

JEREMY ROSE, WILLIAM PARKER AND PAUL GRABOWSKY: CONNECTING THROUGH MUSIC

by Ian Muldoon*

There is entertainment, there is art for art's sake, and then there is art which tries to reveal truths, tries to make connections between us, with each other, and to connect with the natural world of which we are part. In literature Dickens obviously, and Steinbeck, and Primo Levi and Arthur Miller are amongst the many writers who provided entertainment as well as providing insights and revealed truths and making connections with our finer natures. In music, jazz has been the preeminent genre that has mirrored this leap from just entertainment to making deeper connections.



In literature Steinbeck (left), and Primo Levi (below) amongst others, provided entertainment as well as providing insights and revealed truths, making connections with our finer natures...

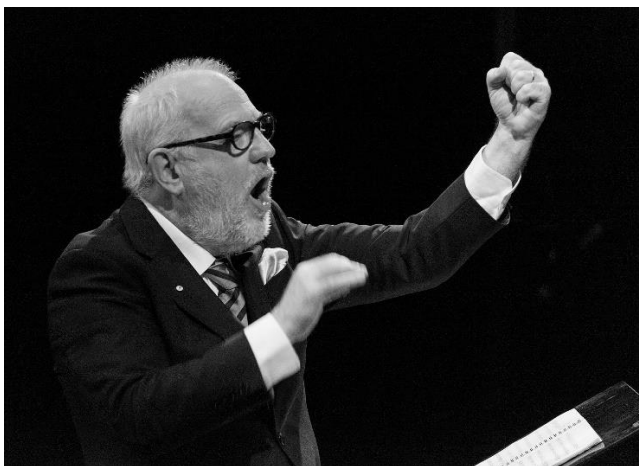


**Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour.*

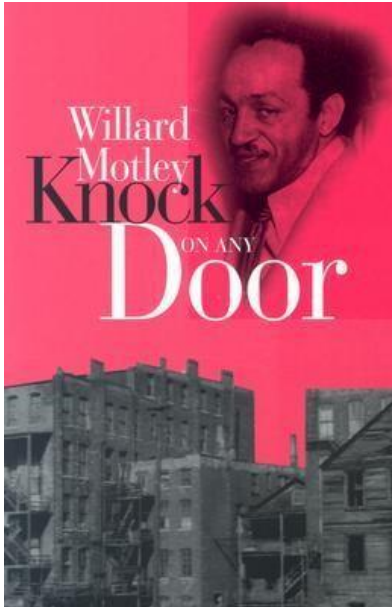
Jeremy Rose has produced a work based on a masterpiece about our nation's beginnings in which truths are revealed about our identity. William Parker has produced a body of work engendered by his experience as an African American steeped in its musical legacy, which work is among the most substantial by any musician in recent memory with the purpose of making connections between all humans. Paul Grabowsky has produced a suite which features music from of one the oldest cultures on earth helping to make connections between it and us. This suite is one of the more recent in Grabowsky's oeuvre, a part of his artistic legacy which must stand as substantial as any in our history. It's through art that we connect, however humble that art may seem at times.



Jeremy Rose (left) has produced a work based on a masterpiece about our nation's beginnings... PHOTO CREDIT KAREN STEAINS. William Parker (below) has produced a body of work engendered by his experience as an African American... Paul Grabowsky (far below) has produced a suite which features music from of one the oldest cultures on earth helping to make connections between it and us...PHOTO CREDIT ROGER MITCHELL



Neither black, nor gay or for that matter American, Catholic, Italian, or a migrant, I was an impressionable 13-year-old Anglo Saxon Australian and read a book by an African American gay writer Willard Frances Motley called *Knock On Any Door* (1947). This book is about an American Catholic altar boy of an immigrant Italian family called Nick Romano growing up poor in Chicago. I felt I was Nick Romano. I was young, screamingly alive, and confused. Differences I realised were constructs - Church, accent, Nationality, poverty - and all of them could be changed or reconstructed. Romano chose to confront the simplest construct, poverty, and turned to crime, botching up a robbery at a train station. I stole from Woolworths. Romano and I got caught.



