

3 | Torres Strait Islander Musics: Tradition, Travel and Change

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‘In Torres Strait, we’ve got ailan [island] blues, ailan country, ailan hula, ailan jazz, ailan folk. It’s all just good music to us – done ailan style.’¹

Introduction

Torres Strait Islanders in Australia have managed and interwoven tradition, travel and change by calling upon long-standing social and cultural practices – especially those historically developed by and suitable for a mobile, maritime people.² As this analysis demonstrates, these processes of management and interweaving also apply to their social and cultural uses of music (and dance) and the concomitant music-making. A key issue is how sustainable a musical tradition can be, in this instance, in the face of a substantial diaspora over several generations from home islands’ communities in the Torres Strait region to the Australian mainland.

The ancestral home islands of Torres Strait Islanders (henceforth Islanders) are located within the tropical region of Queensland, encompassing over 200 islands lying between the island of New Guinea (modern-day Papua New Guinea and Indonesian New Guinea) and the island continent of Australia. Seventeen of the region’s islands currently have communities varying in size from dozens or hundreds of people up to approximately 3,000 on Thursday Island (Weiben).³

Islands in the Torres Strait region first came under the colony of Queensland and British jurisdiction in 1872, and this area was expanded in 1879. In 1877 the region’s administrative centre was established at Thursday Island, eventually becoming the entrepôt for the burgeoning pearling industry. Before the mass and permanent dispersal of many Islanders to the mainland during and after World War II, lives on their home islands had historically revolved around travel and the intra-regional movement of social and cultural capital, trade goods and marine and terrestrial resources. The harvesting and processing of marine resources from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries – such as *bêche-de-mer*, pearl shell, pearls and trochus shell – led to a multicultural workforce.⁴ There was a subsequent

importation, circulation, adoption and adaptation of diverse music traditions within what is presently considered 'Ailan style' music.⁵

In the 2016 census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people constituted approximately 3.2 per cent of the Australian population of circa twenty-five million.⁶ Roughly 38,000 people identify as Islander and 32,200 identify as both Islander and Aboriginal. Approximately 800,000 people identify as Aboriginal. Islanders are thus a minority within an Indigenous minority. Currently, two-thirds of Islanders live on the Australian mainland, many in Queensland.⁷ In the Torres Strait region, there are approximately 5,000 residents, mostly Indigenous, in eighteen communities in five distinct 'clusters' of islands. There are also two mainly Islander communities in the Northern Peninsula Area on Queensland's nearby Cape York Peninsula.⁸ Similar to Aboriginal peoples, in Queensland from the late nineteenth century until circa the 1960s, the personal lives, place of residence, work, social and cultural activities of Islanders were comprehensively monitored by governments in blatant policies of race-based social engineering and coercive control.⁹

What follows here is a description and discussion of how tradition, travel and change have been managed and interwoven in the music of the social and cultural lives of Torres Strait Islanders, both in the Torres Strait and in their diaspora on the mainland. Detailed documentations of tradition exist in personal recollections, community oral histories and from the *Reports* of the 1898–1899 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition (henceforth CAE) (and other briefer accounts); those of travel are from the account of a representative Islander male emigrant post-World War II; those of change are contained in descriptions of contemporary Islanders or the music they create and perform.

Tradition

Regarding tradition, Islanders have benefitted because some music traditions were propitiously documented in the late-colonial era by the CAE. Consequently, those documentations are significant for contemporary Islanders. Alfred Cort Haddon (1855–1940) was a driving force behind early academic research about Islanders. Initially a biologist and zoologist and later an anthropologist and ethnologist, Haddon first came to Torres Strait in 1888 to study marine life but also became intrigued by Islander society and culture. He returned in 1898 as director of the CAE, which was unique for its time in the broad expertise and interests of the team of

researchers; the resulting six *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits* of its research (1901–1935)¹⁰ ‘represent the most detailed corpus of ethnographic information on a group of Indigenous Australians from the nineteenth century’.¹¹

Photography and film were used to record dances, music-making and re-staged ceremonies; wax cylinders were used to record traditional music and singing; and the records included notations of music descriptions of the instruments used and the social context of their use.¹² Even if the cultural activities documented are commonly now out of living memory for contemporary Islanders, the audio recordings, ethnographic films and photographs provide aural and visual glimpses of music at the end of the nineteenth century.

