

NEW NORCIA STUDIES

NUMBER 22
2015



Ways of Telling

SPECIAL BICENTENARY EDITION

Music Making at New Norcia Mission to 1900

This paper addresses the significant role of Aboriginal music making under Bishop Rosendo Salvado's leadership at New Norcia Mission during the 19th century. Drawing on the rich resources of the New Norcia Archives, this paper explores the encounter of European and Aboriginal musical cultures at the Mission. Vital to this history are the outstanding musical achievements of the Aboriginal boys and young men in religious choral singing and playing the organ and piano and instruments for the Mission string orchestra and brass band. They amazed all with the speed of their learning and the power of their performances. The paper addresses these themes in the context of the practical, emotional and spiritual life of the Mission.

Dedicated to Peter Little (2003–14)
Grandson of Celine Indich

The achievements of Aboriginal music making at New Norcia Mission under Bishop Rosendo Salvado's leadership stand as a beacon in the history of missions in the British Empire. The importance given to musical accomplishments there is evident in the unique musical treasury of manuscripts, musical instruments and photographs held in the New Norcia Archives. Three photographs from the collection set the scene for this essay.¹ The first, from 1867, shows Yued boys singing the Mass at the High Altar of the Abbey Church (*Figure 1, p. 34*).

In another, they are practising sacred songs with the monastery organist and choirmaster, Fr Odo Oltra (*Figure 2, p. 34*).

These beautiful images hold the threads of events set in motion when Spanish Benedictine music encountered Aboriginal musical culture at a place that is unique in Australian mission history. They set the scene for the stories that unravel in this essay. They also lead us to a third photograph from 1900 of a distinguished Aboriginal man in a hat, suit and tie



About the Author

ANNA HAEBICH is a multi award-winning scholar known for her innovative cross-cultural approaches to research. Her research interests and publications include histories of Aboriginal peoples and ethnic minorities and visual, material and performance cultures. Her major publications are: *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800–2000*; *For Their Own Good: Aborigines & Government in the Southwest of Western Australia 1900–1940*; and *Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950–1970*. Her most recent publications are *A Boy's Short Life: the Story of Warren Braedon/Louis Johnson*, co-authored with Steve Mickler, and *Murdering Stepmothers: the Execution of Martha Rendell*. Anna is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences and the Australian Academy of Humanities. She is currently documenting a history of Aboriginal performing arts in WA.

seated with the New Norcia cricket team (Figure 3, p. 35). This is the outstanding Yued musician, Paul Piramino, who embodied the pinnacle of Aboriginal musical achievement at New Norcia. Sadly, his story ended two years later with the sudden conclusion of the Mission's glory days of Aboriginal music making following Salvado's death in 1900.

The site selected for New Norcia deep within Yued country marked the coming together of two very different ancient musical traditions, each integral to religious and daily life: one woven into a web of transnational religious and political networks and the other steeped in 40,000 years of cultural continuity at this site. The missionaries brought a wealth of political connections and cultural riches, with connections to the Vatican in Rome and powerful patrons in Spain, notably the monarch Queen Isabella. They were heirs to the living Benedictine missionary tradition stretching back to the earliest years of the Christian church in Europe, and to the lessons of Spanish colonialism that rose to glory from the early 1500s and ended ignominiously in the late 1800s.

The Benedictine path involved far more than preaching for conversion. Through labour and example, the monks engaged their charges in farming, Christianity, schooling, and settled family and village life. Sacred singing was interwoven in daily religious practice and festivals, bringing village and monastery together. Spanish colonial practice also had strong musical traditions. From the early 1600s, in twenty-five of the Spanish missions in New Spain (today's Texas and California), music was the main subject, teaching the making and playing of simpler

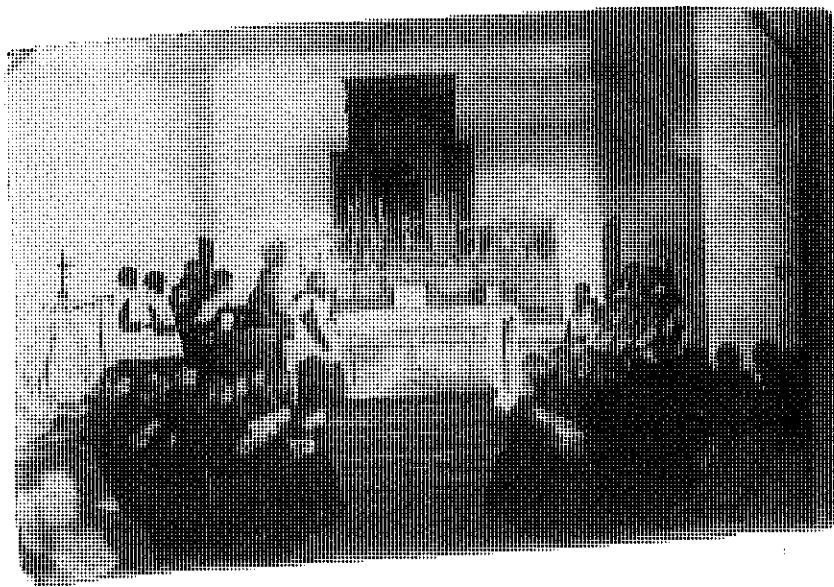


Figure 1: Celebration of mass on 22 October 1867 at the original High Altar of New Norcia Abbey Church with Fr Garrido as celebrant. Also standing are Fr Bertran, Fr Martinez and organist Fr Oltra with two unidentified Aboriginal boys, and another two boys are seated opposite them. Seated are the choir of monks and Aboriginal members of the congregation. NNA 73941P

