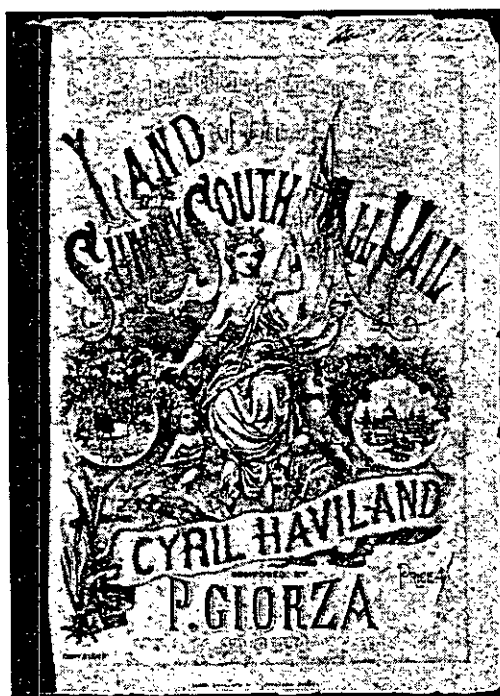


Between the Sheets  
*Two Centuries of Australian Sheet Music*

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Sheet music has the capacity to tell many stories of lives lived, felt and shared, to provoke memories, to express sensibilities and to depict events, ideas and themes that make up a nation's history.

The National Library of Australia collects music both as part of its legal deposit obligations and its policy to comprehensively collect and preserve the nation's published heritage. The Library seeks out, holds and individually preserves 'mint condition' copies of all music currently published in Australia, or by



Australians or related to Australia. The printed music collection also includes a massive retrospective collection of heritage items that, perhaps through serendipity alone, have survived those traditional repositories of the piano stool or the box in the shed. Since the Library formally established its printed music section in 1973, 'hunting and collecting' such items has been a major activity, gathering together music that emanated from the earliest Australian music publishing and retailing houses in the 1840s to the present. The Library now holds over 200,000 items of music in its collection of which approximately 65% is designated as Australian.

The bulk of the printed collection is popular sheet music. This is complemented by two other kinds of collecting of music: firstly, the acquisition of the largely unpublished creative output of Australia's composers in manuscript or facsimile, and, secondly, the field collecting of Australian vernacular music traditions handed down orally through generations. Thousands of hours of music performed and remembered by ordinary Australians is held in the sound recordings

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in the Oral History and Folklore Section. The Curator of Music has responsibilities across all these collections.

The focus of this paper is printed music. Sheet music is essentially utilitarian in that it is made to be played. The emphasis in publishing songs with piano accompaniment, or with ukulele, banjo or guitar charts, and solo piano music demonstrates that sheet music has always been designed primarily for domestic consumption. It exists as an *aide-memoire* for recreating the music in individual or group settings, either to be played strictly from the notation or as a memory jog for new interpretations, played by ear or improvised. It is ephemeral, relatively cheap, and widely disseminated at the time of production. The physical state of items often indicates that sheet music was well used, in homes, pubs, theatres, community halls or recording studios. Some have hand-stitched binding, scribbles, annotations, coffee stains, and even ripped edges.

Each item in the collection has its own story – who wrote the music and/or lyrics, who designed the cover, who performed the music or made it popular, who bought and sold and used it, who kept it, and perhaps even who loved it. Information of this kind is revealed in abundance on the covers and often in annotated pages of music notation. For bibliographers, such items convey much information about the history of publishing and the book in Australia. For musicians, published music tells us about the history of music in Australia – the history of its creation, performance, recording and reception – as well as invoking meanings inherent in the music itself. For the cultural historian, perhaps the predominant interest lies in the ideas the musical item has to communicate about the society in which we lived, worked and played, or the social, historical or cultural context in which the music was created and disseminated.

