

# **Some Preliminary Thoughts on Patterns of Programming in Australia's World Music and Folk Festivals**

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The process by which musicians are selected to perform at music festivals is influenced by a complex series of conventions and assumptions related to each festival's identity, history, management structure and strategic planning. In addition, artistic directors, program officers and program committees make choices based on their own aesthetic criteria. This paper examines the 2012/2013 program choices made by three specific festivals: WOMADelaide, the Bellingen Global Carnival and the Woodford Folk Festival. These three particular festivals have been chosen because each potentially includes musicians who might label their music using the moniker 'World Music'. Information about the festivals is drawn largely from publicly available documents and programs. In addition, we have each attended and/or performed at these festivals on a limited number of occasions over the past twelve years. This article contributes to current research being undertaken at Macquarie University in which World Music discourse and musical ownership amongst World Music practitioners in Australia is being investigated.

Not all musicians who perform at these particular festivals would describe their music using the term 'World Music'. Nonetheless, these festivals take part in complex representations of global sounds and cultures, and hence present opportunities for World Music musicians to gain a place on the program. Though the comparison of the three festivals chosen here is limited in scope, it allows some preliminary conclusions to be drawn about the way World Music is viewed in Australia as well as the way so-called 'World Music' musicians from overseas and within Australia are sponsored, promoted and presented.

## **World Music**

The problematic nature of the term 'World Music' has been discussed at length elsewhere (amongst others, see Taylor 1997, Turino 1998, Frith 2000, Baumann 2001, Stokes 2003 and Murphy 2007). Even though none of the festivals discussed here overtly state that they seek to promote 'World Music', we would argue that they each participate in the creation of a definition of World Music in Australia by virtue of the types of musicians that are included in their line-ups, and the invocation of globalizing terms in the promotion and construction of their programs.<sup>1</sup> The interpretations of World Music that are most evident in these festivals are firstly, one that associates the term with notions of geographical otherness, and secondly, one that demonstrates a semantic overlap with folk music.

As Mitchell (1993) has pointed out, Folkways replaced the term 'International Music' with 'World Music' as a category label in 1987. Such a change reflected underlying tensions between what constituted the 'World' and what might be construed as 'International' from different national perspectives. The same tensions continue to be present within the promotional and discursive constructions of WOMADelaide,

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1 For further discussion on the discourses of the global and its relation to culture, see Isar 2012.

Woodford and Bellingen. At WOMADelaide for example, the international theme is demonstrated by tying particular geographical place names to each artist listed in the program.

Equally problematic in this context is the term 'folk music'. As Graeme Smith (2003 and 2005) states, a blurring of the boundaries between an Australian folk music defined largely by its Anglo-Celtic roots as compared to a folk music based on traditional and contemporary music from the 'whole' of the world is one of the legacies of an increasingly multicultural Australia. Similarly, Mitchell (1993) demonstrates that our understanding of folk is tied to a definition of World Music as international. Festivals such as Bellingen and Woodford are two examples where an overlap between folk and World Music occurs.

Importantly however, the conflation of folk with World Music is part of a complex set of assumptions within different arenas of production and promotion. Numerous scholars have explored this complexity and a few may be cited here. Brusila (2003) examines how the anti-capitalist and communal ideologies of 'post-peasant' folk has clashed with the industrial 'star-system' of World Music. Smith (2005) discusses the crossovers between Australian folk, country, multicultural and world music in Australia and, amongst other things, notes the significant impact of government policy in this arena. Frith (2000, p.307) suggests that World Music is sold in the familiar package of roots rock that draws on folk song, record collecting and a 'pursuit of the original'.

### **Some Brief Background Information**

WOMADelaide was established in 1992 and takes its name from, and is associated with, WOMAD UK. WOMAD New Zealand is similarly associated with the WOMAD brand and was first held in Auckland in 2002. WOMADelaide was originally held biennially but as of 2002, became an annual event with the support of the South Australian Government (McCann 2012, p.10). Subsequently, the WOMADelaide Foundation Ltd was established in 2004 as a non-profit body to present the annual festival, and to foster and develop long-term educational activities (McCann 2012, p.10). Amongst other things, the foundation is charged with 'the responsibility of organizing and promoting special projects for remote Indigenous arts communities' (McCann 2012, p.10).

