

5 | The Spiritual in Australia: Practices, Discourse and Transformations, 1879–1950

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Introduction

In the film *A Time to Dream* – the title a telling reversal of ‘Dreamtime’¹ – Aboriginal tenor Harold Blair, who was then nearing the end of his life, is seen singing the African American spiritual, ‘Go, tell it on the mountain’, accompanied on guitar by Aboriginal country music star Harry Williams.² Blair transforms the traditional lyrical text into an assertion of Aboriginal sovereignty, declaring: ‘Go tell it to Canberra, Brisbane, Sydney, everywhere / Go tell it to Melbourne, to let my people go’ and ‘Black man must claim his tribal land’.³ More than two decades earlier, while on a concert tour for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) celebrating fifty years since Australia’s federation, the tenor confessed to a reporter, ‘I love singing American negro spirituals ... but the Americans went wild about aboriginal [*sic*] songs. That’s the only thing they don’t have in America – aborigines.’⁴ In 1949, Blair sailed for the United States where for six months he was a guest and student at the home of African American baritone Todd Duncan. He also lived at Sloane House YMCA in Manhattan while studying with Duncan’s former voice teacher.⁵ While there, Blair said ‘[h]e did not experience any racial prejudice and nobody could have been kinder than the New Yorkers’.⁶ Blair had a genuine affinity with African American spirituals and some Australian critics considered his interpretation of them on the ABC tour to be the ‘most impressive’⁷ of all in a ‘programme of considerable range and difficulty’.⁸ Blair’s command of the form, his meditations on race and sovereignty while delivering spirituals, and the way his mastery was praised in Australia present a weave of themes related to the impact of African American spiritual singing on Australian musical ideologies and practices that this chapter seeks to untangle.

African American spiritual singing in Australia dates to the nineteenth century. When the renowned mixed vocal ensemble the Fisk Jubilee Singers of Tennessee, USA, toured the region from 1886 to 1889, they sparked a conversation about the boundaries of race and the transformative

potential of spirituals for those who embraced the genre within the Australian context. Frederick J. Loudin, leader of the Fisk tour, believed spiritual singing could be a vehicle for institution building and racial uplift, and white Australians with Christian sympathies – who responded to the music ‘with high-toned sentimentality’ – invested in this notion.⁹

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, responses to spirituals across Australia would greatly complicate these visions and manifest a decidedly different political edge in the realm of Indigenous performance. In what follows we discuss aspects of the impact of African American singers and spirituals in Australia over almost a century from the mid 1880s and how, among Indigenous people, the jubilee or spiritual-singing choir helped to establish and disseminate a political language of freedom that was, in some cases, used to bolster Indigenous claims of sovereignty. This valuation of the spiritual stood in stark contrast to what non-Indigenous cultural critics heralded as the form’s art music potentiality, and we interrogate the tension between these views to map out the complexity of understanding the resonance of African American spirituals in the Australian context.

Early Reports and Performances

The minstrel troupe Lewis’ Original Georgia Jubilee Singers presented a programme in the Hobart Town Hall on Good Friday 1879 – perhaps the earliest African American concert performance in the colonies dedicated entirely to spirituals. Of the programme – ‘[w]hat may truthfully be termed a religious service’,¹⁰ especially given the occasion – it was reported that “‘Swing low, sweet chariot,” was perhaps the most beautiful of all the numbers; “Roll, Jordan, Roll,” and the “Sweet By and By” being very attractive. Some of the songs, such as “Go down Moses” and others had a quaint simplicity that was almost ludicrous, though their fervour would silence a mocker.’¹¹ Some companies, such as Lewis’, combined minstrelsy and spiritual singing, that is, secular and sacred entertainment. Others, such as the Fisks, concentrated solely on the latter. When the Fisk Jubilee Singers arrived in Melbourne in 1886, colonial Christians and others had been prepared by the earlier arrivals to receive this new form of religious folk song that had circulated among enslaved populations in the southern United States, now reimagined through Western-style arrangements.¹²

The story of the Singers’ Australasian tour is now well known and has been researched and discussed from several perspectives.¹³ According to

Patrick Rasico, over their time in Australia, the Fisks 'gave eighty public concerts in Melbourne, sixty in Sydney, forty in Adelaide, thirty in Brisbane, and countless others in smaller towns'.¹⁴

After singing for Aboriginal and Māori groups in Australia and New Zealand, the Fisk director, Loudin, wrote:

I was delighted with the effect of our music. I could see that my theory was confirmed that missionaries to the heathen could make more progress if they made more use of music and singing. The hearts of the people were touched. They came again and again, and when we asked them the reason, they indicated that they recognised a kinship.¹⁵

The idea of organising an Aboriginal choir and taking it on tour predated the Fisk visit although it had possibly been initiated in response to news in Evangelical circles of the success of the Singers' 1870s tours in Britain. It is likely, too, that establishing such a choir was prompted by the great emphasis placed on singing and social improvement in Victorian Britain. Singing was believed to instil moral virtues and hence was a 'force for good'.¹⁶

As early as 1879 a group of Aboriginal singers from the Anglican Church Missionary Society mission at Lake Condah in southwest Victoria had visited Ballarat to perform 'a selection of anthems and hymns'.¹⁷ It was declared that 'their voices possessed a very large share of sweetness and pathos, and that the time and precision shown were quite surprising'.¹⁸ By the mid 1880s news was circulating that the 'latest novelty in church music is an aboriginal [*sic*] choir, which is singing in some of the churches. The company consists of four young men and five "lubras" [women]'.¹⁹ One listener who heard the choir at Lake Condah believed it 'would be a credit even to a metropolitan church'.²⁰ The choir toured townships in Victoria to raise funds to build a stone church at the mission.

Aboriginal and South Sea Islander Encounters

It is well known that the Fisk Singers 'created a profound sensation'²¹ among white audiences in Australia and New Zealand during their nearly three-and-a-half-year stay in the region,²² but the impact of the tour on local and regional Indigenous musical cultures has been less fully explored. A key moment that defined how some Aboriginal peoples came to value spirituals came on Friday 27 August 1886, when, at the invitation of the missionary Daniel Matthews, the Fisks sang for over one hundred Aboriginal residents at Maloga mission station on the New South Wales

side of the Murray River. Bain Attwood writes, ‘It appears that the pain and suffering expressed by these songs allowed or enabled the Maloga people to express their pain and suffering.’²³ Attwood quotes from a letter Loudin wrote to an African American newspaper in Detroit: ‘Many of them wept as they listened to the weird plaintive melodies . . . more touched in fact by it than it has ever been our privilege in any other people.’²⁴ One account indicates that the meeting became a cultural exchange: the Singers ‘sang to the blacks, who reciprocated by displaying their vocal ability’²⁵ – singing the hymn, ‘Blest be the tie that binds’, according to Matthews.²⁶

Attwood notes that the Fisk visit in turn brought ‘another dimension’ to the Maloga people’s singing of gospel hymns.²⁷ A mere six weeks after the Singers visit, a Maloga vocal group was rendering jubilee songs including ‘Steal Away to Jesus’ and ‘Oh, Brothers Are You Getting Ready?’, ‘with a precision of time seldom equalled by European choirs’.²⁸ This observation suggests the writer was aware that the music was governed by ‘its own rules and conventions’, and had some notion of the songs’ aesthetic distinctiveness.²⁹ Attwood suggests that no spiritual was more important to the Maloga people than ‘Burra Phara’ [Bura Fera], a Yorta Yorta translation of ‘Turn Back Pharaoh’s Army’.³⁰

Nicole Anae chronicles what happened next, as Aboriginal performers and others associated with Maloga Mission became bearers of the spirituals to audiences ‘in churches and assembly halls in provincial towns throughout Victoria and New South Wales’, up to the late 1890s.³¹ Loudin departed Australia in 1889, and although Orpheus McAdoo, a member of the Fisks during its Australasian tour, continued to tour the country with his singers over the next decade, McAdoo never resumed the dialogue the Fisks began with the Maloga people. Indeed, from 1900 until the 1930s, apart from occasional performances of spirituals in various parts of the country, mission-organised Aboriginal singing groups largely dropped from sight.

From the 1860s to the early 1900s, South Sea Islanders, as they were known, were brought from Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and other Melanesian islands to Queensland and northern New South Wales to labour on farms and plantations. In the 1890s, the singing of one group of these Islanders was deemed to be of a standard that would allow them to successfully follow in the footsteps of the Fisk Singers as musician-fundraisers:

An entertainment of interest to all educationists was given in Bundaberg by choirs of South Sea boys (Kanakas) [*sic*]. It consisted of part songs – hymns in their own languages, and in English. The object was to raise funds for an harmonium for one

of their mission schools. There was a large and appreciative audience. This concert was the first of its kind in Australia. Several islands were represented. As the *kanaka* is a musical being, there is a possibility here of emulating the Fisk jubilee singers.³²

Here, at an early stage, the Black fundraising jubilee choir – as a commodity – provided the South Sea Island singers with a model to emulate.