A dip into any individual item within the sheet music collections in the National Library will allow us to glimpse the breadth, depth and abundance of the total Australian collection, ranging from nineteenth-century titles such as *The Aboriginal Father* and *Land of the Sunny South*, *All Hail* to the present *Bran Nue Dae*, from *The Melbourne Exhibition March* to the iconic *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*, from *Our Football Girl* to the most popular 'rock' song *Friday on my Mind*. There are some priceless historical gems. Perhaps the Australian cricket team might consider adopting Warren Russell's 1896 *Hurrah for the Bat & Ball: The Universal Cricket Song* as its anthem? Taxpayers might feel that Jack Lumsdaine's wonderful 1930 *Banish the Budget Blues* (1930) is as pertinent today as it was in Scullin's day, although Ella Southworth Clark's confident 1910 prediction, *The Battle's On or Prohibition's Bound to Win*, failed to eventuate. *The Road to Gundagai* is but one of hundreds of songs praising the virtues of Australian town and country, though we might be surprised at the Anglo-centric words



of the earliest versions of *Advance Australia Fair*. The 'Sentimental Bloke', Ginger Meggs, Ned Kelly, Don Bradman, Skippy, Australia's first Holden, Auntie Jack, the 'Wild One' Johnny O'Keefe, Bananas in Pyjamas, Kylie Minogue, 'The Boy from Oz' are all immortalised in sheet music!

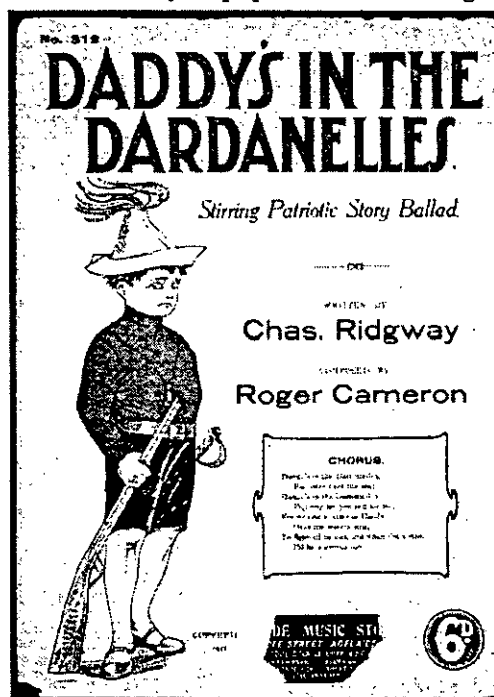
An even deeper layer of 'story' is revealed when the sheet music collection is taken as a whole. What emerges strikingly is the capacity of the sheet music to tell us so much about our past and present society: what we have valued; what we thought; important events and they way they have united or divided us; whom we have loved on state, radio, screen or on the sporting field; what we have advertised and sold through the medium of music; and how we have integrated our social lives through singing, dancing, playing and listening together. The music captures and keeps alive a whole history of personalities, passions, attitudes, commercial transactions and social activities. It is fascinating both for its musical content and its visual, as well as aural record. Above all, the richness of expression and meaning of the music reaches deep into our collective and personal memories at a layer beyond words.

The National Library has recently undertaken several major initiatives to heighten awareness of these collections and to increase access to them. *The Collector's Book of Sheet Music Covers*, written by Robyn Holmes and Ruth Lee Martin (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), and a major exhibition *Between the Sheets: A Century of Australian Music*, curated by John Shortis,<sup>1</sup> together provide a rare snapshot into the total collection. The digital world also makes it possible to preserve fragile items in new ways and to make digital copies available over the web, whilst respecting the rights of creators. New digitisation initiatives of the Library will result in some 20,000 pages or 3500 items of Aus-

1. Exhibition held at the National Library of Australia, 22 August – 11 November 2001, now a National Library of Australia Travelling Exhibition, courtesy of Visions Australia.

lian sheet music made available on the National Library website by 2003, each linked to catalogue records. Initially, the priority is Australian sheet music pre-1930. ScreenSound Australia: the National Screen and Sound Archive and the National Library have also begun testing the web delivery of streamed sound linked to the score, so a new world of access will soon be at the fingertips, and ears, of users. Delivery of related items from the folklore collections will enable, for the first time, simultaneous access to the printed and the oral tradition, opening up new fields of interest in their interrelationship. The National Library and ScreenSound Australia are also developing institutional partnerships with other institutions, including the Australian Music Centre, state libraries and specialist archives, to digitise complementary items from their collections so that a comprehensive virtual collection can be established across Australia. This will result in a new national cooperative service called *MusicAustralia*: a pilot is available at <www.musicaustralia.org>.