WOMADelaide promotes itself as 'Australia's favourite outdoor festival' as well as 'The World's Festival' (WOMADelaide Website). While the term 'World Music' actually does not appear on its website, WOMADelaide is closely associated with World Music performance in Australia (see Symons 2003, p.277).

The Bellingen Global Carnival is held on the October long weekend in Bellingen on the mid North Coast of NSW. Like the WOMADelaide website, the term 'World Music' rarely if ever appears on the Bellingen Global Carnival website, thus overtly distancing itself from the World Music industry as well as the WOMAD label. Global Carnivals Australia was founded as a company by Bryony Taylor and John Richards in 1995 when the first carnival was held (Global Carnivals Australia 2012). The company is a non-profit public company whose stated objectives (as they appear on the Carnival website) aim to 'engender an appreciation of Australia's cultural diversity through the performing arts' and 'provide opportunities for artists who may find their performance opportunities limited by the commercial structures common in the entertainment industry' (Global Carnivals Australia 2012).

The event is smaller than WOMADelaide with three main stages, a DJ tent and a bar with stage. The festival has had some unfortunate set backs in recent years, particularly with the death of John Richards and local elder Neville Buchanan in 2006, which caused the Carnival to take a break in that year. More recently, in 2010, severe weather caused the final days of the event to be cancelled with significant financial losses. Although the festival was held in 2011, again weather was problematic. In 2012, the festival took another break to assess its future.

The Woodford Folk Festival is an annual event held near the town of Woodford in southern Queensland. The first festival was held in 1987 in the town of Maleney and was moved to a site near the Woodford township in 1994. The Festival is produced by the Queensland Folk Federation Inc (QFF), and is described as 'a place you can escape from "reality" and immerse yourself in cultures from near and far' (Woodford Folk Festival, 'The Festival' 2012).

### **Global Harmony, Plurality and Indigenous Performers**

There are of course similarities between each of these festivals even though they each have somewhat different histories and strategic objectives. They each celebrate global harmony, promote grass roots music production, and support different kinds of World Music acts in a milieu of numerous performance and talk-fest events. Each sets up a series of stages for the event dates and invites small-scale vendors and food sellers to create a village atmosphere. The de-humanizing structures of global multinationals and the corporate world are purposely rejected, and instead, an 'authentic' village atmosphere is consciously created, thus overtly referencing a more personal global society actively living in harmony at the local level. Artists join in the village type festivities and reinforce notions of authenticity<sup>2</sup> in their music through association with the small-scale construction of a global village.

The impulse to celebrate cultural plurality and global harmony can be seen in a number of places. WOMADelaide is the 'Worlds Festival', while the Global Carnival overtly promotes an 'appreciation of Australia's cultural diversity'. Similarly, Woodford audiences can immerse themselves in cultures from near and far. The festivals survive and thrive on variation and multiculturalism. We would argue that difference is celebrated in an attempt to achieve global unity beyond the level of a subculture.

Of similar significance to all the festivals is their conscious inclusion of Indigenous Australians. This is a critical part of the Australian context in which the participation of Indigenous Australians signifies a critical self reflection on the global unity/plurality theme. In particular, as Neuenfeldt (2001, p. 65) states, until recently there have been few opportunities for Indigenous performers to participate in the Australian public performance culture. He documents the Murri Programme at Woodford at the turn of the millennium as an example of one project through which performers could 'perform their music, and hone their professional skills' in the broader music industry. At Woodford in 2012, the Songlines venue was dedicated to 'the world's First Nations artists' where one could join with traditional custodians and other senior First Nation's people in musical entertainment that moved between traditional dance performances

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2 The connection between authenticity and World Music has been discussed elsewhere by Frith (2000), Feld (2000), Brusila (2003) and Stokes (2004) amongst others.

and an ‘eclectic feast of funky grooves, reggae rhythms, tribal beats, desert rock, thumpin’ country and down and out soul grabbing blues’ (Woodford Folk Festival, ‘The Program’ 2012). Indigenous musicians are thereby placed within the festival’s overarching celebration of global plurality. Similarly, at WOMADelaide the band East Journey ‘offer a fresh take on music from Arnhem Land’ with earthy traditional sounds, while Sing Sing combine musicians and dancers from Australia, Tonga, PNG and elsewhere in a feast of Oceanic sounds (WOMADelaide Festival 2012). In all three festivals the need to create intercultural harmony at home is considered an essential part of the celebration of global harmony.

