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SIR BALDWIN SPENCER'S RECORDINGS OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL SINGING.

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Introductory Note.

Sir Baldwin Spencer's phonograph recordings (1901 and 1912) in the National Museum of Victoria were dubbed on tape in July, 1957. I auditioned these and made a few fragmentary transcriptions during a short visit to Melbourne the following August.

Considering the age and inevitable crystallising of the wax cylinders, sound-transcription is remarkably successful. This was achieved by fixing a diamond stylus from the original reproducing head to a crystal pick-up. Surface noise was reduced by filtering. Except in one or two places (see Record Annotations) the singing with " stick " and " conch " accompaniment may be clearly heard.

To check tape announcements (by the audio engineer) with Spencer's own spelling of the aboriginal titles, I was granted permission to visit the Museum's strong room where the cylinder collection was kept. There I found 4 large 4¼ inch (internal diameter) and 26 small 2 inch cylinders. Numbers, dates and titles, presumably in Spencer's hand, were written on the outsides of the cardboard box covers. Most of the small boxes were marked N.T.1912.

Three titles on the larger boxes did not agree entirely with Spencer's spoken titles as I had just heard them on tapes. I was interested to note that these corresponded with some in another set of records made by Spencer in 1901 which I had previously heard in Adelaide (1956), also dubbed on tape.

At some stage in their history, the 1901 cylinders—including possible duplicates—became divided and the box covers changed about. Those in Adelaide (Section 5), which are fitted in a carrying case with felt-lined lid and cylinder supports, were probably selected for a special purpose.

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* Mrs. John Moyle, author of "Know Your Orchestra" (Cheshire's) which she wrote as Alice Brown.

At the commencement of each Record Annotation will be found my copy of Spencer's box number, title and comments. Some were not easily deciphered and I may have misinterpreted these.

Acknowledgments.

The following musical analysis forms part of a project on the intervallic structure of Australian aboriginal singing undertaken in the Department of Music, University of Sydney, with assistance from the University Research Grant.

Acknowledgment is also made to the Director of the National Museum of Victoria, Mr. C. W. Brazenor, who kept me informed of re-recording proceedings, and, on my arrival in Melbourne, supplied me with a first-class machine for playing the tapes.

I. SPENCER'S REFERENCES TO THE RECORDINGS.

W. Baldwin Spencer made his first recordings of Australian aboriginal singing at Stevenson's Creek and Charlotte Waters in March and April, 1901. As pioneer in this field, his claim (1928, p. 355) has not been disputed.

An earlier collection of wax cylinders was played before the Royal Society of Tasmania in 1899, but the singer's mother was allegedly a Tasmanian aborigine.[1]

Spencer's recordings were made on a large Edison phonograph, the gift of Dr. Angus Johnson in Adelaide and with the cinematograph used on the same expedition, it was regarded at the time as " magnificent equipment " (Thomas, 1901).

After taking the train from Adelaide to the terminus at Oodnadatta Spencer, then Professor of Biology at the University of Melbourne, and F. J. Gillen, Special Magistrate and Sub-Protector of the S.A. Aborigines, followed the telegraph line to Alice Springs. During this earlier stage of their journey, which proceeded further north, the $4\frac{1}{4}$ inch cylinder-recordings were made.

The novelty of hearing themselves " played back " at first alarmed the aborigines but Spencer and Gillen soon found, as others have done since, that little coaxing was needed to get them to sing near the machine. Children were always too shy to perform—the reason, perhaps, for the disappointing dearth of children's singing in all record collections.

[1] Fed. Record Library, A.B.C. Sydney 4 songs on 16 inch disc.

Comparing Spencer's method of recording with his own, Davies (1927) believed that better results could be obtained by selecting and bringing one or two natives to the phonograph horn than by attempting to record the entire group.

It is true that Professor Davies obtained good vocal definition this way, although the instrumental accompaniments on his recordings[2] are not always audible.

From Spencer's records, many of which have captured the sound of accompaniments such as calls, thuds and other percussive noises, a clear impression may be obtained of the general style of the ceremony and of the song's actual part in it. And, despite these background sounds, melodic outlines are not obscured. Moreover, " actuality " recordings, in which Professor Elkin has also specialised, can demonstrate (with the help of descriptive notes made on the spot) the parts taken by soloists, group and, to some extent, dancers. Recorded male and female voices are not always clearly distinguishable. Some female voices have a harsh, chest quality, others are nasal and strident, depending, no doubt, on the age of the women. Two women's corroborees may be heard on Spencer's cylinders Nos. 9 and 16 (1912).

In his diary (1901) Spencer gives an account of conditions under which the first records were made. Extracts which refer to the phonograph are given below:—

Camp 4—*Stevenson River.*

March 22 The phonograph is a beauty! It was given to us in Adelaide and we can both take records with it and repeat them as soon as they are taken. Gillen and myself felt quite happy to be amongst the blacks again and to hear the old corroboree songs once more and I don't know whether we or the natives were the more excited.

Camp 9—*Charlotte Waters.*

March 28 This evening we have had the phonograph at work again and shall soon have done with this and shall send it back again. It has been a success and we have got some good corroboree songs.

March 29 Today we have been at work again with the phonograph. First of all we got 2 lubras to talk as if they were having a quarrel which they did in real earnest and then we made them end up with a peal of laughter.

[2] Col. (Aust.) PRX 9–11 (12 inch standard).

The language they used can't well be translated but it sounds splendid. After that we did the same with two men, but it is not quite so good. Then the women sang corroboree songs . . .

March 30 The natives have not come in yet and all we can do is wait patiently for them. I have the cinematograph ready to work when they do come. They are going to give us some rain dances during which they will wear great big head dresses and look very grotesque.

March 31 . . . Last night we got some more phonograph records—one or two especially good rain songs in which two men imitated at intervals the cry of the curlew which came with the rain.

April 1 The natives are gradually coming in . . . they have promised to give us a corroboree tomorrow so that I shall have the chance of using the cinematograph for the first time.

