with as the last song in the set, which he says is “Sun in Me.” 79 However, in the manuscript of *Sun*, the order of songs is the opposite of what Sculthorpe outlines, with “Sun in Me” first, then “Tropic,” then “Desire Goes Down to the Sea.” There is no doubt about this, because the manuscript has the songs clearly marked with roman numerals I, II and III. However, when Sculthorpe described the work in 1963 to

76 Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 60.
77 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 240.
78 Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 60.
79 Ibid., 59.
Curt Prerauer he wrote that it was “a dark ‘dark sun’ work moving from things negative & a no-desire-ness to light & goodness, to God, Lawrence’s God.”

Such a sequence would see “Desire Goes Down to the Sea” as the first poem and “Sun in Me” last. Sculthorpe’s later memory of the narrative gist of the cycle was therefore opposite to its original form, in which the songs rather proceed towards a state of “no-desire-ness” and away from “light and goodness.”

Sculthorpe finished “Sun in Me” by staying up all night before it was due to the Mellers, and it is not surprising therefore that he reused material from the other two songs in it, although the melody he wrote is new. He must have been happy with the opening two bars, because he reused the gesture as the opening of *Irkanda III* (1961). The chord used consists of two perfect fifths a minor ninth apart: A-E and B♭-F. In the next passage, shown below, the voice enters, and the chord is from “Desire Goes Down to the Sea” mm.9-12. The accompaniment pattern is slightly reworked, shown in the example below, and there are occasional C♯ and E♭ embellishments. Subsequent chords include somewhat spare dissonances (for example, A♭-E-G, mm.9-12), as well as a chord of a triad and fifth a major seventh away from each other (E♭-C-E♭-G and B-F♯, mm.13-18, which is basically mm.3-6 from “Tropic,” transposed), and quartal and quintal sonorities. The harmony, vocal style and accompaniment style are all similar to aspects of “Tropic” and “Desire Goes Down to the Sea.”

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81 Ibid.
Musical Example 5: 17 Sculthorpe, Sun “Sun in Me” mm.4-6

In 1964 Sculthorpe withdrew Sun from his catalogue, explaining at the time to the Sydney critics the Prerauers that some of its material had gone into The Fifth Continent (1963), a work that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Irkanda III and D.H. Lawrence’s Kangaroo

The final ‘Australian’ piece Sculthorpe worked on at Oxford is the piano trio Irkanda III (1961) (he also composed some theatre music during this time). The project to compose Sun had been instigated in April 1960, and Sculthorpe wrote the songs in July and August 1960. The piano trio was actually commissioned the year previous, in June 1959 by the Birmingham Chamber Music Society but at the time there was no due date set, and Sculthorpe ended up writing most of it after Sun, around October, 1960. In mid-1960 Sculthorpe had decided to enter the trio in the Alfred J. Clements Memorial Prize for Chamber Music, feeling that he may have a chance in the competition as well as a more concrete reason to finish the piece. At this point he also decided that the piano trio would be an arrangement Irkanda II, to save time. He missed the competition deadline but met with the players, the London Czech Trio, at the beginning of November 1960 on route from Oxford back to Australia and they played through the sections that had been completed by then. The score contains the inscription “Jan. 1961, Launceston, Tasmania” and annotations on the original

\[\textit{superscript}\]

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 303.
\(^{83}\) Ibid., 227, 253.
\(^{84}\) Ibid., 248-49.
\(^{85}\) Ibid., 251.
title page indicate that three movements had initially been intended, but the work ended up as a one-movement piece, and as noted, most of it had likely been completed in Oxford in October 1960 before Sculthorpe returned to Launceston.\textsuperscript{86}

Inside the existing title page of \textit{Irkanda III} Sculthorpe wrote the formulation “Music to be always austere... Australian.” Here, he obviously carries through the characterization “austere” used in the letter he'd written to his parents in May 1959 on the completion of \textit{Irkanda II} when he translated “Irkanda” to mean “an austere and lonely place.” The idea of the Australian landscape as “austere” is something that continues in relation to the \textit{Irkanda II} and \textit{III} music up to the time Sculthorpe reused it in his Piano Sonata (1963), since for that work he uses a slightly rearranged version of the inscription “Always austere: Australian.” Interestingly, the Piano Sonata also reworks the song “Tropic” from \textit{Sun}, so Sculthorpe seems to have felt “austere” was an appropriate characterization for that music as well. As noted, many of the chords in \textit{Sun} seem harmonically more complex and richer than in \textit{Irkanda II}. The Piano Sonata will be discussed in the next chapter.

There does not seem to be an extant program note for \textit{Irkanda III}, but a review gives some clues to Sculthorpe’s thinking around the time of the work’s composition. In a Birmingham newspaper John Waterhouse’s review of the first performance noted “I am told that Mr Sculthorpe had asked his interpreters to prepare their mood by reading the classic descriptions of bush-country and loose-clutching civilisation in DH Lawrence’s \textit{Kangaroo}.” Skinner has determined that this is the first record of Sculthorpe’s interest in the novel and posits that it was around mid-1960 that he must have read it.\textsuperscript{87} Sculthorpe later told Michael Hannan that he read the book not only on Mellers’s promptings but also after reading John Douglas Pringle’s \textit{Australian Accent}, first published

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 253.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.

Australian Accent was a book mostly about Australian cultural mores from the point of view of an outsider, written by a Scottish journalist who had been editor of the Sydney Morning Herald for five years, and who, as Skinner notes, called Kangaroo the only “profound book” about Australia.  

Sculthorpe’s impressions of Australia are therefore triply shaped here by metropolitan gaze(s): Mellers’s, Lawrence’s and Pringle’s.

Lawrence’s contempt and dislike of Australia infuse much of Kangaroo, and his class and cultural snobbery (despite or because of his own working class background) are applied viciously to Australian social and cultural life. However, as Skinner writes, through the book the narrator’s feelings about Australian landscape “develop from fear to a kind of grudging love.”

Sculthorpe was to chart this progression in his later work The Fifth Continent (1963), to be discussed below, however in relation to Sculthorpe’s aims for his performers in Irkanda III it is notable that Lawrence’s writings about the Australian landscape through most of the book posit life in Australia as having advantages to do with the lack of civilisation as Lawrence sees it, leading him to feel a strong ambivalence to the culture that has developed and which he sees as being as “vacant” and “empty” as the land. He finds beauty in the landscape at times, and purity, as well as frequently a gloom that, in his comparisons such as that quoted below to ghosts and corpses, make it strange, almost gothic and Other to him. In many passages he further emphasizes vastness and a sense of alien hostility, qualities he projects that induce feelings of fear and loneliness.

in Europe, he had made up his mind that everything was done for, played out, finished, and he must go to a new country. The newest country: young Australia!... And the vast, uninhabited land frightened him. It seemed so hoary and lost, so unapproachable. The sky was blue, crystal pure and blue, of a lovely pale blue colour: the air was wonderful, new and unbreathed: and there were great distances. But the bush, the grey, charred bush. It scared him... It was so phantom-like, so ghostly, with its tall pale trees and many

88 Ibid., 241.
90 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 295.
dead trees, like corpses, partly charred by bush fires: and then the foliage so dark, like grey-green iron. And then it was so deathly still. Even the few birds seemed to be swamped in silence. Waiting, waiting – the bush seemed to be hoarily waiting. And he could not penetrate its secret. He couldn’t get at it. Nobody could get at it.91

Sculthorpe used much of this passage as spoken text in *The Fifth Continent*, and it was therefore clearly significant to him. It is worth quoting some of Lawrence’s other impressions from early in the book as well, however, to give more of a sense of what he conveys about experiencing Australian landscape. He writes of “the wonderful Southern night-sky, that makes a man feel so lonely, alien,” “it was strange... that the tree-covered land could be so gloomy and lightless.”92 Further:

Freedom!... There is a great relief from atmosphere, a relief from tension, from pressure. An absence of control or will or form. The sky is open above you, the air is open around you... The *vacancy* of this freedom is almost terrifying. In the openness and the freedom this new chaos... The absence of any inner meaning: and at the same time the great sense of vacant spaces... It was still a raw loose world.93

As in so many characterisations, Australia is at once ancient while, as outlined above, new and open:

That curious somberness of Australia, the sense of oldness, with the forms all worn down low and blunt, squat. The squat-seeming earth. And then they ran at last into real country: rather rocky, dark old rocks, and somber bush with its different pale-stemmed dull-leaved gum trees standing graceful.94

The music of *Irkanda III* is a rearrangement of some sections of *Irkanda II* and, as mentioned, begins with the first two bars of the song “Sun in Me” from *Sun*. The main sections of *Irkanda II* that Sculthorpe reuses are those that above were analysed as “A,” “B” and “E.” fast *moto perpetuo* passages of E-F

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92 Ibid., 10, 15.
93 Ibid., 23-24.
94 Ibid., 80.
alternations in the bass along with the semitone-saturated “Melody I” (A), the
canon on the mode 1 b2 3 4 5 (B) and the section that quotes the
lamentational melody of Irkanda I (E). Therefore, the two works share
dissonant, static music, pizzicato and arco canons, atmospheric, ponticello
tremolo passages, occasional passages of harmonics, and melodies with very
high degrees of semitone movement, occasionally of a lamentational character.
Most of the music is fast, and there are quite a number of passages that
emphasize bass movement in the piano in which two or three notes are
repeated in succession for long periods at the quaver or crotchet. There is,
additionally, a slow middle section which is where the statements of the
Irkanda I melody fall, compared in the examples below with its version in
Irkanda II.

Musical Example 5: 18 Sculthorpe Irkanda II Melody 2, usually stated “Very
slowly”

Musical Example 5: 19 Sculthorpe Irkanda III melody, violin, mm.129-36
(Fig.10), “very slowly”

ff with expression
Sculthorpe’s adjustments to the *Irkanda II* music involve enrichment and added dissonance to some of the harmony, however, there are also other passages in which he tones the dissonance level down and takes instrumental layers out. Some quintal chords are added in the manner of *Sun*. The work has a much simpler and tighter structure than *Irkanda II*, and also includes some arpeggio patterns in the piano in a similar style to those of *Sun*. An element which is new is the addition of quadruple stop chords (and some similar chords of less pitches) in the string parts against other activity and other harmonies in the piano, which by their timbral and registral separation from the main layer of music give a bitonal sense, even when they include some pitches in common with the main material, as in the example below. Such chords, which sound as isolated elements helping to create a ‘strange’ atmosphere, almost like birds or cries, became an important feature of Sculthorpe’s later music. Some chords had been used in similar ways in *Irkanda II*, but usually with only two or three pitches.

