

Ethnomusicology Section

21st September, 1967

Mr. C. Osborne,
Snake Bay Settlement,
Melville Island,
via DARWIN.

Dear Mr. Osborne,

Thank you for your letter of 5th September and the enclosed information about Spencer's recordings. This will make a very valuable addition to the documentation relating to tape recordings which we are assembling here in our tape library.

I have listened again to the Bathurst Island recordings with your transcriptions in front of me and am delighted to find that both words and song rhythms can now be followed clearly.

As a matter of further interest - and hoping you will have a few spare moments to hear them - I am sending you under separate cover a very short recording of song words spoken to me following some singing by Snake Bay boys in Darwin. As an excuse for my persistence here, I can only say that expert transcriptions of song words are invaluable to ethnomusicologists; and, naturally, whenever they can be used in publications they are very gratefully acknowledged.

I have been especially interested to know that your informants confirmed what mine have told me and that Spencer's cylinder No. 4 does not contain Tiwi material. After playing No. 4 to a Jiwadja group at Bagot in 1962, the spokesman, Tuesday Cooper, said he thought the singing related to an open (non-secret) ceremony held on the mainland. The people to whom the ceremonial singing was thought to belong included groups from Victoria River, Wave Hill, Port Keats and Roper River. It was said that the didjeridu was not normally used by these mainland groups. But Tuesday Cooper thought that, on this occasion, "white man, he tell 'em". Perhaps Spencer asked everybody present to perform at once!

2.

The end of the high vocal part which concludes cylinder No. 4 was emphatically entitled Nga:lguruk. From other comments made by Tuesday Cooper it seemed to me that "Nga:lguruk" is the same ceremony as Ngurimak, also known at Oenpelli as "Ubar". The Jiwadja folk told me - and I should be glad to have your confirmation of this - that on Bathurst Island the didjeridu is called aritzu:da(?) and that it was first used "only to copy birds, geese, buffalo or man (sic)". It was not used with singing. Do Tiwi men play the didjeridu nowadays?

According to my informants in Darwin, it is possible to hear a remark on No. 20 (recorded at Bathurst Island) called out by one of the dancers: "Oh don't be too long". Apparently the custom is, or was, for one dancer when tired to call out for some one to take his place. I am wondering if you have been able to record any spoken accounts of song or dance procedures of this kind?

If you happen to pass through Melbourne on your return from the north and could manage to visit the Ethnomusicology Section we should be very glad to see you.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs.) Alice M. Moyle,
A.I.A.S. Research Fellow

... 1 encl, under separate cover

An