

MULGA WIRE



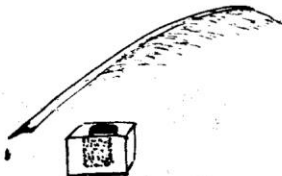
Nº 2 A BUSH MUSIC CLUB PUBLICATION

EDITORIAL

It's about bloody time that we Australians overcame the stupidity and short-sightedness of deference to foreign influences. Conspicuously absent at the Rocks Festival was any attempt to Australianise the proceedings - Uncle Sam hats and an Irish Governor of the Rocks were indicative of the Australian content. The Shell Folkloric Festival was noticeably missing an Australian group. Why?

It is apparently becoming acceptable to have American accents emanating from our domestic radio and T.V., not only in content (which is ludicrous enough) but in announcements as well. Why?

The Great Australian Apathy will be the tombstone of our heritage in a defeat by neglect, unless.....



THE BUSH MUSIC CLUB

The Bush Music Club is a group of people informally performing and enjoying our Australian heritage of songs, dances, yarns and recitations. The club acts as a centre for collecting and sharing traditional and contemporary folk lore. Interaction between professional and amateur performers is stimulated by participation in club activities such as workshops, Beer & Cheese nights, Singabouts, festivals, campfires, publishing and public performances.

MULGA WIRE

Mulga Wire appears each even month at the B.M.C. Beer and Cheese night. Contributions must be with the editors by the workshop night on the odd month, or post to MULGA WIRE, G.P.O. BOX 433, SYDNEY, 2001.

Mulga Wire is free to members of the Bush Music Club, and 30¢ to non-members. Subscription is \$3.00. per annum, including postage, for six issues.

Views expressed herein are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Bush Music Club or the editors.

Publishing committee consists of Bob Bolton, Ralph Pride, and Dave Johnson.

ADVERTISING.

Full Page.....\$5 Half Page.....\$3 Quarter Page.....\$2
Classified advertisements.....20¢ per line. Business Cards.....\$1
Copy is to be on Quarto and ready for reproduction by the times given above.

TALKING WITH JOHN DENGATE



John Dengate has been writing good topical songs for so long now that there are people who think his middle name is "Trad." or "Anon.". His songs are as up to date as the latest news broadcast and as historical as scandals and crises that have passed out of our memories into the pigeon-holes of Hansard.

BMC : Is there anything that stimulates you to write songs?

JOHN : Well, I suppose, an interest in politics, an interest in history, an interest in society; in the past and how the past relates to the present.

BMC : Why writing songs? Is there any musical background in your family?

JOHN : Not really....but I understand that my father was a fair sort of mouth organ player.I didn't really know that until I was in the Bush Music Club and I used to come home and practise various tunes, various songs, around the house, and first of all Dad disclaimed any interest but then he started to fish out the mouth organ and I found that he could play it then, thinking back, I remembered that he used to play it when I was a kid ... but that was so many years ago.

BMC : Did your interest in songwriting and singing start with the Bush Music Club?

JOHN : No. It started a bit before that. I think it probably started, when I was a kid I did write one or two songs to tunes I'd heard on the wireless, so I suppose I was always interested in writing songs.

BMC : What sort of songs were they?

JOHN : I think the first song I ever remember having written was a thing to the tune of.... .."In a cavern, in a canyon"....what's that called....?

BMC : Um....was a miner, forty-niner.....Oh! "Clementine."

JOHN : Yes..."Clementine"....I just can't remember the whole thing but I think the last verse

went:
Politicians, referendums,
Voting No and voting Yes,
This silly flutter, won't get us butter,
Or stop spuds from getting scarce.

JOHN : I think that was about the time of the Menzies referendum on the outlawing of the Communist Party, in the mid 1950's. I would have been about 15 or 16. I suppose the innate interest was there, but it was pretty well innate or undeveloped.

BMC : Was the political interest strong?