**Musical Example 5: 20** Sculthorpe *Irkanda III* mm.25-30

![Musical Example 5: 20 Sculthorpe *Irkanda III* mm.25-30](image)

**Figure 5: 3** Structural analysis and derivations, Sculthorpe *Irkanda III*

Key: **Blue** = new, **Maroon** = altered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Irkanda II</em> and <em>Sun</em></th>
<th><em>Irkanda III</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm.1-2 of “Sun in Me”</td>
<td><strong>Very slowly</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm.1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintal harmony of superimposed P5s, A-E-B♭-F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| mm.11-24 (A) of *Irkanda II* | **Briskly**  
mm.3-20, Fig.1  
E-F quavers 8ve lower  
Melody in cello, one note changed  
Inner parts omitted (both E-G and A-B♭ dyads), less dissonant |
| mm.11-24 (A) of *Irkanda II* | mm.21-30 Fig.2  
mm.21-22 C-C♯-B♭ in bass new  
mm.23-30 piano A-B♭ dyad with added A, new rhythm  
**Harmony added:** new pizz chord every 2 bars E♭-B♭-G-A, new D-A harmonics in vl |
| mm.11-24 (A) of *Irkanda II* | mm.31-44 Fig.3  
Melody in vl in *Irkanda III* version  
Piano new: very low D and A alternating in bass, D-E-A chord in treble  
**Added chords** every 3 bars G-D-A-Ab vl (*Sonata for Violin*)  
F-B♭-D-A cello |
| mm.45-54 Fig.3  
Canon 1 on A, two part (B) of *Irkanda II*  
F-A♭ bass from Fig.25 (m.342-50) | mm.45-54  
Canon 2 part at octave on D#, *pizz.*, theme altered in last few bars and *comes* extended further  
Rhythm from ⅜ into ⅝, simplified  
B♭-A dyad pedal changed to F-A♭ bass then F-A♭-C  
arpegg.: n.b. bitonal implications, bitonality projected by register and instrumentation  
mm.55-60 F-A♭-C moves to Ab-C then C-E- Ab  
Vl and vc pizz chords C-G-E♭-B and G-D-B♭-F# |
| mm.95-106 (A) of *Irkanda II* | mm.61-78, Fig.5  
F-E bass oscillation has an A added above E, cello  
Melody 1 *Irkanda III* version in octaves in piano  
**Very slowly**  
mm.79-82, Fig.6  
M2 dyads Ab-B♭, Db-E♭, ending with Ab-B♭-Eb |
<p>| mm.121-30, Fig.7 | mm.95-106, Fig.7 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(E) of <em>Irkanda II</em></th>
<th>Melody 2 (<em>Irkanda I</em> theme) in <strong>harmonics</strong> in cello Piano has D-A from <em>Irkanda II</em>, and <strong>added B♭, C# omitted</strong> <strong>mm.101-106 piano harmony changes</strong>, faster harmonic rhythm, chords G-D-E then E-B♭-C♭ arp. to A♭-E♭-G. New melodic fig in <strong>vc</strong>, imitated in <strong>vl</strong> E-F-B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>mm.271-76</strong></td>
<td><strong>mm.107-28 Fig.8-9</strong> <strong>Same as Irk II</strong>: A melody in quaver tremolo, <em>pp sul pont</em>. <strong>mm.107-11</strong> A-E bass into <em>Sun-like piano arpeggio</em>, adds F-B♭ dyads occasionally <strong>mm.112-6</strong> Messiaen-like bird figure now in harmonics <strong>E added to A-G-D# chord</strong> <strong>New 2 bar interlude</strong> in place of mm.277-78 of <em>Irk II</em> <strong>mm.119-28 repeat 107-16</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>mm.279-84</strong></td>
<td><strong>(A, varied) of Irkanda II</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fig.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>(E) of Irkanda II</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **mm.121-30, Fig.7** | Melody 2 (*Irkanda I* theme) in harmonics in **vl**, melody transposed up M2 to begin on **G New harmony** in _Sun-like_ piano figuration: retains 5<sup>th</sup> in bass (here: E-B) and A♭-E♭-G-D with fleeting B♭-F#'s (three P5s a m3 away from each other) |
| **mm.198-214, Fig.13** | (A, varied) **of Irkanda II**                                 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Briskly</strong></th>
<th><strong>mm.198-214, Fig.13</strong> (A, varied) of <em>Irkanda II</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>mm.141-</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fig.11</strong> <strong>Melody A, varied version, &amp; this further altered. Counterpoint part from <em>Irkanda II</em> omitted. Harmonised with F-A♭-E</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **mm.367-82, Fig.27 (A+B) of Irkanda II** | **mm.157-74, Fig.12** **Two part c.pt of A & B themes from *Irkanda II*, final open string chords C♭, G, A♭ octave grace notes added** |

| **Same ending on low D** | |

As was the case for *Irkanda II*, the musical language of *Irkanda III* falls solidly in the tradition of exoticist evocations, and invites readings in relation to primitivism and landscape, in line with the title and Sculthorpe's explanations of the piece (now, seemingly, lost). In relation to his score inscription “Music to be always austere... Australian” Sculthorpe invited reception through European perceptions of Australia, and it is notable here that what is representative of ‘Australian’ to Sculthorpe is the austerity of the desert, rather than the lushness
of, for example, coastal rainforests or the Tasmanian pastoral: in this formulation the outback is again the most Australian place. And it seems that at least sometimes the work was heard this way: after a performance in Barcelona in 1965, a reviewer who also expressed his approval of the chance to hear any Australian music, wrote that the music had "primeval ruggedness...and a primitive, rough, strong poetry which does not exclude delicacy and tenderness in certain passages...deserved the warm approval shown by the audience." Sculthorpe also seems to have invited such interpretations, presumably in program notes, from those who were familiar with the colonial exotic of Australian painting, leading John Waterhouse, in the review quoted above, also to say that “Mr Sculthorpe [was] paralleling certain Australian painters in his evocation of the Australian landscape." It is thus highly notable that in this period, after contact with Mellers and after reading Lawrence, Sculthorpe was giving his audiences these comparisons to shape their reception of the work and their understanding of the atmospheres he was seeking to evoke.

More specifically, in terms of the idea of Australian landscape as “austere,” the often spare textures of the work afford listeners the opportunity to hear what Sculthorpe was presenting as a landscape evocation as, indeed, austere. The opening music, shown below, is vigorous but registrally sparse and harmonically bare. Many dissonances in the work are harsh, and the occasional lamentational melodies can be heard as bleak and the atmospheric tremolo passages as strange and other. John Waterhouse also heard the work as atmospheric:

its ideas are often musically eloquent as well as evocative. But it seems to me to strain its medium to excess. Much of the keyboard writing is explosively percussive, most of the string-writing is dependent upon the special ‘effects’ of pizzicato, harmonics,

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95 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 362-63.
96 Ibid., 254.
tremolo, *sul ponticello* and so on. For a time, one is held by the atmosphere.\(^{97}\)

**Musical Example 5: 21** Sculthorpe *Irkanda III* mm.1-12

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**Back to Australia**

Sculthorpe’s father fell sick in March 1959, and by mid-October 1960 it became clear that Sculthorpe would have to go home, a feeling made more urgent when he was told shortly after that his father’s illness was terminal. Sculthorpe left England on November 4, 1960, this time by plane.\(^{98}\) His father passed away on 5 May, 1961, while Sculthorpe was back in Launceston.\(^{99}\)

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\(^{97}\) Ibid.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., 221, 249-51.

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 255.
Chapter 6
Tasmania to Sydney and widespread renown

When Sculthorpe arrived home from Oxford on 6 November 1960, he was still a fairly obscure figure in Australian musical life. However, towards the end of the period covered in this thesis, as Skinner says:

Sculthorpe was well into what Geoffrey Serle later described as his ‘dazzling progress.’ By the end of 1964, Sculthorpe’s place in the cultural hierarchy would be widely acknowledged, as ten years before Patrick White’s had been, and Nolan’s and Drysdale’s ten years before that.¹

In June 1965, similarly, he was able to tell his mother “I seem to have been in the Herald every day this week!”² Later that year he was signed to the publisher Faber Music.³

Positive, personal and sincere reactions to Sculthorpe’s music were certainly a large factor in this “dazzling progress,” as will be demonstrated below. However, the institutional, personal and critical support Sculthorpe received was also considerable and brought considerable benefits. As Sculthorpe himself later said, it was in the 1960s that “I really emerged as a known composer through criticism.”⁴ As outlined in the introduction, in recent years there has been a growing element in commentary on Sculthorpe that posits him, in the words of Gordon Kerry, as “the right person at the right time to bring a sense of Australianness to our music.”⁵ Skinner goes to the heart of the causes and effects of this when he says:

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¹ Graeme Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe: The Making of an Australian Composer (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 309.
² Ibid., 395.
³ Ibid., 400.
⁵ Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 7.
1963 turned out to be the year things changed. A handful of newspaper reviewers, academics and arts bureaucrats decided that they could prevaricate no longer and that it was time for them to anoint music’s Dobells and [Patrick] Whites.\(^6\)

Before looking at Sculthorpe’s music from this period, it is worth charting this “dazzling progress” in more detail. Initially, for example, towards the beginning of the period, in 1962, there was so little paid work that Sculthorpe was seriously thinking of returning overseas.\(^7\) By early 1963 things had improved enough in relation to film composition that Skinner says “offers of film work seemed sufficient almost to feed him,” even though he had only been getting a few classical performances each year.\(^8\) Through 1963 this increased to many performances, and some of these, as well as other opportunities, were instigated by an increasingly large set of supporters, including composer Margaret Sutherland, critics Curt Prerauer and Roger Covell, several conductors, and actor and writer Max Oldaker. In 1963, for example, Sculthorpe’s appointment to a lectureship at the University of Sydney was no doubt assisted by Roger Covell having spent some time encouraging the Chair of the Music Department to hire Sculthorpe.\(^9\)

Institutional and critical support and interest in Australian music were also growing, especially in relation to younger composers. Sculthorpe was one of several young composers to attend the 1963 Hobart Composers’ Conference, a new event of which Larry Sitsky later said “suddenly the whole thing burst open and people realized we were there.”\(^10\) Similarly the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, at this point a partially government-funded but mostly private body,\(^11\) was looking to cultivate Australian opera and ballet works. In 1964-65, through his contacts, Sculthorpe met the Trust’s Executive Director, Stefan Haag, and the

\(^{6}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., 263.
\(^{8}\) Ibid., 301.
\(^{9}\) Ibid., 299.
\(^{10}\) Ibid., 408.
Chairman and driving force, H.C. “Nugget” Coombs, a “banker, economist and public service mandarin.” Haag in particular seems to have had a policy of encouraging ballet and opera Gesamtkunstwerke, bringing (usually) several Australian artists together to produce a single Australian work, which one can only suppose would therefore be extra Australian. A primary example was the 1964 production of the ballet “The Display” at the Adelaide Festival. Its subject matter was the Australian lyrebird, with choreography by Robert Helpmann, music by Malcolm Williamson and design by Sidney Nolan, the combination explicitly “intended to be very Australian.” From 1964 Sculthorpe worked sporadically on an opera project for the Trust, initially with Patrick White as librettist, whom he met through the Prerauers (Sculthorpe wanted to collaborate with White before he’d read any of White’s work). After the collaboration with White fell through in early 1965, Alan Moorehead was brought in, a journalist and author whom Sculthorpe met at the 1964 Adelaide Festival and who was in the process of writing the book The Fatal Impact, an influential if overly simplistic account of colonialism in the Pacific that emphasized the rapacity and destructive force of the colonisers.

Sculthorpe wrote to his mother in early 1964, “[t]he Trust want to build me, to make me, in the eyes of the general public, as familiar a name as Patrick [White] and Sidney [Nolan].” Even if this was possibly an exaggeration, Sculthorpe was certainly offered more projects. For example, there was a musical (which he turned down) and what Sculthorpe at the time termed a “folk opera” on one of the defining moments of Australian nationalist history, the Eureka Stockade. The collaborators for the latter were to be Robert

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12 Ibid., 13.
13 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 328.
15 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 318, 322.
17 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 328.
Helpmann and either Drysdale or Nolan, and the writer was Kenneth Cook, whom Sculthorpe had also met at the 1964 Adelaide Festival. Cook’s earlier novel *Wake in Fright* (1961), an outback dystopia, is discussed below. Whilst the “folk opera” never eventuated, the degree of institutional support for the Australian performing arts is clear.

Similarly, although the 1964 Adelaide Festival didn’t officially include any Australian works except Dorian Le Gallienne’s *Sinfonietta*, a series of concerts were organized by the Sydney and Adelaide branches of the International Society for Contemporary Music and took place in the unofficial program. Works by Meale, Butterley, Sculthorpe, Sitcky and Werder were presented, alongside pieces by Messiaen and Schoenberg. Nigel Butterley viewed the series as marking “the arrival of Australian music’s ‘New Wave,’” and Roger Covell similarly felt that the concerts seemed “the most important musical event at the festival.” Important also were the contacts Sculthorpe made, and no doubt the feeling of being at the centre of the Australian arts across multiple media: in the periodical *Nation* the “private festival” was described, at which “individuals of many skills, opinions, temperaments and loyalties... meet and talk with each other recognized by an occasion which recognizes their importance in our society...[this is] new to the Australian arts.” At a party Sculthorpe played a tape of *The Fifth Continent* (1963) to Geoffrey Dutton, Sidney Nolan and the young art critic Robert Hughes. He also met writers George Johnston, Xavier Herbert, Hal Porter, Max Harris and Alan Moorehead, and spent considerable time in a bar with Drysdale (by now a close friend) and Nolan, Geoffrey Dutton and Stefan Haag. As Skinner has said, “the festival was his ‘coming out’ as a figure of interest in the Australian arts.”

