Music museum curatorship: Reclaiming rights and responsibilities for musicking on Minjerrribah (North Stradbroke Island), Australia

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Abstract
The Music Curator describes a staged approach to support the reclamation of rights and responsibilities for music-making on Minjerrribah (North Stradbroke Island), in southern Moreton Bay, Queensland. This is part of enabling a localised movement toward claiming agency for planning the future course of musical development—especially early childhood musical development. The stages are to firstly understand the local music history from the perspective of local people. Secondly, the person-environment-occupation transactions are described to understand people’s musical relationships to Country. The Person-Environment-Occupation (P-E-O) Model, developed by Canadian occupational therapists (Mary Law and colleagues, 1996), is commonly used to assist individuals to adapt their occupational performance to adverse circumstances. Finally, local people and stakeholders are invited to engage in a strategic planning process to develop Music Action Plans for facilitating community musical development in the future. These stages of musical development are briefly discussed in this paper to highlight the role of the Music Curator, as an occupational therapist and ethnomusicologist, who facilitates the creative process. There are indications that the P-E-O model can be applied to the new context of music curatorship, especially for cultures with strong environmental relationships.

Keywords: Music museum, museum curatorship, ethnomusicology, Australian music history, Aboriginal Australian cultural heritage, Asia-Pacific community music.

Introduction
The vitality of music-making on North Stradbroke Island (NSI) is sustained by transactions between people-environment and their musical occupations. The Aboriginal people of NSI refer to the southern Moreton Bay region as ‘Quandamooka,’ which is the traditional land and sea of the Ngugi, Nunuccal and Gorenpu peoples. Following the devastating impact of colonisation on Quandamooka people’s language, lore, lifestyle, and cultural traditions, a renewal process of revitalising Jandai language, song and dance has been instigated by the Elders and Native Title Holder Aboriginal Corporations. The author has ancestral connections to the Quandamooka region, through the Irish mariner, Charles Lee who manned the lighthouse in the 1870s at Cowan Cowan on Moreton Island (adjacent to North Stradbroke...
Island). The Lee family settled at West End, Brisbane, following the death of Charles Lee at age 64 (Brisbane Hospital, 1884). They named their house ‘Cowan Cowan.’

In this small island context, music curatorship involves supporting local people to better understand and plan how to reclaim rights and responsibilities for keeping music heritage and culture strong. This article describes how this renewal process may be stimulated by a creative, staged approach which outlines the emerging role of the Music Curator working in collaboration with Museum, Schools, Elders and Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation. One aspect of this process is to develop musical resources and technological applications that sustain the ‘best fit’ between people-environment and their music occupations.

The stages in this collaboration are firstly, exploring the music history of NSI and mapping sites of cultural significance for children’s musical development; secondly, observing the people-environment-occupational transactions that occur during music-making; and lastly, facilitating strategic planning with stakeholders to develop Music Action Plans. In the wake of colonisation, the role of the Music Curator is to support and enable local people to participate in action learning and building capacity for music history research. This process occurs in the context of meeting with a ‘Community of Discovery’ — a democratic collective composed of Elders, museum staff, volunteers and people who are interested in exploring music history and planning how to enhance children’s musical development in the future.

The paper demonstrates a socio-ecological approach to the curatorship of music history and sites of cultural significance by applying the P-E-O Model with small island communities in Queensland, Australia. This place-based planning supports the gradual return of roles and responsibilities for music teaching and learning to the Island peoples.

**Quandamooka Music History and Heritage**

The reason that it is necessary to understand music history and culture prior to strategic planning, is that there has been disruption of Quandamooka song, dance, lore, language, livelihoods and music occupations through colonisation (Meston, 1923). Quandamooka refers to the Southern region of Moreton Bay that was populated by the *Ngugi, Nunuccal* and *Gorenpul* Traditional Aboriginal Owners prior to European invasion and settlement of the island from the early 19th century. Dunwich, a township on North Stradbroke Island became
the site for a series of church and government institutions in the 19th and 20th Centuries which had their own musical traditions and culture.