JOHN : Oh yes! Dad was very interested in politics and we used to get politics, morning, noon, and night.

BMC : What about once you were in the Bush Music Club?

JOHN : Well, actually, I was about to say, it did come even a bit before that. It came in Menidee when I met a bloke called Brian Mooney who was a labourer on the Water Conservation & Irrigation Commission and up until then I hadn't known anything about folk music, I was barely aware of its existence except in the form of nice little school songs... ..like "The keeper did a shooting go, and under his cloak he carried a bow, all for to shoot at a merry little doe, among the leaves so green oh" in fact it's a very good song...I taught it to my class....

BMC : Especially good when you realise what it's all about.....what kind of bow keepers carry under their cloak for shooting at merry little doe.

JOHN : Yeah...but I wasn't aware that folk music had other, more interesting facets until I met Brian Mooney and he knew a few of the very good, standard Australian folk tunes and he also knew a lot of Irish stuff; rebel songs, love songsparticularly the rebel songs, of course appealed to me because of the political aspects....that's where I became interested in the guitar as well, so that when I came to Sydney I bought a guitar and then started looking around, without really knowing what I was looking for, and found the Bush Music Club.

BMC : When was that?

JOHN : That would have been 1962 or 63....That was at the first Clarence St. premises.

BMC : Are you aware of writing in an Australian style?

JOHN : Yeah...I think that the Bush Music Club was a tremendous thing for me because I met people like John Meredith, Alan Scott, and Duke Tritton...and people like Jamie Carlin, younger people but the first thing was, I learnt a lot of tunes, I learnt a lot of songs.

BMC : Was it just tunes? What about styles? ...Guitar styles?

JOHN : Yeah, well not so much guitar styles because, quite frankly, there were no good guitarists in the Club, but Jamie, of course was a good concertina player, and tin-whistle player; There were good accordion players, good mouth-organ players and so on,...I couldn't say there were good guitarists, but certainly singing styles....anyone who's ever heard Duke Tritton sing, talked to him, listened to him....couldn't help but be influenced by him, and by people like John Meredith, Alan Scott, and all these other people....they certainly had a big influence on me. In fact Alan Scott was the first to say to me... .."If you're going to sing an Irish song, don't do it in a bogus Irish accent"...I've come to believe in that more and more, that you should sing songs in your natural voice, and not try to pretend to be something that you're not.

BMC : Do you think that there is a definable Australian Style?

John : It would certainly be difficult to define and I don't think there is one inflexible style. I think there are different styles and the different styles are probably related to

different individuals. What I'm trying to say is that each individual singer is naturally going to have an individual style, and that's good. You don't want everyone trying to sing the same. I agree.....I don't think you should go and get field recordings of Sally Sloane....Simon McDonald.....Duke Tritton...and try to imitate them...it's damn silly. But nevertheless, I think it's good to listen to these field recordings, to hear what these people did and to hear the way they interpreted the songs...I think it is partly a question of interpretation. Interpretation is a part of style, of course it is only a part. I think you've got to sing the songs as naturally as you can. I think you've got to know as much about the songs as you possibly can:

JOHN : Learn as much about the songs as you can; the history of the songs and develop sympathy for the songs. If you haven't got a deep feeling for the songs, a deep sympathy..an empathy perhaps is perhaps the right word, well, probably you're better off not singing it because I do believe that the song is more important than the singer...if it's an old song that has survived a hundred years or whatever, and if it has passed down from singer to singer and perhaps each singer has given a little more to it....then the song is more important....than the singer.

BMC : Yes, I've been listening to (a band) that I think is a good Irish band that thrives in camped-up Australian material, half of the time as a comedy relief.

JOHN Yes, I think this hamming-up of songs can be overdone.

BMC There are a couple of songs that bear it: Woolloomooloo Lair is one, but that isn't a bush song anyway.