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18 Ibid., 343-44.
19 Ibid., 338, 361.
20 Ibid., 334.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 334-36.
23 Ibid., 338.
In 1963 Sculthorpe received a very prominent commission from the chamber music society Musica Viva. It was the group’s first ever commission, and Sculthorpe agreed to compose a string quartet, his sixth and the last of his Irkanda period works, eventually finished and performed in 1965. Sculthorpe speculated that perhaps Mirrie Hill had a hand in his choice; the commission was named the “Alfred Hill Award” after Mirrie’s late husband the composer Alfred Hill, and some of the funding had been provided by Hill’s estate. His reasoning was based on her outburst at the Hobart Composers’ Seminar in 1963, “if he was a racehorse, I’d back him!”

These years also saw Sculthorpe’s music circulated more widely internationally. A UNESCO committee instigated recordings of new Australian music to send to international radio stations. The first recording was a collection of chamber music distributed by the World Record Club and by October 1965 copies were sent out.\(^{25}\) Richard Toop, then a young musicologist in England, recalls that the first Sculthorpe piece he heard was the String Quartet No.6 on this album.\(^{26}\) Tapes were also sent to radio stations through the Paris International Rostrum of Composers in 1965,\(^{27}\) and it is notable that these locally instigated initiatives were thus reaching overseas channels of distribution.

Finally, Sculthorpe’s international reputation was shaped by the 1965 Commonwealth Festival in Britain, at which the String Quartet No.6 and Sun Music I (1965) were performed. Skinner notes that Australian culture was very prominent and well received in the festival, not only in terms of classical music, but also with respect to groups like The Seekers, as well as ballet and film.\(^{28}\) It was just before the festival that Sculthorpe was signed to Faber.\(^{29}\) Mellers wrote a recommendation for Sculthorpe, and in Skinner’s interpretation, the signing

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 300-01.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., 381, 420.
\(^{26}\) Richard Toop, personal communication, 2013.
\(^{27}\) Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 382.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., 385-86. The set of characteristics of each composer is Skinner’s interpretation.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 399-400.
was undertaken “with the looming Commonwealth Arts Festival in mind, one composer [was included] from a Commonwealth country with a potential to make an impression in Britain itself.”

Works to mid-1965

Sculthorpe wrote several works in this period as well as film scores, and since he was heavily involved in teaching at the University of Sydney from 1964, most are to some degree reworkings of his previous music.

The most significant works are:
Irkanda IV (composed early June 1961)
The Fifth Continent (finished in June 1963 and premiered December 1963)
Piano Sonata (finished October 1963)
El Alamein (film score, January 1964)
The Troubled Mind (film score April 1964, drew on the Piano Sonata)
String Quartet No.6 (January 1965).

This music brings the Irkanda period to a close and Sculthorpe’s next piece, Sun Music I, composed later in the year, was a stylistic departure in what Sculthorpe hoped would be a ‘non-European’ direction. However, since it drew heavily on musique concrète and European texturalism, the degree to which that is the case is highly debatable, although it was definitely promoted and received on highly ‘Australian’ terms.

The relationships of the various classical pieces of the period to each other and to the Oxford works are outlined in the following table. It is notable that some of the pieces, The Fifth Continent, Piano Sonata and String Quartet No.6 consist almost entirely of previous music. They will thus be analysed more briefly than the works in previous chapters.

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30 Ibid., 399.
**Figure 6:** Musical relationships between Sculthorpe’s classical works from *Irkanda II* to String Quartet No.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Drawn from</th>
<th>Into</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda II</em> (1959) string quartet</td>
<td>Includes main melody of <em>Irkanda I</em></td>
<td><em>Irkanda III, Irkanda IV</em>, Piano Sonata, String Quartet No.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sun</em> (1960) high voice and piano</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Fifth Continent</em> “Pacific,” Piano Sonata, String Quartet No.6 and small elements in <em>Irkanda III, Irkanda IV</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> (1961) piano trio</td>
<td>Parts of <em>Irkanda II, Irkanda I</em> (main melody), intro of <em>Sun “Sun in Me”</em></td>
<td>Piano Sonata, String Quartet No.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Fifth Continent</em> (1963) for speaker and orchestra II Outback</td>
<td>= <em>Irkanda IV</em> with solo vl part now in orchestra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Fifth Continent</em> III Small Town</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Fifth Continent</em> IV Pacific</td>
<td><em>Sun “Desire Goes Down to the Sea”</em></td>
<td>String Quartet No.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Fifth Continent</em> V Epilogue</td>
<td>Material from mvts II-IV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Piano Sonata (1963) | I = *Sun “Tropic”*  
II = *Irkanda III*, some accomp. of “Sun in Me” | String Quartet No.6 |
| String Quartet No. 6 (1965) | I = I of Piano Sonata  
II = II of Piano Sonata, *Irkanda III* & motif from *Fifth Continent “Pacific”*  
III material from *Sun 3*rd song, “Prophecy” | |

_**Irkanda IV**_

In Sculthorpe’s initial program note for *Irkanda IV* he translated the title as “a remote and lonely place,” and as Skinner notes, this was the first of many times
he used the phrase. However, “austerity” is still mentioned as a characteristic of his musical language:

This work is a plain and straightforward expression of the composer’s feelings upon the death of his father earlier this year. Although the music is quite characteristic in its austerity and in its economy of material, it is much less complex in its tonal organisation than most of the composer’s works. The one movement, predominantly slow, is made up of the alternation of a ‘refrain’, heard at the outset, and developments of the intervals used in the refrain.32

There is no mention of landscape other than a brief allusion in the translation of the title and as Skinner says, this note is likely much closer to Sculthorpe’s thoughts when writing the piece than some of the things he later said.33 Importantly, most of the reviews of the first performance received the work as an expression of grief in line with the content of the program note.34

In 1977 Sculthorpe recalled the circumstances of some of the composition of the work:

I’d been visiting my father in hospital – he was dying. My mind was full of death. Then I came home and there was a letter from Wilfrid... the baby had died... I was so upset... that I sat down at the piano and just played the melody of the song, and when I’d done it I realized that that’s not for the song cycle, this will go in the end of the piece I will write in memory of my father.35

It seems therefore that it was at this point – around April 1961 – that Sculthorpe composed a melody for the end of “Sun in Me” that he was satisfied with; as noted in the previous chapter he had felt that his original melody was inadequate. Also, here, are the origins of his idea to write *Irkanda IV* and for it to be a memorial to his father, to whom it was dedicated. The instrumentation of the work – solo violin, strings and percussion – was shaped by a commission

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33 Ibid.
34 See ibid., 281-82.
35 Ibid., 255.
from the Melbourne ensemble the Astra String Orchestra with Wilfred Lehmann as soloist, and the group performed the piece in August 1961.\textsuperscript{36}

Sculthorpe’s recollection above and the original program note indicate that the writing of the piece was shaped by his grief. This is certainly also the way he presented the piece in subsequent program notes. By 1969 he was describing the refrain as “a ritual lamentation heard at the outset.”\textsuperscript{37} In a lecture from the 1990s analyzing his work he labels the “martial figure” music (D’ in the structural diagram below) “Marcia Funèbre” and its recurrence (D\textsuperscript{2}) “Quasi Marcia Funèbre.”\textsuperscript{38}

As he also says, “the work is quite characteristic in its austerity and in its economy of material,” and stylistically it is highly congruent with his previous Irkanda music and what he had earlier referred to as his “Australian style.” Sculthorpe surely indicates this in his naming of the piece as one of the “Irkanda” works. The continuity with previous pieces is especially apparent in that the work begins with the opening passage of Irkanda II which in Irkanda IV becomes the “refrain” described in the program note. The refrain is subsequently repeated with slight variation twice more through the piece. As noted in a previous chapter, Irkanda IV also uses the “martial” passage from the Sonata for Viola and Percussion. The work is thus particularly significant in Sculthorpe’s development in this period, firstly because it was received extremely well and has been performed and recorded many times since, but also because the expressivity related to the grief Sculthorpe was experiencing, in combination with the qualities of his existing ‘Australian style’ outlined in previous chapters, seem to have allowed it to be heard as a plausible and moving evocation of the ‘loneliness’ of the Australian outback. Specific reception in relation to this idea will be outlined in below.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 255-57.
\textsuperscript{37} Andrew D. McCredie, The Composers and Their Work (Canberra: Advisory Board, Commonwealth Assistance to Australian Composers, 1969), 16.
\textsuperscript{38} Peter Sculthorpe “Irkanda IV” lecture notes, dated by Skinner as 1990s, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
The structure of *Irkanda IV* is outlined in the diagram below. The work incorporates, as Sculthorpe said, a refrain which returns twice after it is stated. The first return is an eleventh higher than the initial statement but the original harmony is retained (re-voiced), and the theme thus has a different tonal relationship to the accompanying chords. In the final statement (*A*³, below), the theme is an octave higher than the original, and each of these statements at higher pitches give an effect of intensification as the work progresses.

**Figure 6: 2 Structural analysis of Sculthorpe *Irkanda IV***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Bars</th>
<th></th>
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</table>
| *Irkanda II* opening    | 1-18  | **A** Refrain
very slowly ♩ = c.60, \( \frac{8}{4} \)
“ritual lamentation heard at the outset”
Melody altered from *Irkanda II*, simpler and more static. Mm.9-18 repeated and altered. |
| Fig.2                   | 19-28 | **B** \( \frac{8}{4} \)
A-Db-C bass, *pizz.* quadruple stop strums,
Tom tom on first beats of bars |
| *Irkanda II* canon     | Fig.3 | **C** Canon \( \frac{8}{4} \) ♩ = c.72
Entries on B, E, F#, B, E |
| theme 2                 | 29-38 |       |
| Fig.4                   | 39-52 | **Episode** \( \frac{8}{4} \) Briskly ♩ = c.84
quartal / quintal chord w M7 & m9
Towards end, tom tom beats |
| *Irkanda II* opening    | Fig.5 | **A¹** Refrain \( \frac{4}{4} \)
Melody 11th higher than initial statement,
chords as previous, re-voiced |
|                         | 53-62 |       |
| Fig.6                   | 63-78 | **D** ♩ = c.60, \( \frac{4}{4} \)
Begins sparsely, then to DM7 chord and motivic material similar to “martial” theme |
| Sonata for Viola and    | Fig.7 | **D¹** ♩ = c.72 and \( \frac{4}{4} \) ♩ = c.72
Percussion “martial figure” | 79-95 | Martial figure and tom tom punctuated by
dissonant chords, then oscillating m9 & M7 |
|                         | Fig.8 | **B¹** ♩ = c.60, \( \frac{4}{4} \)
Bass fig transposed to D-B♭-A, melody in 5ths | 95-102 |       |
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<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 9 103-12</td>
<td><strong>B²</strong>&lt;br&gt;Melody in 5ths continues, now quartal harmony then ends with Gm7 chord and diss melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 10 113-36</td>
<td><strong>D³</strong>&lt;br&gt;( \cdot = c.60, \frac{3}{4} )&lt;br&gt;m9 &amp; M7 oscillation, melody on martial neighbor fig in “romantic” parallel 6ths, tom tom roll, martial percussion omitted&lt;br&gt;Ends with F#-C bass and tom tom on beats</td>
</tr>
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**Sonata for Viola and Percussion “martial figure”**

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<th>Figure</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 12 137-47</td>
<td><strong>A³</strong>&lt;br&gt;Refrain&lt;br&gt;very slowly ( \cdot = c.60 )&lt;br&gt;Melody on D, 8ve higher than opening</td>
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**Irkanda II opening**