The songs aside, Christians motivated by colonial concerns for the welfare of the South Sea Island labourers both saw and heard a racial affinity between these men and women and the touring African Americans. One observer in the late nineteenth century, who attempted to accompany Queensland plantation worker converts on a pump organ, recalled the experience in some detail:

Their singing of European hymns is altogether unique and indescribable. One realises, after hearing them, where the charm lies in the Jubilee Singers' music . . . The deep voices, the almost tragic earnestness, the constant repetition, but, above all, the tendency to unfinished cadences, and the constant dropping into a minor key, and the utterly indescribable element of savagery in it, so like, and yet so unlike, the queer monotonous chants of their 'Sing-Sing' corroborees, make it a thing never to be forgotten by those who have ears to hear, and eyes to see. It was by no means an easy task, although a pleasant one, to accompany those hymns.³³

Paul Anderson writes of the 'romantic racialism' that informed many friendly reactions to performances of the various Fisk touring singing groups over the decades, and how they 'raised troubling questions about the ideological markers of racial difference and the shifting aesthetic borders between presumably natural and artistic expression'.³⁴

Uplift and Assimilation

In the 1930s and the 1940s, the Christian missionaries W. B. Payne at Cummeragunja, New South Wales, and Rodolphe Schenk near Laverton, Western Australia, expended considerable energy in developing and mobilising fundraising Aboriginal performance troupes that were redolent of jubilee and minstrel culture. Following a period of dissension between Maloga residents and the head missionary Matthews in the late 1880s, Maloga Mission was closed, and the residents relocated to Cummeragunja, six kilometres away. Payne arrived in Echuca in 1924 and became active as

a Church of Christ lay preacher. In 1932 he formed a choir at Cummeragunja Mission, which eventually ‘toured some thousands of miles under his direct supervision, giving concerts at various centres’.³⁵ The spiritual ‘Turn Back Pharaoh’s Army’ was a constant in the choir’s repertoire, being sung ‘in Aboriginal’.³⁶ Given its subject about the Israelites’ flight from Egyptian bondage, it appears that the song had become a kind of emancipation anthem for Maloga and Cummeragunja residents, a dozen of whom, the year after the Fisk visit, had signed a petition to the New South Wales governor calling for the return of portions of their land.

Of Schenk’s group it was recorded, ‘They are a minstrel show, whose faces were blackened by nature rather than the smudge of a burnt cork’.³⁷ Spirituals featured prominently in the repertoire of each ensemble. It was Payne’s hope that the tours he organised would cause whites to ‘realise the capabilities of aborigines’³⁸ – that seeing and hearing the people perform would ‘bring home to white people the duty they owe to the colored folk’.³⁹ Schenk’s work of touring with the Mt Margaret Native Minstrels was interpreted at the time as an assimilationist effort towards ‘solving the native problem’ in Western Australia.⁴⁰ It is worth noting that neither Payne nor Schenk promoted Fisk-like entrepreneurialism among the Aboriginal musicians they supported.

A newspaper article acknowledging Payne’s work upon his departure for Victoria in 1941 explained that ‘by giving scope to the natural desire of these simple folk to express their emotions in song, he has been instrumental in bringing sunshine into their lives and raising them both mentally and spiritually to a higher plane’.⁴¹ For his part, despite ‘pressure from the mission constituency to focus purely on evangelism, from the beginning of his work in 1921, Schenk realised that a ministry to body and soul was needed to uplift the Wongutha’ Aboriginal people at Mt Margaret.⁴² It can be seen that the language and notion of uplift was applied to Aboriginal Australians from early in the twentieth century and retained currency even to the mid 1960s.⁴³ Importantly, settler driven notions of ‘uplift’ overlapped in rhetoric but differed substantially in conception from the African American driven and directed musical uplift movement of the early twentieth century. In the African American context, self-determination and cultural uplift were theoretically bound – that is, cultural uplift was conceptualised by African American intellectual leaders as a commitment to and reinvestment in African American culture. In the Australian context, the notion of uplift was discussed largely in non-Indigenous circles and essentially functioned as code for assimilation.⁴⁴