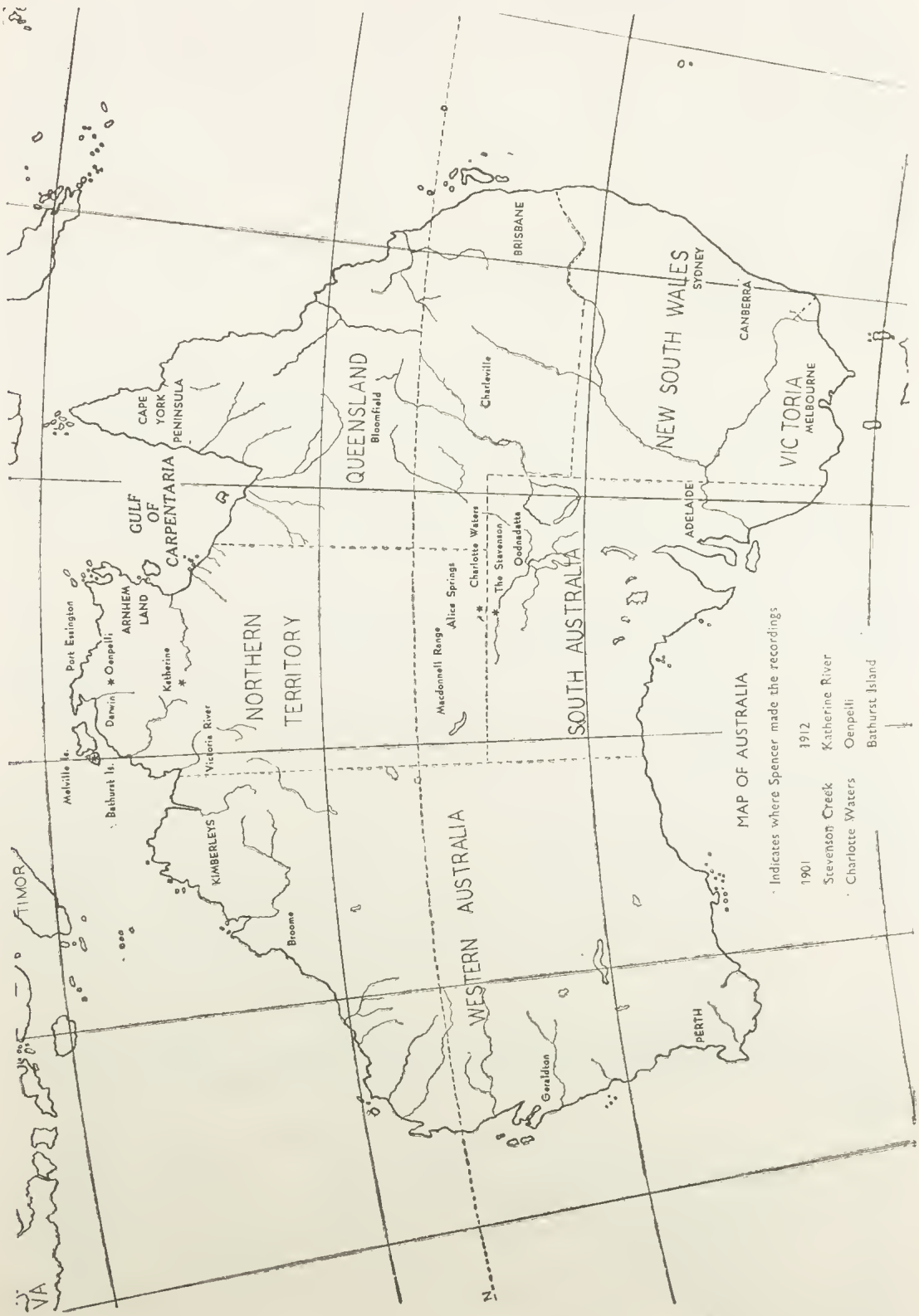
April 2 The natives came in bringing some special sticks like huge bull-roarers from a place about 25 miles off. They are now decorating them with designs in red ochre and charcoal and white clay in a quiet spot down by the water-hole so that the women cannot see them. They are going to perform tomorrow.

April 3 . . . in the evening we had the natives up for a last go at the phonograph. We only had material for three songs and when we had taken these and let the men hear them we packed the machines and records up ready to go back to Adelaide by a team starting down in the morning.

Spencer makes further reference to the 1901 records: (1928 Vol. I: 361):

> The wax cylinders that we had to use were so large —they were between 5 and 6 inches in diameter[3]—that I was afraid to risk carrying them further north, not only because of the heat, but because of travel on camel-back, which was the only means of transport, so I thought it safer to use them all whilst we were in camp at Charlotte Waters, pack them up and send them south from there, so as to avoid as much travel on camel-back as possible. As it was, 8 out of the 36, despite careful packing, were cracked and spoiled during transit.

[3] This would be a generous estimate of the external diameter A.M.


TIMOR
Melville Is.
Bathurst Is.
Port Essington
Darwin
Oenpelli
ARNHEM LAND
GULF OF CARPENTARIA
CAPE YORK PENINSULA
Katherine
Victoria River
NORTHERN TERRITORY
KIMBERLEYS
Broome
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Geraldton
PERTH
QUEENSLAND
Bloomfield
Charleville
BRISBANE
Macdonnell Range
Alice Springs
Charlotte Waters
The Stevenson
Oodnadatta
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
ADELAIDE
NEW SOUTH WALES
SYDNEY
CANBERRA
VICTORIA
MELBOURNE
MAP OF AUSTRALIA
Indicates where Spencer made the recordings
1901 1912
Stevenson Creek Katherine River
Charlotte Waters Oenpelli
Bathurst Island

The total number of wax cylinders used during Spencer's excursions to Katherine River, Oenpelli and Bathurst Island in 1912 is not known. But more of these smaller reels appear to have survived transit from the Northern Territory and other possible hazards. By 1912, phonographic equipment was lighter, more compact and the cylinders more durable. Twenty-six of these have been successfully dubbed on tape, not excluding three unidentified specimens.

For verifying the dates of some of the later recordings, further quotation is made from Wanderings in Wild Australia (Vol. II:891ff):

> After our motor trip (from Katherine to the Gulf of Carpentaria then south to Newcastle Waters) Dr. Gilruth[4] had gone to Darwin and I stayed behind at the Katherine waiting for Cahill, who came in from the Roper on October 26th. I had sent down to Melbourne for a phonograph and fortunately it had come in time for Cahill to bring it with him, so we managed to secure some good results of native corroborees and ceremonial songs.

Nov. 4 We packed up and today Cahill and myself started off for the Flora River, when we hoped to come in contact with one or two tribes, more especially the Waduman and Mudburra who live in the Victoria River country. (See records Nos. 12 and 21 A.M.)

On November 29th, 1912, Spencer left Darwin for Bathurst Island.

Dec. 2 (Bathurst Island) . . . I had brought the phonograph over so we were able to get not only cinematograph records of the dancing, which include the usual ones, buffalo, crocodile and sailing boat, but also very interesting phonograph records of the songs associated with the ceremony. (See records Nos. 3, 4, 6, 16 and 20 A.M.)

An entry in Spencer's diary for Saturday, October 26th—Monday, November 4th, 1912, at the Katherine Telegraph Station, reads:

> . . . With the aid of Cahill I have got some very good phonograph records here . . . They are the same as Gillen and I got before with just slight differences (marginal note: really are quite different) in that one or two of them are more interesting because a kind of trumpet made out of a hollow branch was used.

[4] Dr. J. A. Gilruth, Administrator of the Northern Territory.

II. ACCOMPANYING INSTRUMENTS.

Sound-accompaniments to the singing are profuse in the 1912 series of recordings.

Apart from vocal accompaniments, which include ceremonial calls and shouts, a variety of rhythmical percussive sounds are audible such as claps, thuds (stamping?) and the striking together of special pieces of wood or " sticks ".

These rhythm sticks are of various shapes and sizes and have been observed in Central Australia (Spencer 1899, p. 604) and in Arnhem Land (Elkin 1953, p. 94). An especially heavy pair was recorded by C. P. Mountford on Groote Eylandt (picture on p. 31).

Peculiar clattering sounds betray the presence of boomerangs which are struck together, two to each player. In the record titles these are apparently included among the " sticks ". Singing to the accompaniment of beaten boomerangs—broader, flatter and more curved than the sharp-angled, returning type (see picture p. 31)—has been recorded many times in the centre, also in the west and north of the continent.

Also recorded on the 1912 series are accompanying sounds made by the " conch ", Spencer's name for the Australian wooden trumpet, currently called the " didjeridu "* (p. 32).

Spencer's recordings of the " conch " are important. Those from Bathurst Island (cylinder Nos. 4 and 6) point to a wider distribution of this " aerophone " (Sachs 1940) than is indicated by later recordings from Arnhem Land and the Kimberleys. And the sample from the Katherine (Cylinder No. 24), in which several " conches " deliver high-pitched, unmusical sounds is unique among Australian records. These, surely, are the " horn blasts " to which Davies (1927) referred.

In style, the Nabakawulla conch accompaniment (Cylinder No. 6) is similar to didjeridu droning in the west and north-west of Arnhem Land. (Transcription Ex. 4 and Record Annotations to Cylinder No. 6 p. 21.)

The Bathurst Island performances may have resulted from a recent importation of the trumpet from the mainland. It is possible that didjeridu players from Port Essington accompanied Cooper to Melville Island. Spencer however, says nothing of a

* Dr. H. Basebow (1925). The first writer to use the term " didgeridoo ", observed that the player blew with a vibratory motion of the lips and at the same time sputtered into the tube indistinct words which sound like " tidjarudu, tidjarudu, tidjaruda " (p. 375).

new importation. On the contrary, he seems to imply a widespread and already well-established use of the conch on Bathurst and Melville Islands.