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<th>Figure</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fig. 13 148-56</td>
<td><strong>C⁴</strong>&lt;br&gt;Canon, same order of entries as before&lt;br&gt;Now <em>tremolo</em> on bridge &amp; with bass drum roll</td>
</tr>
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**Irkanda II canon theme 2**

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<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fig. 14 157-66</td>
<td><strong>B³</strong>&lt;br&gt;( \cdot = c.72 )&lt;br&gt;B, but with trill on A and ST figs in 5ths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 15 167-74</td>
<td><strong>B⁴</strong>&lt;br&gt;( \cdot = c.60, \frac{3}{4} )&lt;br&gt;ST motifs in 5ths, tom tom on 1st beat of bar and 3.5, G repeated bass</td>
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**New melody from *Sun “Sun in Me”***

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<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 16 175-84</td>
<td><strong>Coda</strong>&lt;br&gt;VI melody <em>ad lib.</em> over E bass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Fig. 17 185-6**

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<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 17 185-6</td>
<td><strong>B⁴</strong>&lt;br&gt; Interruption of Coda[^39]</td>
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**New melody from *Sun “Sun in Me”***

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<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>187-94</td>
<td><strong>Coda</strong>&lt;br&gt;VI melody over E₃⁰₉ chord, STs in 5ths, ends&lt;br&gt;E♭-B♭ harmonics over chord</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted, the theme and its harmony are adaptations of the opening passage of *Irkanda II*. The version of the theme in *Irkanda IV*, described by Roger Covell as a “grieving melody,”[^40] is melodically a simplification in terms of pitch of *Irkanda II*. A notable adaptation is the scotch snap rhythm, a pattern that permeates Sculthorpe’s later work. It is also a prominent characteristic of

Ernest Bloch’s music, as Hannan notes. Hannan sees the *Irkanda IV* theme, which he does discuss in relation to *Irkanda II*, as a derivation of one of the main melodies of Bloch’s Violin Concerto.\(^4\) It is hard to imagine how such a process of double derivation may have arisen; however, given Sculthorpe’s habit of quoting / adapting melodies from other sources it is certainly possible that Hannan is right.

**Musical Example 6: 1 Sculthorpe *Irkanda II* mm. 1-10**

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\(^4\) Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas*, 51.
Musical Example 6: 2 Sculthorpe *Irkanda IV* mm. 1-8

In a lecture from the 1990s Sculthorpe described the opening chord as “consolidating the ground I had already made my own... one major seventh
superimposed on another." According to Sculthorpe, implicitly analyses the main pitches in the opening chord as $A_b$-G and $E_b$-D. The voicing strongly emphasises the fifths $A_b$-$E_b$ and G-D, however, and in the *Irkanda II* version the first violin plays the melody in parallel fifths, which seems to emphasise an interpretation of the chord as two superimposed fifths a major seventh apart. Whatever way one sees it, from Sculthorpe’s account the principle of superimposition of intervals a fixed distance apart seems to have governed the chord’s construction.

The harmony of *Irkanda IV*’s opening passage is thus very similar to *Irkanda II*, only simplified slightly. A major difference is that when the passage in *Irkanda IV* is repeated, immediately after the excerpt shown above, it actually comes to resolution and articulates the implied tonic of G. Sculthorpe noted that he “went quietly on modern dissonance, because that is the way my father would have liked it,” and the dissonance is less pronounced in *Irkanda IV* than *Irkanda II*, but the sense of tonal resolution and stability rather than just implications of tonal centres is also greater, as this example demonstrates.

Covell noted the preponderance of melodic semitones and minor thirds in *Irkanda IV*, and discusses the music of other sections of the piece as emphasizing the same intervals. Sculthorpe’s student and copyist Ian Cugley perceptively described the way the melodic material in *Irkanda IV* works. His analysis is particularly pertinent to the opening theme, and is worth quoting:

Choosing three or four notes which form the ever-present minor second minor third combination, he has arranged them in various groups and sequences and called this a tune. Although not particularly impressive at first, this set of notes eventually exercises

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42 Peter Sculthorpe “Irkanda IV” lecture notes, dated by Skinner as 1990s, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
43 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 257.
the almost hypnotic fascination of an *ostinati* – which I suppose, it almost is.45

The subsequent contrasting material, labelled B above, has a transitional character (shown below from Fig.2 in the next musical example). This new music projects the intervals of the perfect fourth and semitone in a bass ostinato creating a rumbling, uneasy effect with semitone interjections in the upper parts. Importantly, bitonal quadruple stop interjections continue a feature already noted in *Irkanda III* and present also in later works, especially String Quartet No.6.

**Musical Example 6: 3 Sculthorpe *Irkanda IV* mm. 16-21**

In the next passage Sculthorpe reuses one of the canons from *Irkanda II* (labelled C above), as discussed in the last chapter. The first appearance involves an *accelerando* played *pizzicato*, and this, combined with the dissonant intervals the canon produces give quite a menacing character. When the canon returns towards the end of the piece, the music is *tremolo sul*

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ponticello and Skinner describes it as “sepulchral.” What is interesting here is that these atmospheres are similar in character to a passage from Lawrence’s Kangaroo that Sculthorpe later used in The Fifth Continent, which the speaker intones at the beginning of the movement “Outback” (effectively, just before the music begins). This movement actually consists of the music of Irkanda IV. In his 1999 autobiography Sculthorpe dates his interest in writing a work in relation to this passage from Lawrence before he returned from Oxford, and implies that the work that resulted was Irkanda IV:

It was to take life from some descriptive passages in the early part of D.H. Lawrence’s Kangaroo: “But the bush, the grey, charred bush.... It was so phantom-like, so ghostly, with its tall pale trees and many dead trees, like corpses, partly charred by bushfires.... And then it was so deathly still. Even the few birds seemed to be swamped in silence. Waiting, waiting – the bush seemed to be hoarily waiting... It was biding its time with a terrible ageless watchfulness, waiting for a far-off end, watching the myriad intruding white men.”

The menacing, and then the ghostly, weird atmospheres of the canon on its second appearance seem particularly appropriate to the passage from Lawrence, although it is notable that Sculthorpe had written the music of the canon by May 1959 in Irkanda II and similarly in that work the passage recurs towards the end of that piece in its “sepulchral” tremolo sul pont character. Irkanda II was written at about the time Sculthorpe met Mellers and it is therefore unlikely he had read Kangaroo at this point. However, what is notable also about the passage from Lawrence is the sense of alienation and the ascription of a kind of sentience onto the bush, and such alienation has particularly been congruent with many of the receptions of Irkanda IV as a whole. Again, what seems to be the case here is a set of inspirations and allusions that come together over a period of time and not necessarily before or during the writing of the music, but these allusions shape perceptions and

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46 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 257.
47 Peter Sculthorpe, Sun Music: Journeys and Reflections from a Composer's Life (Sydney: ABC Books, 1999), 60-61.
receptions of the work, including Sculthorpe’s. Whether or not such an interpretation is retrospective, it is compelling close to Lawrence’s writing.

Sculthorpe’s grief, and the notions of loneliness and pathos also seem to have shaped hearings of the use of the “martial” passage from the Sonata for Viola and Piano, another major contrasting section of Irkanda IV. In section B, shown in the previous musical example, a funeral march topos enters the work with the tomtom articulations on the first beat of each bar. Sculthorpe seems to have intended this to continue in the D “martial” sections in his later characterisations of them as “Quasi Marcia” and “Quasi Marcia Funebre,” and Skinner calls their music a “danse macabre.” These new, grief-laden elements seem to have intensified the affective character of Sculthorpe’s Irkanda music in this work, and led to interpretations of an even more convincing sense of loneliness. Wilfrid Mellers wrote of the piece “[t]he music induces a human distress even more lacerating than anything in Sculthorpe’s earlier work.” Hannan felt that “those qualities which have been allied to the themes of loneliness and desolation seem, oddly enough, greatly intensified.” Additionally, these passages seem later to have provoked even more commentators in their nationalist need to identify what was ‘European’ and what was ‘Australian’ in Sculthorpe’s music, and probably taking their cues from Sculthorpe, the “martial” music has been identified as ‘European’ quite a number of times.

Mellers and Covell discussed the work in relation to landscape in a way that supports the argument that passages of musical spatialisation achieved with harmonic stasis or percussion textures (or both) can evoke a sense of landscape in Sculthorpe’s work. Here, the solo ‘voice’ of the violin further suggests a

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48 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 257.
50 Hannan, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 15.
human voice or subjectivity against such textures, as it has in landscape topics in the classical canon.\textsuperscript{52} Covell wrote that “the percussion provides cymbal hazes and drummed rumbles and taps which are like a reminder that a whole uncaring landscape is the context for this particular grief. Human agony is not dwarfed by the landscape; it is given another, more disturbing dimension.”\textsuperscript{53} Mellers felt that “[t]he Outback engulfs the self as the solo violin’s chant wavers between diminished fourths, major and minor thirds and augmented seconds, with all the tonal ambivalences thus implied, while the orchestra evokes an eternal emptiness by way of telescoped concords.”\textsuperscript{54}

The Coda of \textit{Irkanda IV} was described later by Sculthorpe as an “aria.”\textsuperscript{55} It begins with a melody played \textit{liberamente} by the violin over a bass E sustained for eight bars, towards the end of which enters his percussion ‘signature’ sound of a roll on the rim of a gong. The melody is then supported by a \textit{tremolo} string chord. As he explained to the press in 1961, just after writing the work:

The melisma of the solo violin is, in fact, a reflection of the poem [Sun in Me]... Lawrence, in his poem, relates sun and atom to God and atom. The high white C, which must be the whitest note of all, represents the word God. Following this, the music ends in a haze of wind and sea and sun.\textsuperscript{56}

As Skinner notes, the text of the end of the poem can be matched word for word to the melody “And further, the sun within the atom / which is god in the atom.”\textsuperscript{57} The coda gives a sense of calm and resolution after the preceding grief-inflected, even (to Covell) “bitter” music, and Sculthorpe later described it as

\textsuperscript{53} Covell, \textit{Australia’s Music}, 206.
\textsuperscript{54} Mellers, \textit{Singing in the Wilderness}, 149.
\textsuperscript{55} Peter Sculthorpe “Irkanda IV” lecture notes, dated by Skinner as 1990s, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
\textsuperscript{56} Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 257.
“an affirmation of life and living.” As Sculthorpe also notes, if one matches the text to the melody, the word “god” corresponds with the high C harmonic.

**Musical Example 6: 4 Sculthorpe Irkanda IV mm. 187-90**

It is especially interesting, and perhaps anachronistic in relation to the frequent discussion of the outback in Sculthorpe’s music that he mentions the sea in the comment above, although that had been the context for the recent “Desire Goes Down to the Sea” in Sun. Perhaps some of Sculthorpe’s landscapes in this music are intended in a more generalized spacious ‘Australian’ sense than is usually acknowledged.

*Irkanda IV* attracted a great deal of attention on its first performance, and elicited mostly very favourable reviews. As noted earlier, most of these were in terms of the work’s grief rather than Australianness, although John Gilfedder wrote “Irkanda IV sounds Australian, yet personal.” John Sinclair found it “a first-rate work” and Linda Phillips wrote to Sculthorpe saying it was “most

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58 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 300, 257.
impressive, with a deeply-felt, sad emotion, and brilliantly written.”

Skinner quotes quite a number of further examples along similar lines. In 1963 *Irkanda IV* was one of the pieces Sculthorpe sent to Curt Prerauer to introduce his music, and Prerauer was delighted to anoint a new Australian composer whose work he (finally) approved of. After hearing the tape of the work he wrote to Sculthorpe “[m]y dear Peter, you've got the stuff... Perhaps the *first* Australian music that can be called great without a mental qualification or query.” In an article shortly afterward in *Nation* he wrote of Sculthorpe's works generally, “[w]hat I have seen and heard of Sculthorpe's works makes me think he is the first Australian composer to unite in music all the elements that could constitute such an elusive thing as an Australian idiom.” However, later, as will be shown, he started to feel that Sculthorpe's work was too atmospheric and insufficiently modernist.

