

24 January 1984

Ms Robin Boylan
Western Australian Museum
Francis Street
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Robin,

In acknowledgement of your letter of 13 December, 1983 I enclose photocopies of two articles describing two different phases of my work on cataloguing tape-recorded Aboriginal music (See Recorded Sound, No 37 January, 1970 and Phonographic Bulletin No 28, November, 1980.

In my PhD thesis, submitted 1974, to the Music Department, Monash University, I attempted "a taxonomic approach to the study of Aboriginal song performances". Nine song categories, designed for music collected from Cape York, Queensland to the Kimberleys, WA, were described:-

- 1) Cult; 2) Maraiin; 3) Magical; 4) Clan; 5) Djatpangarri;
- 6) individually-owned; 7) Women's 'love magic'; 8) birth, 'crying' songs etc; 9) children's songs. Over and above these nine categories there are, as you know, two dominating song classes : 'Open' and 'closed' (ie restricted to the uninitiated).

Auditioning, that is listening to the recorded contents, is, in my view, an essential part of the cataloguing of Aboriginal music. Song items must be heard and recognised as such, each one numbered on the "Audition sheet" (for accurate scientific reference) and all item durations timed with a stop watch. As part of the cataloguing process these items should be retrievable either by means of an electronic 'pips' signal (on the matching tape copy) or by reference to a tape clock or timer on the playback machine.

As you will realise, cataloguing Aboriginal music is aurally exacting; and it is essential to have technological assistance for such work.

The processing of audio data - I have coined the term 'audiography' for this work - must not be confused with musicological (ethnomusicological) research work based on these data.

Classification and categorisation of music depends primarily on the goals of the researcher; and the researcher's own powers of aural perception play a vital part here.

The only reliable method I know for distinguishing song types is to take copies of the tapes into the field and play them to knowledgeable Aboriginal men. Even then, there may be some dispute! Knowledgeable Aboriginal men are not as numerous today as they used to be.

I would be very glad indeed to have your initial listing of the W.A.M. collection of Aboriginal songs from the Kimberleys. This would make it easier for me to advise you further.

Awaiting your reply,

Yours sincerely

Alice Moyle (Dr)
Honorary Visiting Fellow