Musical traditions were key social and cultural practices figuring conspicuously in the CAE’s research agenda. Charles Myers observed:

The songs of the Miriam or Murray Islanders . . . are of considerable interest from the standpoint of musical history and development. For they differ among one another not only in complexity of structure but also in date of composition and place of origin . . . They also [show] evidence in the great traffic in tunes¹³ which may go on between the inhabitants of neighbouring islands, thus raising the general question as to how far the fundamental characteristics of the music of a given people are fixed or are modifiable, temporarily or permanently, by the importation of foreign airs [i.e., music] [emphases added].¹⁴

In the Torres Strait region at the time, and on the mainland later, there most certainly was the ‘importation of foreign airs’, not only Anglo-Australian and European ‘airs’ but also Pacific Islander and Asian ‘airs’. For example, in 1881–1882, years before the CAE, the visitor Edward James Cairn diarised an impromptu Islander performance on a rainy night in the eastern islands: ‘They sang native words to tunes of Home Sweet Home, God Save the Queen & after a while one reached down a large tom [tom-tom/drum] and after drying by the fire the skin stretched over one end [to tighten it] commenced to beat it and then all adjourned outside the house and three of the natives commenced dancing.’¹⁵ Undoubtedly, Islanders had to adjust to the ‘audibility of strangers’ in their midst as the community soundscapes, both natural and human, changed.¹⁶ Some of the introduced music (and dance) and music-making practices were adopted, some adapted and some discarded, but all contributed to the eventual eclecticism of contemporary ‘Ailan style’ music (and dance) as truly multicultural.

So, what were some kinds of traditional music that were documented and preserved for future generations by the CAE? What ‘true echoes’ of

historical soundscapes remain for Islanders to hear?¹⁷ What films and historical photographs remain for Islanders to see after over 120 years? Islander drums, known in broad linguistic terms as *warup* (in *Meriam Mir*) or *buruburu* (in *Kala Lagaw Ya*), are wooden, single-headed membranophones, with variations in style (e.g., size, shape) and decoration (e.g., painting, incising, carving). Most were sourced from what is now Papua New Guinea's Western Province.¹⁸ Some of the other instruments surveyed by the CAE have disappeared from common use in the Torres Strait (e.g., jaws harps, flutes, pan pipes). However, a range of other sound-producing, mostly percussive instruments were described and are still used, including bamboo slit-drums (*marap thram/lumut*), bamboo clappers (*marap*) and rattles/shakers (*kulap/gor*).¹⁹ There was also what Haddon described as a trumpet or, more accurately, probably a *bu*-shell (*Syrinx aruanus*) used for signalling and to mark community events. Along with other marine shells, they had ceremonial significance as material expressions of spiritual belief. Islanders still use the *bu*-shell as an aural, visual and symbolic marker of Islander identity.

Haddon noted, 'Songs may be accompanied by drum-beating on ceremonial or festive occasions, and may be sung, spoken in recitative in a humming tone, or even muttered. It is impossible to draw a hard and fast line between different classes of songs . . . Singing in one form or another enters nearly every ceremony.'²⁰ However, there were strict rules as to who could drum or sing in particular ceremonies or social situations. The linguistic aspects of songs and singing were fluid, as Haddon also noted:

Mr [John] Bruce [the government school teacher] says that 'many of their songs are merely words to them which they cannot explain as they say the language is foreign . . . They will sing hymns in Samoan just as seriously and with as much gusto as if they understood the language; they are quite satisfied if the air [music and melody] pleases them.'²¹

Given some early London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries were from Polynesia, and many Islanders were and are still very linguistically and musically adept, it is not surprising they could readily learn the new Christian hymns' melodies and imitate the pronunciation of words with little in-depth knowledge of the textual meaning. This was comparable to what had happened previously within 'the great traffic of tunes', which, as noted by Myers, were sung in various languages. It is also not surprising that dances changed with the prohibition of previous styles and the introduction of Polynesian-style sit-down dances. More exuberant dance styles

such as those from the island of Rotuma allowed 'approved' dancing to continue, albeit driven musically by the centrality of Islander drums and other percussion and visually through the use of Islander adapted adornment and dance paraphernalia.²²

