

'Musical Gems that will Capture the Public Imagination!'

The Production and Distribution of *Around the Boree Log*

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Around the Boree Log is a collection of secular songs by Dom Stephen Moreno published by the Benedictine Community at New Norcia, Western Australia, in 1933. Its mode of production was unusual, perhaps unique, for music published in Australia. This paper examines the publication of *Around the Boree Log* to illustrate aspects of music production, distribution and reception in Australia in the 1930s and 1940s. It traces the publication of the collection from the preparation of printer's copy at New Norcia, through its printing in Perth, its advertising and distribution, the transfer of its copyright to Pellegrini and Co. in 1935, to the return of large numbers of unsold copies to the Benedictine Community at New Norcia in 1941.

Introduction

Stephen Moreno's collection of secular songs *Around the Boree Log* comprises 20 songs with piano accompaniment, setting verse by the Catholic poet John O'Brien. The titles of the songs indicate the flavour: they include 'The Little Irish Mother', 'The Presbytery Dog' and 'When the Circus Came to Town'.¹ 'These beautiful songs', according to an advertising flyer for this collection, 'breathe the very spirit of the Australian bush—the wonderful spirit of the old pioneering days when faith waxed strong and courage ran high'. Enthusiasm for the collection—'Musical Gems that will Capture the Public Imagination!'²—did not infect potential purchasers, and six years after its publication the question was posed 'What is wrong with it?'

This paper⁴ was prompted by the existence at the Benedictine Community at New Norcia of some printing blocks with musical notation and some tools which resembled music engraving tools. The New Norcia Community has a long musical tradition dating from 1846. These printing blocks and tools are significant for the history of music printing and publishing in Australia, for they indicate that music was prepared for publication at New Norcia using professional techniques requiring high levels of skill.

1. For more about the poems and the poet see Frank Mecham, *John O'Brien and the Boree Log*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981.

2. On an advertising flyer for *Around the Boree Log*. Copy in the New Norcia Archives 02912.

3. New Norcia Archives 02897 ¼: Letter from Ulisse Pellegrini to Moreno, 16 October 1934.

4. A version of this paper was presented at the 'Music Publishing and Book Selling in Australia' seminar, sponsored by the History of the Book in Australia Project and held at Monash University on 17 November 2000. For a further discussion of music publishing at New Norcia see Ross Harvey, 'New Norcia's Printed Music', *New Norcia Studies* 7, 1999, 34–45; and Ross Harvey, "'To Make Propaganda of His Music': Music Publishing at New Norcia", *Australasian Music Research* 4, 2000, 113–130.

Most of the music published at New Norcia was liturgical music composed by Don Stephen Moreno. Born in Spain in 1889, he received his musical education in Rome and went to New Norcia in 1908. He was a prolific composer of liturgical music, much of it specially directed towards 'restoring Gregorian chant as the basis of liturgical worship' according to the tenets of *Moto Proprio* as decreed by Pope Pius X.⁵ Moreno died in 1953. From 1909 until 1931 most of Moreno's music was printed and published in Italy, the bulk of it by Chenna in Turin.

Around the Boree Log

Around the Boree Log was a departure from Moreno's usual liturgical compositions. It was the first of the New Norcia Community's musical works to be prepared at New Norcia and published in Australia. The publication, sale and disposal of this work can be traced through material in the archives at New Norcia.⁶ Printers' copy was prepared at New Norcia and printed in Perth by The People's Printing and Publishing Company of Western Australia Limited. Copies of *Around the Boree Log* note on the inside back cover:

Wholly set up and printed in Australia by The People's Printing and Publishing Company of Western Australia Limited 38-40-42-44 Stirling Street, Perth Western Australia. Engraving Plates (from the original manuscripts by the Benedictines of New Norcia) and Cover Design, by Art Photo Engravers 13 James Street, Perth, Western Australia.

In January 1933 Moreno had sought advice from some of his Perth contacts about the viability of his proposed production method. He wrote to a Mr Sampsin(?) that

We intend to publish some of my latest musical compositions in a way a bit different to that which we had adopted so far. It consists in writing first the required copy in a very large size using for the purpose rubber stamp ink, ordinary ink and a very dark pencil. The idea is to get by means of photography ordinary blocks and then to have them printed as common illustrations. One of the works that we intend to publish first is a collection of 20 songs. This book contains 32 pages all the blocks to be of the same size : 6 x 9 inches. As the blocks contain everything that would appear on the page I understand that the printing of the book—as far as the

5. Jean Farrant, 'Moreno', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Music*, ed. Warren Bebbington, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.389.