**Cultural Wilderness**

In his 1999 autobiography, Sculthorpe discussed a further interpretation of the *Irkanda* series, “[t]he music of the series, overall, is expressionistic and full of yearning, a yearning, perhaps, for the civilisations of the Western world.”

Here, perhaps, there is an echo of Sculthorpe's sense from the late 1960s that the *Irkanda* music was ‘too European.’ However, in *The Fifth Continent* he had actually used the music of *Irkanda IV* not only coming after the lines from D.H. Lawrence about the “hoarily waiting” bush but also in relation to the following phrase, which also expresses the idea of longing for European civilization. The phrase comes directly before *Irkanda IV* begins, “He was not happy, there was no pretending he was. He longed for Europe with hungry longing...” Given that the 1963 setting was made before Sculthorpe is on record as being concerned about his music being ‘too European,’ and additionally he later told

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59 Ibid., 258.
60 Ibid., 257-59.
61 Ibid., 278.
64 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 295.
Ian Cugley that it was at just this point that he was thinking of returning to
(European) serialism, it seems unlikely that a fear of too much ‘Europeanness’
is the issue here.\textsuperscript{65} However, the idea of “longing” for the civilisations of the
Western world does relate interestingly to a different aspect of Sculthorpe’s
later perspectives because he told Michael Hannan, presumably sometime in
the late 1970s, that when as a student he had studied in Melbourne he was
disappointed with cultural life there because he felt that others were
unreceptive to this highbrow and philosophical interests.\textsuperscript{66} As noted in Chapter
1, this seems not to have been the way he usually felt about Melbourne, but it is
an interesting construction to apply to Australian life and culture. Hannan
went on to say (problematically, I argue) that this “precipitated his
estrangement from European styles of thinking as appropriate models for an
Australian aesthetic.”\textsuperscript{67} Sculthorpe later told Geoff Wyatt “[w]e are not a
thinking people – but a visual people,” and Andrew Ford “[w]e’ve yet to become
a truly civilized nation... here we are stuck in Australia.”\textsuperscript{68}

The trope of Australia as a barren cultural wilderness as well as a barren
landscape has been alluded to through this thesis. It is an understanding that
originates at least as far back as the nineteenth century, and Richard White
links it to writings by Alexis de Tocqueville about America, which were then
also broadly applied to other settler colonies. De Tocqueville felt that the state
of the colonies was in some senses the future that Europe should look forward
to as they were largely democratic and less stratified than the ‘old world.’
However, bound up with this were anxieties about (amongst other things) the
state of culture in such places, what de Tocqueville saw as a “middling
standard” in the arts without any aristocratic basis of support. White notes that
this led to negative views in England about the quality of American, and by

\textsuperscript{65} Cugley, “Peter J. Sculthorpe: An Analysis of His Music,” 50.
\textsuperscript{66} Hannan, \textit{Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas}, 6.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 6-7.
\textsuperscript{68} Geoff Wyatt, "Listening to the Landscape," \textit{POL}, August / September, 1977, 89;
Andrew Ford, \textit{Composer to Composer: Conversations About Contemporary Music}
(Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), 39, 41.
implication, Australian culture. Geoffrey Serle surely draws on a similar set of ideas about the materialism of colonial cultures when he quotes Thomas Jefferson at the beginning of his 1973 cultural history of Australia, *From Deserts Prophets Come*, “[t]he first object of young societies is bread and covering. Science [or culture or learning] is but secondary and subsequent.” These ideas also permeate Lawrence’s *Kangaroo*. Later commentators have pointed to a binary here that forms understandings of relationships of the metropole with the colonies, writing that there are “old ideological dichotomies that characterize the relationship between metropolis and periphery, such as those of the mind and the body or thought and emotion.” Such binaries are further evident in some Australian nationalisms from the late nineteenth century through the First World War, in which Australia is presented as a rural place in which the British race was finding enhanced, vigorous and manly expression in comparison to life “back Home.”

This is certainly congruent with some of the British views of Australia discussed in the last chapter as the “colonial exotic.” It is certainly also a theme in many Australian cultural expressions, and in many of these the wilderness of ‘the’ landscape becomes not only a shaping condition of an uncivilized, inferior culture but a symbol of it as well. In Roslynn Haynes’s analysis of the cultural understandings of the desert in Australian history, she notes that in the twentieth century the desert:

slid into metaphorical use for the spiritual barrenness of its few inhabitants, depleted in morality as in energy by their arid land. It was not long before the physical emptiness, the ‘hideous blank’ at the centre of the map, was taken to signify an even more disturbing

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72 White, *Inventing Australia*, 73-84.
wilderness, the metaphysical void at the centre of the national identity.\footnote{Roslynn D. Haynes, Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film (Cambridge; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 28.}

Similarly in A.D. Hope's well-known poem “Australia” (1939) the fourth stanza includes the following:

the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: 'we live' but 'we survive',
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

This notion of mere survival rather than cultured life is intensified in the recurrent theme that life in Australia is more than a struggle – if you survive it, it will probably exact some price, it will change you, and you will lose your civility. Texts by Marcus Clarke and Henry Lawson often give the sense that the landscape and its brutalising isolation prompt human despair, madness and death.\footnote{Graeme Turner, National Fictions: Literature, Film, and the Construction of Australian Narrative, 2nd ed., Australian Cultural Studies. (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 26.} Dangerous, desperate, often mad characters abound in Australian film and literature, and without the narratives of triumph commonly associated with American culture. Kenneth Clarke, referred to above, was an exact contemporary and one-time collaborator of Sculthorpe. His novel Wake in Fright (1961) was made into an influential film a decade later. A schoolteacher stays in an outback town for several days where he is rapidly sucked into the barbaric, distressing way of life of the friendly but violent locals, despite his initial horror and scorn towards them. In Wake in Fright the outback is a place that changes and uncivilizes and the teacher ends up losing all his money gambling and then brutally killing a kangaroo, amongst other things that seem to shock him (and by inference, viewers). Although ‘the outback’ or ‘the bush’ is set up in a polar relationship with the teacher’s educated city origins, in some senses the outback itself stands in for Australia as a whole: at one point the teacher discusses how he’d like to become a writer in England eventually, since even urban Australia is too uncivilized to support writing other than
journalism.\textsuperscript{75} There are plentiful shots of outback landscapes and a score that is clearly influenced by Sculthorpe’s \textit{Sun Music I}. Nick Cave’s recent film \textit{The Proposition} (2005), again using highly static non-diegetic music, articulates similar and even more unhinged and violent themes.\textsuperscript{76}

In Chapters 1 and 2 the biographical trope of creative isolation predisposing originality was discussed in relation to Sculthorpe. The themes of the loneliness of the landscape in his work, especially after \textit{Irkanda IV}, were specifically related to such a theme by commentators. Sculthorpe’s friend Max Oldaker wrote an article in the \textit{Launceston Examiner} and then published a second version of it in the \textit{London Magazine} in 1962, titled “This Music Evokes Australia’s Loneliness.” In it, he makes much of Sculthorpe’s loneliness and isolation, and views loneliness as a necessary condition for a creative life:

\begin{quote}
Peter Sculthorpe as a boy was not unacquainted with loneliness, which in itself is indicative of a creative mind... It is not surprising that over a period of years he has felt compelled on occasions to express in music loneliness and remoteness... He has not written of the solitary human soul, but a conception of the desolate open spaces, of the sights and sounds therein and the immense fortissimo of the great silence. He... compound[s] much of the harsher Australian colouring with qualities of greater universality. His ‘great loneliness’ might as easily be that of the Antarctic, or the barren wastes of the moon.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Here, the notion of a difficult personal loneliness is a precondition of creativity, and in some senses, this resonates with wider conceptualisations of the conditions and character particularly Australian creativity might have. The poem quoted above by A.D. Hope ends with the following:

\begin{quote}
Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} Ted Kocheff, \textit{Wake in Fright} (Melbourne: Madman Entertainment, 2009, DVD; first released 1971).
\textsuperscript{76} John Hillcoat, \textit{The Proposition} (Sydney: Sony Pictures, 2006, DVD; first released 2005).
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come.

This explicitly titled poem, “Australia,” thus finishes with the hope that the Australian cultural wilderness might actually be the source of a special creativity. Geoffrey Serle borrowed the phrase for the title of what Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White called his “bird’s eye view” cultural history of the ‘high arts’ in Australia, *From the Deserts Prophets Come* (1973). In the ‘metropolitan gaze’ in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s discussed in the last chapter, similarly it was the type of landscape and the lack of civilization that was posited as producing a particular type of creativity, and Wilfrid Mellers implied the primitivism and vital force of both in a 1965 article, also quoted in the previous chapter. Sculthorpe, it seems, was tapping into these ideas in his view of his own work, and also perhaps using these themes to ‘spin’ the characteristics of his music in ways that he thought would be acceptable and resonant to critics.

*The Fifth Continent*

*The Fifth Continent* was conceived in relation to a request from the conductor Joseph Post for a piece for the ABC to enter in the 1963 Italia Prize. Sculthorpe told the Prerauers that “I’ve been wanting to write a major work that is a logical outcome of my serious music to date.” He wrote the work over several months at the beginning of 1963 and it is in five moments for speaker and small orchestra (strings, percussion, trumpet, oboe, harp and tape recorder, with tapes of a didgeridoo and wind sounds). As noted earlier, the speaker recites texts from Lawrence’s *Kangaroo*. The “Prologue” outlines the basic material for the rest of the work, and “Outback,” movement two, is as noted above, *Irkanda IV*. The third movement is called “Small Town” and is related to Lawrence’s descriptions of the New South Wales coastal town of Thirroul. The music for “Small Town” has since proved the most popular of whole the piece, and although the work as a whole is only very rarely performed or recorded “Small

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Town” is performed quite often. The music of “Small Town” is tonal and the prominent chord progression throughout piece is from Hoagy Carmichael’s “Heart and Soul” (because it was a favourite of Sculthorpe’s friend Russell Drysdale). The main melody is based on one Sculthorpe had written for a children’s film in 1961. The music is more characteristic of Sculthorpe’s film music rather than the rest of the Irkanda works, and will not be analysed in detail here.

The fourth movement, “Pacific” is based on Sculthorpe’s music for “Desire Goes Down to the Sea” from Sun with the addition of a new theme treated in canon. As in “Desire Goes Down to the Sea” “Pacific” is clearly sea music, using the wave-motion from the song’s accompaniment and additional texturalist passages with no prominent melodic material. A new motif, highly characteristic of the Irkanda style, is used in the canon material: up a semitone, up a major seventh and down a semitone, and Sculthorpe reused this motif prominently in String Quartet No.6. On the whole, “Pacific” is a more consonant, atmospheric iteration of the Irkanda style, as was for the most part “Desire Goes Down to the Sea,” but now with more plentiful minor second and minor third interjections. The structure and derivations are shown in the diagram below.