A fortuitous result of the 1898 documentation of music tradition is that there is not only a paper trail for Islanders to follow but also an aural and visual trail to help them celebrate, reclaim and sustain facets of their traditional music culture. That opportunity applies not only to those living in the Torres Strait region but also to the now clear majority of Islanders who have travelled to the mainland and remain there. As Islander community advocate Eddie Koiki Mabo, who was born on Mer but lived for decades on the mainland, has noted, 'Songs that were recorded by Haddon in 1898 were still alive in 1960.'²³ Similarly, when anthropologist Jeremy Beckett recorded songs on Mer Island in the late 1950s, there were songs performed which had a pre-colonial provenance.²⁴

Travel

Historically, Islanders were long-distance traders from their home islands with their sailing canoes. They navigated the Torres Strait region, as trade goods moved between southern New Guinea coastal areas and Aboriginal areas on Cape York Peninsula in a chain of customary exchange networks.²⁵ Travel was crucial to a local economy where resources were traded between isolated islands with different kinds of marine and terrestrial environments and resources.

So, what traditions of music travelled to the Australian mainland?²⁶ An early cohort of economic sojourners travelling to the mainland was from the Murray Islands, an important site for the CAE's music research. The personal experiences of one member, Reverend Elimo Tapim, originally from the island of Mer, highlight the importance of music in maintaining and sustaining connections with the traditions of home islands, as well as adapting to changes in Islander sociality and culture over time, place and situation.

Reverend Tapim was born on Mer in 1942 and is a member of the Dauareb clan. He first came to the mainland in 1960 and has lived in Townsville for decades. Townsville, Cairns and Mackay are some of the Queensland coastal towns now with large Islander populations. As well as being an Anglican priest, he also worked within the education sector and is active in Islander community music events in both sacred and secular

contexts. He has clear memories of his immersion in traditional Islander music and dance as a child on Mer: ‘My first memory of *warup* was because of my dad. He was a dancer. And there was always a drum beating when people [were] singing. And every time when you heard the noise, it woke your spirit up . . . We don’t teach one another [the drum beats or dance steps] like today’s style [on the mainland] – like you have to [be] trained. It was just [an] automatic thing.’²⁷ He is also connected through marriage to the iconic Islander ceremonial drum *Wasikor*, which was mentioned and photographed by the CAE.²⁸

When Reverend Tapim left his home island almost empty-handed, a main reason was economic. The pearling industry had rebounded momentarily post-war but then the widespread introduction of plastic for buttons, changing fashions and the emerging periculture industry (pearl farming) led to its irrevocable decline: ‘The price on pearl and trochus [shell] was going down and most of the men-folk they left their home seeking for a better job to support their families . . . I worked on the railway because a lot of family [did too]. My cousin was a leading hand on the railway gang, so I got a job much easier that way . . . [I] arrived with no wallet, no nothing, just a suitcase.’²⁹ Railway work suited employers and Islanders because the fettler gang members were strong and healthy, had a good work ethic and spoke some English. They were also often related or from the same island and thus had an internal hierarchy based on kinship, family and age-grade seniority.

One activity helping to keep spirits up during many months away from family and friends in an unforgiving new climate was music. In railway mess halls and canteens, it was common for Islander men to sing. Reverend Tapim recalls:

Island people everywhere we go we always sing. Singing is a main part in our lives. When you row a dinghy out to the reef, you can hear people singing in the dinghy. Or you go to the garden, they will sing. And even, we come down south [and] we work on the railway. All day on the railway line, whether it is cold or hot it never stops us singing.³⁰

Music also helped coordinate some work duties, particularly when a large group of Islander men working with crowbars moved and adjusted heavy railway tracks.³¹

Reverend Tapim also remembers how during his first years in western Queensland, entertainment had to be self-made: ‘You know there was nothing there. We just a bunch of guys working together. And pay day we will be just meeting at the pub there. You know, just drink, singing and

dancing.’ They had to improvise to put an Islander touch on the music, because although there were a few guitars or ukuleles available, there were no drums or percussion – two key components of Islander music. Islander drums (*warup/buruburu*) were too bulky, the snake-skin tympanum too fragile and personal possessions too limited for them to be readily transported. To approximate Islander percussion, the best they could initially do was to fashion *kulap/gor* rattles/shakers using the one material readily available at a canteen pub: metal beer bottle tops. However, for the Islander railway workers, music was a double-edged sword. Although it might temporarily help with homesickness, it also reminded them of their families and home islands. The mainland was not only far away, foreign and freezing in winter but also overwhelmingly non-Indigenous.