The key historical milestones of the establishment of institutions at Dunwich are outlined by members of the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum (Carter, Durbidge, Cooke-Bramley, 1994). In 1827, Governor Darling commissioned the building of an outpost at Dunwich as a Military Post and Stores Depot. This enabled the larger ships to service the penal colony to unload their incoming and return cargoes in the shortest possible time. The military station was withdrawn from Dunwich with the closure of Brisbane’s Penal Colony in 1839. A Catholic Mission to the Aborigines was established on these premises in 1843 by four Passionist Fathers, one Frenchman and three Italians, but closed by 1847 due to a number of reasons including language difficulties, physical hardship, church red tape, and response of Aboriginal people (Carter, Durbidge, Cooke-Bramley, 1994: 44).

A quarantine station was sited at Dunwich in 1850 to protect free settlers from disease. It closed in 1864, and a Benevolent Institution began operating at Dunwich. A quarantine emergency demanded that the Quarantine Station re-open again in 1865, which then moved to Peel Island. The Dunwich Benevolent Asylum officially opened in 1867, and was a home for the aged and infirm—but also housed younger people with a disability, inebriates, and for a short time, lepers. Conditions were poor and over-crowded (Rentoul, 2015). Church services and concerts were held at the Asylum in the Victoria Hall, which opened in 1896. “The hall had seating for 300 people, with a stage, piano, pipe organ and wings which allowed concert parties to dress for vaudeville acts and concerts. Artists came from Brisbane to perform in the hall” (Carter et al., 1997: 55). The asylum moved to Eventide, Aged Person’s Home at Sandgate, in Brisbane after WW2 (Diamond, 2012). Vincent Martin (1997) reports that by 1947, all Aboriginal people left the Island because there was no longer work there, since many were employed in menial labour for the Asylum. Some people returned when sand mining commenced operations on NSI in the 1950s, which provided some local employment—but with very serious environmental consequences (Ferguson, 1997).

The loss of traditional Jandai language and song and dance customs occurred as part of the dispossession of Quandamooka people from their land, language, and occupational role of cultural transmission across generations. Response to the disruption of Quandamooka people’s traditional lifestyle is evident in adaptations of corroborees-- to stage a new form of
entertainment for the European settlers (including asylum employees). Newspaper accounts report that the most successful entrepreneurs of this genre were John William ‘Billy’ Cassim, and ‘Funny Eye,’ (Welsby, 1921; Dunwich celebrities who have passed away, 1890). Cassim’s Aboriginal name was Nyoryo, meaning rope hauler, also spelled Nuwhju in some accounts. He was born around 1840 and passed away in 1890. The unnamed writer of this newspaper article (1890: 787) describes Nyoryo’s role: “Billy was a born comedian and buffoon. His services were essential to the success of every corroboree; no set part was given him, but he was left free to improvise parts for himself, which invariably ‘brought down the house’.”

The corroboree entertainment that Cassim improvised included the Chinaman corroboree, and the South Passage Corroboree (Dunwich celebrities who have passed away, 1890: 787).

In the former, two Chinamen go fishing. Casting their net, they have a haul of sharks, and nothing but sharks. Of course the nets are torn to pieces, and they are in dire distress. The motif of the play is slender enough, but the attempts of the blacks to rig themselves up as Chinamen, and their imitations of their jabbering and gesticulations in terror at the sharks, and the lamentations over their torn net, were as provocative of laughter amongst their own countrymen as among the whites who happened to be present at the performance.

In “The South Passage Corroboree,” a party of blacks go to the telegraph operator stationed there and inform him that they had just come from the back beach of Stradbroke, where a big ship was ashore. The telegraph operator of course sends word to Brisbane, and a steamer comes to the relief of the supposed shipwrecked party. Finding themselves duped, the white fellows swear at the blacks who are assembled to witness the fun, and even shoot at them, but with no effect, as the blacks are off into the scrub with shouts of derisive laughter.