JOHN A thing like....Widgeeweeera Joe...now, that really does lend itself to it. I remember in the old days of the Concert Party, we used to do it in the streets of Gulgong with Harry Glendinning, and Dale used to ring the bell....and Harry would get down....he'd almost be shearing the bloody sheep in the streets of Gulgong!

I think John Manifold had a bit to say about this sort of thing....about hamming up songs and, actually, John Manifold to some extent blamed "Reedy River"; if I remember correctly he said 'through "Reedy River" a lot of the new generation of bush singers seemed to think that they had to act the songs rather than just sing them'.

BMC He also blamed, I think, "Reedy River" for a distorted kind of bush band; he doesn't seem to think much of the lagerphone or the bush bass.

JOHN No, I can see what he's getting at ; I haven't got a lot of time for the lagerphone myself. I think a little bit of lagerphone goes a long way, actually.

BMC It's a good thing for keeping rhythm in dance music.

JOHN Yes, as long as it's not allowed to take over.

BMC As long as the bloke holding it keeps in rhythm.

JOHN Put it this way, I think lagerphones should be tolerated rather than encouraged.

BMC What about instruments....the guitar's not very traditional in Australia?

JOHN That's true....it's such a flexible instrument....you can play it so quietly....of course it's often played quite tastelessly, but it can be played so tastefully, so quietly, or it can be played quite vigorously....it's an instrument with such versatility and so much character. If it is used tastefully it can add to songs; if it's used in such a way that it detracts....I repeat, I think that the song is more important than the person

and I think the song is more important than the instrument...and if the instrument starts to detract from the song, then the guitar should be thrown down the steps.

BMC What do you think of unaccompanied singing? I know you do sing unaccompanied at times.

JOHN I like a bit of unaccompanied singing; again, I don't think that a flashy guitar style should be allowed to take over the song. I have seen some very good guitarists spoil songs by allowing their guitar technique to become more important than the song and I don't agree with that; I think, obviously, that everyone should play an instrument as well as they can, but when the song becomes just a vehicle for showing off a guitar technique, I don't approve of that...if it's a really worthwhile song. If the song's just some rubbishy little damn song, then it probably doesn't matter.

BMC What about the songs, written and traditional; how do you feel about your own songs and other people's written songs and the older traditional material? Is there a favourite there?

JOHN I've developed a really deep love for traditional music, particularly traditional British Isles, Irish, British-Australian and Irish-Australian. Through this feeling for this type of the songs I've written...well, often I've just lifted the tune...I've quite openly used a traditional tune, but I think this is in the folk tradition. Obviously that is what happened in the early days of Australia. People just wrote songs to existing tunes... sometimes it gives an old tune a new lease of life. Sometimes, I admit, it is being a bit presumptuous. If you take a tune that is already used as a vehicle for a damn good song and you just use that tune for a song of your own, well it's a little bit egotistical perhaps and you just have to hope that you're going to write a damn good song. If you don't, the sooner it's forgotten, the better.

BMC What comes first in writing the song, the tune or the idea?

JOHN It would be impossible for me to generalise. Sometimes I hear a tune for the first time and think 'Jeez, that's a good tune. I'd like to write a song to that tune and in that case the tune comes first. Often, no, I just get an idea and start writing it down, perhaps in a rough, poetical, form and then the tune suggests itself somewhere along the way in the song's development. Sometimes, they both seem to come together: a tune and an idea and often they're the best ones.

R.B.

B U S H B A N D

The bush band (alias the Concert Party) resumed its activities recently with a performance of songs and dance medleys at the Glebe Community Fair, on Saturday 23rd July. A well rehearsed but apprehensive group faced the audience and soon warmed, to give a creditable show. In attendance were Bob Bolton, Helen Dunlop, John Frazer, Ray Grieve, Dave Johnson, David Murkell, Anne Pidcock, Rose and Ralph Pride, Kerry Sanders and Keith Snell.