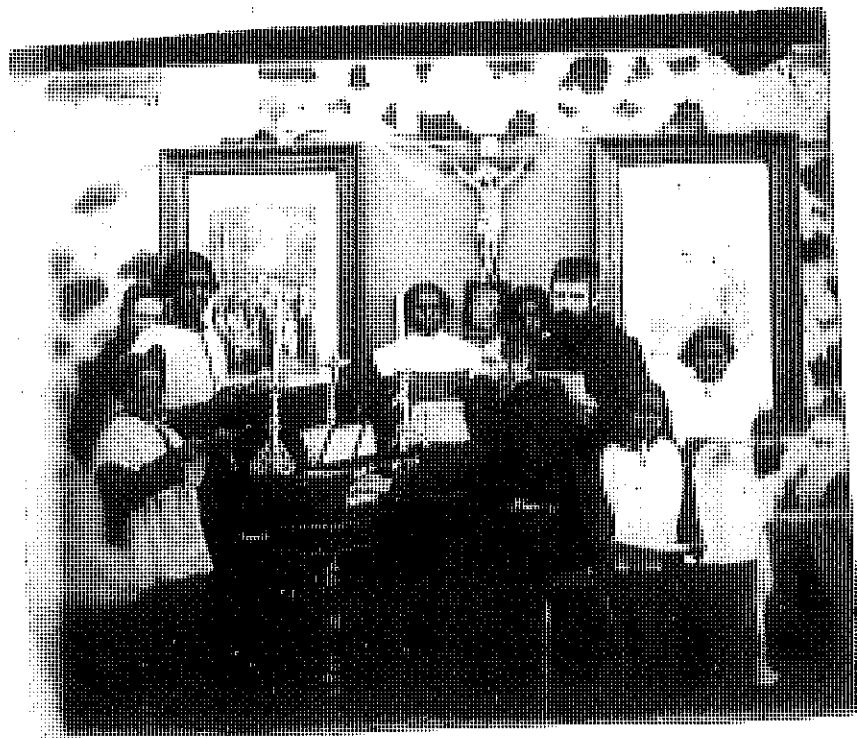


Figure 2: Music teacher Fr Oltra with two unidentified monks and six Aboriginal boys practising at the harmonium, c.1867. NNA 40453P

instruments, and instruction in string and woodwind orchestral instruments sent from Mexico City and the necessary musical notation. Music was central to the children's daily routines to 'the end of the day's work in church'.² As well as simple melodies, the students sang Gregorian chants³ (the 'sung version of Roman Catholic liturgy' dating from early Christian

times) for Mass usually in four parts, singing from a 'quaint sheet' of colour-coded musical notation.⁴ Such was the pleasure of singing the simple memorable sacred refrains taught by the padres, like the *Albado* (Praise of God), the *Albanazos* (Praises) and *O Dios Mio* (Pardon) sung during Lent, and *Santos Dios* (Hymns of Solace) that, 300 years later in the late 1930s, were still being performed at local festivals.⁵

According to Roberto Esposto, Salvado was 'programmed' by Hispanic colonial precedents in the Americas directed at the care and protection of Indigenous people.⁶ They were viewed along a continuum from 'primitive innocence' to 'degraded savages' but all were deemed to be in need of protection, both from themselves and the immorality and violence of outsiders, as they progressed inevitably towards European civilisation. Influenced by these Benedictine and Spanish traditions, Salvado condemned the cruelty and violence he witnessed in the Swan River Colony. He also shared the transnational humanitarian optimism and practice documented in the 1837 Select Committee of the British House of Commons (known as the Buxton Report). This set out a strategy for Christianising and civilising Indigenous peoples to become British subjects and

concluded that 'every tribe of mankind is accessible to this remedial process'.⁷

This assemblage of ideologies and practices framed Salvado's idiosyncratic vision of missionising that was judged as enlightened and compassionate for the times and as a showcase of benevolence and charitable reform. This background, and the Mission's growing land and manpower, set New Norcia apart from the colony's struggling evangelical Protestant missions with their small holdings, limited cash, few workers and music making confined largely to the singing of simple hymns.