The Cummeragunja choir developed 'an excellent reputation, having toured extensively in Victoria', and in 1936 it was favourably compared with the Waiata Māori Choir, which had visited Australia the previous year.⁴⁵ This was an interesting comparison. Better known in New Zealand as the Methodist Home Mission Party, the Waiata 'choir' was a 'pan-tribal' Māori group that was established by the Methodist Arthur Seamer.⁴⁶ Through music and performance, Seamer aimed to portray 'a vibrant choral picture of cooperation, which aimed to bridge the gap between Māori and Pākehā congregations apparent within Methodist communities'.⁴⁷ This was Payne's aim too, and he was critical of white congregations' apathy towards Aboriginal communities and churches.⁴⁸ It is quite possible he was influenced by Seamer's vision, since following the Waiata Choir's 1935 and 1937 tours of Australia, the Cummeragunja group began to be referred to as a 'choir and concert party',⁴⁹ diversified its repertoire, and its performances culminated in 'a demonstration of the Native Corroboree dance'.⁵⁰

A regular item in Schenk's Mt Margaret Native Minstrels' mid-1940s performances was the presentation of a series of dramatic scenes 'that portrayed the actual living incidents at Mt. Margaret from the early days of corroborees and spear fights to the present-day industrial and spiritual development'.⁵¹ The Mt Margaret group's concerts featured 'beautiful singing and negro spirituals'⁵² including 'Jerusalem Morning', 'He Rose', 'Hear Dem Bells', 'I Want to Be There', 'Jacob's Ladder', and 'Sweet Is the Story', the 'outstanding feature' of which singing was the 'gift . . . for harmonising'.⁵³ The party also boasted a 'percussion band' that included 'four mandolins, tambourines, gumleaves, accordions and drums'.⁵⁴

Payne and Schenk were drawing on old models of African American entertainment, forms that had peaked in popularity just after the turn of the twentieth century. To recall, the 'idea to send a group of students on a tour to raise funds for an industrial school dated from the world tours in the 1870s of the Fisk Jubilee Singers from Tennessee', as Veit Erlmann explains.⁵⁵ In 1947, Schenk's Minstrels undertook a tour overland by three-ton truck across South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales that involved almost 7,000 miles of driving.⁵⁶ Responses to these performances continued to be characterized in romantic racialist terms. For example, a review of a Mt Margaret Minstrels concert in Albury, New South Wales, stated: 'There is a charm about the singing of Australian natives which grips; its very artlessness is captivating and arouses enthusiasm. Wherever

they have gone, they have created a sensation.⁵⁷ As Laura Chrisman points out, '[a]bout the ability of the [original Fisk] Singers to "charm" their audience, white and black writers were unanimous'.⁵⁸

The Rise of Radio and Secular Singers

Following the increase in popularity in the 1920s of the touring classical concert singer in Australia, individual Aboriginal girls and young women especially began to be identified as holding promise as solo singers, at first in church and mission contexts. Broadly speaking, the successes of these singers – whether performers of sacred, popular or classical song – were celebrated as exemplars of cultural assimilation in action. In the case of almost all of them there was a stated or implied emphasis on the benefits of voice training or cultivation, an unspoken yet obvious assimilationist objective.

One of the earliest to be singled out was Nellie Hetherington, who from the mid 1920s toured churches and sang over Brisbane's radio station 4BC. Nellie had been orphaned at the age of three and adopted by a missionary. The *Telegraph* in Brisbane wrote that she was 'the last of her tribe and the grand-daughter of an aboriginal [*sic*] king and queen'.⁵⁹ References to her 'royal' lineage were meant to elevate her status in the eyes of the public. Matter-of-factly, *The Herald* in Melbourne reported, 'In native language, Nellie Hetherington . . . sang a pathetic ditty today, in the middle of an interview, telling the story of "no more corroboree in this place, the white man has come and taken all the land; I'm going home to the happy place."⁶⁰ It continued, a 'note of loneliness and pathos creeps into her voice when she sings the hymns and negro spirituals with which she has entertained audiences throughout Australia'.⁶¹ According to a Queensland regional newspaper, 'Nellie has been truly called the Aboriginal Queen of Sacred Song, and is no mean performer at the piano. It is certainly a mistaken idea to think that the Australian native cannot rise above his condition, for in this case we have a girl of culture and ability with accomplishments that fit her for any station of life.'⁶² Other such singers include a ten-year-old Aboriginal girl from Port Noarlunga, South Australia, identified only as Rosa, in whom the Presbyterian minister E. A. Davies believed he had 'discovered a "Black Melba"'.⁶³ (The label had previously been applied to the singer Susie B. Anderson, who was a member of the African American entertainment troupe Orpheus McAdoo brought to Australia in the late 1890s.) Davies described Rosa as