Notwithstanding the equivocal emotional aspect of music for Islander railway workers, Reverend Tapim recalled how he was finally able to get a drum on the mainland: ‘My first *warup* was when [we railway workers were] camped at Proserpine and we used to go out every payday to Airlie Beach [on the Coral Sea coast of Queensland] and there was a [tourist] shop there that was selling drums.’ If a skin burst or ripped due to the extreme dry heat or cold, he could get a replacement skin from friends on Saibai Island, which is only a few kilometres away from the villages on the Papua New Guinea coast in Western Province where traditional trading networks were still maintained.³²

Islanders in the early post-World War II diaspora, such as railway workers, had to improvise to keep a connection to music, be it via singing or dancing. As the diaspora increased and Islanders stayed on the mainland, family and personal networks meant more instruments could be sourced and, with steady work, afforded. Islanders also learned about useable mainland materials such as goanna skin (*Varanidae*/monitor lizard) for drum skins, lawyer cane (*Calamus australis*) for binding and local beeswax to tighten up drum heads. Over several generations, keeping the connections between those who had travelled to the mainland, their families and communities in the Torres Strait region was a challenge, but it remained a focus for Reverend Tapim and other concerned community members and educators. A crucial activity for youth was using music and dance to sustain their cultural ‘Islander-ness’. Another cross-generational activity was encouraging the use of ‘language hymns’ in worship, where traditional language use is allowed by some Christian denominations.³³ In Reverend Tapim’s opinion, the cultural activities in schools such as music and dance were very important for non-Indigenous students also; in the

mainstream media they are frequently presented with negative depictions of Indigenous peoples.

The factors of isolation and the relative lack of the mainland's wider opportunities meant there was a persistent 'pull' to relocate 'down south' – even with the establishment of representative local government in the Torres Strait region, Native Title decisions and improvements in access to education, health and other governmental services.³⁴ Music provided one avenue of – and forum for – general agreement and sustained shared cultural practices between diasporic mainland populations of Islanders and those who remained on their home islands.

Change

Changes in Islanders' music as a cultural practice have seen some forms being adapted or revived, while some have cohered after the diaspora.

Some cultural practices documented by the CAE at the end of the nineteenth century have survived, perhaps altered but still intact in their essence. In particular, dance and its attendant music, music-making and often feasting remain vital social and cultural practices. Family and community-based music and dance for personalised cultural events such as tombstone unveilings, marriages and non-invasive male initiation ceremonies such as first shave retain their importance in the Torres Strait region and on the mainland.³⁵ Similarly, there are also key religious events such as the commemoration of the arrival of Christianity on 1 July 1871 at Erub (Darnley Island) by the LMS on the boat *Surprise*. That event, *The Coming of the Light*, is celebrated by many Islanders, regardless of Christian denominational affiliation. Another widely recognised pan-Islander community event is Mabo Day (3 June), in honour of Eddie Koiki Mabo (and the other Mer Island claimants David Passi, Sam Passi, James Rice, Celuia Mapo Salee) in the High Court's Native Title decision (3 June 1992).

In all such cultural events the use of *warup/buruburu* drums and other Islander percussion is common; they have become part of what can be appreciated as key components of Islanders' 'aural ethnicity':³⁶ presenting sounds and images which have come to symbolise the culture, similar to how they did when the CAE researched and recorded their traditional use.³⁷ One major contemporary difference is how events and performances can be easily documented via digital film and audio recordings and disseminated on social media. Consequently, the physical distance between

home islands and diasporic communities is no longer a detriment to reinforcing or revitalising cultural practices.

Nonetheless, diaspora to the mainland has had profound effects on Islander culture there, such as the use, viability and maintenance of traditional music and languages, similar to developments in the Torres Strait region. However, one cultural practice where some traditional language use has been retained is in sacred music.³⁸ This is important to sustain the two endangered traditional languages and their dialects. But how long languages can be sustained is unknown if Torres Strait Creole/Yumpla Tok continues to predominate in both locations.³⁹

Just as Islanders are a demographic minority within an Indigenous minority, their music has had a less expansive and different commercial trajectory than the music of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. Commercially recorded Islander music emerged fully in the Torres Strait region in the late 1980s and early 1990s with albums by the Mills Sisters: Cessa Nakata (b. 1927), Ina Titasey (1927–2014) and Rita Fell-Tyrrell (1934–2004).⁴⁰ They were connected to Islander communities at Naghir Island and Thursday Island. The siblings played guitar, ukulele and percussion and sang harmony to Islander songs in several traditional languages, along with popular songs in English.⁴¹ They did not start their career at local pubs until they were in their fifties. Some people referred to them as the ‘Singing Grandmas’. They eventually toured nationally and internationally as entertainers in the ‘world music scene’. They performed in an unadorned and straightforward style as was apt for their generation’s rendering of Islander music as ‘roots’, albeit very eclectic, folk music.