After this performance, the band was approached for the ARS VIVA Annual Jazz and Folk night at Lawson for the following Saturday. So began another week of intense practise with an emphasis on dance tunes for the required dancing. Performers this time were Bob Bolton, Jenny and John Frazer, Ray Grieve, Dave Johnson, Bob Murray, Anne Pidcock, Ralph Pride and Keith Snell. The audience were enthusiastic in their appreciation, particularly with the dances for each of which (4), they crammed the dance floor. Particular thanks to John and Jenny Frazer for their hospitality in providing accommodation for the group on Saturday night.

Present day Australia owes most of its cultural heritage to a very few unsung, unselfishly devoted folk collectors. These days, many would assume that the days of collecting folk material are past and gone. Nothing could be further from the truth! There is still a wealth of valuable material waiting to be preserved. Opportunities lost today are lost forever. For those who would like to have a go at it, but don't know how, we have re-printed the following article from our own Singabout magazine. It comes from John Meredith; prominent folk collector, foundation member, and life member of the Bush Music Club

COLLECTING FOLK SONGS

What to Look For. What is a Folk Song?

What is a folk song? Ask a dozen folk-lorists this question and you will get a dozen definitions. Some of the purists, would admit only the old country songs of Great Britain and Europe --- the songs of the peasants, or the "folk". Others, not quite as narrow in their consideration, might include the street ballads of a somewhat later period. These were written on the same themes as folk songs, and often sung to a folk song tune, but they were churned out by professional ballad writers for the consumer market. They would sell their song to a printer for a shilling or two, buy a few dozen broadsheets from him, and hawk them around the streets for a ha'penny or a penny, usually singing the song as they went, to help sales. Other folk song collectors would include as folk songs, all the old music hall and popular songs of the last century which have taken the public fancy and passed into the oral tradition i.e. circulated by word of mouth. Quite a few enthusiasts of the present day classify as folk songs, the more recent topical political and industrial songs.

It is necessary for each collector to arrive at his own definition, based on his own observations, and framed to suit his own ends. No other folk lorist will agree completely with him. My own definition at the present time, is more or less:-

"A song composed by an unsophisticated musician or singer to describe some happening or some aspect of his life, or of someone near to him, and written purely for the purpose of self expression or commemoration, and which has established itself in oral circulation."

I do not differentiate between the song set to an older folk tune and one set to an old popular tune. Indeed, it is sometimes impossible to tell what the origin of the tune is. Several songs I have recorded have had rather lovely simple tunes, which I considered to be traditional, e.g. Out on the Condamine, and Once I loved a fair young Jockey, but have since discovered to be derived from sentimental songs of the last century.

But I would not class Little Boy Lost as a folk song, although it takes on a narrative ballad form and was written under similar circumstances to many folk songs - to commemorate an event - because it was written by a professional purely and simply for the Top Forty market. If people are still singing it in the Guyra district in 50 years time, then I might change my opinion.

On the other hand, recently in Culgong, a sleeper cutter started to beef out a song in the bar of the Royal Hotel - Wrap me up with my Canthook and Wedges, a simply parody on The Dying Stockman. Here is a song that was written because the man liked the tune, but felt that the words didn't mean much to him, so he wrote new words, expressing how he felt about cutting timber up in the lonely hills on the west of the great divide.

There are those who say that all our Australian folk songs are only parodies, in short, that we have no Australian Folk Songs. But we must remember that there are NO ORIGINAL FOLK SONGS. All folk songs of all countries are derivative - they are adaptations, fusions, and variants of other older songs, quite often songs from other countries.

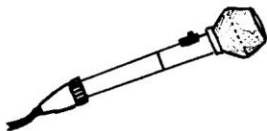
Even the songs on which these people say ours are parodied, are not pure by any means. They might say The Wild Colonial Boy, is only a parody on The Wearing of the Green; true, perhaps, but I wonder if they know that this typical Irish folk song The Wearing of the Green is a parody on a Scottish popular song?

Where To Find A Folk Song.