**Figure 6: 3 Structural analysis of “Pacific”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Very slowly, ( \dot{\text{quarter}} = \text{c} ).90</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Introduction: harp gliss ( \frac{1}{8} )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun “Desire goes down to the Sea” melody mm.1-6</td>
<td>Fig.1 3-14</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Melody on C over F bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Two G(\flat)-D(\flat) harp dyads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Two bars D(\flat)-C(\flat)-A(\flat)-G chord tremolo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{90}\) Ibid., 296.
| **Sun “Desire goes down to the Sea” melody and accomp. mm.1-6** | **Fig.3 15-24** | Melody now on A as in song, with only slightly altered accomp. Uses “sea spray” acc. fig from song. Gong played on rim throughout Penultimate chord new F#-A-G#-A |
| | **Fig.4 25-38** | B didgeridu tape fade in Canon: 3 part, new theme, elements of *Sun* melodies and melodic style, entries on E, A, D |
| **Sun “Desire goes down to the Sea” mm.11-20** | **Fig.5,6 39-52** | C 8 Melody altered at end. Accomp. chords from song (mm.11-14 of song), brief dissonant figures added mm.49-52 melody extended with new material, contains cell from canon theme (ST-M7-ST) over continued chord from song |
| | **Fig.7 53-68** | D Moderately ♩ = c.88 Episode – textural passage ♩ Harmonic idea from *Irkanda II* D-A-Db-F, now over Gb bass (superimp 5ths), plus embellishments. Scotch snap rhythms. Passage ends with bass tritone c.f. bass tritone m.15 of song |
| | **Fig.8,9 69-98** | Episode – textural passage repeated at faster tempo: briskly ♩ = c.100, dissonances added, lowest 3 notes of chord now C#-D-G. Towards end cresc and wind machine fade in |
| | **Fig.10 99-102** | Textual – broadly ♩ = c.88 ♩ E-A-D chord, harp ad lib glissando |
| | **Fig.11 103-108** | B ♩ very slowly ♩ = c.72 Canon on last four bars of previous canon theme |
| **Sun “Desire goes down to the Sea” melody and accomp. mm.1-6** | **Fig.12 109-20** | Melody now octave higher, mm.116-19 new extension of melody. Chord revoiced to emphasise 5th: D-A-E Texturalist harp figures and gong rolls |

The “Epilogue” is a short movement consisting of reworkings of the material from the rest of the piece.
The first performance of the work in December 1963 in Hobart was received fairly well and the piece was re-broadcast on the ABC on Australia Day 1964. Skinner has said of it that “as an attempt to extend and develop the Irkanda IV idiom, however, The Fifth Continent was a picturesque cul-de-sac.”81 The Prerauers were not very impressed, saying that they found the work atmospheric but not more than that. At around the same time, Curt Prerauer wrote to Sculthorpe about Irkanda IV after hearing a live performance of that work in Sydney in 1963:

The impression of the work itself was still more atmospheric and ‘Australian’ in the best sense... But – quite candidly: I’m glad that you are back with serialism. Irkanda IV is independent, new, and all that, but I wonder how much further you can go with this idiom.82

Sculthorpe, about to move to Sydney to take up the lectureship at Sydney University, was under pressure to come up with something more serious.

The Piano Sonata

As Skinner notes, “aware of expectations, not least of the Prerauers and [Sydney] ISCM, and after going ‘quietly on modern dissonance’ in Irkanda IV, this was [Sculthorpe’s] most self-consciously ‘modern’ work for several years (certainly since Irkanda III).”83 Sculthorpe had been planning a piano work for the ISCM since July 1963, but with pressures of time, he recycled “Tropic” from Sun and Irkanda III, becoming the first and second movements of the sonata respectively. There are a couple of new, short sections, and Sculthorpe has added further dissonances in some sections, but most of the music is old. One feature which does emerge in this piece is more use of tritone simultaneities in chords, especially in the bass register. Some of the new sections involve this

81 Ibid., 297.
82 Ibid., 299-300.
83 Ibid., 304.
kind of tritone movement as well as intervals such as minor ninths. *Irkanda IV*-style scotch snap rhythms are also evident in some sections.

**Figure 6:** 4 Structural analysis of Sculthorpe Piano Sonata

**Movement 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin of material</th>
<th>Piano Sonata, movement I Very slowly ( \cdot ) = c.48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Sun “Tropic” mm.1-2** | Introduction  
mm.1-4, into \( \frac{4}{3} \) |
| **Sun “Tropic” mm.3-6** | A  
mm.5-8, into \( \frac{5}{4} \)  
Piano pattern changed slightly, chord changed by addition of two M7 dissonances |
| **Sun “Tropic” mm.7-10** | mm.12-14, into \( \frac{5}{4} \) and \( \frac{3}{2} \), some tiny adjustments |
| **Sun “Tropic” mm.11-15** | mm.15-18, into \( \frac{2}{3} \)  
Same changes to chords as mm.5-8 |
| m.15 | mm.19-20  
Changes, but retains D♭-C bass |
| **B** | mm.21-32 **new material** |
| | Blank score section |
| **Sun “Tropic”** | A\(^1\)  
“mysteriously”  
mm.?33-47  
Shortened version of previous A, some octaves for bass notes changed |
| ? | Score pages missing, *Callabonna* has short coda |
### Movement 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin of material</th>
<th>Piano sonata, movement II Fast tempo assumed</th>
<th>Also used in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>mm.1-5 <em>missing</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> mm.6-20</td>
<td>A mm.6-20 Omits two vl chords</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> mm.21-30, Fig.2</td>
<td>mm.21-30 Omits vl chords, and lower A of A-Bb-A chord omitted except on accented articulations, ends with low Bb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> mm.31-44, Fig.3</td>
<td>mm.31-44 Revoicing of <em>Irk III</em> piano part into <em>Sonata</em> l.h. mm.31-36, two Ab-G dyads of melody harmonized as Ab-G and C-G mm.37-43 bass changed from D-F to F-Ab (was bass under <em>Irkanda III</em> canon), bass of each phrase now low A not D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“mechanically”</td>
<td>mm.45-63 <em>New material</em>, chord of superimposed m3s a M7 apart Bb-Db-A-C-C played percussively, interspersed w ST figure C-Db-C and l.h. m9 &amp; tritone alternation from mvt 1, mm.49-53, 57-60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> mm.61-78</td>
<td>“hard and percussive” mm.64-82 E-F bass oscillation from <em>Irkanda II</em> returns instead of E-A to F, some A-G patterns diff octaves &amp; harmonized differently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> mm 79-106, Figs 6 &amp; 7</td>
<td>B <em>Very slowly</em>. ≈ c.80 mm.81-110 mm.81-83 chords altered to emphasise Eb-Ab-Bb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canon, small adjustments mm.99-110 <em>Irkanda I</em> theme now on F over chord from <em>Irkanda III</em></td>
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<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> mm 107-16, Fig.8</td>
<td>“remote” mm.111-22 Theme in diminution as in <em>Irk II &amp; III</em> Parallel 4ths F-B♭ to E-A emphasised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sun “Sun in Me”</em> mm.3-6</td>
<td><strong>Coda</strong> mm.123-30 Based on “Sun in Me” harmony &amp; accompaniment pattern. <em>New melody</em>, scotch-snap rhythms (with ties), semitone emphasised, chromatic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm.130-48 <em>New material</em> hocketing octaves between hands, cross relations, repeated chord A-E-B-D-F. Final chord D-A with m9 E♭</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sculthorpe withdrew the work after reusing the material in the String Quartet No.6, but the first, slow movement was later reissued as *Callabonna* (1989) for solo piano (the name dates from 1989 and derives from the lake in South Australia that Russell Drysdale told Sculthorpe *Irkanda IV* reminded him of).\(^8^4\)

The handwritten score of the Piano Sonata in the National Library of Australia looks to be the one used as the template for the published version of *Callabonna* as the handwriting is the same as the published score. Furthermore, a few sections of the Piano Sonata manuscript are missing, so it is uncertain from when the existing manuscript dates. Given that there were few later performances, however, it is likely that at least the second, fast movement dates from around the time the work was composed. The score contains a reworking of the inscription of *Irkanda III*, here it is in the form “Always austere: Australian.”

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\(^8^4\) Ibid., 307.
Given how little Sculthorpe talked about his works from this period in terms of ‘Aboriginal’ inspirations, it is instructive to note that there is a black and white drawing in a seemingly ‘Aboriginal’ style on the back of the work’s title page, above the “Always austere” inscription. As far as I’m aware, other than the use of the didgeridoo recording in *The Fifth Continent*, this is the only connection Sculthorpe made between his work and any sense of ‘Aboriginality’ in this period. Much later, in a program note for *Callabonna*, he said that the work “is my first real knowledge, through [Russell Drysdale], of the plight of our aboriginal people.”

Given that Sculthorpe had written most the musical substance of the work before knowing Drysdale, this is a connection that can have only been made, at the earliest, when he rewrote / rearranged the music in 1963.

**Figure 6: 5** Drawing from the score of Sculthorpe Piano Sonata

Russell Drysdale’s wife Bonnie died within a couple of months of the completion of the sonata, and Sculthorpe decided to dedicate the first movement of the work to her.86 Here, again, connections of an *Irkanda*-period work with grief became part of the public presentation of the music.

Sculthorpe performed the piece himself at an ISCM concert in Sydney in November 1963. It attracted only a few reviews, and in terms of understanding...

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85 Peter Sculthorpe, “Callabonna” program note, undated, but seemingly printed on a 1980s or 1990s computer printer. Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
86 Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 312.
how audiences heard its musical character, the most interesting one is from Curt Prerauer, who said of the piece in a comment that also applied to Richard Meale’s work “Australian music should begin to blossom at last and the music critic can rejoice that this country’s primeval power and vitality will one again prove victorious over cultural reaction.” Meale’s work is hardly primitivist, but this characterization at least shows that Prerauer was conscious of the discussion of a kind of colonial primitive around works such as those by Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale. Fred Banks felt the sonata had an “idiom of knotty power... pervaded by a sense of lonesomeness.”

String Quartet No.6

String Quartet No.6 is one of the major works of the *Irkanda* period, and as noted above, it was commissioned as the inaugural Alfred Hill Award from Musica Viva. The award specified a chamber work, and Sculthorpe and the administrators agreed on a string quartet. As Skinner notes, the quartet was the “longest in gestation” of all his music so far, with the Award being announced in August 1963 and Sculthorpe not completing the work until January 1965. It was a busy period, with teaching beginning at the University of Sydney and the composition of two film scores. One of these was for a documentary *The Troubled Mind*, later renamed *Under Stress*, about life in mental institutions in Victoria. Significantly for the quartet, the film score reworked the Piano Sonata for a chamber ensemble and in that sense was a rehearsal for the reuse of the Piano Sonata music in the first two movements of the quartet. The quartet was dedicated to Russell Drysdale’s former wife Bonnie who, as noted above, had recently died. Since it was suicide, Skinner interprets the use of the Piano Sonata music in the *Troubled Mind* and then the quartet as forming a link in Sculthorpe’s mind between Bonnie’s death and the

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87 Ibid., 311.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 301.
90 Ibid., 364, 300.
91 Ibid., 339-40.
mental illness documentary. Initially, however, Sculthorpe had only intended the first movement to be a dedication to Bonnie, but when Drysdale misunderstood, thinking the dedication was to be for the whole work, Sculthorpe kept it that way.92

Skinner argues that the pressure on Sculthorpe in relation to the Piano Sonata intensified when it came to the quartet. It was over three years since Irkanda IV and the critics were expecting “something new.” Sculthorpe told Michael Hannan several years later that he felt he should not risk “untried musical material” in the work and that he sensed that his career was on the line.93 He later also characterized the reuse of material in a similarly apologetic tone when he wrote “[u]nfortunately there were pieces, and I won’t name the pieces, in which I tried to recapture the formula of Irkanda IV, but of course one can’t go back and recreate... but some pieces written in the manner of Irkanda IV are not unsuccessful, for example String Quartet No.6.”94

The quartet is mostly a reworking of previous pieces, with no sections of new music other than a few extra bars in the third movement (Fig.25). Sculthorpe at times alters the harmonies, adds chords, sometimes increasing the dissonance and occasionally reverting back to earlier versions of the music such as those from Irkanda III. Movement one is a reworking of the first, slow movement of the Piano Sonata (also Callabonna), movement two is the fast second movement of the sonata, and movement three is the music from “Pacific,” again, slow. The “new” motif from the canon in “Pacific” is used in the second movement (Fig. 10 and Fig.11) as well as in the third, in its original place as part of the rearrangement of “Pacific.”

