

'ALL TAKE, TAKE, TAKE...' MIGRANT MUSICIANS,  
THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL, MULTICULTURALISM AND MUSIC-  
MAKING IN AUSTRALIA.

by

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**ABSTRACT.**

This thesis examines the music of seven multicultural recordings funded by the Australia Council under its recording grant category. Propositions resulting from this analysis are then examined in the social context of the ideology of multiculturalism. Resulting from this, some explanations are given for the recent development of Anglo/Australian, 'multicultural' music.

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## Chapter 1.

### INTRODUCTION.

"...objectivity is nothing more than male subjectivity." -Adrienne Rich.

"Jazz-its the American Negro's tradition, its his music. White people don't have a right to play it, its colored folk music...You had your Shakespeare and Marx and Einstein and Jesus Christ and Guy Lombardo but we came up with jazz, don't forget it, and all the pop music in the world today is from that primary cause."  
-Charles Mingus.

"It's a multicultural society you gotta give an' take." -Man Friday.

Today Australia is described officially as a multicultural society. (Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs:1989:2ff.) But the term "multiculturalism" can mean many things to many people. For some it is purely descriptive. We are multicultural because of the physical presence of peoples from many cultures in Australia. (Zubrzycki:1988:1ff). For others, it espouses a set of moral values including tolerance and the acceptance of diversity and difference. (Price: no date of publication:3ff.) For successive governments since Whitlam, multiculturalism has encompassed a set of specific policies aimed at assisting vast numbers of migrants adjust to the Australian reality. (Foster & Stockley:1988). For yet others, multiculturalism has

been, and remains a sham; a smokescreen that clouds the continuing racism and economic exploitation of migrants in Australia. (Jakubowicz:1981).

However one views multiculturalism, there is no denying that migration has had a major impact on post-war Australian society. Migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds continue to challenge Anglo/Australian cultural supremacy. They have contributed and continue to contribute to all aspects of Australian society and culture. The extent to which they are heard, or are a 'muted group', is one of the broader questions indirectly dealt with in this thesis. (Spender:1985:76ff.)

Australian musical activity has also been affected by the process of migration, although one could argue that the revolution in communications technology, coupled with the marketing of commercial 'pop' music has had the single greatest impact on Australia's (along with most other countries') musical life. That complex relationship between commercial and non-commercial musical forms is another issue indirectly dealt with in this paper. I am not attempting to give final answers to these problematic questions, for that would require a great deal more time and research than the scope of this thesis permits. However, I do hope to provide food for thought, and perhaps impetus for further study.

The main text of this paper examines a body of music produced within our so called multicultural society. Within Australia's music industry this music has lately, somewhat loosely been termed 'multicultural music'. There are seven recordings by seven different bands. Not only could all of them be described as multicultural, but also, all seven recordings have been partially funded by the Australia Council, "the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body". (Australia Council Annual Report:1989:5ff.)

The purpose of this thesis is threefold. Firstly, it is to document this music. By today's commercial standards, each of these recordings have had incredibly small print runs. On average, only about 1,000 units of each have been pressed. It is conceivable that they might well become collectors' items in the not-so-distant future. Hence, this kind of work helps document a very small corner of Australia's music scene in the 1980s through to the present day. This scene may well grow in the future, or could disappear totally largely as a result of non-musical, social and/or political developments. A second purpose is to examine the music itself, and the ideas behind the music within its social context. I have combined musical analysis with the findings from a number of interviews I conducted with representative musicians from each of the bands. Thus techniques of oral history and musicology have been combined with bibliographic research to create the



methodology for this paper. Thirdly, I intend to suggest a number of explanations for the questions this examination raises. To do this, I need to include an analysis and historical account of multiculturalism and its relationship to migration, as well as a similar critical analysis of the policies of the Australia Council and its relationship to migrant musicians in Australia.

The study is largely the result of my own critical analysis of the seven recordings. To inform this analysis I formally interviewed one musician from each of the bands. These interviews were taped and then transcribed. The interviews consisted of a number of set questions followed by a more free ranging discussion. This methodology enabled me to canvass responses to particular issues as well as allowing the interviewees to speak their minds over a range of concerns. Along with these formal interviews, I had many informal conversations, usually with migrant musicians as a way of testing the validity of my analysis. Where possible these are referred to in the text.

An examination of the bibliography reveals several key areas of research that has informed this thesis. From past ethnomusicology I have found the ideas of Keil and Blacking particularly useful. Information and statistics about the Australia Council are largely drawn from the Council's own publications. Additional information about the seven recordings and their grant applications was supplied by the Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council.

