

A Music Manuscript Tsundoku-ist IAML Conference September 2017

When the public was invited to the memorial service for Stevie Wright, (lead singer of the Easybeats, Albert Production's first success) on Friday January 8 2016, we received the sheet music for "She's so Fine" (1965). Later that year Alberts - who as J Alberts & Son had been one of the major sheet music publishers in Australia - became absorbed into BMG - apart from the works of Vanda & Young, Stevie Wright and AC/DC which remained part of 'the family'.

Preparing this paper opened up a wide field of enquiry which ruined the 'tsundoku' label of the title of the piece. Tsundoku emerged as a word on the internet; "buying books and not reading them; letting books pile up unread on shelves or floors or nightstands". I applied it to the boxes of music manuscript of all description that had withstood my five years of home and storage moves. Once the idea of the paper was accepted I began to be more connected to the collection; adding to it, creating a database around it and becoming interested in relevant history of early Australia.

Studying the business acumen behind the music publication business changed my viewpoint from a subconscious prevalent augur of being 'stuck' in Australia to absolute admiration and wonder of what people achieved as well as an derisive amazement of just how quickly European civilisation established itself, wiping out indigenous cultures and populations in the process. Delving into the industrial revolution's speeding up of manufacture, the free convict labour, the wealth created from the discovery of gold with its resulting surge in motivated migrants; helped to understand how.

The time of the Australian sheet music publishing history lies somewhat parallel to the second part of the industrial revolution and to the developments and technological innovations allowing the recording of entertainment. In his 2012 TedX talk "Music and Emotion Through Time" Michael Wilson Thomas describes notation - 'music's silent powerful partner' being replaced by technology which enabled music to be divorced from performance ..

by taking over the role that notation had always played, [technology] shifted the balance within music between instinct and intelligence way over to the instinctive side.

Charles Hazlewood in his 2011 Ted Talk "Trusting the Ensemble" speaks of notation-free music in an ethnic context;

{South Africans} don't read music. They trust their ears. You can teach a bunch of South Africans a tune in about five seconds flat. And then, as if by magic, they will spontaneously improvise a load of harmony around that tune because they can.

With these two points of view in mind, sheet music's business element, that it must create what the market can support, provides a delightful dichotomy; between the professional music publishers, the musicians and creators of the product, and the desire and ability of those who purchased it.

"The Stardom and Celebrity of David Bowie" 2015 Symposium at ACMI in Melbourne happened alongside the simultaneous opening of the Victoria & Albert travelling exhibition "David Bowie Is" at ACMI. The speakers were academics whose line of research was -

David Bowie - which at the time was mind-boggling. Yet throughout 2016 with its transpiration of many rock heroes, that Stevie Wright song sheet proved to have the strongest 'zeitgeist'; a sense of place.

Another academic discipline that struck me was hearing of a fellow book club member talk of her research into "The Emotional History of Objects". The physicality and sense of purpose of old music sheets and the obvious care and musicality that had touched them yet with an invisibility of their experience struck a chord.

The BBC Broadcast books (England) of our English childhood, full of classical snippets are quite different to the ABC Songbooks (Australian) decades later which rely on fun illustrations and modern songs. Participating online during Brassbanned's live streaming of competitions, brought up the need for children interested in playing music to have access to practice space and instruments as well as the extent of brass and woodwind bands worldwide. Percy M Young's "Garland's of Song series A pupil's edition" (Scotland, c1940s) have him describe in the preface the strength in encouraging each child's special ability ..

Some are affected chiefly by melodic elegance, some by harmonic beauty, some by rhythmic vitality, and some by the interesting stores that centre round the life of the composer.

Graeme Skinners thesis "Toward A General History of Australian Music Composition" (2011) cites Marsh as one of Czerny's 'early Australian advocates' and the various copies of his exercises before copyright law came into total effect show how popular piano-playing was and how many publishers were interested in bringing out their particular volumes.

With access to the NLA's collection online, and Trove's newspapers (which have the delightful diversion of correcting scanned copy) it becomes a treasure hunt finding out more about the old scores. Various fashions of journalistic and letter-writing now seem quaint.

Skinner mentions attempts to transcribe First Australian's music in early days; however even when European Civilisation was plonked on top, we have little evidence. Within three family books of Australian folk song, Lahey's book (Great Australian Folk Songs, 1965) contains *Jackie Jackie*, recorded at Cumeragunja station with the chorus ..

Krikita bubula wel dee miah

Billee miah ging gerri wah

Lahey notes the language seemed to have disappeared:

"The natives used an unaccompanied harmony and rhythm which .. white men can't duplicate.. The chorus is said to be uncomplimentary to the whites."

The range of online reference discovers constant new pathways; such as finding the collections of Warren Fahey (warrenfahey.com).

Peter Game's book on Allans (The Music Sellers, 1974), described the end of the engraving of music in Australia, interviewing Gordon Baker. Baker's English equivalent, Victor Hope, says in his interview with Victor Sciafe (*The last of the music engravers*, 2017) :

The discipline, focus and knowledge of the music engravers was quite extraordinary and in many ways they were the unsung heroes of the music publishing business.