The other conch accompaniment from Bathurst Island (Cylinder No. 4) shows more variation. In addition to sustained notes (Trans. Ex. 3c) there are notes of shorter duration, a fifth higher in pitch. Didjeridu accompaniments sounding two notes of different pitch have reached a more advanced musical stage in the rhythmic " obbligatos " of north-east Arnhem Land. Transcriptions of some of these have been made by Jones (1956).

High-pitched conch " blasts " in the " Tjadpa " corroboree (cylinder No. 24) do not resemble the upper partial, or " hoot " notes audible in didjeridu recordings which Professor Elkin made in north-east Arnhem Land. Sound-distortion during recording could not be wholly responsible for the cruder effects on the wax-cylinder No. 24.

An eye-witness account at the time of recording may have supplied the missing information. Now the listener can only guess at the cause. The " blasts " may have been produced from a short tube; the method of blowing may have differed; or the blowers may have been learners.

Exact measurements of individual trumpets, since recorded in various places in the north, are not available. Experimenting myself, with a tube which measured 3 ft. $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. in length, 1 in. internal diameter at mouth end and $1\frac{3}{8}$ in. internal diameter at other end, I was able to produce several notes, the strongest of which was approximately 82 cycles, or the first " E " below the Bass stave. In contrast to this the pitch of the recorded " blasts " is approximately E/5 (660 cycles).

Spencer's use of the term "conch " may have been prompted by a knowledge of the wooden trumpets of New Guinea (Haddon 1917), some of which were representations of the coastal conch or " shell trumpet ". Although Spencer makes not direct reference to these his comment (1928 Vol. II.) on the instrument played by the Bathurst and Melville Islanders implies comparison: It is " commonly called a trumpet by the whites, but really a kind of conch, made out of a hollow bough ".

Elsewhere (1914), Spencer mentions two types of trumpets, (1) those made out of a hollow branch of gum trees, ironwood, etc., and (2) those made from bamboo. (p. 389).

" In the case of the gum trees there is no difficulty in regard to the hollowing out. It is very rare, in any of the northern parts

of the Territory to find any branches which are not hollow, so that the native can easily secure one that is suitable for a trumpet ".

" In the bamboo, the partitions that pass across the nodes have to be removed by means of a fire stick. As a general rule, the mouth end is coated with wax so that the lips can fit on tightly " (p. 391).

Spencer noticed considerable variation in the ability of tribal trumpeters. " In the Kakadu, for example, there is one man who is notably good and will imitate wonderfully well the calls of various birds such as the native companion. When in camp he is constantly asked to perform and the natives listen to him by the hour ". (p. 390).

Trumpet imitations of bird calls were also noted by Roth who alludes (1902) to an aboriginal legend about a wooden trumpet used " by certain sprites for that purpose long before they themselves (the aborigines) knew how to use it ".

The Queensland trumpet, or " yiki-yiki " was heard in areas defined by Roth, which included part of Cape York Peninsula. also Bloomfield. Sometimes it measured 7-9 feet in length and was played resting on a forked stick. Unlike the bull-roarer, the yiki-yiki was not excluded from camp singing among north-east Australian tribes.

Only a few wooden trumpets have been reported as far south. Keith Kennedy (1933) saw one at Geralton W.A. in 1925.

The " ilpirra " or " ulpirra ", a tube of shorter length, which Spencer and Gillen described as " a rudimentary trumpet " was used by central tribes in love-magic ceremonies.

Spencer and Gillen implied that the ilpirra was not a tone-producing instrument but one used merely to " intensify " the singing voice. (1899: p. 607.)

Voice-disguising for magic purposes, aided by different kinds of resonators, is not unknown among primitive peoples. This may well have been practised at some period in Australia, especially where " tubes " were plentiful. At the same time the practice does not necessarily rule out the possibility of musical tone produced by normal (lip-reed) aerophonic vibration, i.e., by blowing through tightened lips thus causing the air to vibrate within the tube.

At Alice Springs, during the " Atnimokita corroboree ", Dr. Stirling (1894) saw a trumpet which measured 2 feet in length, diameter at larger end $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, at mouth end 2 inches ".[5] On the

[5] A similar specimen is exhibited in the Nat. Mus. of Victoria.

third night of the ritual, he heard " dismal notes " extracted from " a straight wood trumpet made out of a piece of mallee (Eucl. sp.) from which the heart wood had been eaten out by termites " (Vol. IV. p. 756).

And in the section on Musical Instruments (p. 100) Stirling (a physiologist) reported that " by sending the voice through the trumpet the reverberations of the naso-pharynx were intensified and a *monotonous droning sound* produced " (my italics).

In attempting to answer the question whether the Central ilpirra " players" achieved tonal results resembling those of the Arnhem Land wooden trumpets, Stirling's description must be considered; also Spencer's and Gillen's descriptive terms, " rudimentary trumpet" and " primitive conch ".

" Monotonous droning " could be loosely applied to some styles of northern didjeridu playing, including Spencer's recording of the " conch " on Bathurst Island (No. 6.).

The " primitive conch " of Central Australia may have produced " blasts " as well as droning, although there is nothing in Spencer's writings to indicate this.

Unfortunately no recordings have come to light of an ilpirra or a yiki-yiki accompaniment. The chances that any were made are remote. But it does seem likely that the production of basic tube tone (not necessarily with present-day Arnhem Land refinements) has been more widely practised in Australia than available recordings indicate.

Compared with the more general distribution of " stick " and boomerang accompaniments it could be argued that the wooden trumpet accompaniment to aboriginal singing is a later comer to the Australian musical scene. Its frequent employment in Arnhem Land suggests that the instrument (or the idea of using it) entered the continent here from the north, possibly as a wooden imitation of the shell trumpet. Then, highly favoured in song and dance ceremonies, it doubtless spread east through the Gulf country (Roth), west to the Kimberleys and south as far as the MacDonnell ranges.

III. VOCAL FEATURES.

In recent years, with improved equipment, several collections of recorded aboriginal singing have been made in the centre and the north, regions well-studied by anthropologists.

Collections from the east and south-east are woefully sparse but in all we have enough to show common vocal tendencies, differing styles of accompaniment, even possible " stages " in melodic development[6].

There are few exceptions in Spencer's recordings to the Australian song procedure of commencing at the highest note and ending on the lowest. And none of these substantially alters the downward direction of the singing.

Many of the monotone chants also demonstrate this prevailing tendency by annexing intervals which fall in pitch.

The rhythmic reiteration of the ground tone (Trans. 10a, 11) and the retracing of steps about the upper vocal boundary (Trans. 4, 8, 11) are also common Australian characteristics.

Careful analysis is needed to distinguish between the multiplicity of song-descents which, taken together, constitute one " song-cycle " or full song-ceremony. Noticable variation in the mode, or intervallic sequence, musically distingnishes one cycle from another, and there are also smaller differences to be found between one song-descent and the next (Trans. 3a, 3b).

Ascending intervals occur, either because of a retracing of steps to prolong the descent, or—more rarely—as prefixes to the main descent (Trans. 3c, bars 1-4 and 10a, bars 1-2).

One song-descent may immediately follow another at a higher pitch, necessitating a wide vocal leap from the ground tone of the first descent to the second apex (Cylinder Nos. 18, 26, 27). Singing in this " north-western "[6] style has been recorded in Western Australia (near Broome) and on the west coast of the Northern Territory.

I have labelled these recurring vocal leaps (from ground-tone back to the original apex) " ambit " intervals.