The number of writers that have addressed the issues of Australian multiculturalism has grown enormously in recent years. In my historical analysis of multiculturalism I have found the work of Jan Pettman particularly relevant. Of value also is the research of scholars like Horne, Jakubowicz, and Foster & Stockley. Interesting but less critical in their analysis, is the Australian government's own literature on multiculturalism. While there is much literature in all these distinct areas, I have found very little that has placed recent musical developments in the social context of Australian multiculturalism. This thesis I hope will begin to fill that gap.

There are several reasons for choosing these seven recordings for examination. Firstly, the Australia Council has been at the forefront of promoting multicultural arts, including music. By examining the music supported by the Australia Council we can perhaps

determine what the Australia Council's, and even the federal government's attitude to multiculturalism really is. This practical example highlights the distance between rhetoric and action. Secondly, all the recordings examined were funded through the recording grant category of the Australia Council's Performing Arts Board, over the last two years. This limits the material to an amount manageable for the size of this study. The use of one discreet funding category provides a useful source for statistical and musical analysis. While I acknowledge that further research is required to fully justify generalisations made from this base, I do believe this sample is typical, and raises issues and questions that more empirical data would substantiate. Thirdly, the choice of recordings provides a body of music that, in a temporal art form, best represents the work of these bands. It encapsulates on disc or cassette the results of a number of years of performing. Finally, while multicultural music, or 'world music' may only be a trifle, and indeed history may show it to be nothing more than a passing fad, it is nonetheless growing in popularity at the moment in Australia. This growth is largely the result of the federal government's promotion of multiculturalism as an official state ideology. (Jakubowicz: 1981.) It is therefore interesting to examine the music, who produces it, and how it functions in the light of Australian multiculturalism.

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify some points of terminology. Despite the efforts of some writers (see for example, Liffman:1982; Lowenstein & Loh: 1977.) to reinstate the term "immigrant", I prefer to use the word "migrant" despite its lack of grammatical purity. My sole defence is that migrants themselves use this term almost exclusively, and after all, language is an ever evolving set of symbols, not an ossified tome. Spender reminds us that language is also related to class:

"It is worth noting that approximately 10 years ago there was widespread belief that there was something wrong with the language of blacks and of the working class, but that within those 10 years the explanations have shifted so that there is now general consensus that the "deficiency" lies not in blacks or the working class but in society. We can now appreciate that what has been termed 'correct' English is nothing other than the blatant legitimisation of the white middle class code." (Spender:1980:13.)

As Lowenstein & Loh point out, most post-war migrants to Australia have been working class, (Lowenstein & Loh: 1977:12), and as this is their term, I see no good reason not to use it.

Other terms I, and other authors in the area use, (Voulgaris:1987; Price: no date of publication:3ff), include 'first generation migrant'. That is, someone now residing in Australia but born overseas. 'Second generation migrant', that is, the Australian-born child of a first generation migrant; 'third generation migrant', and so on. The abbreviation, NESBs (migrants from 'non-English speaking backgrounds') is also commonly encountered in the literature (Voulgaris:1989:2-13) and used throughout this paper.

Various terms have been used by academics and musicians in an attempt to describe a genre that is typified by its diversity of musical styles. These terms include 'multicultural music', 'fusion', 'ethnic music', 'immigrant music', 'migrant music', 'new traditions', 'world music', 'cross-over', and 'new-Australian music' to cite a number from a by no means exhaustive list. All of the musicians interviewed expressed difficulty in defining and naming their music. This problem becomes especially important when preparing publicity material for the press. The Australia Council uses the terms 'ethnic', 'multicultural' and 'fusion' almost interchangeably. (Australia Council:1986:c:2-72.) As we

shall see demonstratively, not all the music examined is a fusion, or cross-over of styles, while of course, some of it is. The term 'ethnic' is very problematical. While I agree with the present chairperson of the Australia Council, Donald Horne when he writes:

"...multiculturalism will have real meaning in Australia when the English are seen only as one group of ethnics among others..." and "...that it is an Australia in which it is proclaimed that we are all ethnics..." (Horne:1983:4-7.)

nonetheless, the term 'ethnic' is most generally used to refer to migrants from NESBs. (Pettman:1988b:2ff). As much of the music examined in this thesis is not actually produced by 'ethnics', in that common sense of the word, it seems to be a somewhat misleading term for this study. The same could be said for the terms 'migrant' and 'immigrant' music.