Another recording artist of an older generation who emerged in the early 2000s was Henry ‘Seaman’ Dan (1929–2020). A former deep-water pearl-shell diver, pearling lugger skipper and mineral prospector, he was born on Thursday Island in 1929 and also started his recording career late in life at the age of seventy. He learnt his early music from Islander and Aboriginal musicians (folk and country-western) and also from African American military (jazz) musicians stationed in Cairns, Queensland, during World War II. He was of mixed cultural heritage and not from a traditional-language-speaking community. Therefore, he was not confined to a home island reserve under government policies of island-based or linguistically based forced displacements. He was allowed to live on Thursday Island, where he absorbed the multicultural and multilingual music being celebrated at private ‘house parties’, where his mother played accordion or visitors danced to 78 rpm records.

Though a late starter, ‘Seaman’ Dan recorded eight albums and won several prestigious national music awards, as well as the noteworthy national civic award, Member of the Order of Australia (AM) (2020).⁴² He sang, wrote and adapted songs in a range of eclectic styles, including blues, hula, folk, comedy, jazz and ‘slow-drag’ fox trots. He recorded his last album at eighty-seven years of age and actively performed locally until then.

In an early pre-World War II diaspora of Islanders or part-Islanders to the mainland, the descendants of West Indian colonial-era sailor Douglas Pitt Senior were noted as fine singers and dancers.⁴³ Three of the Cairns-based Pitt sisters, Dulcie, Heather and Sophie, and their brother Walter were all-round entertainers; they could sing, dance and play instruments. They entertained in the broader community and during World War II performed for troops stationed in north Queensland. They eventually entertained ‘down south’ and Dulcie (1921–2010) branched out as a soloist, performing as Georgia Lee.⁴⁴ She became a fixture on the jazz ‘scenes’ in Sydney and Melbourne before going to the United Kingdom and working as a vocalist with the top society band, Geraldo. When she eventually returned to Australia, she continued to perform and toured with Nat King Cole in 1957, but also acted in movies. The next generation of the Pitt family also maintained their links to Islander musicality; for example, Wilma Reading performed internationally with top jazz orchestras, such as those of Duke Ellington and Count Basie, and on television.

Christine Anu (b. 1970), a well-known Islander singer, dancer and actress, is based on the mainland. Her connection is to Saibai Island, and she trained in dance at the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA).⁴⁵ As well as recording numerous albums and songs – including the Torres Strait Islander song and sit-down dance ‘Taba Naba’ with the children’s group The Wiggles – she has also appeared in big-budget films such as *Moulin Rouge*, stage musicals such as *Little House of Horrors* and *Rent*, and numerous television shows.⁴⁶ She sang the iconic ‘My Island Home’ at the closing ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympics to a global audience. She has traversed various contemporary styles of music but has consistently maintained links to Islander musical culture in the Torres Strait in her live performances.

Another mainland-raised Islander is Will Kepa. His connections are to Iama (Yam Island) and he has worked as an audio engineer, producer and multi-skilled instrumentalist and arranger.⁴⁷ As a composer and songwriter, his soundtracks have been used for documentaries and television series. He is currently studying in the School of Music and also managing

the Indigenous recording studio Yil Lull at the Australian National University in Canberra.⁴⁸ His musical background includes working as a musician and audio engineer for numerous projects in Torres Strait and Far North Queensland communities, as well as performances with Henry ‘Seaman’ Dan, the multicultural group Austronesia, a project celebrating Islander contributions as fettlers on Australia’s northern railway networks (*Straight from the Strait Songlines*) and diverse commercial and cultural artists and bands. Other contemporary Islander recording artists and performers focus on sacred and secular music.⁴⁹

Many Islander songwriters in both the Torres Strait and on the mainland draw upon some aspects of traditional music.⁵⁰ One common style is to use traditional chants in songs, often as a repetitive chorus or bridge/middle eight.⁵¹ However, the verses may well be in English, and Islander percussion is used as a marker of ‘aural ethnicity’.