Paradoxically, " ambit " intervals are not melodic intervals. They may be known only after the melodic descent has been completed (Trans. 2). The " ambit " is more than a theoretical abstraction, such as scale or compass; its function from one song descent to the next, in the strong downward " pull " to the ground-tone and released swing upwards, is best described as " magnetic ".

Tones above the ambit (Trans. 8, 11) may be regarded as an accessory to the main descent.

[6] The Intervallic Structure of Australian Aboriginal Singing (M.A. Thesis 1957).

An ambit of a certain size may be associated with songs recorded in one particular region, e.g., the minor third ambit of some of the Central Australian songs. And, as one might expect, the ambits of the " Arunji " recordings which Spencer made in 1912 (Nos. 2, 8, 15, 18, 19, 25, 26 and 27) are the same (octave).

There have been instances of changes in the intervallic sequence of song-descents in the same song-cycle recorded on more than one occasion. This was so with the Warranggan (Djauan tribe) corroboree (not unlike Spencer's " Arunji ") which Elkin recorded in 1949 and again in 1952. (Jones 1956.)

The resemblance of aboriginal song-descents to diatonic modes in Western musical theory has frequently been noted. Similarities noted here (see Record Annotations Nos. 3, 6, etc. 1912) are based on immediate aural estimates.

Accurate measurement of the recorded frequencies, and calculation of the intervals in cents is beyond the scope of the present study. The use of such terms here as " octaves ", " fifths ", " major thirds ", " minor thirds ", etc. indicate intervals closest in effect to their equal-tempered equivalents.

If played on the piano, the accompanying musical examples will only vaguely copy the actual sounds. Transcribed examples therefore are intended merely as a pointer to the singing.

In Spencer's collections I have found, so far, only one instance of a " pentatonic " mode of descent. This occurs in the third and fourth song-descents of the Bathurst Island corroboree. It is to be found on Cylinder No. 4 in the 1912 series (Trans. 3b). The descending intervallic sequence here is: tone (major 2nd); minor third: tone: semitone. This sequence is not that of " anhemitonic " pentatonism associated with the black keys of the piano.

Among the earlier (1901) cylinders is a short, repeated polka-like phrase which immediately attracts the ear. Compared with irregular or " free " aboriginal rhythms this strict, isometric sample has an unusually tuneful quality. (Tape III., first of the large cylinders. Trans. 13).

A large proportion of monotone chanting is to be heard on these earlier recordings. Time patterns (Trans. 14) are closely related to the repeated word-or syllable-groups.

In the accompanying transcriptions the sung syllables, or " song-texts " have been omitted. These may be difficult to obtain[7], and intelligible translations, still more so.

[7] Spencer (1928) transcribed a few song-texts.

Musicological importance of the sung syllables lies not with their meaning—which, even if known may not be constant—but in their number, rhythm and repetition.

Within one song-descent a short " text " may be wholly repeated, partially repeated and with additions which may be spontaneous. It often becomes apparent that changes in the song rhythms are paralleled by changes in the syllable groups.

A particular " verse " style may well be a vital determinant in aboriginal song-style; conversely, the style of the singing may substantially alter the length of the syllables in the " text ".

In unwritten singing of this kind close investigation of the relation between melody and " text " is necessary for a full understanding of the nature of each. Musicological advance along these lines will need linguistic reinforcement. But it is still possible—indeed it is a necessary preliminary—to first examine the intervallic and rhythmic elements of the sung tones in their separation from the syllables.

IV. RECORD ANNOTATIONS.

A brief description of the singing and accompaniment as heard on each cylinder is given below. Spencer's numbers and titles, as I deciphered them from notes written on the outsides of the cylinder-containers, are included to aid identification. Except for No. 9, which comes first, the smaller 1912 cylinders have been dubbed in numerical order. The four earlier cylinders follow these at the end of Tape III. and the beginning of Tape IV.

Tape I.

Box-title: No. 9 Woman's Corroboree, Katherine Creek, N.T., 1912.

Female group singing. Percussive accompaniment, which does not synchronize, is probably produced by clapping or striking the thighs with cupped hands, a common practice among aboriginal women during singing and dancing.

The " ambit " interval (see vocal features) is a 5th. The 6th above is heard in its role of *appogiatura*, and is slurred in its descent to the 5th. (Example 1.) Other notes in the descent are not as clearly distinguishable. Irregular grouping of the time-units (notated as crotchets) is not an unusual feature in Australian singing. Bar-lines are added merely to aid recognition of recurring groups. No accentuation is implied.

The date, 1/11/12, found inscribed on the cylinder, is announced on the tape.

Box-title: No. 1 Corroboree, Katherine River, N.T., 1912 Sticks, one voice, final shriek.

Solo chanting on one tone. Approximate pitch A/3[8] (Top line Bass stave). Group-shouting, yells and thuds ultimately resolve into a swinging (3/4) rhythm. Yells preceded by short shouts are frequently heard in Northern Territory ceremonies. The total effect is not unlike a loud, concerted sneeze.

Box-title No. 2: Arunji (Snake Corroboree), Katherine Creek, N.T., 1917 (?) sticks good.

(The figure 7 is surely intended for 2. In the Melbourne Museum's collection, no other records are so dated.)

The "sticks" may be boomerangs—or assisted by boomerangs—(Accompanying Instruments). These slow down to a beat of longer duration when the ground tone is reached. The "ambit" interval is an octave. There are two structural intervals of a fourth (Ex. 2). Each song-descent is varied to some extent as it passes through these two conjunct "tetrachords" of (approximately) one tone, semitone, tone each. The first tetrachord—or partial descent to the "dominant" (8765)—is heard three times, the second (5432) twice, before the ground tone (E flat) is reached.

Arranged in consecutive order, the tones of the "Arunji" corroboree—or part-corroboree—resemble those of the ancient Greek Hypophrygian, or mediaeval Mixolydian mode. c.f. Cylinder No. 25.

Box-title No. 3: Yoi-i, Bathurst Island, shrieks, &c., sticks.

(On Bathurst and Melville Islands, Yoi, means corroboree.) Referring to Spencer's spelling Colin Simpson (1951: 145) suggests that it indicates not a flat "yoy" but "yoi" with "a lively little *e* sound whipping off at the end.")

Solo monotone chanting is similar to that on Cylinder No. 1 and punctuated by group yelling, &c. The accompanying clatter is probably that of boomerangs. A unanimous yell (pitched about an octave above the chanting tone) ends the vocalizing.

Box-title: No. 4 Bathurst Island, 1912, Corroboree Conch, sticks.

This is without doubt the most colourful performance Spencer recorded. The singing rises to an unmistakable climax and the wooden trumpet or "conch" (see Accompanying Instruments) provides co-ordinate accompaniment throughout.

[8] 1952 Olson. Musical Engineering: p. 29.

Of the eight vocal descents recorded on the cylinder, the third and fourth (Ex. 3b) offer substantially different melodic material from the first and second (Ex. 3a). The eighth, with its rhapsodic style, rise in pitch and extension of the ambit, stands apart from the rest (Ex. 3c). Before this (presumably) last descent of the cycle there is a prefixed ascent which extends the full range to an octave. There is also a second, subordinate descent commencing of bar 18 which is prefixed by (i) an ascending augmented 4th and (ii) a minor 3rd. The mode of descent resembles that of the ancient Greek Hypolydian (Mediaeval Lydian) and the heavily outlined " sharpened fourth " (bars 10-11, 12-13) contrasts with previous structural " perfect " fourths (Example 3b, bars 1-12. 18-21).

From the fifth to the seventh song-descents, the accompanying conch sounds are of short, instead of long duration and are pitched a 5th higher (not shown in Transcription). In the eighth descent the conch reverts to the first pitch and concludes the cycle with quickened staccato sounds. The accompaniment is shared with sticks and thuds (stamping?).