92 Ibid., 366.
93 Ibid.
**Figure 6: 6 Structural analysis of Sculthorpe *String Quartet No. 6***

Movement 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Lento molto $\cdot$ = c.48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun “Desire Goes Down to the Sea” mm.3-4</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Melody split between 8ves, upper neighbour ST now appoggiatura over G-D-A chord Then chord including superimp 5ths m9 apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, I “Tropic”</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>m3 bass oscillation now E-G Quadruple stop pizz chords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, I</td>
<td>Fig.1 7-16</td>
<td>More dissonant chord (tritone + P4 = M7) but with bass notes moving sim to Piano Sonata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, I “Tropic”</td>
<td>17-22</td>
<td>As for piano sonata, mm.3-6 repeated over bass m6 lower, now tritone rather than 3rd in bass line, chord altered slightly. Mm.21-22 similar to Sonata, tritone introduced in chord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, I</td>
<td>Fig.2 23-34</td>
<td>Same, a tone up, except a ST dyad has become a quad stop chord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material of Piano Sonata missing</td>
<td>35-38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, I “Tropic”</td>
<td>Fig.4 39-50</td>
<td>As before, mm.3-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, I “Tropic”</td>
<td>51-52</td>
<td>Ends on low Db</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Movement 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, <em>Irkanda II &amp; III</em></td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>E-F oscillation in bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, <em>Irkanda II &amp; III</em></td>
<td>Fig.5 5-22</td>
<td>A Con moto $\cdot$ = c.144 Main melody from <em>Irkanda II, III</em> and P Sonata Occasionally pizz quad stops added, trill added in final 2 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, <em>Irkanda III</em></td>
<td>Fig.6 23-30</td>
<td>Transposed to C-Db-C, dissonant <em>Irkanda III</em> version of chord, occasional pizz quad stops added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, <em>Irkanda III</em></td>
<td>Fig.7 31-44</td>
<td>Same, accompanying chord D-E-A thickened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata mm.45-64</td>
<td>Fig.8 45-66</td>
<td>Mostly the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, <em>Irkanda II &amp; III</em></td>
<td>Fig. 9 67-84</td>
<td>Cello E-F pattern now E-A to F as in <em>Irkanda II</em> mm.95-106. Melody in higher octaves at times. Quartal and quintal <em>pizz</em> chords punctuate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fifth Continent</em> “Pacific” motif</td>
<td>Fig.10 85-88</td>
<td><em>Lento</em> ♩ = c.80. Motif from canon in “Pacific” – ST-M7-ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, <em>Irkanda II &amp; III</em></td>
<td>89-100</td>
<td><em>Canon</em>, two voice, at the octave. Pedal trill from canon in <em>Irkanda II</em>, grace-note octaves down scale from <em>Irkanda III</em> and Piano Sonata.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, <em>Irkanda I &amp; II &amp; III</em></td>
<td>Fig.11 101-112</td>
<td><em>Irkanda I</em> theme as in piano sonata “piangendo.” Same acc including scotch snap rhythm. Motif ST-M7-ST mm.111-12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata, <em>Irkanda I &amp; II &amp; III</em></td>
<td>Fig.12 113-24</td>
<td>Main melody in diminution <em>tremolo</em> as in previous pieces “<em>lontano molto.</em>” Harmonics in acc. as in <em>Irk II</em>, quad stop <em>pizz</em> punctuations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Sonata melody mm.123-30 &amp; bass notes</td>
<td>Fig.13 125-36</td>
<td>Much richer, more complex harmony than Piano Sonata using superimposition of chords and intervals at tritone, retains E-B then C bass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> Fig.11 mm.141-54, <em>Irkanda II</em></td>
<td>Fig.14 137-54</td>
<td>Main melody with F-A♭-E bass as in <em>Irk III</em>. New dissonant chord 149-50 B-F-E-F, final chord adds B&amp;F bass: B-F-A-B♭-A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda II &amp; III</em></td>
<td>Fig.15 155-66</td>
<td>C.pt. of main melody and canon theme as in <em>Irk II &amp; III</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Irkanda III</em> ending</td>
<td>Fig.16 167-74</td>
<td>Repeated emphatic chord changed to A-E 5th with B dim triad. Ends on low D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Movement 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>Bars</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Mvt</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td><em>Lento</em> ♩ = c.60. Introduction: transposed motif and quad stop chord opening of 1st mvt, added another quad stop chord 5th away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific, Sun “Desire Goes Down to the Sea”</td>
<td>Fig.17,18 3-14</td>
<td><em>A</em> Up a semitone (F♯ bass). Harp interjections now <em>pizz quasi arpa</em>. Chord at end of phrase now M3s a M7 apart over D bass (<em>Sonatina</em> chord). Tonal relations changed – bass at end of phrase F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific, “Desire Goes Down to the Sea”</td>
<td>Fig.19 15-24</td>
<td>Same, omits D bass and final harp fig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>Fig.20 25-38</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canon now in ♭ not ♭ &lt;br&gt;Same, 3 voices on E, A, D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pacific, “Desire Goes Down to the Sea”</th>
<th>Fig.21,22 39-52</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same, takes superimposed 5ths from harp arp (G-D, F#-C#) and substitutes them for chord in Pacific, bass still E-B. Omits harmonics. Chord mm.43-44 now superimp M7s a 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; apart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pacific</th>
<th>Fig.23 53-68</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderato assai ♫ = c.88 &lt;br&gt;Same texture, harmony changed. Now A-C-F in 3 lower parts and Fb-Ab with embellishments of G-B – superimposed M3 a M7 over F triad.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pacific</th>
<th>Fig.24 69-88</th>
<th>Con moto ♩ = c.100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altered: retains pizz, texture &amp; M3s in vl2 (Fb-Ab to G-B). Chord now harsher: two M7s a tritone apart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Pacific | Fig.25 89-100 | Chord in lower parts C#-D-G becomes two alternating ST & m9 chords G-G-A♭ & C-D♭-C-D♭ |

| Pacific | Fig.26 101-4 | Idea of very loud tremolo chord retained, chord changed from quartal / quintal to harsher quartal + m9s E-A-F and A-E-B♭ then milder C-E-A♭-G |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pacific</th>
<th>Fig.27 105-10</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lento ♫ = c.72 &lt;br&gt;Canon as before beginning with ST-M7-ST motif</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pacific</th>
<th>Fig.18 111-24</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same quartal / quintal chords, harp part omitted, more dissonances added to some chords eg M3 superimposed at M7 mm.121-22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sculthorpe’s program notes for the quartet in the 1960s include the following. The original note states:

The Quartet... which is freely atonal, is based completely on several motifs heard at the outset. There is little formal growth, however, in the nineteenth-century sense, but rather growth by accretion, almost it might be said, like the manipulation of building blocks made of sound.
As noted above, Kenneth Hince reviewed the work and felt that “freely tonal” might better describe it,\(^{95}\) so Sculthorpe took “freely atonal” out of subsequent versions.

The notes also included the following:

The first movement of String Quartet No.6 is tense and introspective, almost funereal, the work having been written upon the death of a close friend. The second movement is hard and rhythmic in its outer sections, and in its central section again tense and introspective, with the loneliness of some secret desert place. The last movement, the longest of the three, draws out the original motifs in yearning melodic lines, until the tension is resolved...

It is perhaps interesting to note that the last movement of the String Quartet stems from phrases and fragments of phrases from another short poem by D.H. Lawrence, and also from his novel *Kangaroo*. The passage concerns a state of no desire, and a state of desolation and loneliness before the somber face of the Pacific Ocean.\(^{96}\)

The “loneliness of some secret desert place” is a highly lamentational, anguished section and the *Irkanda I* style is reinforced by the up a semitone – up a major seventh – down a semitone motif from “Pacific.” Interestingly, the *Irkanda I* melody appears in this section – no doubt associated with the “desert place” – but quite strongly disguised with the introduction of a longer rest changing the phrasing and with an additional, scotch snap accompaniment rhythm. The melody is in the cello, below.

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\(^{95}\) Skinner, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 377.

\(^{96}\) McCredie, *The Composers and Their Work*, 17.
Very little of the initial reception of the work seems to have mentioned Australianness, and the only commentary I’ve found that does is by Wilfrid Mellers; even Covell heard the work more in relation to grief. Mellers wrote in 1965 that “this is the only music known to me which discovers – by way of its glinting, shimmering bitonal textures and stalking, minatory rhythms – a sound equivalent for the ‘feel’ of Australia.”97 The piece was, however, mostly very well received, with Prerauer commenting, for example, that it was “Sculthorpe’s strongest and most impressive work” that showed “promising vistas on his output to come.”98 Felix Werder interpreted it through the theme of struggle in the face of alienation, “a tense work, ruthlessly overpowering in its emotional arguments and reflecting a strongly romantic approach, one can even speak here of a Jeremiah-like strength, to the problems of the lost individual in a world facing desolation.”99

98 Skinner, Peter Sculthorpe, 377.
99 Ibid., 381.
In terms of audience reception, it was one of the highlights, if not the highlight of Sculthorpe's *Irkanda*-period career. As he wrote to his mother after the premiere:

There were over 2000 people present, & I had to keep going back & back again, to the platform. If I hadn't felt so completely removed from the work, & it was almost like listening to music by somebody else, then perhaps so great an acceptance could have been dangerous.\(^{100}\)

\(^{100}\) Ibid., 377.
Conclusion

In 1989, the year after writing the orchestral piece *Kakadu*, Sculthorpe travelled to Kakadu in the Northern Territory for the first time. He later said of the experience:

I had lots of books about Kakadu and photographs and so on and I sort of had those all round me and I wrote this piece. The piece it’s fairly bold, quite strong, it’s even wild. And about a year after I’d written it I went to Kakadu and I realized that most of the photographs I had were sort of very dramatic photographs because they made good photographs! And I didn’t feel the drama there that was in the books that I had. And so if I’d written *Kakadu* after I’d been there it would have been a very different piece. So I’m glad I hadn’t been there. But the music that I wrote about *Kakadu* from that point was much more calm and serene and because when I arrived there I felt very much at home, very happy and it wasn’t like the original *Kakadu* piece at all.¹

He confirmed this in an undated program note for the guitar concerto *Nourlangie* (1989):

I first began writing music about the north of Australia, especially Kakadu and Arnhem Land, in the later 1970s. This music tends to be somewhat angular and intense. In 1989, upon making my first visit there, I experienced a deep sense of contentment. Inevitably then, my subsequent music concerning this landscape has a feeling of serenity, with little angularity and intensity.²

Here, there is an interesting disjunction between the impressions Sculthorpe had about the outback from the culture around him and those he experienced when he later visited it. Within Australian culture the characterisations of outback landscapes usually involve, as George Seddon says, “the clichés, it’s always ‘vast,’ ‘harsh,’ ‘hostile,’ ‘unforgiving,’ all thoughtlessly Eurocentric

² Peter Sculthorpe, Program note “Nourlangie,” undated, Papers of Peter Sculthorpe, National Library of Australia.
words.” Roslynn Haynes traces the history of Australian outback landscape tropes from the journals of the nineteenth-century explorers onwards, and argues that even into the twentieth century, “the literary and artistic perceptions of the landscape remained haunted” by the explorers’ accounts. These landscape tropes circulated through the culture of mid-century Australia in Sculthorpe’s formative years and into his adulthood, in films, documentaries, travel writing, novels, poems and paintings. They were present in the reception of Australian painting in England from the 1950s, as well as in D.H. Lawrence’s writing about Australia, and these further shaped Sculthorpe’s sense of the character of his own nation. The disjunction between these understandings of the character of the outback landscape and Sculthorpe’s own impressions when he went there highlight the way that understandings of the land were shaped by a history of accounts by explorers and colonists struggling to survive, the theme of exile, and the use of the landscape as a symbol of cultural wilderness.

The savage, austere, remote, wild, harsh, mournful, lonely, atmospheric, strange and ‘other’ landscape music of Sculthorpe’s Irkanda period is built on these cultural tropes. His music in this period is rarely serene, the major exception is the end of Irkanda IV when in the memorial to his father he writes a passage that, in his words, is “an affirmation of life and living.” The rest of the Irkanda music draws on the long musical heritage of exoticist representations to construct the Australian landscape as Other: dissonance, harmonic stasis, the semitone and augmented second-inflected orientalism of the Middle-Eastern desert, astringent and atmospheric harmonies and string timbres, prevalent perfect fourths and fifths.