A similar corroboree by ‘Funnyeye’ is described, using costumes from observation of European music-making in Brisbane (Dunwich celebrities who have passed away, 1890: 787):

The only play or corroboree of a similar kind known among the Amity Point blacks was the “Monkey Corroboree” by Captain Funnyeye, who was the philosopher and sage of the tribe, and predeceased Billy [Cassim] about a year. Funnyeye, on a visit to Brisbane, saw a monkey on a barrel organ... On arrival at home he set to work, and,
after spending days of toil, he got himself faultlessly rigged out as a monkey in every detail, a kangaroo skin and tail forming a capital groundwork. His whole rig-out and imitations of the monkey’s tricks produced a great sensation, and there was issued a special command for a repetition of the play.

A noticeable aspect of the European reports of staged entertainment by these Aboriginal men is that they adapted the function of the song and dance to generate an income for themselves—taking up a collection during the performance (Welsby in Thompson, 1967: 123); as was customary in European traditions. The spiritual significance of corroboree performance may have been lost, but the stories of everyday life scenarios were enhanced by comedic musical performances of Aboriginal cultural leaders.

Quandamooka peoples’ language loss coincided with the establishment of the Myora (Moongalba) Aborigines Mission at Moongalba on NSI in 1892. Archibald Meston (1923: 19) states that the loss of whole Aboriginal tribes and languages occurred in the last thirty years.

Among the old Moreton Bay tribes there were seven dialects spoken, and they are all practically extinct. In my lifetime I have seen tribe after tribe disappear, one dialect after another become extinct, until there is hardly a soul left of the people who spoke the dialects familiar to me in my youth. The tribes of Moreton, Bribie, and Stradbroke Islands have gone for ever, and all that is left of their dialects, presumably, is what was taken down by me in 1870 and 1874. On Stradbroke Island there are still some half castes and quadroons who speak part of the old Coobennpil dialect but with them and even that will disappear, so that white people in the last short period of 30 years have seen whole aboriginal tribes and their languages passing silently away from us, like a series of dissolving views, into Eternity. It seems to me to be a scene so solemn, and tragic, and pathetic, as to be capable of exciting pity in the hardest hearted and serious reflections in the most thoughtless.

This interruption of the usual transmission process of song and dance customs, and the loss of the occupational role of ‘song men and women,’ had a profound effect on diminishing the traditional ceremonial practices and spiritual responsibilities for Caring for Country and living things. The relationships between people-environment-community music practices were adapted by Quandmooka people over time as they were forced to assimilate to European
lifestyles, but remnants of language and song were still passed on by the ‘Grannies’--Kindara, Lizzie, Sydney and Mary Ann and others at Moongalba, even though this was forbidden on the Myora Aborigines Mission (Durbidge & Cooke-Bramley, 1997).

With the removal of Aboriginal people to reserves and missions, or adoption by white families, social dislocation occurred and European songs and Christian hymns predominated in institutional settings, such as schools, missions, and churches. Faith Walker (1997) reports that the Myora Aborigines Mission was very different to many other Aboriginal missions in Australia; as evidenced by Walter Roth, Chief Protector of the Aborigines, report of his visit to Myora in 1905. Roth (1906) stated that, “they speak good English and are well able to take care of themselves.” The extended family were located in close proximity to children on the mission at Myora. The residents of the Myora Aborigines Mission organised many of their own activities within the constraints of requiring approval from the Mission superintendent or managers (Walker, 1997). Paul Tripcony (1972, 1973), advises that dances were held at the Myora Aboriginal School at Christmas, Easter and Arbor Day. These evenings were organised by a residents’ committee and music was supplied by Aboriginal artists using accordions. This is supported by the accordion artefact that was brought to the North Stradbroke Island Museum by Ellie Durbidge in 2000 (Fig. 1). The museum metadata record states that it was played by Fraser Brown (an Aboriginal stockman who drove cattle on NSI). Brown played the accordion at dances at the Capembah Café, Point Lookout, NSI.