Box-title: No. 5 Larappi Corroboree, Nallakun tribe. Oct. 10, 1912, N.T. Sticks (no conch on), poor.

No corresponding record.

Box-title: No. 6 Nabakawulla, Bathurst Is., N.T., 1912, Conch, recitative, final shout.

The conch accompaniment in the Nabakawulla corroboree is similar in style to didjeridu accompaniments recorded north-west of Arnhem Land[9]. " Tremolo ", vibrant tones, difficult to convey in music notation, accompany each song-descent and extend beyond. With the sticks they provide connecting instrumental tissue between the end of one song-descent and the beginning of the next (Ex. 4). Spencer's " recitative " probably applies to groups of five equal tones which alternate with two of longer duration. Small ornaments decorate the vocal descents which finally become more like glissandos.

A structural interval of a 4th (bars 11-12) is linked conjunctly to one of a 5th (bars 5-6) after the manner of the ancient Greek Hypomixolydian and mediaeval Phrygian modes.

Box-title: No. 7 Wait Ba Oenpelli. Fair.

The cylinder in this box was broken. No. 11 contains relevant material and may have been a duplicate.

[9] Elkin, Sydney University Series IB; Simpson (A.B.C.) Series Side 1. Cut 2.

Box-title: No. 8 Djauan Tribe, Arunji Corroboree (shrieks), Katherine River, 1912.
Sticks good.

These " sticks " provide accompaniment in rapid beats (quavers) or in beats of double duration (quaver, quaver rest).

The ambit is an octave with an accessory tone above. The full vocal descent approximates the major mode.

Box-title: No. 9 Women's Corroboree, Katherine Creek, N.T., 1912.
1912.

The corresponding cylinder was dubbed first on the tape. See above.

Box-title: No. 10 Nuba-la-mil-la Corroboree, Kakadu Tribe, Cepelli, N.T., 1912.

In their sequence and variation the song-descents of this cylinder exhibit unusually complex structure. In the first vocal section (Ex. $5a^1$ and a^2), the ambit is a 6th. At the end of the first descent there is a rare ascent of one tone to the " ground-tone ", which in this case is best termed the " finale ". In the second vocal section (5b) there is an ascent beyond the ambit, the magnetic " pull " being temporarily upwards. A further coda-like section descends a 5th below the " finale " suggesting the key of A minor (5c).

Relation between vocal and stick beats is (approximately) 4 to 3. Vocal rhythm is numerical not accentual (Sachs 1953: 46). At the conclusion of the vocal descents, the stick accompaniment is effectively varied to produce a clear, isolated " ping ".

Many stick accompaniments to aboriginal singing might appear to go their own way. This is not so in the Kakadu ceremony where the stick beater co-operates with the singers intelligently and effectively.

Box-title: No. 11 Boy's initiation. " Wait Ba ", Oenpelli, 1912. Jamba; Fair.

(The " Jamba " is the first of five ceremonies for the Kakadu man (1928: 891). This is followed by the " Ober, Jangoan, Kilori and Muraian ". " Wait Ba " is the refrain of calls by the women during the initiation ceremony.)

In the singing, the ambit is a fourth with an accessory tone above. Following the first melodic section, there is a long succession of calls, after which short-compass singing is resumed.

Tape II.

Box-title: No. 12 Warangu (*more likely Warangin*) Corroboree, Waduman Tribe, 1912.

Very fair, voices good.

(15/11/12 announced on tape.)

Melodic line is again determined by a 5th, the descent being made in short stages. Pitch of the singing is unusually high. Stick beat pattern is iambic, i.e., in triplets with the third sound omitted (c.f. Jones: 265). In the " Warangu " corroboree there are features which parallel Elkin's recordings of the Djaun Warranggan Corroboree.

Box-title: No. 13 We-ipa Corroboree, Yukal Tribe, N.T., 1912.

(8/10/12 announced on tape. But as Spencer's phonograph was not operating until 26/10/12 (see Section 2) the first figure 2, must have been missed.)

Minor 3rd is the encompassing interval. Similar short song-descents, repeated as here with upper accessory tones, are to be heard in Central Australian recordings by Davies, also by Elkin and Villeminot (Elkin 1957).

Rhythmic patterning (quaver, two crotchets, three quavers, &c.) suggests syncopation. The percussive accompaniment is probably hand and thigh clapping by women.

Box-title: No. 14 Wallugu Corroboree, Waduman Tribe 15/11/12.
Good conch.

There is no corresponding cylinder on the tape. It will be noted that the same tribe sings on No. 12, though without a " conch ".

Box-title: No. 15 Women's Corroboree (Snake), Katherine River, 1912.
Voices good.

(28/10/12 announced on tape.)

The song-descents are major in mode, passing through the full octave, then a sixth. Ambit, mode and rhythm of the singing resemble later Waranggan recordings (Elkin). For commencing vocal rhythm, see Ex. 6.

Box-title: No. 16 Nabaka Walla, Bathurst Island, 1912.
Good.

Unlike Cylinder No. 6, there is no conch accompaniment on this Bathurst Island recording. Monotone chanting ends in a descent to the 4th below and in this respect resembles samples of Melville Island chanting recorded by C. P. Mountford. But

unlike Mountford's samples Spencer's have no ascending prefix. No. 16 is a damaged cylinder. Despite surface noise percussion (stamps?) is audible.

No. 17 was not among the box-titles.
Box-title: No. 18 Arunji (Snake) Corroboree, Katherine River, 1912.
Voice, good sticks.

Again the " good sticks " sounded like a typical boomerang accompaniment. After prolonged recitation on the uppermost note, singing descends through degrees corresponding to those of the major scale. Higher descents follow and then a return to the first. In comparison with single descents, these two- and three-fold descents are innovations in melodic form. I have termed this style of singing " north-western ". (c.f. Ex. 12).

Box-title: No. 19 Djaun Tribe, Arunji Corroboree, Katherine Creek, 1912.
Sticks very good.

Singing again revolves round the octave ambit, with repetitions of the uppermost note. The regular rhythm of the sticks, in groups of three equal beats, synchronises with familiar (3/4) patterns in the vocal part (Dotted crotchet, quaver, crotchet; minim, crotchet, &c.).

Box-title: No. 20 Nabakawalla Corroboree (grave posts) Bathurst Is., 1912.
Good; single voice, yell; sticks good.

Solo monotone chanting at unusually high pitch. Other chanters follow the soloist. High-pitched (Tremolo) calls are probably executed with hand striking the lips. Percussion accompaniment by (probably) several boomerangs. For rhythmic patterning, see Ex. 7.

Box-title: No. 21 Gumbil Corroboree, Waduman Tribe, N.T., 1912.
Voice; shouts.

(15/11/12 announced on tape.)

Group chanting on two tones a minor 3rd apart. Approximate pitch E flat/3 and G flat/3. There are similarities here to Waranggan and Kunapipi two-note chanting.

Box-title: No. 22 Wijudju Corroboree, Binbinga Tribe, N.T., 1912.
Conch and sticks; good conch.

Group singing. Octave ambit with one accessory tone (Ex. 8). Also additional shorter descents, not transcribed. Regular rhythm characterizes the singing on this cylinder. The

short, staccato, " pedal " accompaniment of the conch lacks the variety of the Bathurst Island corroboree (No. 4). For stick and conch rhythm only (synchronized), see Ex. 9.

Tape III.

Box-title: No. 23 Lurkan (mourning ceremony) Mara Tribe, N.T.
Sticks only: good.

The continuous stick beats (quavers) do not synchronize regularly with the vocal rhythm. At the conclusion of the song-descent they are heard, solo, in a short trochaic passage. (Ex. 10b.) The singing commences and ends on the same pitch, thus eliminating the " ambit " interval, which is rare (Ex. 10a.) As mentioned previously, ascents prefixed to the song descent are unusual in Australian singing. Professor Davies recorded prefixed ascents (Aranda " Wild Dog " songs), but they precede gradually by tones and semitones (i.e., conjunct) not as the Lurkan ascent which is disjunct and sounds the " broken " minor triad.