### **Practical Considerations and WOMAD Collaboration**

There are a number of other organizational strategies and aesthetic choices at a more practical level that influence programming and ultimately differentiate each of the festivals discussed here. Some of these practicalities are expressed on the festival websites within the instructions for musicians wishing to perform. The following ‘Information for artists interested in performing at WOMADelaide’, is a case in point:

WOMADelaide is an invitation-only (curated) festival with the budget and space to program around 35 international and 25 Australian artists/groups each year, including street theatre and visual artists. A new line-up is presented each year and repeat acts usually only return after a gap of 5 years or more. International artist selection is done in consultation with WOMAD Ltd in the UK and WOMAD NZ (which is held the weekend after WOMADelaide)

The festival does not encourage unsolicited applications and there are no application forms to fill in. ... Broadly speaking, the festival seeks artists of a very high standard – rock, opera, pop, urban/R&B and jazz styles are not usually programmed (WOMADelaide Festival 2012).

The statement above clearly emphasizes the curatorial direction of the programming. Artists must either be well-known or be summoned for a specific reason in order to appear in the line up. Significantly, rather than trying to define which acts will be selected, the instructions provide a short list of exclusions. The influence of the broader WOMAD organization, particularly in the UK and New Zealand is clearly stated.

In an interview with WOMADelaide Program Director Annette Tripodi (pers. comm. 17 July 2012), she clarified these matters and emphasized four things that influenced programming decisions: logistics; international profile; excellence and the demographic profile of the WOMADelaide audience.

Regarding logistics, WOMAD festivals in Australia and NZ, unlike their counterparts in Europe, cannot rely on a stream of performers travelling through the country from whom they can pick and choose. By contrast, in Europe, festival organizers can book a ‘show’ and assume that artists as well as managers will organize travel, visas, accommodation, customs clearance and quarantine. For Australia and New Zealand these added logistical burdens need to be considered and budgeted for. In general, therefore, festivals in Australia and New Zealand must choose a number of big name headlining World Music acts that attract crowds but do not break the budget. Once they have made these decisions the remainder of the program can be filled with local acts.

One way that WOMADelaide is trying to manage the extra burden of logistics is by coordinating their programming with other events. In our interview with Tripodi, she

stated that international artists are generally booked at the same time for both WOMADelaide and WOMAD NZ. A cursory look at the Adelaide and NZ festivals shows the level of collaboration that is undertaken. Table 1 provides a list of musicians performing at the 2013 Adelaide and New Zealand events. The left-hand column presents the Australian line up while the right-hand column presents the New Zealand line up. As is customary for the WOMAD sites, each act is identified not only by name but also by country of origin, thus emphasizing the diversity of *nationalities* in the list.

Table 1: Artists appearing at WOMADelaide and WOMAD NZ (WOMADelaide Festival 2012 and WOMAD NZ 2012).

<b>2013 WOMADelaide (8-11 March)</b>	<b>2013 WOMAD NZ Taranaki (15-17 March)</b>
Hugh Masekela (South Africa)	Hugh Masekela (South Africa)
Jimmy Cliff (Godfather of Roots Reggae) (Jamaica)	Jimmy Cliff (Jamaica)
Clairy Browne & the Bangin' Rackettes (Australia)	
The Correspondents (UK)	The Correspondents (UK)
DJ Click (France)	DJ Click (France)
Salif Keita (Mali)	Salif Keita (Mali)
Mia Dyson (Australia)	
East Journey (Australia)	
The Herbaliser DJs (UK)	
LA 33 (Colombia)	LA 33 (Colombia)
Vieux Farka Toure (Mali)	Vieux Farka Toure (Mali)
Kingfisha (Australia)	
Moriarty (France)	
Novalima (Peru)	Novalima (Peru)
Paul Ubana Jones (UK/Nigeria/NZ)	
Tim Rogers & The Bamboos (Australia)	
Souad Massi (Algeria/France)	
The Herd (Australia)	