Ellie Durbidge states, “Fraser and other boys [Jack, Thornton, and Arthur Borey] rode their horses from Dunwich out to Point Lookout for the dances.” The donor’s estimated date of the accordion is 1946 to 1956, however the instrument is almost identical to the photograph of the Paolo Soprani ‘button-box’ or melodeon with 12 keys online,¹ which is estimated by the owner to be dated from 1900 to 1920. The Paolo Soprani company (which has changed hands) confirmed that the accordion dates from the early Twentieth Century. It is therefore, highly likely that the accordion artefact is older than originally estimated in museum records, so may have been played on the Myora/Moongalba Aborigines Mission which was situated near Capembah Creek. The accordion is one of the few tangible remains
Fig. 1. Wooden accordion donated to North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum in 2000, by Ellie Durbidge (photograph by Sandra Kirkwood, 2015). Storage location DM-AR-OS-C04; Queensland Museum ID number: 6193.

of Aboriginal music-making that is available for public display on NSI. The Paolo Soprani accordions were manufactured in Castelfidardo, Italy, which suggests introduction to NSI by Europeans. It is not known who originally owned the accordion or brought it to NSI, or how Fraser Brown came to learn to play the instrument. Further oral history would be beneficial to understand more about the musical repertoire and performance tradition. Cultural diversity of the NSI population increased following WW1 and WW2 after closure of the Myora Aboriginal Mission in 1943, and the requirement for the children to attend the Dunwich State School. In the post-WW2 period, migration, tourism, broadcasting, internet and multi-media technologies have resulted in translocation of music traditions from various locations around the world to NSI. There has been no scholarly study of NSI music history to date, which indicates the need for further research across cultures, to show the musical developments in the NSI coastal townships of Dunwich, Amity Point, and Point Lookout. Some recordings of
Aboriginal language and song on NSI survive in historical archives of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) which can be accessed and analysed through collaboration and consent with Aboriginal Corporations. There is potential for ethnomusicology research if Elders and Native Title holders permit.

**Current state and contemporary music-making on NSI**
North Stradbroke Island, known as ‘Minjerribah’ to Quandamooka people, is distinctive from the mainland in several ways. There is only one school on the Island that caters for the preschool and primary years from Prep to year 6. The secondary department at Dunwich operated for 20 years, and closed in 2012. The old Dunwich high school campus and the former vocational training and learning centre is now occupied by the Quandamooka Yoolooburrrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) which manages the native title interests of the Quandamooka area, following the Quandamooka Native Title Determination by the Federal Government on 4 July, 2011.

Demographic analysis of economic challenges experienced by small Island communities by Howard Guille (2014, p. 11) reveals that there has been considerable gentrification of North Stradbroke Island at Point Lookout. Economic inequalities exist for Island residents with lower median individual incomes and greater unemployment rates recorded at Dunwich, compared to Point Lookout in 2011 (Guille, 2014, p. 14). Inequality of income distribution is also associated with statistics related to disadvantage and unemployment. Aboriginal people make up twenty-one per cent of the population of NSI, and this is as great as forty per cent at Dunwich. Guille (2014: 15) states that “The estimate is that in 2006 about 18 per cent of non-Aboriginal households, and up to 45 per cent of Aboriginal households, in NSI were living below the poverty line.”

Quandamooka Yoolooburrrabee Aboriginal Corporation (2015) has established businesses and strategic plans for native title holders to become more self-sufficient and to generate income in sustainable ways that safeguard the natural environment. One of the niche creative industries is revitalisation of remnants of traditional song and dance by brothers--Joshua Walker (Yullu burri ba cunnjiel, 2013, CD), Raymond Walker, Che Walker, and the Yulu Burri Ba dancers that performed at the inaugural Quandamooka Festival in July, 2015. The dancers perform regularly at festivals and cultural events on NSI.
It is not a level playing field, however, because some people and cultural groups have better access to music tuition and support from musical mentors than others. This is largely due to financial means and the people’s affiliation with musical sub-cultures. There is a plethora of musical festivals which provide public entertainment for people of all ages such as: the annual Stradbroke Chamber Music Festival; the Lines in the Sand Festival; the Island Vibe Festival; the inaugural Quandamooka Festival (2015); and performances of the Stradbroke Island Singers choir, and local singers and musicians at cafes, markets and public halls.