The book and the exhibition were designed to complement each other, to take two snapshots of the materials from slightly different perspectives. The exhibition examines individual items of sheet music that are viewed as 'markers' of the social record of Australia in the twentieth century. Curator John Shortis has explored the personal connections of sheet music to events, people and their experiences. In this way the exhibition traces the history of popular music through a century, weaving people's experiences and remembered pasts through music about Federation, the wars and the Great Depression, and through dance crazes, theatrical entertainments and television soaps. The exhibition explores the interdependence between printed music and the traditions of music performance and sound recording (sheet music often includes such information as 'as sung by', or 'as recorded by'). It demonstrates that technological change underpins changing styles and functions of sheet music, for example the pre-eminence of music printing houses gradually waning with the appearance of the sound recording studio. Sheet music, once the primary means



of dissemination of music, becomes 'after-the-fact' publication for the contemporary music industry, only produced if and when the song or the performer becomes a commercial hit. The exhibition locates examples of individual sheet music in their local communities, from Gundagai to Woolloomooloo, from the Murray River to the Franklin Dam and, through collages and murals, nostalgically parades Australia's century of icons and stars.

The book explores these dimensions but with a broader focus, selecting some 100 images of Australian sheet music, composed and published from 1840 to 2000, to portray certain key themes and stories about Australian culture. In this view, music functions as a social barometer, reflecting and symbolising changing cultural ideals, attitudes and the collective experiences of the nation and its people.

Through three key themes, the book explores a myriad of cultural ideas and meanings. Anthems, songs, marches and dances related to significant national occasions represent the theme of citizenship and the growth of nationhood, from colonial life to the present. Musical impressions of Aboriginal culture by Europeans from as early as the 1840s, ballads from immigrant traditions, songs of Empire and 'home', nationalist sporting jingles, music celebrating the ANZAC legend: all these musically portray shifting attitudes in the way Australians have viewed and understood themselves and created their country.

Musical and visual images of place include sentimental depictions of home, of the 'bush', of towns, the city and the beach, as well as images of native flora and fauna. Advertising songs and jingles for Billy Tea, Vegemite, Aeroplane Jelly, Sydney Flour or A Country Practice have much to tell us about the physical and social environments in which Australians have lived, raised families and worked.

Examples reflecting the customs of singing and playing in the home are counterbalanced by items that reveal Australia from early on as a sophisticated antipodean and urban culture. This was an Australia that populated (and loved) the seaboard, that hosted visiting star performers and exported local talents – a society alive to the latest international fashions, trends and social pursuits. 'Icons, idols and entertainments' capture in music the cast of ratbags, rogues, idols, adventurers and heroes that has shaped the legends of the sporting arena, the suburbs, the bush, the stage or the pub and charmed our eyes or ears on screen and on record.

For each one of the images chosen for the book and exhibition, there are of course a myriad of other songs, dances or instrumental pieces that another reader or curator might have chosen. These can be found in hundreds of archive boxes and multiple rows of shelving in the National Library. Each item of sheet music

is individually stored and preserved – in Mylar pockets for the old and more fragile material, and in plastic bags for the more contemporary items.

Almost every item of Australian sheet music is now individually listed in the National Library's catalogue and in the National Bibliographic Database, making it relatively simple to search for and locate individual music items. The Library has also established an International Standard Music Numbering (ISMN) agency, a free service for Australian music publishers, ensuring ready international identification.

Efforts to retrospectively collect all published Australian music have been sustained alongside the collecting of contemporary music. The collection consciously makes no selective judgements about musical style or artistic quality, thereby ensuring that the Library has an extraordinarily representative collection of music as it was created, performed and heard in Australia from colonial day to the present. It is precisely for this reason that the significance of the collection, taken as a whole, is understood and valued. It is a collection which is as remarkable for the stories it weaves about Australia and Australians, in their multiple manifestations and layers, as it is for the quantity, quality and breadth of sustained artistic endeavour.



### Illustrations

Page 28: P. Giorza, lyrics by E. Cyril Haviland, 'Land of the Sunny South, All Hail'. Elvy & Co., 1879. National Library of Australia Music Collection.

Page 30: Jack Lumsdaine, 'Banish the Budget Blues'. D. Davis & Co., 1930. National Library of Australia Music Collection.

Page 31: Roger Cameron, lyrics by Chas. Ridgway, 'Daddy's in the Dardanelles'. Dinsdales, c1916. National Library of Australia Music Collection.

Page 33: Albert Francis Lenertz, 'Aeroplane Jelly Song'. Published in West Ryde, NSW, 1930s. National Library of Australia Music Collection.