Knock On Any Door was made into a film with John Derek as the young hero, and Humphrey Bogart as a lawyer. The line spoken by Nick Romano "Live fast, die young, and leave a good-looking corpse" became a teenage anthem mirrored by the antics of many and existentially realised most publicly by James Dean, in cinema and in real life, who died at 24 after crashing his Porsche Speedster which had the words "Little Bastard" painted across the rear cowling.



*John Derek in
Nicholas Ray's
film "Knock On
Any
Door" ...PHOTO
COURTESY IAN
MULDOON*

Motley's second book was also filmed. Ella Fitzgerald accompanied by pianist Paul Smith recorded the album *Ella Fitzgerald Sings Songs from the Soundtrack of 'Let No Man Write My Epitaph'*. But Motley's first book established itself as an adolescent classic at a time when the "teenager" was being invented.

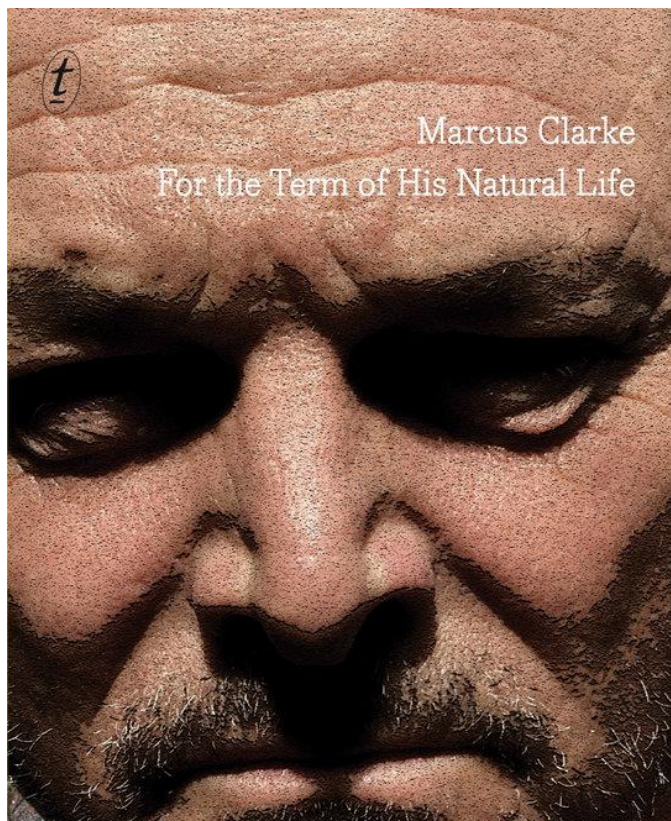


The novel *Knock On Any Door* was an impressive instance of the power art has to connect accompanied by empathy, understanding, sympathy, even wisdom, and to lift the spirits and to reveal some "truth". The novel was melodramatic and no literary gem but it does speak to adolescents quite powerfully. It highlighted for me the many things that separate humans at the expense of their common humanity - I identified with Nick Romano despite the many social and cultural differences between us. I realised that Art serves to inoculate us against stupidly categorising and separating ourselves from others based on *inter alia* ethnicity, gender, religion, class, wealth or nationality.

Emotions such as fear and hate are in the main learned emotions. Politicians exploit them to their own advantage and underfund the Arts because the Arts are a dangerous source of ideas. The main idea of *Knock On Any Door* is a basic one: poverty is a crime which devours the innocent. It is also a potent political message where narrative control is important - poverty is either the fault of the poor individuals or evidence of structural issues within the society that govern the distribution of wealth. Narrative control is slipping because of universal education and the role of the free press. Robert Hughes in his masterpiece *The Fatal Shore* (1986) contributed much to revealing and reshaping the narrative regarding the "settlement" of Australia.