This cultural diversity of contemporary music performance has arisen through a rather haphazard, demographic mix of interactions from people who are co-located on the Island, and visitors who perform for hotels, clubs, and events on NSI. The socio-cultural environment and politics of musical performance has been affected by educational practices and government policies, particularly those concerning the rights and restrictions on Aboriginal peoples following colonisation. Quandamooka people’s cultural expression has been restricted under the control of government institutions and music education practices which largely followed European musical traditions in the Aboriginal Mission, institutions and state schools. The resulting music-making of people on NSI reflects globalisation patterns and socio-political policies which govern pathways to music teaching and learning through the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum. Many teachers struggle to deliver culturally relevant creative arts education as part of the mandatory schooling of children from the age of 4 to sixteen years. Informal music education occurs outside of school for some subcultural-groups, and some children access private tuition, and participate in community music groups or through digital technologies if they have the financial means and support—complicated by having to travel to the mainland for high school, music lessons, band practice and concert performances.

Preliminary mapping of the contemporary music-making on NSI reveals that there are numerous opportunities for musical entertainment at local festivals and events, and by attending groups such as YouthLink holiday activities, the Q-Crew contemporary dance group, or Yulu-Burri-Ba dance troupe. From Prep class, children are taught to sing the national anthem and some other songs in Jandai language by their class teacher who is a Quandamooka Aboriginal woman. Quandamooka traditional song, dance, storytelling, arts/crafts, Jandai language and cultural practices are being revitalised by Aboriginal Corporation’s and Elder’s
involvement in festivals, and the commissioning of research for community cultural education.

Musical instruction in European instruments is available for students from years 2 to 6 at primary school. The history and current state of musical development requires further study by local people and music researchers because it has not yet been documented in a systematic, scholarly way. Musical developments tend to occur in an _ad hoc_ way according to the resources available and capacity of residents, teachers and culture bearers to access services and support such as Redland City Council and Arts Queensland Regional Arts Development fund. There is value in exploring the music history of NSI over time, to inform strategic planning with stakeholders to develop Music Action Plans that can be implemented by local people, rather than relying on state government services. The community cultural organisations, Aboriginal Corporations, Dunwich State School, and the NSI Historical Museum all have potential for agency in supporting children’s musical development in the future.

The focus on the shared vision for early childhood musical development arises from Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s vision, expressed in the “Song of Hope” poem: “to our father’s fathers, the pain, the sorrow… to our children’s children, a glad tomorrow.” The aim is for collaboration between services and strategic planning that enables children to find pathways in musical development, and to access suitable teaching and learning opportunities that are culturally relevant, and available regardless of economic means.

**Application of the People-Environment-Occupation Model (P-E-O)**

Conventional methods of music history were not considered suitable for NSI due to the high demographic of 50 per cent of Aboriginal students reported at the Primary School. An alternative model has been proposed by the Music Curator who is an occupational therapist and ethnomusicologist. The Person-Environment-Occupation Model is an enabling approach that was developed by Canadian occupational therapists (Law et. al, 1996; Strong et. al, 1999) to help people with a disability to negotiate different aspects of their life to obtain a ‘better fit’ for better functioning in activities of daily living, work and recreation. This transactional approach can be applied to support people’s cultural engagement with community music because it is relational and also considers the importance of the connections between people, music-making occupations, and the environment. This socioecological approach is proposed
for describing and analysing music history and planning culturally engaged early childhood community music practice for NSI. The study provides a new application of the model beyond its original context. This will reveal whether the theoretical model is suitable or needs to be tailored further to the unique needs of small island communities. It may also be necessary to explore further updates of occupational performance models and consider the recent development in technology and other factors.

Role of the Music Curator

The first stage of engagement of the Music Curator is to get to know people, community cultural organisations and Aboriginal Corporations, and to understand who is responsible for organising the musical events and gatherings. Attending musical events and festivals reveals the nature of people’s participation and the musical repertoire and style of performance. This allows the Music Curator to negotiate a brief for supporting music-making on the Island with the community cultural development sector.

