

ABORIGINES TAKE THE AIR

Unusual Broadcasts Prepared

A young Australian girl has for some months been busy preparing a unique series of radio broadcasts. She is Julitha Walsh who, in the session "Under the Southern Cross", sang aboriginal songs and played tape recordings of native music never before heard by white folk.

A free-lance broadcaster, Julitha spent most of her twenty-one years on Mileura sheep station in the far outback of Western Australia. Her name, Julitha, is the aborigine for Walkabout. She is a seventh generation Australian, whose great-great-grandmother came out to Sydney in 1790 with a letter of introduction from Lord Nelson to the Governor of the Colony.

Bush Was Home

As a child Julitha's only playmates were the pickaninnies belonging to the aborigines who worked on Mileura. The natives taught her their songs, folk legends and customs and she grew to love these kind and gentle people. She spoke their dialect as fluently as English.

By the time she was six years old she would ride out mustering with the stockmen, and when she was sent to boarding school in Perth she was so lonely for the bush that she says she "cried for three days."



When she was still in her teens her father passed on and for two years she and her mother managed the 750,000-acre station. Her mother looked after the administration side and Julitha organized the muster camp, and earned the reputation of being one of the finest stockwomen in the West.

She took a course in wool classing by correspondence and each season she classed 2,000 fleeces. She loved the rugged life and was particularly fascinated by the Gniganya tribe which had been employed on the property for three generations.

Her special friend and singing teacher was Bunnabuddy, the wife of the chief. "My singing daughter," her mother used to call Julitha.

Knowing how well she sang their songs, the chief presented her with two corroboree sticks, which are used to beat time with the music, and taught her how to play them. About nine inches long and an inch thick, they are made of coolibah wood and are smooth from being handled so much.

Two years ago, Julitha and her mother and young brother left Mileura in charge of a manager and moved to Sydney. One day she was invited to appear in a radio session and talk about her experiences in the outback among the aborigines.

She illustrated her talk with an eerie tribal song that Bunnabuddy had taught her; and it was this song, so exciting and sung in a low husky voice with such fire and primitive rhythm, that gave her her start as a free-lance broadcaster.

Musical Gold Mine

Afterward she was asked to give a series of talks on aboriginal life and customs, and then the Australian Broadcasting Commission lent her a tape recorder and, with three suitcases of equipment, she went off on a one-woman "walkabout" to the Centre to record native music and gather material on the everyday life of the tribes.

She spent most of the time among the aborigines at million-acre Noonkah Station in Western Australia. To them she was Collinda, "the young girl with fair hair and blue eyes."

When they had overcome their fear of the "music box," as they called the tape recorder, they treated it as a great joke and everybody wanted to sing into it. Every evening they gathered on the lawn in front of the homestead and made music for her.

One day, Julitha called all the men of the tribe together and asked them if they would sing their sacred men's songs for her. "No women to look," she said, and added sternly, "Koonju womba idga," which means "Sing properly, and don't pull my leg."

They recorded for her their ancient chants, and presently she heard giggling and looked round and saw the bushes moving, and little heads appearing. All the girls were listening in!

Julitha came back from her six-month "walkabout" having travelled 14,000 miles, recorded the music of six corroborees, and sixty songs. Some were soft women's songs, such as lullabies, others were songs of the pickaninnies telling of the snake and the little emu. All were songs never before heard by white people. Now her ambition is to travel widely and tell the world about her friends, the aborigines.