A small but telling example of how differences can be misunderstood and perhaps become entrenched prejudice is shown in cases of first encounters as detailed in *The Fatal Shore*. One such encounter is between the British soldiers "Gubbas" (ghosts) and the Kay-ye-my clan of the Guringai people at a northern cove of Sydney Harbour, which prompted Captain Arthur Phillip "to give the name of Manly Cove to this place" in reaction to the confident and manly behaviour of its inhabitants. But the

locals stank with a putrid odour. Whilst the British sailors would have had their own stink of stale sweat, powder, and ship detritus, which in our deodorised present era of Tom Ford and Old Spice fragrances, we may find repugnant. The Guringai people were covered in the smell of rotting fish which they used as an effective mosquito repellent. Undoubtedly, in letters home written by some of the ship's crew perhaps even by Captain Phillip and entered in the ship's log for historians to uncover, "stinking natives" or "stinking blacks" would have been reported and likely entered the lexicon of "understanding" of the general population. Differences get used to define worth and status often for political and economic advantage. Frequently differences are used to assuage guilt and to turn the invaded into the "other" as people "not quite human" as "uncivilised" as perhaps "barbarians" and so an event such as the Tasmanian genocide of indigenous inhabitants can be justified. More about *The Fatal Shore* later and one Australian musician's response to it.



INTRODUCED BY ROHAN WILSON

Text Classics

You don't need to be the African American descendant of slaves to understand pain, loss, or the drive to be free, or the imperatives of the blues, or improvisation....

For The Term Of His Natural Life (1872) by Marcus Clarke about convict life in the Australian gulag is an earlier version of poverty as a crime, with the "criminals" - overwhelmingly the English or Irish or Scottish poor - who were shipped to the Antipodes as forced labour. Artists show that the power of the imagination is more important than knowledge. You don't need to be the African American descendant of slaves to understand pain, loss, or the drive to be free, or the imperatives of the blues, or improvisation. What humanity has endured throughout history, or created, is not the exclusive province of one nation over

another, or one religion over another, or one culture over another. Differences constantly tend to cloud our common experiences. It's no different in music, where music is contextualised to such an extent that its beauty and musical significance is sometimes lost. "Jazz" is a pre-eminent example of this contextualisation.

In 1984 I organised for a band to play in the Union Bar of the University Of New England, Armidale. That band included Paul Furniss, a world class musician. The performance was reasonably well attended and attended to, but the purpose of the Union bar was basically getting pissed as cheaply as possible; the music was accepted as background entertainment, and a bit of entertainment in return for fees paid by students of the Union.



*In 1984 a band played in the Union Bar of the University Of New England, Armidale. That band included Paul Furniss, a world class musician....
PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ REAL BOOK*

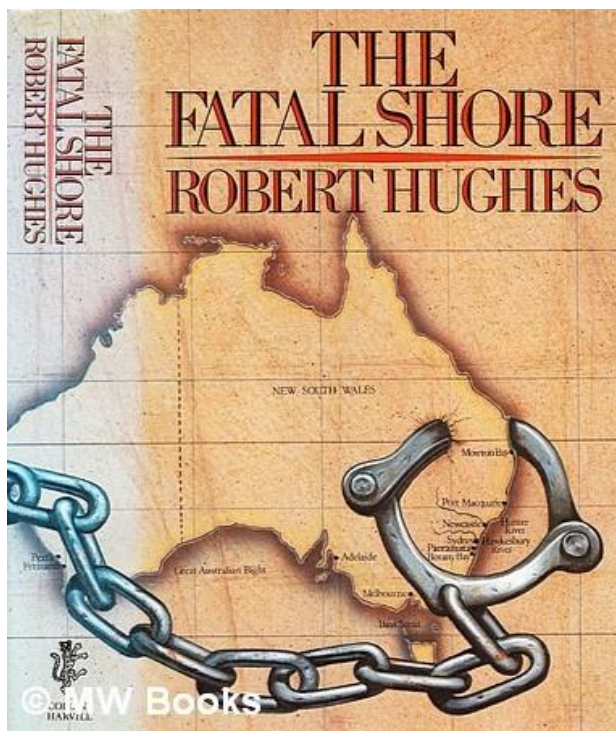
That same year the music department of the University hired a Japanese/Hawaiian Koto player to perform in the main Arts lecture theatre and performance space. The hall was packed for that performance and due deference and respect and attention paid to the music. There was an element of theatre about the occasion but the music itself was interesting and well played.