Therese Radic states that music was 'integral to New Norcia since its foundation' and she identifies three dominant musical strands: 1) the Benedictine religious tradition of liturgical worship in Latin, a vital part of everyday life and the round of religious festivals that expressed the perfection of heaven, reaffirmed monastic values and bonded the religious community; 2) the lively Spanish and Galician folk and popular music; and 3) English, American and Anglo-Australian songs, marches and dances with popular appeal.⁸ A fourth strand, not mentioned by Radic, was classical music. There were several highly skilled musicians. Dom Rosendo Salvado was



NEW NORCIA - Cricketers

Figure 3: New Norcia Cricket team; Paul Piramino seated in middle row on the far left, 1900. NNA 73710P

a renowned organist, singer, composer, pianist and teacher. He had a deep love of music, which he considered a gift from God created for worshipping His Glory. He expressed his praise and thanksgiving on arriving safely in the Swan River Colony in 1845 by singing the litany as they approached the shore, the *Benedictus* on landing at Fremantle, and then the *Te Deum* before prostrating himself before God on the sandy ground.⁹ There was also the monastery organist and choir master, twenty-seven-year-old Fr Odo Oltra from Valencia, who in 1853 took over from Salvado the training of Aboriginal boys from St Mary's Orphanage in choral singing for the Mass. Salvado's brother Santos Salvado was an accomplished double bass player who arrived in 1869 bearing gifts from Queen Isabella of Spain, including a double bass, harmonium and a Stradivarius viola. He left New Norcia in 1879 for medical reasons and returned to his former role of royal chaplain in Spain but assisted with mission affairs until his death in 1894.

The Yued people had their own rich musical traditions of singing and music making in everyday life and at important corroboree events. Noongar musicologist Clint Bracknell describes Noongar culture and people as being 'routinely musical'.¹⁰ In his *Memoirs*, written in Rome in 1851, Salvado documented his ethnographic observations of Yued music, the only known first-hand account.¹¹ A speaker of the Yued dialect of the Noongar language, Salvado wrote admiringly of its 'many sonorous sounds, like the most harmonious ones in Spanish, and supple sweet-sounding ones, like the most attractive in Italian'.¹² The songs were poetic 'short utterances' that were repeated with increasing emphasis.¹³ He noted the varied styles and the strong emotions they aroused: there was 'a graceful and beautiful style...and a grave and serious one...a war-song...rouses them with its energy, works them up into a frenzy, and then hurls them into the fight', while a sad song made them 'very tearful indeed' and dance music made them 'happy and gay and full of life'.¹⁴ Salvado noted how Yued men visiting distant parts brought back new songs that they passed on to others or made fun of them with 'comic gestures' to create their 'happiest moments' together gathered around the fire.¹⁵ Daisy Bates wrote that 'there is no business in life among the natives in which music [songs] has not a part...on all occasions, music is the medium of expression of their feelings'.¹⁶

Salvado wrote that the Yued people loved to dance just as much as sing in the corroborees he attended. He described how, at large gatherings of three to four hundred people lasting over a week, men with their bodies painted and heads decorated with 'parrot-feathers, emu feathers, dogs' [dingo] tails' danced by the firelight. In a single line they followed the 'manager or corroboree master' and lead dancer, imitating them perfectly as they gestured with their arms and legs and twisted their bodies and 'stamp[ed] the ground with their feet', keeping time with the clapping of the *miro* (spear throwing board) and *kylie* (boomerang). Salvado transcribed his piano piece *Maquialo* from the melody line of a corroboree that he sometimes played or sang to rouse the men to work 'with so much energy and zest that it seemed that the dance had put new life into them'.¹⁷

For some time New Norcia and its surrounds were filled with a transcultural mix of musical sounds of corroborees and Gregorian chants and various instruments, melodies, rhythms and languages—Yued, English, Latin, Spanish, Galician, Italian and French. In this cosmopolitan site the shared love of music could build a bridge between the monks, the Yued people and the surrounding settlers. However, this did not last. Just as the binary figure of the missionary as good or bad has been reconstructed in recent histories into that of a complex, fragmented and ambivalent figure, so Salvado emerges as conflicted in his views and actions regarding Yued music making and corroborees. Despite his sympathetic ethnographic writing he did little to maintain their musical practice, considering the melodies to be monotonous and simplistic and lacking in texture with no wind or string instruments or drums and only wooden weapons for accompaniment.¹⁸ During 1878, he recorded his growing irritation with corroborees held in the vicinity of the Mission, calling for quiet after the eight o'clock evening bell and instructing elders from outside the Mission that they were not to hold any more corroborees there. 'They had enough already and they are not producing any good here'.¹⁹ Soon after, the mission dances began in the boys' and girls' so-called 'orphanages'.

In his history of music at New Norcia, Rev James Flood notes the strong appeal of corroborees for the Yued people, the 'frenzied glory' that created an experience that 'far outshone...beauties of our

civilisation'. He observed that, rather than forcing acceptance, they had to be carefully 'weaned' and 'coaxed' to accept European ways of enjoyment by 'a gradual process, and by one that they could not observe, from their old love and to be coaxed into finding pleasure in our ways of enjoying themselves'.²⁰ From this came Salvado's enthusiasm for the weekend cricket matches, feasts and evening dances with popular music played by the boys and young men and attended by Aboriginal people, local farmers, visitors to New Norcia and, on occasion, Salvado himself. This approach was not just useful training to develop 'natural talents for sports and music' but a deliberate strategy of 'render[ing] [the Yued people] contented and happy' in order to replace their 'savage customs' with European civilisation.²¹ Fr Eladio Ros observed in his history of music at New Norcia:

Deep psychologist and practical man as Bishop Salvado was, he endeavoured to foster the taste for music among the Mission Aboriginals which, in turn, helped them considerably to absorb the Christian mode of living and contributed towards their happiness and contentment at the Mission. The founder of the Mission knew very well by experience that, given music, singing and dancing, the Australian native is often one of the happiest creatures in existence.²²

By the mid-1880s, under Fr Oltra's tuition, the Aboriginal boys were performing a varied repertoire of musical styles—sacred, classical and popular—drawn from wide-ranging musical traditions and playing keyboard and string and brass instruments in an orchestra of twenty players and brass band of twenty-five.²³

Little is recorded of the girls' musical experience except that they learned mainly educational songs in school and sang in church. No mention was found of them playing musical instruments. This is not surprising given the patriarchal nature of the Mission. Still, the girls showed skill and enjoyment in their singing. Writing in 1878, Fr Santos Salvado noted that in church they 'sing the hymns, and it's a pleasure to listen to them. I play the double bass and keep as serious as a mattress',²⁴ and that the 'native girls too, and even the entire native population used to participate in the liturgical singing'.²⁵ During one

Sunday evening Benediction, 'because the natives are so many, their singing filled the church so much that the community [of monks] which was singing from behind the altar, scarcely could be heard at all'.²⁶

Experts of the time agreed that Aboriginal children had 'innate' musical abilities. Flood cites Queensland protector of Aborigines, John William Bleakley, that they had a 'keen ear [and were] naturally musical' and readily learned Western instruments, to which Salvado added they had 'amazing memories'.²⁷ That the New Norcia children were musically gifted is evident in the response of visitors who were reportedly 'spell bound by the music'.²⁸ Visitors typically followed the journey from Perth with a guided tour of the picturesque monastery and farm and then attended Mass and the evening dance. When Governor Frederick Napier Broome (1883–39) and his wife Lady Baker visited in 1885 they had their own small concert in the monastery courtyard. The Aboriginal boys and girls sang *God Save the Queen* followed by other 'different little tunes' accompanied by the string orchestra of violinists Peter Jatter, Benedict Jatter, Henry Rossa, cellist Paul Piramino and double bass player Mini, who could scarcely reach the instrument's tuning screws, with Fr Oltra at the harmonium. Lady Baker wrote to her son in England of 'the dear little fellows—black as jet, but intelligent, well-looking, and well-mannered, and earnest in their work'.²⁹ Requests flowed in for the children to perform outside the Mission but Salvado refused, explaining that 'the less of the city life the natives saw...the better for them. He had them securely hedged in at home from evil influences and example and he intended, as far as in him lay, to safeguard them in their primitive innocence'.³⁰

These observations by visitors suggest that the children who performed for them willingly joined in the music making and enjoyed the process. One boy who travelled forty miles by cart with a priest to serve at Mass sang all the way and 'every time he ceased singing one song it was to begin another'.³¹ Given a flute, an instrument he had never seen before, the boy mastered its difficulties by the end of the trip and could play a few tunes 'very well'. Such stories are also testimony to the children's generosity of spirit. Still we can never know their true feelings about this musical 'training and entertainment'³² that drew them into the Mission's 'temporal regime of work, leisure, celebration and worship...in the

whole field of practical, relational and spiritual living'.³³ Nor can we know their feelings about this new music that contrasted with all the Aboriginal musical elements of style, performance and purpose. Were their performances a mix of cultural assimilation or covert cultural assertion? Ros provides the intriguing insight that the boys' choir sang using their Aboriginal vocal intonation and tone that Salgado's successor, Torres, ruled to be 'offensive' but that they refused to change.³⁴

Nor do we know much about the children themselves. In the early years, most were Yued children who moved between their families and the Mission 'orphanages' and were familiar with both musical cultures. However, many of the children and adults died during the epidemics of measles, influenza and whooping cough that ravaged the Mission between the 1860s and 1880s. We can only imagine the grief felt by the surviving Yued children. From the mid-1870s, children were brought in to the Mission 'orphanages' from camps in the south, displaced from their families, culture and country. Again we can only imagine their grief finding themselves trapped in a strange new place. Did the children suffer from the 'fatal melancholy' attributed by Salgado to Aborigines' despair at the loss of their way of life, their family and their cultural traditions? As he explained: 'As soon as native habits and customs begin to undergo change under European influ-

ences, the work of destruction has at the same time begun'.³⁵ His programme of sacred and popular music making, of spiritual training and education, of outdoor activities and bush excursions must have brought the children some relief. Noongar people today draw on similar elements to heal the pain of intergenerational trauma from these earlier times, but now within the context of reunion with family, country and culture.