Now we have found out what a folk song is, perhaps we have decided to become a folk song collector. Having equipped yourself with a tape recorder -- a lightweight model, of course - you are ready to do some collecting, but where?

You needn't travel far. I have collected over half my material from the suburbs of Sydney. There are thousands of old people living in and around Sydney, who spent their lives in the bush, in the outback - or whose parents did - and who know many folk songs. Once you have located one, that person will often tell you of someone else. Sometimes it becomes a chain reaction, with uncles, aunts, parents and old mates coming in from everywhere. The same thing applies in country towns. It is just a matter of making diligent enquiry until you locate your first performer. I have often found that an advertisement or a paragraph in a local paper will bring good results. Likewise publicity in the bigger city papers, if it can be arranged.

Not all performers are old. I have recorded quite a few young blokes who picked up songs while knocking around the bush, or from their parents. The thing is that there are plenty of performers waiting to be recorded. I am most concerned that many of the older folk who know the songs are dying and taking a wealth of traditional folk lore and oral history to the grave. About half the old people on my tapes who were in the 70 to 80 plus age group are now dead. I have the names and addresses of many more who are not on my tapes -- I just didn't have time to call on them, and they are now dead. It is a terrible thing to realise that half the uncollected material now in existence will be lost for all time in the next five years.



How To Go About Recording It.

The most difficult part of folk song collecting is the actual making of the recordings and cataloguing them. Conducting the interview can be most difficult and this is where some would be collectors come to grief.

You must be sincere in your approach to the old folk, and you must talk to them in their own language. Any attempt to talk down to them will lead to failure.

And it doesn't do to try to be too witty either. Most old folks - country bred - have little time for city slickers and smart alecs.

I always try to show a genuine appreciation of the material at their own level and from their own viewpoint, and to this end I nearly always carry my accordian with me and am prepared to sing a song or two myself. Once I have the confidence of the performer it's usually easy going.

The next point we are concerned with is making the recording and conducting the interview. Many old folk are afraid of electrical gadgets, and this makes them liable to "mike fright" the main symptom of which is mental paralysis or mental confusion. I explain how the machine works and if necessary play over part of a tape of other recordings. This puts them at their ease and also gives an idea of the type of material you are seeking.

When making the actual recording, one thing you must remember is never to prompt the performer, should he falter in his singing. You might be recording a version of The Dying Stockman. The old chap sings one verse and chorus, starts the next verse, and suddenly forgets the words. You know this song well, and tell him the next couple of lines, so he sings them. That was the worst thing you could have done. He very likely knew quite different words to those you told him, but just used yours in desperation to fill in, and bang went your chance of getting an interesting variant of that song.

I never interfere or suggest words. It is better to switch off your machine and let your old man have a little practise, then have another go.

Now for the problems. The very next song the old chap will want to sing for you is Silver Threads Among the Gold or When You and I were Young Maggie. Please yourself whether you want to record everything he wants to sing, or whether you have a yarn and try to explain in ordinary language, just what a folk song is. It's not as easy as it sounds to really explain to an elderly person. I usually explain that I'm only interested in the old bush songs that people made up about themselves, or their work, and songs about shearers, bushrangers and so on, or the old British tunes that they were sometimes sung to. I generally get the old folk to understand what I want and why I want it. Of course some collectors like to record the complete repertoire of each performer, so they can get an idea of what percentage of the songs and music they know is really traditional and what is commercial.

As I have already said, the main things to remember are to be sincere in approach and tactful in explanation.

TO BE CONTINUED IN MULGA WIRE No. 3

THE FOLK EVENT OF OUR YEAR!
 THE 2ND. BUSH MUSIC
FESTIVAL

7TH-9TH OCTOBER

PROGRAMME

Friday : RECEPTION, Student union, Ultimo
 : CONCERT, Turner Hall, Ultimo.
 Saturday : WORKSHOPS, Student Union,
 : BUSH BALL, Balmain Town Hall,
 Sunday : BOREE LOG, Picnic at Australiana
 Village, Wilberforce, via Windsor

FINAL DETAILS TO BE ADVISED.