However brilliant Furniss is, he was not received reverentially as the Kimono wearing Japanese/Hawaiian Koto player of the week before was. Furniss was an ordinary Australian, who looked and dressed pretty much like the bloke who worked in the hardware store. He didn't sing and seemed quite a boring personality with (God forbid) an Australian accent. But musically, I hadn't heard anyone on that campus - visitor or resident - who could play music as well as Furniss. It's as if listeners had restricted hearing, censored hearing and they had learned long ago what was "good" music that deserved study. Magpies are music to trombone

player George Lewis; the Mocking Bird was to Duke Ellington; Whippoorwills were to W C Handy. But “good” music was part of the Western Musical Canon, and studied at University. Furniss and his music was entertainment of sorts for the drinking public. The visiting Koto player was a University sponsored visiting artist to whom attention must be paid. I venture to suggest that had Furniss bothered to shave his head, powder his face, wear a Kimono or dinner suit with black tie, and play a solo clarinet against a black backdrop under the auspices of the University Of New England Music Department his artistry would have been celebrated and applauded and revered.

Taken out of its theatrical context, the music of Furniss had a power to connect viscerally that was missing in the Koto.

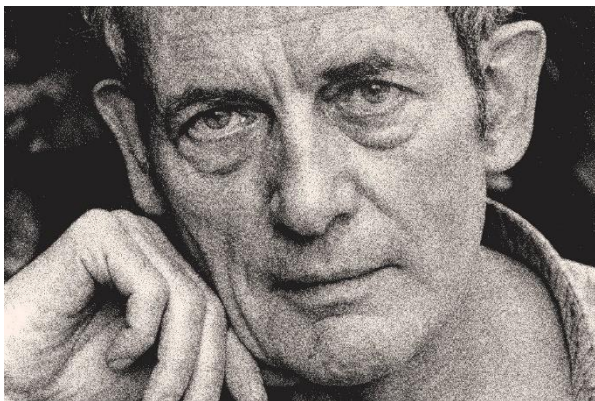
If we say that the two main inspirations for musicians are art (music in particular) or nature, then Jeremy Rose gave himself an ambitious challenge to adapt *The Fatal Shore* to music as he has done in *Iron In The Blood* (2016) ABC. It’s one thing as a saxophonist to take a run at *Lover Man* (Davis/Ramirez/Sharman) either in the key of D or F, it’s quite another to reimagine perhaps the best *written* Australian history of all: *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes (1986) which is a profound work in terms of its contribution to understanding Australia’s modern history, in its accuracy, and in its literal power. *The Fatal Shore* reveals the nature of the invasion of Australia: its use as a gaol and dumping ground for those victims of the British legal system; the genocide in Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania); the brutal floggings; and especially the expunging of our history. As Hughes explains: in America going West meant more freedom, in Australia going West meant the gaol of space, emptiness. The great problem now for the Church, for the Aristocracy, for the powerful, is that they’ve lost control of the narrative.