Box-title: No. 24 . . . rumung . . .[10] Tribe, Tjad-pa Corroboree, Katherine River, 1912.

The " conches " play a peculiar role in the Tjad-pa corroboree. Their plurality is unique among other recordings of single trumpets. And the effect, which is that of signalling rather than an accompaniment to the singing, is quite un-Australian by comparison.

The first " blast " approximates the pitch of E flat/5 (top space in Treble) and is not unlike a Sydney ferry siren.[11] A solo voice is then heard chanting about an octave lower. A chorus of " blasts " then follows, but in the mêlée of yells and shouts it is not easy to separate these from the rest. Unlike the orderly drone accompaniments of the Arnhem Land recordings, the effect here is unmusical.

Box-title: No. 25 Djauan Tribe, Arunji Corroboree, Katherine River N. T. 1912.
No conch on; faint (or fair?)

The vocal part descends one octave. An upper accessory note is slurred in descent. Singing is distinguished by long pauses, first on the 8th, then on the 6th (above the ground tone). Retracing of the last few notes of the descent is not an uncommon vocal feature in Australia. (Ex. 11.) In the course of the

[10] Partly obliterated title.

[11] But higher and more piercing than "steamboat whistle" effects in other didjeridu accompaniments mentioned by Jones (1957).

descent, a flattened seventh suggests the mediaeval Mixolydian mode. Later, the sticks strike up a trochaic rhythm with tremolo extensions and the vocal part proceeds in a similar (3/8) time.

Box-title: No. 26 Djaun Tribe, Arunji Corroboree, Katherine River 1912. Sticks good.

After the first descent (octave) voices leap to a note a major 7th above the preceding apex. (Ex. 12.) This second peak, which is not pitched unanimously, begins a new descent and classifies the singing as " northwestern " in style. (See Vocal features.) Rhythm of the percussion runs counter to that of the singing.

Box-title: No. 27 Arunji (Snake) Corroboree, Katherine River, 1912.

Conversation begins this recording.

Singing follows, similar in style to No. 26.

Three unidentified cylinders: (Xa, Xb, Xc.).

(As announced on tape, the first of these is the only black wax cylinder in the collection.)

Xa. Two sections of short-compass singing are here separated by a call more than an octave higher in pitch. (Approximately F sharp 4.) The second section is marked by a quicker rhumba-like rhythm. Singing here is comparable with that on No. 11.

Xb. A single voice, a poor native specimen, reiterates two tones with audible intakes of breath. A descent is then made through the remainder of the short compass (4th). Accompanying percussion may be stamps.

Xc. Recorded laughter and a specimen of European singing indicate that the third of these unidentified cylinders need not be taken seriously here.

FOUR LARGE 1901 CYLINDERS.

Inscribed on the cardboard boxes which housed these cylinders were handwritten titles only one of which (the first) corresponded with the recorded material.

Box-titles were:—

No. 2 Arunta Tribe
" Corroboree Song ", Charlotte Waters (2) not good.

No. 5 Arunta Song
Rainmaking song
Call of Plover (Pil-Pilpa) Charlotte Waters
Good plover call, rain song.

(On one side of this box was written " Men dancing around the performers ").

No. 6 Arunta Tribe, March 28, 1901
Women's Corrob. (2 women). Good.

No. 7 Charlotte Waters, March 30, 1901
Song relating to the tradition of the great snake of Okilcha.*

First Large Cylinder.

(Tape announcement refers to small piece of paper found glued to inside of cylinder bearing the number 2. (c.f. first box-title).

Spencer's voice is heard announcing the title: " A corroboree song of the Arunta Tribe recorded at Charlotte Waters, April 3, 1901 ". Then follows a solo male voice singing a short-phrased tune with an ambit of a 4th. The polka-like rhythm is strictly maintained and the minor 3rd rise, which occurs within the phrase, gives it melodic shape (Ex. 13).

Towards the end of the cylinder there is a decline in pitch and pace. Singing ends—or is cut off—abruptly.

Second Large Cylinder.

No Box-title corresponds to the recorded material, which may follow No. 18 in the Adelaide set. (See Section 5).

Spencer is heard saying: " Another initiatory song known as the Lallory(?) song". Monotone chanting is approximately A flat/3. Each " verse " commences with a short, decorative and descending slide. An intake of breath is audible at the end of each prolonged chant. Due to variation in speed on the original recording (referred to on tape by the audio engineer) there is a marked rise in pitch. This technical fault highlights breath intakes. A crack in the cylinder causes repetition at the end.

Tape IV.

Third Large Cylinder.

Spencer announces: " A song relating to the tradition of the great snake man of Okilcha, recorded at Charlotte waters. March 31st, 1901.

It is possible that one of the box-titles given above (No. 7), was intended for this cylinder, although there is a slight discrepancy in the date. Dates coincide, however, in Titles No. 7 (Melbourne) and No. 23 (Adelaide). Although immediate

* Mr. T. G. H. Strehlow, of the University of Adelaide, kindly informs me that Akiltja (phonetic spelling) is an important carpet snake totemic centre some miles east of Charlotte Waters.

comparison of sound material has yet to be made, according to rough notes made the previous year in Adelaide, monotone chanting on this third cylinder may be a duplicate of Adelaide No. 23. For rhythmic patterning (13 units) see Ex. 14.

Fourth Large Cylinder.

The sound material on the fourth and last of the large cylinders corresponds with the side inscription (plover calls) on Box No. 5. Spencer's spoken comments contain the words " men dancing around the performers " (c.f. No. 12 of Adelaide Set). There is no singing on this record. A chorus of voices call " Wha! Wha! ", a characteristic feature of Aranda ceremonies.

The cylinder concludes with ten sentences, said first in English by Spencer, then in dialect by an aborigine.

V. OTHER RECORDINGS LOCATED IN ADELAIDE

Twelve of Spencer's 1901 cylinders, which had been in the possession of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia for many years, were handed over to M. J. Barret[12] in 1955. At the present time they are in the care of the Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide. With assistance from the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Mr. Barret made a tape transcription of two of the cylinders. These were successful and he later arranged for further dubbings to be made. On each occasion the cylinders were played on a large Edison phonograph at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, N.S.W.

I am indebted to Mr. G. Lawton[13] for supplying me with the following list:—

No. 1. Unintha Corroboree.
Stevenson Creek.

No. 6. Song sung by the old men at Initiatory Rite of Young men.
Stevenson Creek
22nd March, 1901.

No. 8. Song of the Chitchingalta Corroboree.
Stevenson Creek
22nd March, 1901.

No. 11. Song of the Erkita Corroboree.
Arunta Tribe
Stevenson Creek
22nd March, 1901.

12. Then President of the Anthropological Society of South Australia.
13. Reader in Geography, University of Adelaide.

No. 12. Special Exclamations used at Sacred Ceremonials, by men dancing around the performers.

No. 13. Song of the Kurnmara Corroboree.
Arunta Tribe
Charlotte Waters
28th March, 1901.

No. 17. Women quarrelling.
Two songs by women
Arunta tribe
Charlotte Waters
29th March, 1901.

No. 18. Two initiatory Songs of the Arunta Tribe.
Charlotte Waters
3rd April, 1901.

No. 19. Men quarrelling.
(*Recorded 29th March, see Section* 1.)

No. 21. Sacred Song of the Rain Totem.
Sung by two men of the Totem.
(Plover Imitations)
Charlotte Waters
30th March, 1901.

No. 23. Song relating to the tradition of
The Great Snake of Okilcha
Charlotte Waters
30th March, 1901.

(Nos. 18 and 23 were found fractured longitudinally from end to end; No. 19 was in several pieces).