DON'T BELIEVE THE DATES ON BILLBOARD!

COMING SOON!!

Singabout

MAGAZINE

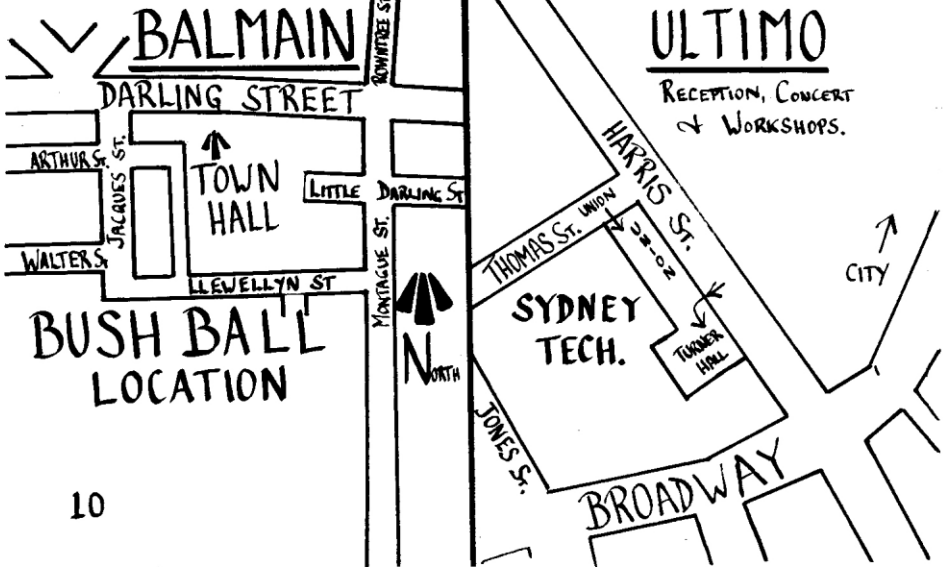
Vol. 7

Contributions of new or traditional songs; verse:
 arrangements: Australiana &c. must be with the publish-
 -ing committee (the haggard looking ones) by 6th.
 September, at the Bear & Cheese Night or by post to:
 Bush Music Club, G.P.O. Box 433, Sydney, 2001, or
 phone Ralph Pride on 502 2425.

DON'T BE THE ONE TO MISS OUT ON OUR BEAUT BUSH MUSIC SESSION

PICNIC, SAT. 6TH. AUGUST.

OATLEY PARK, OATLEY : STARTS 1.00 P.M.



CALENDAR NOTES

AUGUST Sat. 6th BOREE LOG

1.00 pm., Oatley Park, Oatley. Following the utter devastation of our last picnic through the efforts of the fabled Hughie, this popular function is now once again on. Campfire facilities are available.

Tues. 16th WORKSHOP

7.30 pm, Burwood. A workshop devoted to traditional Australian DANCE MUSIC..... Group practice, Expert instruction. Sheet music of arranged dance sets will be made available. For beginners and experienced players.

SEPTEMBER Tues. 6th BEER & CHEESE

Burwood. The Songs They Brought With Them
Although the club is primarily concerned exclusively with the propagation of Australian material, we have programmed a night of imported songs, with the aim of bringing to light something of the origins of Australian folk music.

Tues. 20th WORKSHOP

7.30 pm, Burwood. A workshop of traditional dances. Dance functions are becoming increasingly popular so here is a chance to learn some new dances, and polish up those which you may already know. Music is to be provided by the players from the previous workshop, making this one a double workshop.

OCTOBER Tues. 4th BEER & CHEESE

Burwood. Members' Choice
At last you can sing or have sung the songs you like the best. Always a popular evening, not to be missed.

7th - 9th BUSH MUSIC FESTIVAL:..... CONCERT : BUSH BALL : WORKSHOPS : BOREE LOG :