As in the Spanish missions of New Spain, music was woven into the children's daily routine. Flood listed attending Mass, singing the 116th Psalm, the morning spent doing light chores, then after lunch, school, beginning with the Lord's Prayer and sacred hymns. He added that 'they like singing, and sing of their own accord, not only at school time but also at any time of the day, and particularly in the evening. They sing religious and school songs, including the National Anthem'.³⁶

The boys were initially trained to sing for religious services: the Benediction, Mass, Vespers, church festivals, processions (*Figure 4*) and to honour visiting church dignitaries, as when Cardinal Moran and Bishops Reynolds and Gibney and Dr O'Hara were welcomed to New Norcia in 1887, with speeches by Aboriginal men and women followed by the boys singing with the brothers for Sunday High Mass.³⁷ They learned by memory and sol-fa and some from



Figure 4: Religious procession at New Norcia Abbey Church, nd. NNA 77794P

musical notation to sing the liturgy alternately and in combination with the monks and Gregorian chant in unison or in polyphonic arrangements of up to four mixed voices, singing always in Latin.³⁸ Flood recorded that, from the age of eight, the boys did 'correct singing of even more difficult church chants' for the various services and rendered all correctly in Latin, using the 'various tones of Psalm intonation'. He also noted their sometimes loud and passionate singing with Aboriginal vocal intonation.³⁹

In its monophonic form, Gregorian chant could be considered akin to the repeated melody lines of Yued corroborees, were it not for their markedly contrasting intonation and tone and the rising sound and intensity and powerful rhythms driving the Yued music. By contrast, Gregorian chant typically lacks dramatic contrasts in 'loudness and softness and metre, the musical structure being indicated by the varying flow of the Latin, the meaning of the given line in the liturgy, and the other worldly quality of worship...Gregorian chant provides as clear an example of time measured solely by its contents as we are likely to find'.⁴⁰ Still, the nature of chant was certainly more akin to Yued music than melodic song with melody, metre and rhyme. It could be that early familiarity with Aboriginal music might have assisted those 'boys of eight or nine years of age, and even younger children...[who] surprised many ecclesiastics in Australia by their correct way of singing some of the more difficult chants of the Church'.⁴¹

Nor can we ever know for certain whether the children's singing was evidence of their conversion, as missionaries liked to claim. Historian Jessie Mitchell describes Aboriginal people in colonial New South Wales and Victoria 'engaging creatively with aspects of Christian belief and practice, while not necessarily treating Christianity as a single, unified system'.⁴² This did not meet Protestant evangelical missionaries' expectations of an inner defining experience of conversion followed by close monitoring for salvation and 'conversations and lecturing to encourage moral development'.⁴³

A further tragic obstacle was the many deaths. Despite regular reports of conversions, baptisms and marriages at Smithies mission in Perth and York between 1840 and 1855, the goal of creating an enduring mission community had to be abandoned due to the toll of deaths of children and young adults.⁴⁴ At

New Norcia, the monks sought to convert through their lived example following the Benedictine Rule of work, study and prayer, and gradually over the years new generations of families continued to attend church. Children reportedly showed 'fondness' and 'proficiency' for assisting at Mass and an informed attentiveness that led one eight-year-old to whisper in the ear of an elderly celebrant, 'Father you must go back; you forgot the "Orate Fratres"'.⁴⁵

In 1905 visiting German anthropologist Herman Klaatsch wrote that the New Norcia families were 'as practical Catholics as one could expect to meet anywhere. They are most edifying in time of sickness or death, showing great sincerity of belief and strong faith in the efficacy of prayer and the sacraments of the Church'.⁴⁶ Klaatsch suggested a practical approach to religion, such as that noted by anthropologist and historian Michael McNally, who studied the Ojibwe people of North America, where 'the tradition has been concerned less with the precise nature of the divine than with how to access the divine powers that animate life'.⁴⁷ The paradigm shift for Christian observers to acknowledge, argues McNally, is from 'system to bricolage, from belief to practice'.

Certainly the religious services at New Norcia disrupted Yued spiritual authority. The boys assisted the priests officiating at the church's sacred services. By contrast, Yued elders led their sacred ceremonies and younger men and boys had to complete years of spiritual training before they could participate as adults. The entire mission enterprise eroded the central role of corroborees in regulating Yued spiritual life, marking life stages, resolving conflict, managing resources, arranging marriages and as entertainment. Still, as Mary Eagle's account of the life of New Norcia resident William Monop demonstrates, Yued traditions continued on outside the Mission while they also seeped in through its porous boundaries to claim back the hearts and minds of many children.⁴⁸