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1. Aluridja man (Cent. Aust.) accompanies a song-ceremony with boomerangs (ceremonial type).

[From the Australian Aboriginal, Basedow.]

2. C. P. Mountford recording on Groote Eylandt. The singer accompanies himself with two heavy sticks.

[From National Geographic Magazine, 1949.]

3. The Australian Wooden Trumpet or Didjeridu (N. Terr.) The player's lips are within the smaller end of the hollow branch.

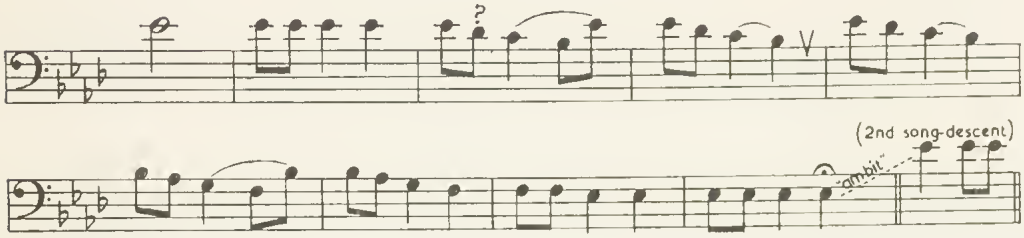
[From the Australian Aboriginal, Basedow.]

4. Scene in the Gber Ceremony, Kakadu Tribe. The man on the left is blowing the "Conch".

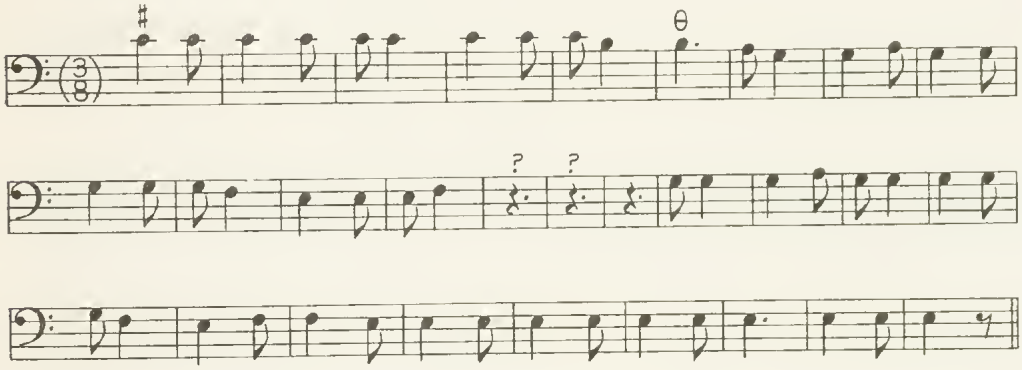
[From Wanderings in Wild Australia, Spencer.]

Ex. 1. (1912 No. 9)

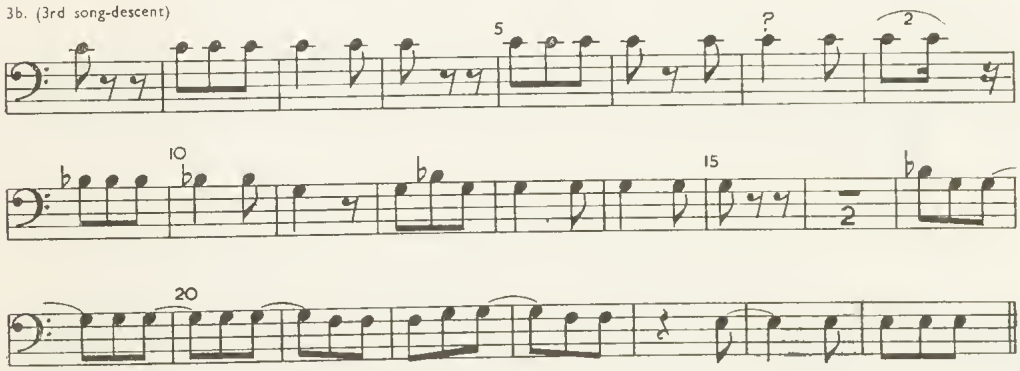
Ex. 2. (No. 2)



Ex. 3a. (No. 4)



3b. (3rd song-descent)



? — Doubt regarding accuracy of transcription

Bar-lines — Added to aid recognition of recurring time groups
(Do not imply regular accentuation)

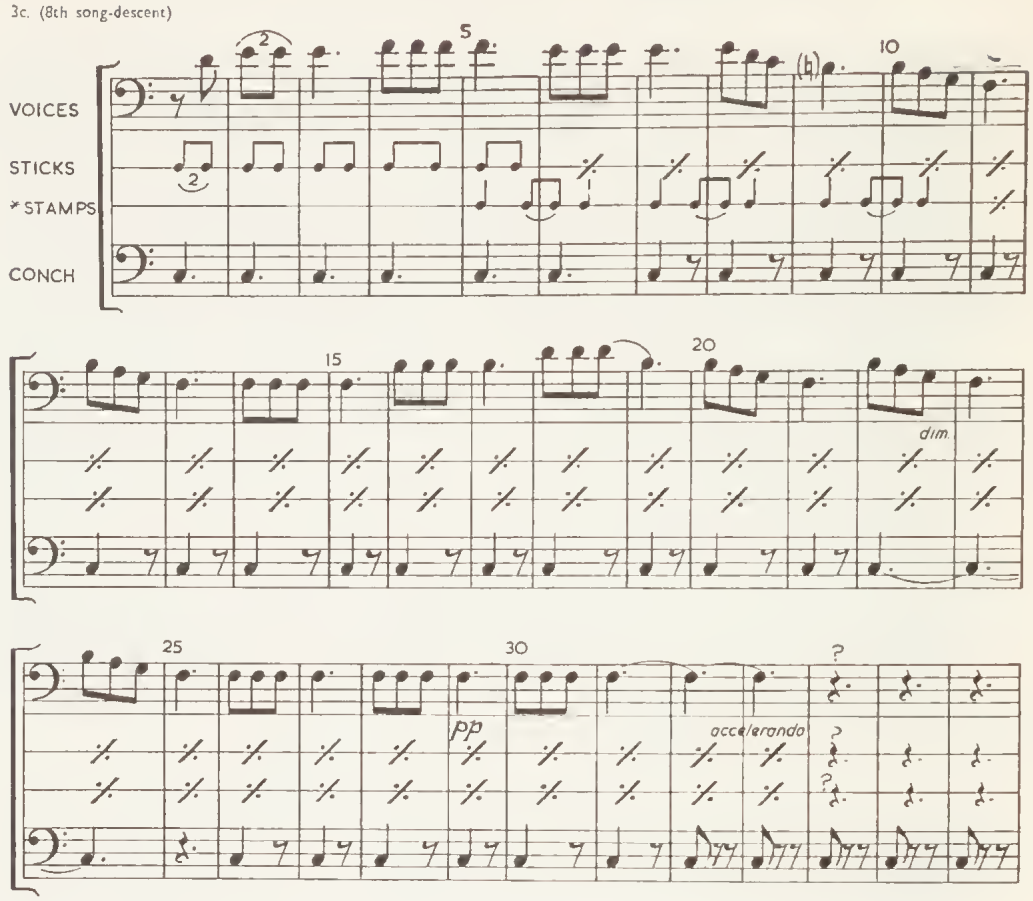
Pitch — A/4 = 440 v.p.s. (rough checks made with violin pitch pipe)