Conclusion

Islander music practices may now be pan-regional, but Islander cultural protocols still have their roots in the home islands and communities. For many Islanders, managing and interweaving culture and music are paramount concerns, especially when they contain traditional elements and practices, such as those documented by the CAE and noted in other accounts. As exhibited by contemporary music in the Torres Strait region and on the mainland, there remain ‘true echoes’ reverberating in Islander music. They broadcast, literally and figuratively, how sustainability is ongoing and how the components of historical cultural soundscapes remain relevant to keeping vital those connections between home islands, communities and diasporic Islanders – even if they are generations removed from them.

Notes

1. H. Dan and K. Neuenfeldt, *Steady Steady: The Life and Music of Seaman Dan* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013), p. 66.
2. I. McNiven, ‘Torres Strait Islanders: The 9,000-Year History of a Maritime People’, *The Torres Strait Islands* (South Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art/State Library of Queensland/Queensland Museum/Queensland Performing Arts Centre, 2011), pp. 211–19.

3. Many islands in the Torres Strait region have both Indigenous and non-Indigenous names. Based on common usage, the name used most often is given first and the other is noted within parentheses (. . .).
4. For the importance of pearling and other extractive marine industries in the Torres Strait region, see R. Ganter, *The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait: Resource Use, Development and Decline 1860s-1960s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994).
5. K. Neuenfeldt, “‘Ailan Style’: An Overview of the Contemporary Music of Torres Strait Islanders’ in T. Mitchell and S. Homan (eds.), *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now: Australian Popular Music* (Hobart: Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies, 2008), pp. 167–80.
6. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census, ‘Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001, accessed 9 January 2022.
7. A. Shnukal, ‘Torres Strait Islanders’ in M. Brandle (ed.), *Multicultural Queensland 2001: 100 Years, 100 Communities, a Century of Contributions* (Brisbane: The State of Queensland (Department of Premier and Cabinet), 2001), pp. 21–35.
8. For details on the Torres Strait region’s communities, cultural protocols and projects, see the Torres Strait Regional Authority website at www.tsra.gov.au/, accessed 9 January 2022.
9. Such legislation and policies included *Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld)*, which included Islanders in 1904; Island ‘reserves’ gazetted, pass systems introduced and ‘Protector’ gained control of wages 1912–1926; and *The Torres Strait Islanders Act of 1939 (Qld)*. Their inconsistent applications are explored in J. Hodes, ‘Anomaly in Torres Strait: “Living under the Act” and the Attraction of the Mainland’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 24(64) (2000), 166–72.
10. A. C. Haddon (ed.), *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol. 2 (1901, 1903), vol. 3 (1907), vol. 4 (1912), vol. 5 (1904), vol. 6 (1908), vol. 1 (1935)). The *Reports* and earlier publications by Haddon are a useful repository for the study of the Torres Strait and Islanders circa late 1880s and late 1890s.
11. I. McNiven, ‘The Ethnographic Echo: Archaeological Approaches to Writing Long-Term Histories of Indigenous Spiritual Beliefs and Ritual Practices’, *Humanities Australia*, 10 (2016), <https://humanities.org.au/power-of-the-humanities/humanities-australia-journal-2016>, accessed 14 January 2022.
12. For information on the British Library Sound Archives’ collection of Oceanic cylinder recordings, see www.true-echoes.com/1898-torres-strait-and-new-guinea/, accessed 4 February 2024. For 1898 Torres Strait Islander recordings, see www.true-echoes.com/1898-torres-strait-and-new-guinea/torres-strait-collection/.