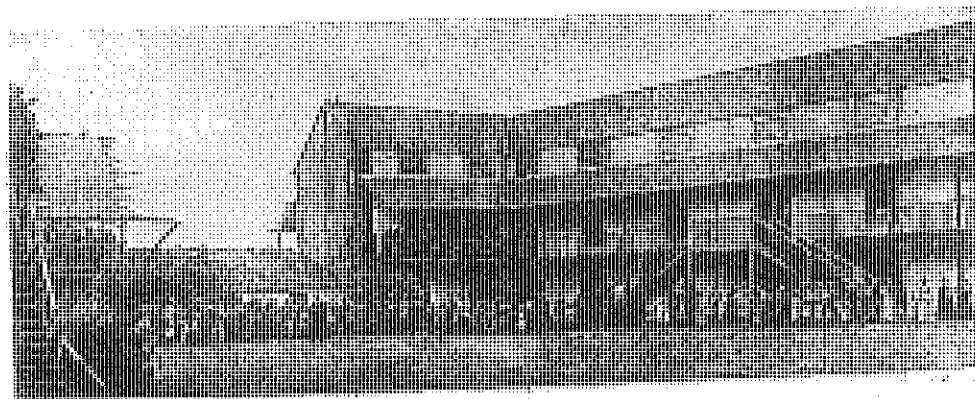
In the early 1880s, Fr Oltra began training the boys for the string orchestra of twenty players that performed in the Abbey Church each year for the Christmas Adoration of the Infant Jesus, and also for the weekly dances, drawing praise of 'first rate' from visitors.⁴⁹ The brass band began to take over from the late 1880s but the orchestra was still playing

when L Lindley-Cowan, the Director of Agriculture in Western Australia, attended a Mission dance in 1893.⁵⁰ A string orchestra was an unusual venture for Aboriginal missions, which was repeated later at the Bungaran Aboriginal Leprosarium near Derby, opened in 1936.

The brass band was started in 1885. Such bands were a transnational colonial phenomenon with an enduring popularity from the 19th century in North America, Africa, and in Australia at New Norcia and the Queensland missions at Yarrabah, Mapoon and Weipa, and at the Cherbourg government settlement. Reflecting colonial stereotypes, Ros observed that it was 'the ideal thing for Aborigines', being easy to learn and spectacular and loud.⁵¹ In the British imperial process, 'brass-banding' signified Western military and religious superiority, with uniformed players disciplined by British bandmasters acting as a powerful visual reminder of the ideology of imperialism.

The story of the brass band coming to New Norcia was far more transcultural in nature. During Salvado's visit to Europe in 1882, his brother Santos suggested that the Mission should provide more than cricket, and so the idea for the brass band emerged. Salvado commissioned his nephew in Tuy, Galicia, to purchase the instruments, which were ordered from the French company Couturier and sent directly to New Norcia. The alacrity with which the boys learned to play amazed all and when Salvado arrived seven months later, the band welcomed him. Salvado wrote to his nephew of the...

...brilliant march executed in a manner I could not believe was possible. Twenty-five brass instruments including drum and percussion...broke out in full blast...And that was my greatest surprise. I knew already that the instruments had arrived at the Mission, but how could I imagine that the natives had learnt to handle them in such a short time!



New Norcia's 'town folk' in the monastery courtyard.
The white cross-shaped building in the centre with Bishop Salvado in front
of the players near the original thatched building of 1847.
Brothers of the community in the sheltered verandahs,
The women & children in front of the ^{west} main wing.
Courtesy photo taken by Mr John Price-Williams, from the main building of the
Middleton Railway Company, Mr Price-Williams in the afternoon of 14 June 1886
From a reproduction in some unidentified overseas publication

Figure 5: New Norcia's 'town folk' gathered in the monastery courtyard with Salvado and the brass band in the centre, 14 June 1886. Photographer John Price-Williams. NNA73606P

One of the best players is a boy not yet nine years old.⁵²

The band learned to play an eclectic range of music including musical compositions by Salvado (of which only part of the Shearing Polka remains), Spanish dance music like the *pasa doble*—a lively dance inspired by Spanish bull fights—and American and English marches and popular tunes.⁵³ The joy for band players was such that older musicians working three miles away from the Mission walked the distance home in the evenings to practise.⁵⁴

Dances were yet another of Salvado's initiatives to replace Yued 'savage customs'. Held on most weekends in the Mission's old mill with the string and brass bands following the cricket and feasting, the dances were 'one of the chief attractions to the Mission' in the district.⁵⁵ One visitor described the band playing 'a lively polka, and several couples were spinning around...with their music, their step-dancing, and their round dances...the aboriginals were thoroughly and spontaneously happy'.⁵⁶ Other visitors recorded that men and women danced separately on Salvado's instructions.⁵⁷ Catholic ladies visiting from Perth in 1878 noted:

...the violin player began to play a *schottische*, two girl couples started spinning around with such relish and artistry as to be able to compete with the most refined aristocratic ladies. Enough to tell that the younger of the two guests got so enthusiastic that she finished up in dancing a polka with one of the native girls.⁵⁸

Some individuals were especially talented and Melchior Cuimara (Taylor) was known for his skilled dancing of Irish jigs, the Sword Step Dance and the Highland Fling. Dances were also held to celebrate Aboriginal marriages with people coming from forty to fifty miles away. For the feast, kangaroo meat held 'the pride of place on the festive board'.⁵⁹

By the early 1890s, the Mission had trained two generations of male musicians. Their music making was a celebrated part of the panoramic civilising landscape of New Norcia and tangible proof of its success in civilising both the wilderness and the Yued people. The significance of music in mission life was much greater than the Sunday hymn singing

of children in Protestant missions of the time. The emotions and meanings that music sustained at New Norcia also went far deeper than the often utilitarian purposes of Protestant missionaries, who used children's singing as propaganda to demonstrate their success in conversions and as proof that their charges were 'equal humans under God'.⁶⁰ A photograph taken in 1886 of the monastic and Aboriginal communities gathered together in the monastery courtyard shows the brass band musicians standing next to Salvado's dominating figure, indicating their significance to the Mission (*Figure 5*, p. 40).