6. The main sources are: New Norcia Archives 02898¾, correspondence with Musgrove's Ltd; New Norcia Archives 02897¾, correspondence between Ulisse Pellegrini to Moreno; New Norcia Archive 02898¾, correspondence between Allan's Ltd, Adelaide and New Norcia; New Norcia Archives 02903, two letters in Spanish dated 1935 concerning the printing history of *Around the Boree Log*.

press is concerned—[would?] be much easier than the printing of text for which the setting of types is required.⁷

Moreno must have received a satisfactory answer, for work proceeded.

Initially 1000 copies of the complete volume and 8000 of Books 1–4, each containing five songs (2000 copies of each of four books) were printed, followed rapidly by another 1000 copies of the complete volume, for sale at 3s for each book and 7s 6d for the complete volume. An advertising brochure was also produced.⁸ It was placed for sale with the agents which the New Norcia Community usually used for the sale of their music, including Musgrove's in Perth. A letter dated 19 June 1933 to Mrs Sutherland Groom of Musgrove's Ltd, Perth indicated that the conditions for Musgrove's becoming agents for *Around the Boree Log* in Western Australia were sole rights for two years on a sale and return basis, a 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % discount, and advertising at Musgrove's expense.⁹

The complete volume was initially received enthusiastically, at least in Western Australia: "Around the Boree Log" has made quite a good start, and I think it will be a great success', reported Musgrove's on 15 July 1933.¹⁰ By comparison, the separate books did not sell. Musgrove's Ltd in Perth, for example, had by 19 February 1934 sold just over half of the copies of the complete volume supplied to it (165 of 300), but only 37 copies of the 1200 supplied of the separate books; and only a few more sales were reported to New Norcia in the following six years.¹¹

By October 1934 Moreno, concerned about the slow sales, had sought the advice of Ulisse Pellegrini, one of the major vendors of Moreno's music through his nation-wide chain of religious supplies stores. Moreno suggested that the price be reduced from 7s 6d to 6s. Pellegrini advised not to do this, suggesting that 'people begin to say "What is wrong with it?" when the price is reduced. Better to leave it as it is, suggested Pellegrini: 'if the sales do not improve we could come out with a New Edition at 5/- or 6/-. In this way we give a good reason for the reduction in price'.¹² At least one part of this advice may have been followed, for on the back cover of the copies of *Around the Boree Log* stored at New Norcia are the words 'Thirteenth Edition, completing 38,000 copies'. I am unable to reconcile this statement with the facts which can be ascertained from archival material at New Norcia which suggest that a total of either 10,000 or 13,000 copies were printed, depending on how the evidence is interpreted. This is certainly not the 38,000 claimed, nor is it a thirteenth edition or printing.

7. Moreno letterbooks, New Norcia Archives 02982, Leaves 2841–2482, 17 January 1933.

8. Printed by the People's Printing and Publishing Co., 28–44 Stirling Street, Perth. New Norcia Archives 02912.

9. New Norcia Archives 028983.

10. New Norcia Archives 028983.

11. New Norcia Archives 028983.

12. Letter from Ulisse Pellegrini to Moreno, 16 Oct 1934. New Norcia Archives 028973.

For reasons now unclear, the copyright of *Boree Log* and the unsold copies were transferred to Pellegrini & Co., Sydney, in September 1935.¹³

Two letters in the New Norcia Archives, dated 28 October 1935 and 10 November 1935, from Abbott Placid to Father Bonifacio at the Order's house in Perth and written in Spanish, provide further information about the number of copies printed and about the handover to Pellegrini.¹⁴ These letters appear to relate to a stocktake before the handover. The printing history is explained:

Of the first edition, 1,000 complete versions and 2,000 divided into parts were printed; as each of the latter consists of four booklets, that makes 8,000 copies [of the booklets] in all. As you can see, there was a huge disproportion between complete [versions] and those in parts. There were insufficient copies of the full version to supply all outlets, so that scarcely had they finished [printing] the first edition when they produced another (which they called "second edition," to show there was a demand) which consisted solely of 1,000 complete versions, so that the two editions together comprised in all 2,000 complete and 2,000 (8,000) in parts.'

Some details of the agreement with Pellegrini are given:

in the contract itself it is stated that we were to sell ourselves or through our agents no more than 2,000 full versions and 2,000 (8,000) in parts; and if we sold out within three years, Pellegrini would supply us and our agents [with additional copies]; and if we did not sell all copies, he would buy them back at the rate of 1/- for each full version and 6d for each part, which amounts to 2/- for all four parts of that version.