The terms 'new traditions' and 'new Australian music' are two particular responses by bands attempting to tackle this problem of naming. While interesting, these particular names do not, as yet, exist much beyond the confines of the publicity material of the bands that coined them. On the other hand, the terms 'world music' and 'multicultural music' are much more widely used. Both are problematical. 'World music' may have a nice internationalist ring about it, which does place this Australian phenomenon in the context of similar musical developments, especially in North America and Europe.

However, it is not an appropriate term to describe the music-making within our migrant communities. Much of this music is not 'international' in outlook, but a continuation of the separate folk traditions from the respective home countries of migrant communities. The term 'multicultural' music is almost universally disliked by the musicians I interviewed. Most perceived that it linked their music to the specific multicultural policies of government.

It is clear then that there is no one universally acceptable term that defines the parameters of this music. Never mind, perhaps the confusion represents a larger contradiction? However, for the purposes of this study I have found we need two terms, which are in no way mutually exclusive. I use 'migrant music' to refer to the music-making within migrant communities, and 'multicultural music' to indicate the music produced as a result of state-funded support for multiculturalism. As I mentioned there is overlap between the two, but I believe the reasons for the usefulness of this distinction will become apparent in the course of the study.

Chapter 2 : Case study 1.

**SIROCCO : PIONEERS ?**

Album Title : THE BREATH OF TIME: NEW TRADITIONS 1.

As the title of the album suggests, this is the first in a proposed series of albums planned by Sirocco. Of all the bands in this study, Sirocco has been together the longest and recorded the most (see discography). The major change to Sirocco's music on this album is that it is entirely original material. In the past, Sirocco used traditional folk dances and songs as the basis of their repertoire.

Sirocco was formed in 1980 by an instrument maker, Bill O'Toole. It began as a trio with current members, Guy Madigan and Andrew De Teliga. Today it most often records and performs as a quartet. O'Toole, the leader of the group describes the fourth member as "floating", meaning that over the years, it has changed quite a few times, often to suit the requirements of the band. On this album, the position of 'floating member' is filled by Dougal Kelly, who was also co-author of many of the tracks. There are also two 'guest musicians', the exceptional Chinese flautist, Chai Chang Ning, and the didjeridu player, Charlie McMahon. O'Toole also referred to these extra musicians as 'floating members' of the



band. In years gone by, the fourth member of the group has been filled among others, by Michael Atherton (1980-5, now in Southern Crossings) and Sabahattin Abdagcik, a Turkish saz player and vocalist.

None of the three permanent members of Sirocco have folk music backgrounds, but come from popular music styles such as rock, and rhythm and blues. As O'Toole explains:

"Most folk musicians were fairly laid-back performers, what I needed for a dance-band to play the sort of music that I'd seen throughout Europe and I knew was here in Australia, which was multicultural music, was to get musicians who had alot of stick."  
(Dunbar/O'Toole:1990)

O'Toole considers Sirocco to be pioneers in the area of multicultural music. Indeed they were among the first groups of Anglo/Australian musicians to exploit the folk traditions of Europe and the Middle East. It was O'Toole's contact with these bands in Europe that led to the formation of Sirocco. Migrant communities in Australia seem to be only peripheral to Sirocco's formation and ongoing activities. When asked if migrants formed a substantial part of Sirocco's audience (a not unreasonable assumption given the nature of their music) O'Toole exclaimed:

"...Oh God no! No of course not. You could say all really nice things about it, but it is not true, they don't come, it's as simple as that."  
(Dunbar/O'Toole:1990).

In fact, apart from the occasional migrant musician, Sirocco has little formal contact with migrant communities. More surprisingly, O'Toole views the whole notion of multiculturalism with contempt:

"I think multicultural music is absurd, we're not interested in it, I think the term multiculturalism is a really bad term anyway, I don't think it is in anyone's interest to promote multicultures in a country. Its ridiculous. What you do is you get the best of those cultures, and I don't think melting-pot is a good term for it either as that assumes that everybody just has to somehow absorb all these different cultures, it doesn't work like that, what you have to do is create something new from those things, and pick the best out of it." (Dunbar/O'Toole:1990).

The problem with these ideas seems to be who chooses what are the 'best' aspects, and what if the others disagree? These ideas clearly assume a notion of cultural superiority.

O'Toole is consciously interested in forging a new style of Australian music. This is explicitly stated on the cassette jacket of 'The Breath of Time : New Traditions 1.':

"It's not Rock-but contains the excitement of Rock and Roll, it's not Folk but draws for its inspiration on the multicultural folk music of Australia and it's not Classical and yet the band has a chamber orchestra approach to its music-'New Tradition' is the only apt term for this style of music. Sirocco has swept the old classifications aside to form a fresh style." (Sirocco:1990:record notes.)