‘the best child singer’ he had ever heard in the state, whose voice had ‘a surprising volume and richness of tone’.⁶⁴ Then there was Gwen Natoon of Swan Reach, South Australia, who in 1932, when she was eighteen, was ‘delighting Adelaide people with her clear mezzo-soprano voice’.⁶⁵ Attention was paid to the fact that she had received ‘no voice training other than the singing taught at the mission station . . . but her voice is very true and sweet’.⁶⁶

This field began to branch out, from sacred music in the late 1920s towards classical and popular idioms in the 1940s and 1950s. The nationwide radio programme *Australia’s Amateur Hour*, which began in 1940, was in no small part responsible for this development. The programme travelled around the country, featuring performers from a different town or city each week, and listeners voted by phone for the ‘winning’ performance. As the *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser* reflected in 1945, ‘Hundreds of thousands of radio listeners had been pleasantly surprised to have revealed to them that among Australian Aboriginals there are songsters of both sexes who would grace any musical gathering, and one or two who could easily attain fame on the concert platforms of the Old World.’⁶⁷ The news article went on to mention Harold Blair, Dorothy Levy of Moree, Pete and Arthur Davis of King’s Cross, and Doug Williams and Hazel and June Murray from Cowra, all of whom had scored highly on the programme. The piece concluded by emphasising, ‘our aboriginal [*sic*] population has considerable talent as musicians and entertainers, and . . . the public is more than ready to appreciate their performances. At present there is very little outlet for this talent, and very little chance of developing it into a serious asset. It is up to us in Australia to remove both these obstacles.’⁶⁸

In 1944, fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Green of Fitzroy, Victoria, ‘won the Mary Stahl singing scholarship to Melbourne Conservatorium’.⁶⁹ She had been a featured soloist with an Aboriginal choir in a radio broadcast.⁷⁰ According to one report in 1946, in Betty Fisher of Croker Island in the Northern Territory, ‘Australia may have a real native soprano of note in the near future’;⁷¹ another announced that she ‘may yet become the Marian Anderson [celebrated African American contralto] of Australia’.⁷² Seventeen-year-old Alice Bateson, originally from Georgetown, Queensland, topped the telephone poll for the 1946 *Amateur Hour* contest that was broadcast nationally. She sang both popular and light classical items⁷³ and hoped to ‘study classical music in conjunction with her piano studies’.⁷⁴ In the mid 1950s Isobel Kuhl, who was raised in the Ballarat orphanage, began to win competitions and gain attention as a contralto soloist.⁷⁵ Some of these singers, Green and Kuhl for example, were supported by Doug Nicholls, president of the

Australian Aborigines' League, which had been founded in Melbourne in the 1930s.⁷⁶ Most eventually dropped from sight or made their way in the field of popular music.

Australian and African American Perspectives in Conflict

The discourse sparked by Aboriginal engagement with Western art music surveyed above is charged with the logic of assimilation that underpinned mid-century discussions of Australian national music culture. Amanda Harris' work is particularly useful in illuminating this web of thought. On one hand, non-Indigenous Australians 'increasingly saw themselves as Australian rather than British citizens' in the lead up to and aftermath of World War II and increasingly 'turn[ed] towards Australia's actual Indigenous people' in their search 'for a sense of distinctiveness and points of differentiation from Britain'.⁷⁷ On the other, non-Indigenous judgements of musical progress continued to be anchored in the aesthetics of European art music.⁷⁸ This can be seen in something as basic as the art music terminology used to categorise the voices of the singers mentioned above who were heard over radio. Regarding one of the singers, Betty Fisher, who was viewed as a potential 'real native soprano', an influential women's committee from Western Australia expressed concern that if everything possible was not undertaken 'to further her training and prevent [her] incarceration in a native settlement', then 'her voice may be lost to civilisation'.⁷⁹