13. The phrase ‘the great traffic in tunes’ was used as a title in an exploration of the evolution of music in Torres Strait’s eastern islands by H. Lawrence, “‘The Great Traffic in Tunes’: Agents of Religious and Musical Change in Eastern Torres Strait’ in R. Davis (ed.), *Woven Histories, Dancing Lives: Torres Strait Islander Culture and History* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), pp. 46–72.
14. C. Myers, ‘Music’ in A. C. Haddon (ed.), *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. 238.
15. E. J. Cairn, *Diary of two trips with Captain Rolls on the Alice Mead to the Huon Gulf and Astrolabe Ranges in New Guinea* (1881–1882), MSS 446, Mitchell Library, Sydney, n.p.
16. H. de Ferranti, ‘Music and the Japanese of “Monsoon Australia”, 1920s–1960s’, Online Symposium Paper, 2 October 2021 at *Resonating Across Oceanic Currents: A Maritime History of Popular Music in and from Japan, 1920s–1960s*.
17. For the British Library’s True Echoes project, see <https://true-echoes.com>, accessed 4 February 2024.
18. The history, sourcing and contemporary uses of Islander drums are canvassed in K. Neuenfeldt, “‘Listen to My Drum’: The Musical, Social and Cultural Importance of Torres Strait Islander *warup/buruburu* Drums in Australia’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2 (2016), 61–80.
19. *Kulap/gor* rattles/shakers commonly use goa nuts (*Pangium edule*) strung together.
20. Haddon, *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, vol. 4, p. 284.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
22. See M. Mua and J. Beckett, ‘Taibobo: Dancing over the Oceans, from Rotuma to Torres Strait and Back Again’, *Oceania*, 84 (2014), 331–4.
23. E. K. Mabo, ‘Music of the Torres Strait’ in F. Magowan and K. Neuenfeldt (eds.), *Landscapes of Indigenous Performance: Music and Dance from Torres Strait and Arnhem Land* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005) pp. 46–50.
24. As detailed in J. Beckett, *Torres Strait Islanders: Traditional Music of Torres Strait* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, AIAS/11, 1988) and documented in the tracks ‘Songs of the Malu-Bomai Dances’ and ‘Songs of the Malu-Bomai Cult’. Some of the ancestral songs are still sung as entertainment.
25. D. Lawrence, ‘Customary Exchange in the Torres Strait’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2 (1998), 13–35.
26. There were individuals and extended families with a Torres Strait connection such as the Pitt, Sailor, Savage and Walters families, who were also musicians and dancers in Cairns. They had left or were allowed to leave because they were

- not 'under the act' due to their multinational heritage. To explore reasons for such informal emigration, see J. Hodes, 'Anomaly in Torres Strait'.
27. Reverend Elimo Tapim, interview with author, 18 March 2014, Townsville, Queensland.
 28. Reverend Tapim refers to it as a 'survival drum' because it is the sole historical traditional drum still held in the Islander community on Mer.
 29. Tapim interview.
 30. Tapim interview.
 31. See D. Salisbury, 'Railway Songs: The Diaspora of Eastern Torres Strait Islander Music as a Reflection of People, Identity and Place' in E. MacKinlay, B. Bartleet and K. Barney (eds.), *Musical Islands: Exploring Connections between Music, Place and Research* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009), pp. 94–118.
 32. The rivers of Western Province in Papua New Guinea are one source of the freshwater file snakes (*Acrochordus arafuræ*), a preferred drum skin.
 33. See H. Lawrence, P. Matthias and T. Whaleboat, 'Revitalising Meriam Mir through Sacred Song' in J. Wafer and M. Turpin (eds.), *Recirculating Songs: Revitalising the Singing Practices of Indigenous Australia* (Hamilton, NSW: Hunter Press, 2017), pp. 318–35.
 34. Post-Mabo decision, there also have been confrontations between those who stayed on the home islands during the diaspora and those who had left, in particular over Native Title claims and decisions that could fracture families and communities, especially when members of the diaspora returned to claim what they thought was still theirs but the courts or the home island communities had decided otherwise.
 35. A Tombstone Unveiling is the final Islander funerary event, which is scheduled an indeterminant time after a death and has clear-cut cultural protocols about how it is organised, funded and celebrated.
 36. J. Troutman, *Kika Kila: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p. 96.
 37. Islander visual artists have also benefitted from the CAE by visiting the Cambridge Museum in the UK and also other institutions in Australia and overseas to examine Islander artefacts such as masks, carvings and drums.
 38. For the use and importance of Meriam Mir language hymns in worship, see Lawrence, Matthias and Whaleboat, 'Revitalising Meriam Mir through Sacred Song'. For language revitalisation in the Torres Strait at Saibai Island, see A. Harvey, 'Kalaw Kawaw Ya (Saibai Island, Western Torres Strait Islands, Australia): Language Snapshot', *Language Documentation and Description*, 20 (2021), 75–85.
 39. A. Shnukal, 'Language Diversity, Pan-Islander Identity and "National" Identity in Torres Strait' in R. Davis (ed.), *Woven Histories, Dancing Lives: Torres Strait Islander Identity, Culture and History* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), pp. 107–23.