His attitude toward migrants and their musical traditions is that they provide a sort of rich palette of musical colors, with which this new style can be painted.

"Now if we can get the best out of that, (migrant music and musicians) and let it happen as a natural process, groups like Sirocco just writing their own music, but being influenced by it, then you are going to come up with a creative tradition."

Further:

"...we get multicultural music and ethnic, (you know, music, for the want of a better term,) and we do what we like to it." (Dunbar/O'Toole:1990).

Of all the bands in this study, Sirocco is the only one to have worked together full-time for a number of years. For four years they played the Musica-Viva schools show circuit, which is a common source of employment for multicultural bands. O'Toole described the experience as "harrowing" and is quite cynical about being a professional musician in Australia.

"In Australia unless you're on top of the rock and roll scene or you're subsidised very, very heavily like the Opera or something like that, you can forget being professional...we could easily be full-time again but it is pointless, because being a muso in Australia you can't get bank-loans, you come out of it with nothin', you might be a legend and everybody knows you, but in the end you come out with nothin'." (Dunbar/O'Toole: 1990).

Thus, despite being the most successful and well-known band in this study, O'Toole identifies the fragile place non-commercial musical forms have in Australia. Pop music, and the fully funded classical music flagships-the ABC orchestras and the Australian Opera-are identified by him as the only long-term, economically viable means of being a professional musician. As he tellingly says:

"Unless you clone American music nothing will happen, you won't last a year."  
(Dunbar/O'Toole:1990).

These days, Sirocco play very little. They do not play the pub circuit or have any regular gigs. They do what O'Toole describes as "the big things", meaning festivals such as Maleny (1989/90) and the National Australia Day concert at the Sydney Opera House. Needless to say, they are no longer a dance band. This latest album reflects this change. One side of it was produced to provide a musical accompaniment to an exhibition at the National Gallery entitled: 'CIVILISATION: ANCIENT TREASURES', an exhibition travelling Australia from the British Museum. The music functions somewhat similarly to film music, providing atmosphere to enhance the visuals. This is certainly a departure from Sirocco's past recordings. The album is co-produced by the ABC and is distributed through the ABC Shop network.

Much of the music is structured around the Chinese flute-playing by Chai. Consequently pentatonic melodies feature throughout. The new fourth member, Dougal Kelly also brings a new element to Sirocco's sound, that of synthesised music. Electronics not only add to the texture, but are also used as sound effects. A good example is the track entitled 'River'. The sound of a gurgling brook is used as a structural device in the piece, hence this computer-generated effect becomes a musical motif.

Much of the music on this album is simple in construction and unobtrusive. It lacks the energy and verve present on their previous albums. However, despite the fact that it is all original music, this recording, like Sirocco's other discs, is characterised by an wide variety of musical source material. Tracks like 'Nightscape' and 'Breath' display the influence of Chinese music through their utilisation of pentatonic melodic material. Others like 'Desert Wind' feature the didgeridu and attempt to depict the Australian landscape. 'Desert Wind' is evocative and in this regard successful. This eclecticism is a feature of the multicultural records in this study. If there is a sense of unity of style at all on the record, it is because most of the tracks are composed by Kelly and De Teliga. However, it could just as easily be the result of the conception of the music as an accompaniment for an exhibition. There is nothing on the album that commands your attention. It

sounds as if it were written as background music. What detail or subtlety there might be in the music, or the performance of it, is smothered by the excessive use of reverberation in the mix of the tracks. One wonders whether there was something they were trying to hide.

A curious fact about Sirocco is that despite O'Toole's rather anti-multicultural views, the band is often sent abroad by the Department of Foreign Affairs as representatives of Australian culture!

"...Sirocco is getting recognised by the Australian government as being a representative of Australian music, so we're being sent overseas to various trade things, we're going to Vladivostock this year, Siberia, for the Australian trade exhibition there, and we've just come back from India, we did three weeks in India". (Dunbar/O'Toole:1990).

One can only assume that to the powers that be, Sirocco's music is considered to be multicultural, at least in sound, and thus worthy of promotion overseas as a good example of multicultural Australia. This is despite O'Toole's views on the subject.

O'Toole perceives Sirocco as a band with an important role to play in Australia's cultural development. Despite the obstacles of commercialism, and pop-music culture, he is confident, even abrasive in his appraisal of the band:

"I mean, the sort of talent that's in the band, the fact that we've been together for ten years...that's a very powerful little unit we've got there. We're all determined to make a success of what we want, not necessarily economic, I mean if that happens it happens, but success in doing something important."  
(Dunbar/O'Toole:1990).