The Western aesthetic frame through which the Fisk singers and other early twentieth-century spiritual artists delivered their work situated the mastery of spirituals in a similar arena of cultural work. Yet tensions would noticeably arise in Australia during the twentieth century between those who championed spiritual singing as a pathway to assimilation and African American singers who viewed the cultural value of spirituals in starkly different terms. Consider for instance the two different stories of Paul Robeson's artistic work that circulated in Australia during the 1930s. In a celebration of Robeson's accomplishments printed in the *Northern Star*, *Daily Examiner*, *Advocate* and *Freeman's Journal*, Robeson is depicted as 'a highly-educated man', a singer with a 'perfectly trained' voice, whose 'interpretations at all times, are full of musical intelligence'.⁸⁰ His popularisation of spirituals through recordings for the label His Master's Voice is in turn framed as a watershed moment for concert artists worldwide interested in listening to and taking inspiration from a new kind of art music.

The article brings this point home in its closing sentence: ‘A notable instance of this is the late Dame Nellie Melba, who has recorded “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.”’⁸¹

Robeson’s view on the value embedded within – and the promise articulated through – the performance of spirituals broke sharply from this depiction. Throughout the 1930s Robeson called into question the efforts of African American artists who worked, in his view, to turn ‘themselves into imperfect imitations of white gentlemen’.⁸² The stakes of such assimilation, for Robeson, were both economic and cultural. In an article for the London-based *Daily Herald*, subsequently published in Hobart’s *The Voice*, Robeson lamented the fact that while African American artists were ‘laboring with Beethoven and Brahms ... Stravinsky has been borrowing from Negro melodies’ and that ‘in a popular form [i.e., jazz], Negro music, launched by white men – not Negroes – has swept the world’.⁸³ Robeson’s artistic vision did not prohibit utilising the ‘technology of the West’ – that is, Western artistic devices and practices – as a meditative ingredient in the development of African American cultural works, but it did assert that the goal of African American cultural practice should be a ‘graceful, natural growth from within’.⁸⁴ As Robeson proclaimed, ‘It is not as imitation Europeans, but as Africans, that we have value.’⁸⁵

In an exceptional instance the African American concert soprano Dorothy Maynor attempted to foster similar thinking in Australia, when in 1952 she advised Nancy Ellis, an Aboriginal soprano from Katanning, Western Australia: ‘By training this girl’, Maynor said, ‘I hope she will produce a type of music of her race – aboriginal [*sic*] music.’⁸⁶ Perth’s *Daily News* reported that Maynor wrote a letter to the city’s Lord Mayor in which she outlined a vision for Australian music, noting:

Miss Ellis, a mezzo-soprano, had a marked gift and displayed great strength of character. After training in the United States for three or four years, she should be given State employment to develop musical talents among West Australian natives, and could be available to all Missions and schools in the State, Miss Maynor said. This could lay the foundation of a native folk music.⁸⁷

Subsequently, Ellis was sent to the Sydney Conservatorium to study opera and lieder. When she returned to Western Australia to give recitals to raise funds for further training, one of these was advertised as follows: ‘Miss Ellis’s repertoire covers a wide range, and the programme presented at Northam [WA] will include excerpts from Handel’s “Largo”, Goldini’s “Caro Mio Bien”, Bizet’s “Carmen”, and songs from Brahms, Schumann,

Hugo Wolf, Sibelius, and others. She will conclude with a bracket of negro spirituals.’⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Ellis did work on Maynor’s idea of producing Aboriginal art music, since in a 1958 interview she performed, *bel canto* style, an ‘Aboriginal hunting song’.⁸⁹

Conclusion

The Fisk Jubilee Singers’ nineteenth-century tour of Australia set into play both performance practices and discourses about the power of Westernising non-European music that fit easily within Australian assimilationist social ideology. Yet there is plainly more to this historical story waiting to be revealed in the thoughts and aims of those who performed spirituals in Australia for Australian audiences. The divide between how non-Indigenous Australian audiences located the cultural importance of spirituals in the way they appeared to mirror or at least seemed capable of housing Western art music expressions, and how Robeson valued these musical works as articulations of African American cultural resilience speaks to a key point of difference between African American music makers and cultural critics in the Australian press. Digging deeper, the adoption of spirituals as anthems of emancipation for Maloga and Cummeragunja residents, the use of spirituals as a way of securing space on Australian concert stages and over the radio for Aboriginal singers seeking to express a broad range of talent, and the use of spirituals to call out the Australian government’s racist policies (as in the example of Harold Blair with which we began the chapter), one begins to see the story of the spiritual in Australia as one of considerable complexity. Its spectrum of uses does not belong to a singular cultural project, and its social impact, from its earliest days in Australia, has never followed a singular line. The web of meanings mapped out in this chapter charts the broad contours of this story and provides a starting point for critical analysis of the dissonances and tensions that arise between different kinds of engagement with and celebrations of this globally resonant musical practice.