Today, the music publishers that thrived for over one hundred years are mainly integrated into big conglomerates. The copy of Czerny currently in the Sydney store of Allans Billy Hyde (originally bought out by Brashs, which was the first of many of its receiverships, before being 'saved' by Gallins Music in 2012) - is of the American company Alfreds, which began in 1922 on New York's Tin Pan Alley, and who bought Warner/Chappells music publication division in 2005. While lyrics of songs are freely available online (often incorrect) legal copies are available - with the 'duplication, adaptation, arranging and/or transmission' copyright restrictions still intact, from companies such as musicnotes.com.

A copy of "Oh Dry Those Tears" was sung at a 1901 Ballad Concert at St James; which were an early form of promoting new songs thus increasing sheet music sales of them. William Boosey's "Fifty Years of Music" (1931), led on to finding a plethora of research including that of Professor Derek B Scott and contemporaries. Thus the "Boomerang Songster" becomes not just a miraculous marketing phenomena of J Albert & Son, copied quickly in format by Australian competitors; but a natural extension of an old idea. They imported Francis & Days songsters, for instance, sticking their label on the front, long before licensing agreements; songsters that started in London out as encouragement for the audience of the Francis Brothers Minstrel act to sing along. Jane Albert (House of Hits, 2010) quotes 10 year old Stevie Wright's delight at finding a Boomerang Songster on docking in Fremantle on their way over to Sydney, just like the Top 40 lyric booklets he loved back 'home'.

The early Australian music publishers relied a lot on trips overseas, to buy in instruments, and to obtain licensing deals with major American and English companies. The publishers diversified and moved with the extraordinary developments in technology : Sir Ben Fuller and Frank Albert were instrumental in the beginnings of the ABC, winning the 1929 'out-sourcing' of the Federal Government's A-class transmitters. When the politicians took back the licences when they expired, forming the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1932; the original consortium bought up B-class licences and formed wide-ranging commercial networks of their own, later branching into television. Fullers invested in their own theatres, and because of this were often at a competitive advantage such as with the introduction of technicolour.

Sir Ben Fuller was from the Fuller Productions family, creating the Tivoli Circuit and building theatres. "The Silver in My Mother's Hair" by Vince Courtney, is an early example of singer/songwriter within vaudeville; expertly detailed in The Australian Variety Theatre Archive (<https://ozvta.com/>)

"Mammys's little Coon" was inserted into Launceston's Examiner in 1906. The influence of American songs (and 'culture') is seen in early Allans printing of The Songs of Stephen Foster to accompany the 1939 movie "Swanee River". Harry Nilsson's song 1941 alludes to how his father walked out on the family in 1944; which does rather colour the pencilled in name "Harry Nilsson" on this and several other old sheets of my collection; however whimsical.

The paper I presented relies a lot on a vaudeville-like use of presentation software special effects carefully timed to a movie format.; such is the immediacy of which times when sheet music was the staple of musical entertainment lacks. It also proved necessary so as not to 'preach to the converted' as my interest in such matters has only just begun.

"My Dear Soul" also from 1901 had lyrics from writer May Byron whose "Day With Shakespeare" was instrumental in James Joyce's writing of "Ulysees", which refers to

“Love’s Old Sweet Song” several times in that book. Joyce’s friendship with singer John McCormack, sometimes referred to as “Minstrel Boy” included their performing with him in 1901. Joyce’s knowledge and love of music is apparently evident all through ‘Ulysees’ and useful information regarding usage of such a collection of this.

Early well-worn music sheets advertised the singers on the front cover; Clara Butt and Kennerley Rumford’s 1913 rendition of “Night of Stars Night of Love” was still passionately remembered by the SMH music reviewer 8 years later. An Australian print of “Nearer My God to Thee” was found in Wallace Hartley’s violin case which he had strapped it to his body after conducting the bands as the Titanic sunk April 2012.

Sheet Music allowed home style enjoyment of the latest dance band crazes, and singalong around the piano. The varied books were in great demand as the voluminous numbers of editions from Alberts, Allans, Essex, Chappell, and the like, show. Once copyright restrictions came into effect, especially after the American law of 1892, dire warnings and business arrangements were prominent on sheet music; one wonders if some of them scared people off playing them at all let alone whistle the tunes in the street! Early Allans music just had the word “Copyright” printed on them and printed in Leipzig; yet soon all printed music was stamped with official owners and warnings against infringements. Often every other available spare space on the page was used for advertisements to encourage sheet music sales. By the time the Monkees tv show was created, sheet music was just another product to sell to fans.

Change can occur lightening fast; businesses have to adapt, with each new invention, consumers needed to be convinced, workers retrained, and resources re-allocated. Sheet music, programs and newspapers help to understand entertainment at the time.

So - in preparing this talk, I lost my status as a tsundoku-ist of music scores. I gained a huge respect for the business of music publishing, while aware of the pitfalls and lost dreams that it must also represent. Participating in the second day of the IAML conference was a privilege.

As Tom Petty said in an interview, “There’s some kind of magic going on there” regarding songwriting and that sometimes he felt just like a conduit. It is my intention to find some of that magic in old-style sheet music.

Thank you.

Ruth Williams

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