The music curator may then guide the description of music history in terms of people-environment-occupations, and assist with the mapping of contemporary music-making on the agreed terms. The assumption is that every person has a unique music story of how they have experienced music during their lifetime, or even the lifespan of a band or choir. Some people like to tell their music stories in creative ways, demonstrating how they play and sing familiar music or sharing their favourite audio-visual recordings. The museum has archival records of past performances which can be retrieved for analysis with the consent of the people involved.

Strategic planning involves consulting with stakeholders to plan how to achieve the best-fit between people-environment-music occupations. The proposed approach to curatorship is as a support person who can connect people with music resources and services. The author’s previous publications reveal research on these culturally engaged frameworks (Kirkwood, 2009). An innovative participatory action research process is outlined in relation to writing the Centennial music history of a band (Kirkwood, 2008). These case study examples reveal adjustments that need to occur to tailor the approach so it is suitable for each location, musical occupations and for each community cultural group. Care must be taken in
generalising findings from one location to another, or even to different time periods or socio-cultural groups. Local people are best to guide the approach on their terms.

**Creative Process and Research Proposal**

The proposed action research study of music-making on North Stradbroke Island is still in the early stages of planning. Reflection on archival research to date reveals that the Quandamooka people are unique in many ways. Faith Walker’s research on the history of the Myora Aboriginal Mission indicates that Quandamooka people on NSI have demonstrated considerable initiative, self-direction and competency in advocating for their needs when living on the Myora Mission (Walker, 1996, 1997 and 1998). Continuous cultural connection has been demonstrated through the successful Quandamooka Native Title Claim in 2011. This has positioned Quandamooka people well for safeguarding their own music heritage and cultural traditions. The initiatives of the Minjerribah-Moorgumpin Elders in Council (2011), in developing Jandai language resources has paved the way for Elders to support the creation of songs in language. The Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation is supportive of revitalisation of Jandai language.

Through the inspiration of Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s poetry, and the example of Elders, this has led to success in documenting continuing song and dance traditions of Quandamooka people. The profile of niche creative arts industries has been raised by Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation at the inaugural Quandamooka Festival, from July to September, 2015. This creative cultural renewal process is also part of music teaching and learning—for cultural education. The strengths of Quandamooka people in revitalising their Jandai language, song and dance traditions and even Nyoryo, Billy Cassim’s adaptation of corroboree performance reveals that local people are resilient and have the capacity for agency. It follows that local people can develop their own Music Action Plans—given the necessary infrastructure and resources. Obtaining support relies on building co-operative and collaborative partnerships with human services that support place-based planning and implementation of recommendations for early childhood musical development in the future.

The early indications from this study of music curatorship, is that it may support the further return of rights and responsibilities for music teaching and learning to Quandamooka people and community music groups. In this way, culture-bearers can continue to exercise agency.
and develop music occupational roles that were formerly suppressed by institutional control of people’s cultural expressions. The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (section 27), 1948, states that “Everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” It follows, therefore that pathways are needed to access support and guidance from mentors and music leaders, advisers—including music curators who are skilled in processes of community-based rehabilitation with museums. This discussion is part of a planned dialogue with Aboriginal corporations, community health services, school, and the local community cultural service organisations. To date, several organisations have written support letters for PhD research through the University of Newcastle, School of Creative Arts and the Wollotuka Institute. The possibilities are very promising for collaborating with community groups to negotiate and plan how to enhance children’s musical development in the future.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This paper has outlined the scope of the role of the Music Curator and a proposed action research study in collaboration with community cultural groups, North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum, Dunwich State School, and Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation. Consultation with these stakeholders and the University is necessary to ensure that the research proceeds in an ethical way that supports local initiatives and leads to better understanding of local music history. This generates an evidence-base for strategic planning that supports community groups to develop Music Action Plans which are aimed at enhancing children’s musical development in the future. The action research demonstrates a new, emerging role of an occupational therapist/ethnomusicologist working in the historical museum context with the small island communities. Further reports and publications are planned to share the research findings as the study progresses over the next two to three years.

**Notes**

The history of the original Paolo Soprani manufacturer is online at http://www.paolosoprani.com/Soprani/?lin=en. Websites accessed 4 April, 2016.

References