Alim Qasimov Ensemble (Azerbaijan)	
The Tallest Man on Earth (Sweden)	
The Volatinsky Trio (Russia/Australia)	
The Cat Empire (Australia)	
Sing Sing (Australasia)	
Compagnie Luc Amoros "Blank Page" (France)	
Golonka (Australia)	
Soweto Gospel Choir (South Africa)	Soweto Gospel Choir (South Africa)
Illapu (Chile)	
Zoe Keating (USA)	
Heather Frahn and the Moonlight Tide (Australia)	
Antibalas (USA)	Antibalas (USA)
The Bird (Australia)	
Amparo Sanchez (Spain)	Amparo Sanchez (Spain)
Tubular Bells for Two (Australia)	
Mari Boine (Norway)	Mari Boine (Norway)
<i>The Alaev Family (Tajikistan/Israel)</i>	The Alaev Family (Tajikistan/Israel)
Adnaan Baraky (Syria/Australia)	
Tuba Skinny (USA)	
Abigail Washburn & Kai Welch (USA)	Abigail Washburn & Kai Welch (USA)
Jordi Savall – the Celtic Viol (Spain)	Jordi Savall – the Celtic Viol (Spain)
Lau (Scotland)	Lau (Scotland)
Goran Bregovic (Serbia)	Goran Bregovic Wedding and Funeral Band (Serbia)
Bassekou Kouyate & Ngoni Ba (Mali)	Bassekou Kouyate & Ngoni Ba (Mali)
Seth Lakeman (UK)	

Manjiri Kelkar (India)	Manjiri Kelkar (India)
Savoy Family Cajun Band (USA)	Savoy Family Cajun Band (USA)
Nidi d'Arac (Italy)	Nidi d'Arac (Italy)
Ayarkhaan (Russia)	Ayarkhaan (Russia)
Mara & Martenitsa Choir (Australia)	
Hugo Mendez (UK)	Hugo Mendez (UK)
Arpaka Dance Company (Australia)	
Psarantonis (Greece)	
Christine Salem (Reunion)	
Shunsuke Kimura & Etsuro Ono (Japan)	Shunsuke Kimura & Etsuro Ono (Japan)
Swamp Thing (NZ)	
Sudha Ragunathan (India)	Sudha Ragunathan (India)
Dhafer Youssef (Tunisia)	
	VulgarGrad (Australia)
	AHoriBuzz (NZ)
	Aotearoa National Māori Choir with the Yoots (NZ)
	Barnaby Gibbons (UK)
	David Kilgour and the Heavy Eights (NZ)
	Electric Wire Hustle Family (NZ)
	Fly My Pretties (NZ)
	Grace Barbe (Australia/Seychelles)
	Jax Hamilton (NZ)
	Melbourne Ska Orchestra (Australia)
	Mihirangi (NZ)
	Newtown Rocksteady (NZ)

	Tenzin Choegyal and the Monks of Tibet (Tibet) & (Australia)
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A number of things about the programming are notable. By far the majority of acts that are exclusive to WOMADelaide are local acts. The same is true to an even greater extent for the WOMAD NZ line up. The majority of international acts who travel southwards, travel to both Australia and New Zealand – confirming a considerable amount of collaboration. Collaboration serves to consolidate broader organizational networks, which may in turn provide some economies of scale.

There is of course a clearly stated link between WOMAD UK and the Antipodean festivals. Five acts that appear in the 2013 WOMADelaide and WOMAD NZ programs also appear in the 2012 WOMAD UK program. These are Jimmy Cliff (Jamaica), Hugh Masakela (South Africa), Seth Lakeman (UK), The Correspondents (UK) and The Alaev Family (Tajikistan/Israel). By contrast, the two Antipodean acts in the UK festival – NZ Shapeshifters and (NZ) and Barons of Tang (OZ) – do not appear in the 2013 WOMADelaide or WOMAD NZ programs. It seems, therefore, that program coordination between WOMAD UK and the Antipodes is largely in one direction. Certainly no direct connection in the opposite direction existed in 2013.