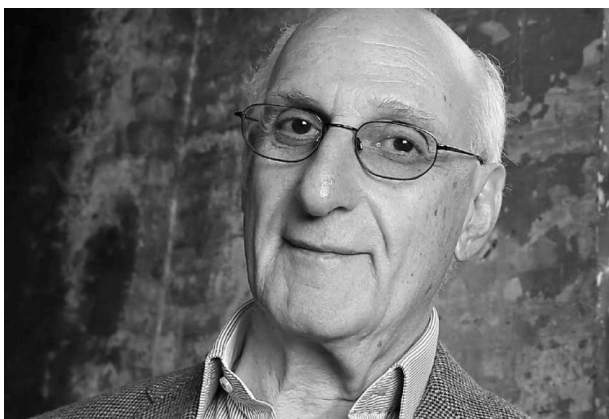
“The Fatal Shore” by Robert Hughes (1986) is a profound work in terms of its contribution to understanding Australia’s modern history...

In 2021 the control of the narrative regarding the lifeblood of the country - its water - is being played out by the powerful. This narrative builds on the image even myth of the struggling (white) farmer fighting floods and drought to “feed the nation”. During “settlement” a billabong may be poisoned to prevent the indigenous from using it. Today much water is appropriated by large industrial size enterprises growing cotton but it has also been stolen by some farmers at the expense of small communities including indigenous communities who have traditionally seen the river system as the river of life. A different kind of poison - absence of water - can be just as devastating as the millions of dead fish in the Barwon River we were witness to in 2019. In short, works such as *The Fatal Shore* and the musical response to it by the modern musician Jeremy Rose, are a reimagining of our heritage, and a recasting of our myth making. Such truths help to ennoble not just the original owners of the land but the “criminal class” who were dumped in it between 1787 and 1868 as opposed to the intrepid British explorers. If not ennoble at least such works help dispel the cultural constructs of “stinking blacks” and “criminal class” to reveal the human stories.

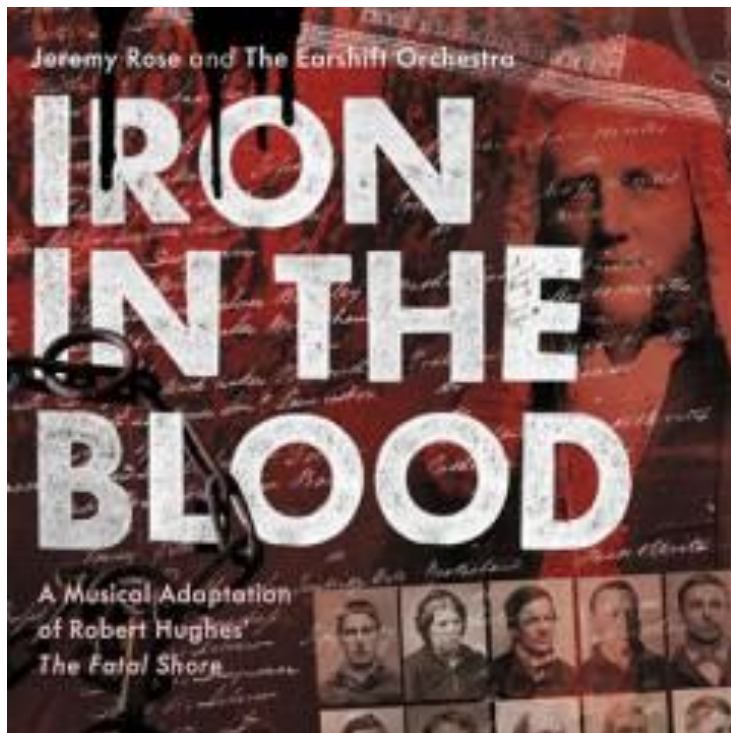
One interesting comparison is the explorer Leichhardt whose travails, spiritual and geographical, were captured in one literary work thought of by the *Guardian* as one of the 100 greatest novels of all time - *Voss* by Patrick White. It was made into an opera written by Richard Meale with the libretto by David Malouf. Spirituality of the original inhabitants was also explored but the narrative of white exploration and the “nobility” of Opera as a fitting vehicle to musically underscore the story, was quite in keeping with the mythical narrative of the Australian nation.