Of an 1893 list of families at the Mission, all the boys and young men would have participated in musical events in some way but there were also individuals who stood out for their gifts.⁶¹ Salvado singled out Lawrence Ponto or Pinto, aged sixteen in 1893, as 'only one in a thousand' for learning to play the piano and accompany the choir on the harmonium in just a few months as a young boy.⁶² Also on the list were the violinists, brothers Benedict and Peter Jatter, aged twenty and twenty-two, both born at New Norcia and sons of one of Salvado's top cricketers, Paul Jatter. (Peter was also a cricketer.)

The all-round outstanding musician of the group was the distinguished Aboriginal man wearing a hat, suit and tie in the photograph of the 1900 New Norcia cricket team, Paul Piramino (*Figure 6*). He was



Figure 6: Detail showing Paul Piramino from the New Norcia Cricket team, 1900. NNA 73710P

a Yued man who was born at New Norcia in 1873, studied music with Fr Oltra and married there in 1898, and then moved with his wife into a Mission cottage. He was a highly trained musician and in demand at the Mission and surrounding districts as far away as Geraldton and Cue. When Fr Oltra died in 1898, Salvado appointed Piramino to take his place as the Mission organist, violinist, choirmaster and conductor of the string orchestra and band master, an unparalleled achievement for the time. In 1901 a reporter from the Perth *Morning Herald* who visited Piramino and his wife at their cottage admired the garden of flowers and vegetables, and the cottage interior, which was 'clean and comfortable looking with pictures, clock and china ornaments and fire burning. Thousands of whites would be glad to have such a cottage, and thousands more would not keep it so clean if they had it'.⁶³

Tragically, New Norcia's musical abundance faded away in the wake of Salvado's death in 1900. This outcome was not immediately apparent when the new Abbot Torres arrived in the following year. He was greeted at the Fremantle wharf by Paul Piramino leading a brass sextet of Aboriginal players. They formed a procession to the church, where a string quartet accompanied the *Te Deum* sung by the monastic choir with Piramino as organist. This heroic public performance would be Piramino's last, together with the other New Norcia musicians. In 1902, Torres suddenly dismissed Piramino, who left the Mission on 10 May of that year. He remained in the district and died on 4 August 1925 at the nearby Moore River Native Settlement, attended by a priest from the Mission. The boys' music making also ceased when their new teachers claimed the boys could not be trained.

In 1902 Aboriginal resident Eliza Willaway explained to a woman visitor that after Salvado's death the people no longer sang and danced as they had.

An unidentified Aboriginal man added: 'We noo dance now his Lordship dead. This new Superior he very good, very kind, but he noo speak English. He noo understand yet'.⁶⁴ Despite opposition from New Norcia's famous composer, Dom Stephen Moreno, Fr Ros eventually revived the boys' choir and brass band in the 1930s. Moreno finally capitulated and, appreciating their talents, wrote and arranged several works of sacred choral music for them. From this time on, the boys once again became part of the round of religious services and major celebrations, including New Norcia's centenary in 1946. But for many years the only Aboriginal music making at the Mission was the sound of a lone cornet played in the evenings from the Aboriginal cottage compound.

The extraordinary era of Aboriginal music making at New Norcia during the 19th century remains unparalleled in Australian mission history. The success grew out of the meeting of two distinct musical traditions, Western and Yued, with Salvado's vision of a gathering of gifted musicians, brought together with the practical necessities of musical compositions and instruments and a music practice that was not 'crudely imposed' or 'submissively absorbed'.⁶⁵ This was tangible proof that Aboriginal children, given the opportunity, could equal and even surpass the musical achievements of others. State educators overlooked this creative response and barred Noongar children from state schools from 1914 on. Nevertheless, Aboriginal music making continued down the generations, not only in the Mission but also in local Noongar camps and at Moore River Native Settlement as the families were moved off the Mission. Paul Piramino and Peter Jatter shared their songs and musical training and the families took their favourite hymns and songs with them. This is another episode, yet to be written, about the rich history of Noongar music making and the New Norcia Mission.

Notes

¹ New Norcia Archives [NNA], Australia's largest private archive, is unique in its musical treasury of manuscripts, photographs and musical instruments (including most of the brass band instruments, some on display in the New Norcia Museum). Music also features in diaries, correspondence, reports, press clippings and publications, such as Salvado's *Memoirs* (1977), the historical writings of Flood (1908) and Ros (c.1970-76), and in the journal *New Norcia Studies*. New Norcia Aboriginal families share a significant living memory of music at the Mis-

sion. In using available accounts of the history of music making at New Norcia, this paper drew cautiously on the principal published sources by Flood and Ros, both of which are secondhand accounts often coloured by the writers' biases. Ros repeats Flood's material extensively in his account of the 19th century before moving on to his own experiences in the 20th century, which Therese Radic describes as 'hagiography'.