As McCann (2012, p.10) states, there has always been some level of organizational interaction between The Adelaide Festival and WOMADelaide. Between 1993 and 2003 the festival organizers and trustees kept the two festivals in opposite years. From 2003 onwards, however, the two festivals have been presented concurrently, with WOMADelaide occurring across the middle weekend of The Adelaide Festival dates. In 2013, for instance, The Adelaide Festival dates were March 1 – 17 and the WOMADelaide festival dates were 8 – 11 March. Though collaboration remains largely at the administrative levels, there have been a few artists who have appeared in both. For instance, in 2013 two artists, Jordi Savall and Goran Bregovich appeared in both line-ups. Presumably, both artists were considered to hold an attraction for the different demographic groups that each festival catered for. Promotion through both festivals' advertising campaigns/networks may have targeted different audience groups.<sup>3</sup>

### **Opportunities for Collaboration at Woodford and Bellingen**

In contrast to WOMADelaide, the Woodford Folk Festival and the Bellingen Carnival have few other major festivals with which they can coordinate programming. The point is emphasized on the Woodford Festival site as follows:

... [w]e cannot cover the costs associated with bringing an international touring act to Australia specifically for the festival.

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<sup>3</sup> The Adelaide Fringe Festival is another part of the March festival season in Adelaide. In 2013, none of the acts listed in the Adelaide Fringe Festival were listed in the WOMADelaide lineup.

We recommend that Artists/Presenters wanting to perform at the Woodford Folk Festival, propose our festival as one date of a self organised and funded tour (Woodford Folk Festival, 'Participate' 2012).

The same is undoubtedly true for the Bellingen Carnival. Large international acts – while necessary for headline value – need to perform elsewhere in Australia to cover costs. Nonetheless, the Peats Ridge Festival, which occurs at the same time as the Woodford Festival appears to offer some opportunities for collaboration. French one-man band 'Chapelier Fou' performed at both recent festivals. He has also appeared at WOMADelaide and WOMAD NZ in the recent past. Similarly, Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings – a ten-piece group from New York, performed at Peats Ridge and Woodford. However, the majority of 'World Music' acts are either local talent, or organize their own tours as recommended by the festival organizers. For instance, Indian sitarist, Rabindra Narayan Goswami performed at Woodford with Indian flautist and Australian resident Vinod Prasanna before the two toured elsewhere in Eastern Australia.

### **New Folk; Old Folk**

The other obvious difference between WOMADelaide and festivals like Woodford and Bellingen is the fact that blues, rock or jazz acts are not excluded in the latter. Whereas WOMADelaide overtly discourages certain genres, the Global Carnival is comfortable placing a DJ like Hermitude in a line up that includes World Music star Baaba Maal. At Woodford, Regurgitator is welcome on the same stage as the Gyuto Tibetan Monks – albeit not at the same time!

At WOMADelaide, a global village is celebrated but there are some limitations. By contrast, Woodford and Bellingen place no such restrictions on themselves and seek to create the same global village as WOMAD. They promote their own independence and the independent nature of the artists they attract.

In this festival milieu of folk and World Music acts, what used to be portrayed as 'The West' and the 'Rest' – two categories that uncomfortably mapped onto Anglo-Celtic folk music within Australia in opposition to everyone else – has now been replaced by a designation based on Australia vs. the Rest. The new designation is not on aesthetic grounds but on place of origin. Acts are either labeled 'International' if they come from overseas – or are silently acknowledged to be 'Other' if they come from within Australia. Australia then adopts for itself the designation of 'Other' in opposition to an International identified beyond its boundaries. Or perhaps the International is still 'the other' in opposition to an otherwise inclusive Australian domain. In whatever way 'Othering' is shaped, there is an International and a Non-International with no aesthetic distinction between the two. Global harmony is thus further emphasized through a partnership based on the exclusion of only two things: commercial mainstream popular music and classical (with a few exceptions).

### **Conclusion**

There are a few conclusions that may be drawn from the comparisons provided in this paper. First, the festivals that have been discussed continue to celebrate plurality and diversity in ways that seem to confirm many aspects of broader World Music discourses. One can detect tensions between the overlap of the genre terms 'folk' and 'World Music' as used in the music industry and these tensions influence festival

programming in a variety of ways. Second, within the WOMAD festivals at least, collaborative programming seems to foreshadow a trend that may well become more pervasive in the future. For the Australian and New Zealand festivals, economic survival requires international collaboration. Third, the connotations of World Music as pertaining to the geographical 'Other' has implications for both the marketing and programming of acts at these festivals. The history of immigration policy from the 1970s onwards in Australia has required a re-evaluation of just who the 'other' is in a multicultural society.

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