Patrick White's novel Voss was made into an opera written by Richard Meale (left) with the libretto by David Malouf (below)... MEALE PHOTO CREDIT LORRIE GRAHAM



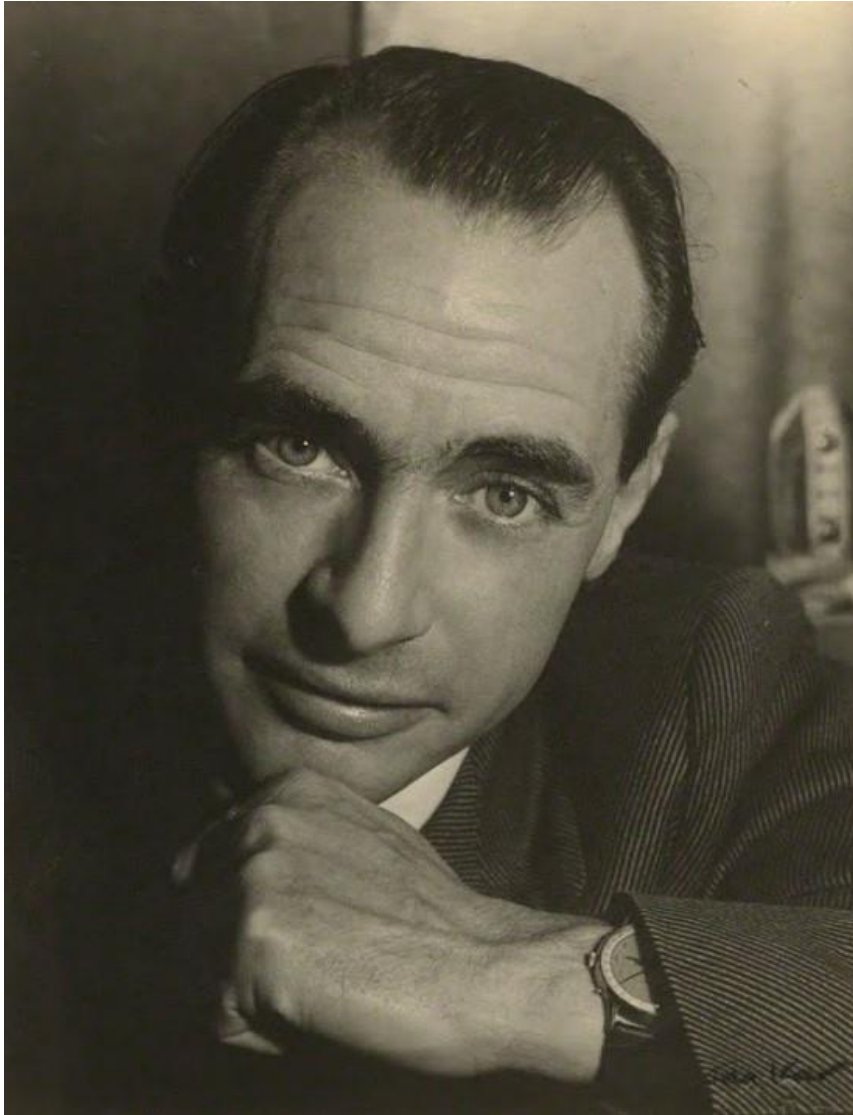
The work of Jeremy Rose is a profound corrective to such narratives and will endure as a substantial artistic accomplishment, one of the most important artistic statements of any that I'm aware about our nation. Where Lloyd Swanton's great *Ambon* is a work from the point of view of the humble, decent, modest, unremarkable Everyman, with the music perfectly suited to that Man's journey and travails in a war, Jeremy Rose's *Iron In The Blood* is operatic, and symphonic and monumental about the "Birth of a Nation". Its libretto is poetic prose spoken not sung, written by Robert Hughes. Its symphonic reach is programme music reflecting both the paradise before it was lost; the invasion; the landscape; the pain; fauna and people. *Iron In The Blood* is a fitting musical realisation of one Australia's greatest literary and historical works.