Notes

1. Dreamtime is an English term that attempts to capture how Aboriginal people in Australia comprehend aspects of time before the present when the world as we know it came into existence. See A. Wierzbicka and C. Goddard, ‘What Does

- Jukurpa ('Dreamtime', 'the Dreaming') Mean? A Semantic and Conceptual Journey of Discovery', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1 (2015), 43–65.
2. A clip showing this scene can be viewed here: Goori2, 'Harold Blair 1973 – from the film "Time to Dream" dir: B. McGuinness', YouTube video, 2:17 (21 May 2020), www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kELTP58TV4.
 3. B. McGuinness, *A Time to Dream* (Australia, 1974), film.
 4. 'Something of Sentimental Journey for Harold Blair', *Queensland Times* (4 August 1951), p. 2, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article118221373>.
 5. 'Harold Blair Returns for Jubilee Concerts', *The Daily Telegraph* (9 April 1951), p. 5, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248637347>.
 6. Ibid.
 7. 'Great Ovation for Harold Blair', *Barrier Daily Truth* (10 July 1951), p. 1, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article141157429>.
 8. 'Harold Blair's Singing Is Enjoyable', *The Advertiser* (14 June 1951), p. 3, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article45718982>.
 9. M. Bellanta, 'Uncle Tom in the White Pacific: African-American Performances of the "Slave Sublime" in Late Colonial Australasia', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 15(3) (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1353/cch.2014.0048>.
 10. 'The Jubilee Singers', *The Mercury* (12 April 1879), p. 3, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article8975844>.
 11. Ibid.
 12. 'Religious folk song' is Sandra Graham's gloss for the spiritual. See S. J. Graham, *Spirituals and the Birth of a Black Entertainment Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), p. 14.
 13. See, for example, L. Abbott and D. Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of American Popular Music, 1889–1895* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), pp. 23–48; M. W. Wittman, 'Empire of Culture: U.S. Entertainers and the Making of the Pacific Circuit, 1850–1890', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan (2010), pp. 268–75; Bellanta, 'Uncle Tom in the White Pacific'; C. Bowan and P. Pickering, *Sounds of Liberty: Music, Radicalism and Reform in the Anglophone World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 274–88; N. Anae, "'[T]hey seemed to recognise us as brethren from a far distant tribe": The Influence of the Fisk Jubilee Singers among Australian and New Zealand Indigenous Communities, 1886–1936', *The Historian*, 80(2) (2018), 241–92; B. Egan, *African American Entertainers in Australia: A History, 1788–1941* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co, 2020); P. D. Rasico, 'The Fisk Jubilee Singers in Australia and Asia, 1886–90', online lecture (16 March 2021), www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqW87g5Yjmw; P. D. Rasico, 'Overview: The Fisk Jubilee Singers' Travels in the Antipodes and South Asia, 1886–1890', *John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library: Special Collections & Archives*, <https://bit.ly/3UKjnQB>.

14. P. D. Rasico, 'The Fisk Jubilee Singers in Australia and New Zealand, 1886–1889', *John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library: Special Collections & Archives*, <https://bit.ly/3HCdGfT>.
15. Quoted in 'The Fisk Jubilee Singers', *The Brisbane Courier* (18 October 1887), p. 7, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3481294>.
16. F. M. Palmer, 'The Large-Scale Oratorio Chorus in Nineteenth-Century England: Choral Power and the Role of Handel's Messiah' in K. Lajos and A. Stynen (eds.), *Choral Societies and Nationalism in Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 104. See also G. Olwage, 'Discipline and Choralism: The Birth of Musical Colonialism' in A. J. Randall (ed.), *Music, Power and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 26.
17. 'Aboriginal Concert', *The Ballarat Star* (7 February 1879), p. 3, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article200132720>.
18. Ibid.
19. '(From Our Exchanges)', *Gympie Times and Mary River Mining Gazette* (22 July 1884), p. 3, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article178023066>.
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