² AB McGill, 'Old mission music', *The Music Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1938, pp. 186-93.

- ³ AW Crosby, *The measure of reality: quantification and western society, 1250–1600*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 142.
- ⁴ McGill, p. 193.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 188–90.
- ⁶ RH Esposto, 'From *Finnisterrae* to *Terra Australis Incognita*: Bishop Rosendo Salvado's utopian imaginings and designs for New Norcia', in R Summo-O'Connell (ed), *Imagined Australia: reflections around the reciprocal construction of identity between Australia and Europe*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2009, pp. 143–4.
- ⁷ British Parliament, *Report of the select committee appointed to consider what measures ought to be adopted with regard to the native inhabitants of countries where British settlements are made*, British Parliament, London, 1838, p. 44.
- ⁸ T Radic, 'The music of New Norcia', *New Norcia Studies*, vol. 1, 1993, p. 9.
- ⁹ E Ros, *Music at New Norcia: a historical survey*, NNA, 00209, c. 1970–6, p. 6.
- ¹⁰ C Bracknell, 'Wal-Walang-al Ngardanginy: hunting the songs (of the Australian south-west)', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2014, no. 1, pp. 3–15.
- ¹¹ R Salvado, *The Salvado memoirs*, ed. & trans. EJ Stormon, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1977, p. 133.
- ¹² Salvado, p. 132.
- ¹³ *ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 133.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*
- ¹⁶ D Bates, 'My natives and I: number 14—songs of the dream-time', *The West Australian*, 26 February 1936, p. 21.
- ¹⁷ Salvado, p. 134.
- ¹⁸ Ros, p. 29.
- ¹⁹ Rosendo Salvado cited in F Uhe, 'John Maher: profile of a New Norcia Mission Aborigine', *New Norcia Studies*, vol. 14, 2004, pp. 76, 78.
- ²⁰ J Flood, *New Norcia: the tribute of an Irish secular priest*, Burns and Oats, London, 1908, pp. 107–8.
- ²¹ Flood, p. 10; Ros, p. 96.
- ²² Ros, p. 42.
- ²³ *ibid.*, p. 25.
- ²⁴ S Salvado, personal correspondence to Sr Gertrude, Carmelite of Compostela, 3 October 1878, cited in Ros, p. 41.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 40.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 41.
- ²⁷ Ros, p. 29.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 32.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 32–3.
- ³⁰ Flood, p. 99.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, p. 100.
- ³² P Dunbar-Hall & C Gibson, *Deadly sounds, deadly places: contemporary Aboriginal music in Australia*, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2004, p. 40.
- ³³ N Thomas, *Colonialism's culture: anthropology, travel and government*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1994, p. 140.
- ³⁴ Radic, p. 16.
- ³⁵ T Shellam, "'A mystery to the medical world": Florence Nightingale, Rosendo Salvado and the risk of civilisation', *History Australia*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 110–35, 122, 125–9.
- ³⁶ Flood, p. 61.
- ³⁷ Ros, p. 38.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 142.
- ³⁹ Flood, p. 100.
- ⁴⁰ Crosby, loc. cit.
- ⁴¹ Flood, p. 97.
- ⁴² J Mitchell, *In good faith? Governing Indigenous Australia through god, charity and empire 1825–1855*, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2011, p. 154.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 158–9.
- ⁴⁴ W McNair & H Rumley, *Pioneer Aboriginal mission: The work of Wesleyan missionary John Smithies in the Swan River Colony 1840–1855*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1981.
- ⁴⁵ Flood, pp. 102–3.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 319.
- ⁴⁷ MD McNally, *Ojibwe singers, hymns, grief, and a native culture in motion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, pp. 10–12.
- ⁴⁸ M Eagle, 'Monop of New Norcia and the Victoria Plains', *New Norcia Studies*, vol. 10, 2012, pp. 49–56.
- ⁴⁹ Flood, pp. 98, 99.
- ⁵⁰ Ros, p. 37.
- ⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 33.
- ⁵² Ros, pp. 34–6.
- ⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 40.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 3.
- ⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁵⁶ Santos Salvado, cited in Ros, p. 36.
- ⁵⁷ LLC, 'The New Norcia mission: an Easter excursion', *The West Australian*, 8 May 1893, p. 3.
- ⁵⁸ Santos Salvado, cited in Ros, pp. 36, 41.
- ⁵⁹ Flood, p. 105.
- ⁶⁰ Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, loc. cit.
- ⁶¹ British Parliament, *New Norcia Mission list of natives at the Benedictine Mission on 31.12.1893*, British Parliament, London, vol. 34, pp. 453–60, viewed 6 August 2015, <<http://www.cifhs.com/warecords/wanewnorcias.html>>.
- ⁶² Uhe, p. 7d.
- ⁶³ cited in Flood, pp. 171–2.
- ⁶⁴ 'The New Norcia Mission: Spanish monks and West Australian natives', *Western Mail*, 18 January 1902, p. 11.
- ⁶⁵ Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, p. 42.