The Sonatina – a youthful assay into these representations and in its Les Six-like character no more than a mild and undeveloped version of them – contains

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an especially revealing passage in which Sculthorpe transforms Beethoven’s rustic *Violin Concerto* rondo theme into a representation of Aboriginal celebration and ceremony. What Sculthorpe does to Beethoven’s theme allows a particularly clear view of the exoticising basis of his musical language as the rustic peasant tropes of the theme are transformed into syncopation within asymmetrical meters, dissonant bitonal harmony based on the major seventh interval, static, parallel perfect fourths and an exotic modal melodic flavouring. Sculthorpe’s use of Beethoven’s theme gives also clues to a representation of Aboriginal people based partly on the rustic trope from earlier European music. Similarly, other musical material Sculthorpe borrowed in this period – the orientalism of Balakirev’s *Islamey* and perhaps of Bloch’s Violin Concerto (itself actually involving representations of Native America) – sees Sculthorpe wanting to create something in his own music in common with the generally understood meanings of the source material.

In his own later comments on his work Sculthorpe has emphasized the idea of dualities operating in tension with each other: Tasmania in relation to mainland Australia, and Australia in relation to “the civilizations of the Western world.” Surely in this sense it is also significant that Sculthorpe’s representations of outback landscapes as austere, astringent and lonely are contrasted so strongly with the pastoral sense of Tasmanian landscapes in his preceding Melbourne-period music. As Roslynn Haynes points out, ideas around the barrenness and harshness of deserts have long been implicitly contrasted with abundance and civilization. “One construction of images... presents the desert as harsh, infertile and punitive... In the Eden story the desert stands in contrast to the garden, the oasis, and by extension to the cultivation that both sustains and emanates from civilization.”

This understanding of the character of the outback and its status as symbolically the most Australian place in Sculthorpe’s music is also, as noted,

5 Ibid., 26.
allied to ideas of Australia as a barren cultural wilderness and this as a symbol of Australian creativity. The placing of Australia, Australians and Australian art works in this construct on the edges of civilization and shaped and marked as Other by being there has been a recurring theme in a nationalist views of Australian art, both from within the country and without. It further permeates Sculthorpe’s autobiographical and his commentators’ biographical accounts. Ideas of Sculthorpe having to create in isolation from knowledge of the musical life of the rest of the world, as well as his personal experiences of loneliness and isolation have been recurring themes in writing about him, but do not seem to be borne out, or certainly not strongly borne out, on closer examination of his life story. However, in as much as Sculthorpe’s musical landscapes seemed appropriately ‘Australian’ to his audiences, so has, it seems, this understanding of the character and basis of his creativity.

The representations of Aboriginality in Sculthorpe’s works are problematically distanced and primitivist, and draw on existing musical representations of primitivism. They also appropriate Aboriginal culture as a symbol of nationhood at a time when Aboriginal people were excluded from the nation, had their children and land stolen and their lives and ways of living subject to paternalistic control by a racist state. However, it makes no sense to condemn Sculthorpe as an individual for this when it is utterly symptomatic of larger trends in Australian society in the mid-twentieth century. He is no more and no less guilty than most of his contemporaries. My purpose in the analysis through this thesis is not to condemn Sculthorpe but to historicize his work. By all accounts he is a well-intentioned and compassionate person whose engagement with Aboriginal and other cultures – through books, usually, rather than directly – was typical of the attitudes and methods he grew up with. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge the problems inherent in these representations. Michael Pisani argues in relation to musical representations of Native America that awareness and analysis of their character may hopefully
assist in mitigating their persistence: “[f]ocussing the broader cultural discourse on the details of stereotypes... may help to limit their destructive influence.”

That so much of Sculthorpe’s music is landscape-based allies it to a larger history of landscape representation as a nationalist cultural strategy within international music history. It is also linked with the prevalence of landscape representations and their prominence in the history of the Australian arts generally. As noted, landscape is implied in Sculthorpe’s representations of Aboriginal people in the ‘Aboriginal place’ of the outback, but from his time at Oxford the focus on landscape increases and the desire to represent Australia through Aboriginality for the most part seems to recede. It reemerges in 1974 when he begins using Aboriginal melodies in his work.

The adoption of Aboriginality as a symbol of Australianness is similarly part of a larger tradition within settler societies of using indigenous symbols to represent the nation, and Nicholas Thomas dates this back at least to the late nineteenth century. Such a gesture is itself part of the larger nationalist strategy of constructing the sense of a primordial past for the national culture. In settler societies, with only a short historical connection to the land that is claimed, the appropriation or representation of indigenous cultural expressions was a way of arguing for an attachment to place. However, the interest in the primordial relationship of the indigenous to the land is often paralleled by a disinterest in contemporary indigenous lives, and the idea of the absence of indigenous people in the present gives the sense that they have given way (due to destiny or Darwinism) for the new colonists. The lamenting tone of

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10 Thomas, *Possessions*, 49.
Sculthorpe’s *Irkanda* music is usually heard as non-indigenous loneliness in the land, but in *Irkanda I*, a “burial rite,” there are also hints of the assumed sadness of the so-called ‘vanishing race,’ part of the common tendency in this period for non-indigenous projections to symbolically corral Indigenous subjects.

The harmonic stasis that is so characteristic of Sculthorpe’s music may be heard in several ways, at once or separately. It does often give a strong spatialising sense in line with traditions of musical landscape topics. Harmonic stasis is also, however, characteristic of the tradition of musical exoticism and similarly of musical primitivisms with their frequent reduction in the complexity of pitch. Similarly, modernism in Sculthorpe’s work may be read in several ways. Modernism is complex, multivalent and contested, and here as elsewhere need not mean just one thing. Sculthorpe’s early attraction to a sense of avant-gardism certainly does recur in the *Irkanda* period, and there are also times when he seems to have notched-up the dissonance level in his works in line with critical expectations. This allowed his music to be embraced in the cultural climate of Australia in the 1960s, anxious to be ‘mature’ and up-to-date with the rest of the world. However, the level of dissonance should also be seen as one of the major representational gestures of his work, marking Aboriginality and landscape as strange, ‘other’ and even primitive.
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Appendix B

Diagram showing the use and adjustments of material from the *Sonata for Violin Alone* into the *Sonata for Cello Alone* then into the *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*

Key: Blue = new, Maroon = similar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonata for Violin (manuscript, 1955)</th>
<th>Sonata for Solo Cello (manuscript, 1959)</th>
<th>Sonata for Viola and Percussion (published version 1964)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction of small no. of quarter-tone inflections</td>
<td>Quarter-tones gone Percussion layer added All transposed down 8ve from cello piece except where indicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ⅰ and Ⅱ</td>
<td>§ and Ⅲ</td>
<td>§ and Ⅲ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement I</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With vigour, briskly</td>
<td>Tempo I: briskly, with vigour</td>
<td>Animato (quaver=160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-15</td>
<td>mm. 1-16 from Vi, transp. down 12\textsuperscript{th} (7-14 transp down 8ve, 15 down a M7, 10-11 melody changed slightly)</td>
<td>Percussion intro 6 bars mm.7-14 same mm.15-20 new – <em>Irkanda I</em> melody mm.21-26 trans up 4\textsuperscript{th}</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 17-18 new mm.19-20 similar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ⅲ and Ⅳ</td>
<td>§ and §</td>
<td>§ and §</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slowly and calmly</td>
<td>A: Mahlerian melody</td>
<td>A: Mahlerian melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.21-52</td>
<td>Tempo II very slowly</td>
<td>Poco lento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“quasi-Mahlerian melody” twice, 2\textsuperscript{nd} time marked “broadly and with great emotion,” broken up by two-part passage 31-42</td>
<td>mm.21-52 same (21-30 transp down 8ve, 31-42 down 12\textsuperscript{th}, 43-52 down 8ve)</td>
<td>mm. 27-58 almost exactly same. (27-30 transp up 4\textsuperscript{th}, 31-43 up 8ve, 44-58 up 4\textsuperscript{th}) 58-60 percussion only</td>
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<td>§</td>
<td>§</td>
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<td>Movement III</td>
<td>B: “rapidly repeated rhythmic figure”</td>
<td>B: “rapidly repeated rhythmic figure”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.33-47</td>
<td>Sul pont, punta d’arco, remote</td>
<td>sul pont, punta d’arco</td>
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<tr>
<td>Islamey quotation ponticello</td>
<td>mm. 53-61</td>
<td>mm.61-70 same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement I</td>
<td>Movement III</td>
<td></td>
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<td>------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>mm.75-86 (end)</td>
<td>mm. 1-16 with great virility &amp; emotion. “Martial figure” includes percussive striking of fingerboard.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>\section{B cont’d: cross-string figs}</th>
<th>\section{C: martial figure}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Tempo I} ma. ad lib. mm.63-74, transp. down 12\textsuperscript{th}, \textbf{m.75 new}</td>
<td>\textit{Tempo II} to \textit{Tempo I} mm. 77-106 mostly same but some harmonic &amp; textural alterations, chords generally less dissonant (77-79 transp. down 1 8ve, 80 down M9, rest 8ve)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| mm.17-30 expressive melody, related to “Mahlerian melody” of mvt 1 | mm.93-106 melody not in octave doubling now, a couple of $\frac{1}{4}$ tones added (transp. down 8ve) \textbf{mm. 107-8 new} |
| mm.105-120 almost all same, $\frac{1}{4}$ tones omitted | mm.105-120 almost all same, $\frac{1}{4}$ tones omitted |

| \section{B} mm.109-140 Balakirev \textit{Islamay} quotation (also quoted above), (transp. down 1 8ve + m7 to A) then adapted to $\frac{3}{4}$, some melodic alterations, cross string tone colour effects | \section{B} mm.125-154 almost exactly same \textbf{m.154 different chord, mm.155-6 new transition passage} |

| \section{C: martial figure with precision} mm.141-148 same but chords less diss and intro of some harmonics \textbf{mm. 149-52 new} | \section{C: martial figure} \textit{Risoluto} mm.157-172 mostly same, retains harmonics, some rhythmic adjustments |

\textit{Islamay} quotation in tremolo, rhythm changed, several melodic alterations towards end. Transp. down 2 octaves + m3. \textbf{m.62 new}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>£</th>
<th>mm. 77-102</th>
<th>Expressive melody now “viciously” <em>pizz.</em>, m.89 “with emphasis”, <em>sul G</em></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td><strong>Interlude: expressive melody related to “Mahlerian”</strong></td>
<td>mm. 153-78 mostly same, transp. down 12th, <em>pizz.</em> m.165 “sagely,” m.167 snap <em>pizz</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td>Changing Meters <strong>B: martial figure</strong> <em>Tempo II</em></td>
<td>mm.179-82 Based on &amp; devp “martial figure” Open string <em>pizz.</em> added. mm.183-84 is from mm.34-36 mm.185-204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td>Changing meters <strong>B: martial figure</strong> <em>Poco lento</em></td>
<td>mm.205-210 very similar mm.211-16 another repeat of martial theme with new textural ideas <em>Alla Marcia funebre</em> mm.217-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td>mm.237-50 percussion solo</td>
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<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td><strong>Movement I</strong> mm. 21-30</td>
<td>mm.205-212 rhythm altered, &amp; in harmonics</td>
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<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td><strong>and §</strong> “with much agitation” mm.127-146 dyads of 5ths alternating across strings</td>
<td>mm.213-26, minor alternations to pitch (open string 5ths transp. down 12th, transition passages down 8ve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td><strong>§ and §</strong> “with much agitation” mm.147-64 (end). A melody interspersed w quadruple stops</td>
<td><strong>§</strong> “ad lib., <em>al tallone</em> mm.213-26, minor alternations to pitch” (open string 5ths transp. down 12th, transition passages down 8ve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td>mm.227-244 (end). Minor alterations, one bar omitted</td>
<td><strong>§</strong> “Quasi cadenza, <em>al tallone</em>” mm.265-84 , same, transp., 2 extra bars of 5ths dyads, m9 in chord m.281 emphasized by revoicing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td>mm.285-304. Minor alterations, some added chords (all transp up 8ve except m.295 up 6th)</td>
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