40. The author co-produced several performances by Cessa Nakata and Ina Titasey in community singing groups and also as session singers.
41. The Mills Sisters' albums included *Frangipani Land* (1993) and *Those Beautiful TI Girls* (2002). There was also a group of Aboriginal women singers in Darwin known as the Mills Sisters.
42. The author was one of the producers of Henry 'Seaman' Dan's albums, as well as performing and songwriting with him.
43. See F. W. Lui, 'My Island Home: Re-Presenting Identities for Torres Strait Islanders Living outside the Torres Strait', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 36(2) (2012), 141–53.
44. See K. Neuenfeldt, "'I wouldn't change skins with anybody": Dulcie Pitt/Georgia Lee, a Pioneering Indigenous Australian Jazz, Blues and Community Singer', *Jazz Research Journal*, 8(1–2) (2015), 211–31.
45. Senior female and male Islanders from the Torres Strait regularly taught Islander music, dance and culture at NAISDA; some Islanders were also affiliated with the contemporary Indigenous Bangarra Dance Company (Sydney) and other state/territory-based dance troupes.
46. See M. Nakata and K. Neuenfeldt, 'From Navajo to Taba Naba: Unravelling the Travels and Metamorphosis of a Popular Torres Strait Islander Song' in F. Magowan and K. Neuenfeldt (eds.), *Landscapes of Indigenous Performance: Music and Dance from Torres Strait and Arnhem Land* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005), pp. 12–28.
47. For an overview of Will Kepa's career, see K. Neuenfeldt, 'Adventures in the Third Space of Intra-Indigenous Recording Projects: Is Border-Crossing a Bridge or a Barrier?' in K. Barney (ed.), *Musical Collaboration between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous People in Australia: Exchanges in the Third Space* (New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 122–40. For Kepa's role in fourteen Torres Strait Islander community recording projects, see K. Neuenfeldt and W. Kepa, 'A Case Study of Indigenising the Documentation of Musical Cultural Practices' in G. Seal and J. Gall (eds.), *Australian Folklore in the 21st Century* (Perth: Black Swan Press/Curtin University, 2011), pp. 73–91.
48. The Yil Lull studio name refers to an iconic 1988 song by Joe Geia from Palm Island. He has a family connection to Eastern Torres Strait. His daughter, Jessie Lloyd, has recorded an album of updated and reimagined Islander community songs: Ailan Songs Project, *Four Winds*, Jessie Lloyd, 2022.
49. See K. Barney and L. Solomon, *Performing on the Margins: Conversations with Torres Strait Islander Women Who Perform Contemporary Music* (St Lucia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland, 2010). Two exemplary singer-songwriters of *Kores* (contemporary Christian choruses) in the Torres Strait are Cygnet Repu from Mabuyag Island and Ettie Mosby from Thursday Island. Mau Power (Patrick Mau) is a popular Islander hip hop artist. He is connected to Dauan Island and is the grandson of Henry

‘Seaman’ Dan. Mau did an Islander-esque version of ‘My Island Home’ with Christine Anu.

50. See C. Lawe-Davies and K. Neuenfeldt, ‘Mainland Torres Strait Islanders and the “Magical Islands” of the Torres Strait: The Music of Gaetano Bann as Metaphor and Remembering’ in K. Dawes (ed.), *Island Musics* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 137–51.
51. This process of Islander songwriting is explored in L. Costigan and K. Neuenfeldt, ‘Negotiating and Enacting Musical Innovation and Continuity: How Some Torres Strait Islander Song Writers Are Incorporating Traditional Dance Chants within Contemporary Songs’, *The Asia-Pacific Journal of Anthropology [TAJA]*, 5 (2004), 113–28.

Further Reading

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- Neuenfeldt, K., ‘“Ailan Style”: An Overview of the Contemporary Music of Torres Strait Islanders’ in T. Mitchell and S. Homan (eds.), *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now: Australian Popular Music* (Hobart: Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies, 2008), pp. 167–80.
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- Watkin Lui, F., ‘My Island Home: Re-Presenting Identities for Torres Strait Islanders Living outside the Torres Strait’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 36(2) (2012), 141–53.