— Less than a semitone

θ — Hummed (closed mouth) effect

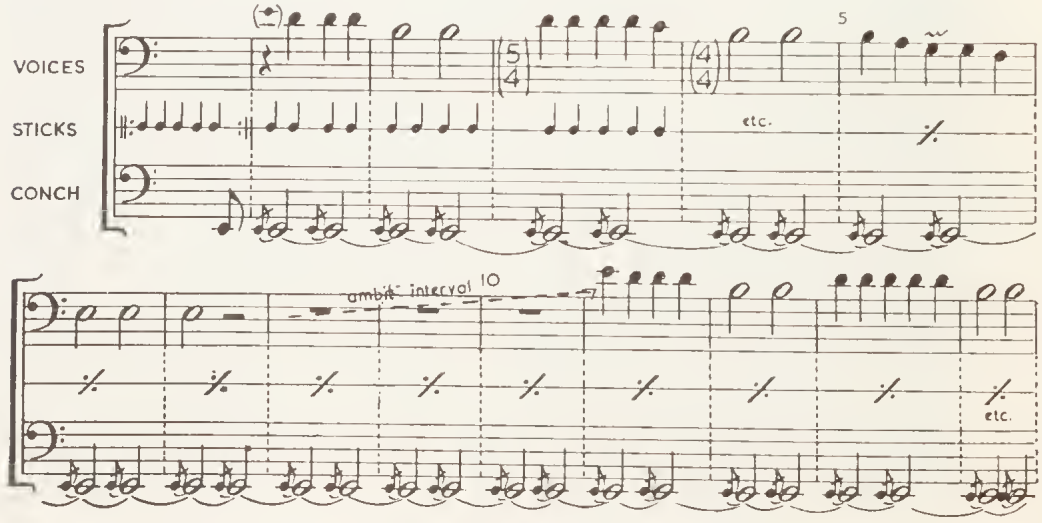
V — Breath intake

3c. (8th song-descent)

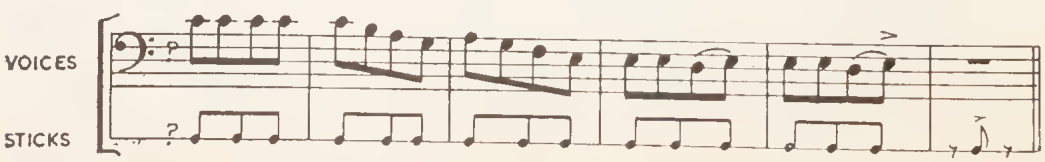


* Transcribed from 1st song-descent

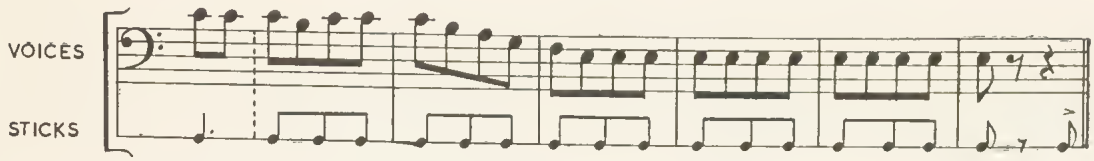
Ex. 4. (1912 No 6)



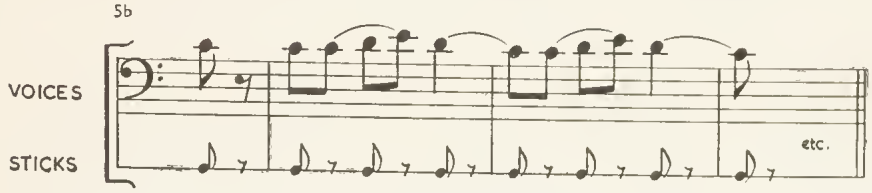
Ex. 5a* (Kakadu No. 10)



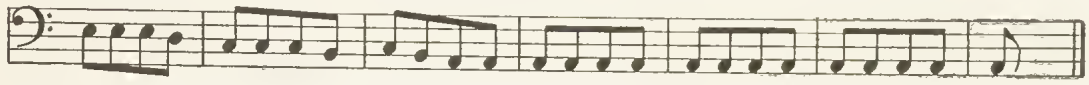
5a²



5b



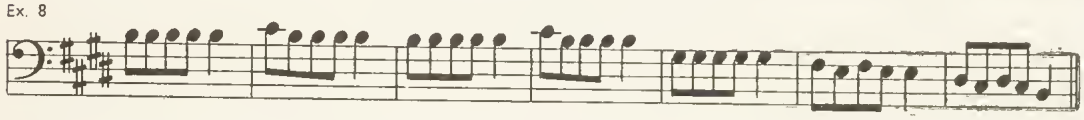
5c



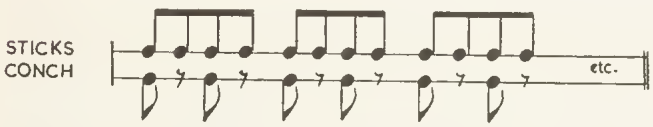
Ex. 6. (Time-pattern only, No. 15)

Ex. 7 (ditto No. 20)

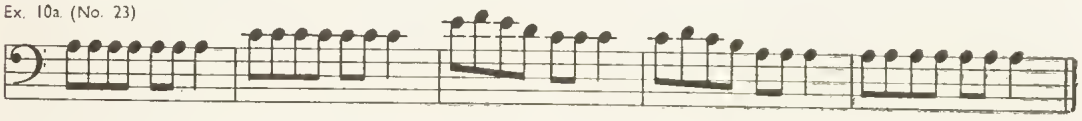
Ex. 8



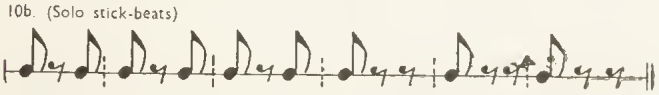
Ex. 9



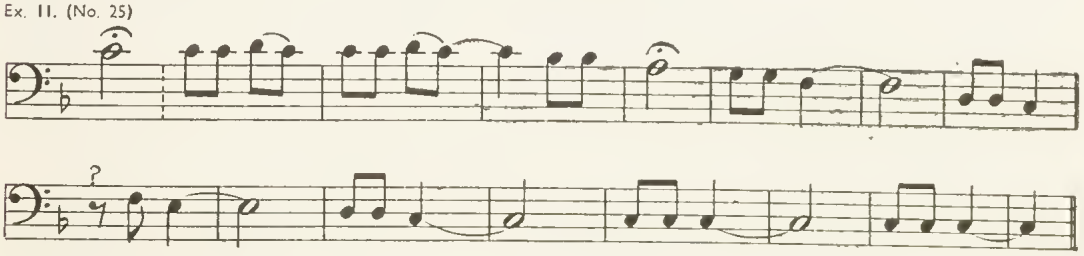
Ex. 10a. (No. 23)



10b. (Solo stick-beats)

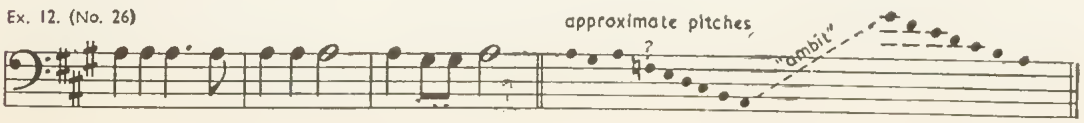


Ex. 11. (No. 25)

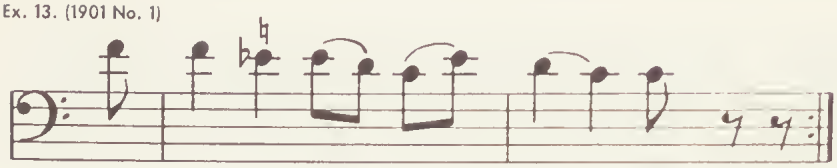


(Later song-descents rhythmically varied) . .

Ex. 12. (No. 26)



Ex. 13. (1901 No. 1)



Ex. 14. (1901 No. 3 rhythm)