Copies of 'Boree Log' held by the 'Worker' (the Worker Publishing Company, Perth, which appears to have become the master agent in Perth for the Community) are noted. It showed the number of copies to hand to be: 560 of the complete volume; 1,325 of Book 1; 1,650 of Book 2; 1,350 of Book 3; 1,325 of Book 4. Abbott Placid noted that 'many or perhaps most of the Complete volume may be of the second edition' and that 'Mr Pellegrini [may] find this odd, because he called an edition which he produced in Sydney "Second Edition," not knowing that we had already done a second here'.

The number of copies transferred to Pellegrini's was noted in a memo headed 'Number of copies to be sent to Pellegrini & Co., Perth, when payment is received from Pellegrini & Co. Ltd., Sydney.' They clearly indicate that *Around the Boree Log* had not sold well: 'Complete, 617. Volume I. 1600. Volume II. 1943. Volume III. 1647. Volume IV. 1616. The rest to be kept for our own private use [about 300 copies of the complete volume and about 70 copies of

13. Letter from New Norcia to Allan's Ltd Adelaide 17 July 1936: 'With regard to disposal of your stocks of Dom Moreno's 'Around the Boree Log', we regret we cannot advise you. We sold the copyright and the unsold copies of that work to Pellegrini & Co. of 543 George St. Sydney as from Sept. 1935'. New Norcia Archive 028984.

14. New Norcia Archives 02903. Translation courtesy of R. Keightley.

each of the separate books].¹⁵ Pellegrini had a long association with New Norcia, being a major agent for the distribution of Moreno's liturgical music. It is possible that he took over the copyright of the faltering *Around the Boree Log* as a favour to the Community and particularly to Moreno, although this is conjectural. By 1941 the sales were practically non-existent and unsold copies were returned to the Community. Large numbers of the parts are still stored at New Norcia.

The Chenna–New Norcia collaboration was clearly successful, so why did Moreno decide in 1933 to publish locally? Dom Ros, chronicler of music at New Norcia, suggested that Moreno chose to use local printers because of doubts about Chenna's ability to deal with texts in English. This is unlikely to be the full explanation. Other possible explanations are that Moreno could exercise greater editorial control over the final product if he oversaw its preparation directly, and there may have been a need to reduce the costs of dealing with a publisher and warehouse based half a world away.

Around the Boree Log was the first of other musical works whose printer's copy was prepared at New Norcia then printed in Perth. The most important works prepared in this manner were Moreno's *Little Flower Hymnal* (published by Pellegrini, Sydney in 1933) and the *Gregorian Manual* (published by the Community and printed in Perth, 1941 and later editions).

Production methods at New Norcia

The story of *Around the Boree Log* is worth recounting because its mode of production was, as noted earlier, unusual if not unique in Australia. The tools at the New Norcia Community are not tools used to engrave music onto metal plates, they are used to stamp music notation onto paper. There is a long tradition of using stamps to prepare printer's copy for reproduction by lithographic processes, and later by photographic processes.¹⁶

Ros describes the process used at New Norcia by Moreno and other monks, including Ros himself, to prepare the printer's copy. Moreno wrote by hand the music placards 'from whence the printing plates would be taken by a photographic process'. The steps, Ros notes, were: trimming cardboard to size, then cutting music manuscript paper to fit it; stamping the musical notation, and writing some of it; cutting the text from pre-printed gummed paper sheets and pasting them in the appropriate places. Ros writes that 'In order to do that work, Dom Moreno improvised some tools of his own; the metal ones, however, were made in Perth under his personal supervision'. He estimates the number of pages produced by Moreno in this manner 'by his own hand' as 459.¹⁷ The Music Room in the Abbey at New Norcia still contains large quantities of adhesive-

15. New Norcia Archives 02903.

16. This process is noted further in Ross Harvey, "To Make Propaganda of His Music": Music Publishing at New Norcia', *Australasian Music Research* 4 (2000): 113–130.

17. Eliado Ros, *Music at New Norcia (Historical Survey)*, 'Third Period: Abbott Catalan (1915–1950)', 150–153. New Norcia Archive.

backed paper on which is printed music notation and commonly-used words used during this process.

Conclusion

What can we learn from this examination of the production and distribution of *Around the Boree Log*? A comment made of another Moreno work published in 1933 is apposite. At the same time as *Around the Boree Log* was being prepared and published, another work, this time of liturgical music, was also being prepared. Moreno's *The Little Flower Hymnal* was published by Pellegrini in 1933. The *Catholic Press* of 5 October 1933 noted:

A word of praise and congratulations is due to publishers, Messrs. Pellegrini and Company, for the admirable manner in which the book comes to us ... The engraving plates have been made from the original manuscripts of the Benedictines of New Norcia and it is with a thrill of pride that we think that here in the heart almost of our Australian bush, a monastic institution is carrying on such great works, similar in character and equal in magnitude to the centuries-old establishments of Europe.

Overstatement, perhaps, but with an element of truth.

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