Hughes provides background to the establishment of this continental gaol as a repository hell for the "criminal class" who were understood by the English of the 1830s as a distinct social class who "produced" crime in the way hatters produced hats and miners coal. It traverses the tragic encounter between invaders and indigenous and the brutality waged against those transported. It provides geographic and climatic reality undergone by the new arrivals. Like the novelist Dickens writing about the England of the 19th Century the reader gets a much better understanding from Dickens of life then and there than by reading historian G M Trevelyan. Similarly to understand the Holocaust it's better to read Primo Levi than any historian if deep understanding is the goal. *The Fatal Shore* may be labelled as "popular history" by some academics, just as Louis Armstrong was labelled "popular" music, but its worth and impact cannot be denied.

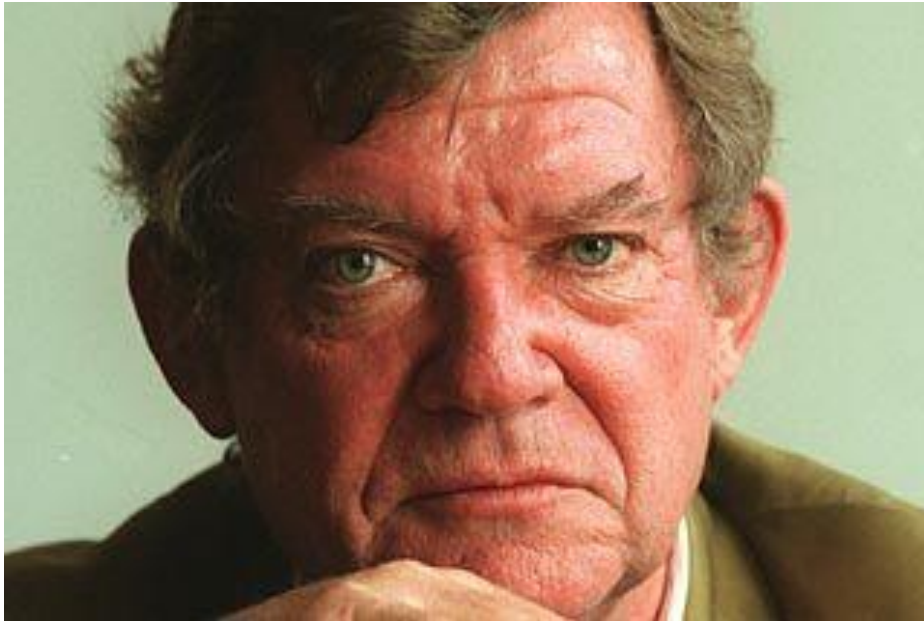
Hughes was prefigured by Alan Moorehead, in his popular history *The Fatal Impact: The Invasion Of The South Pacific 1767-1840* (H&H 1966). Moorehead was clear to use the word "invasion" in the title not "settlement" and his empathy and sympathy for the first peoples is manifest throughout the work. It was a break-out publication

event for Australian “popular” history notable for Moorehead’s writing as much as for its sensibility. Hughes’s work is more substantial, beautifully written and calls on many historical publications devoted to the subject in the period between 1965 and 1985. Neither book seemed to have much impact on Australian consciousness as evidenced by Prime Minister John Howard’s unwillingness on 26th May 1998 to say “sorry” to the Stolen Generation.



Alan Moorehead in his popular history “The Fatal Impact: The Invasion Of The South Pacific 1767-1840” was clear to use the word “invasion” in the title not “settlement” and his empathy and sympathy for the first peoples is manifest throughout the work...

One role of an artist is to reveal “truth”. Hughes is one of our finest writers and his tone in *The Fatal Shore* is not quite cynical, but rather ironic, knowing, and never sentimental, not acerbic but clear-eyed about the strengths and weaknesses of the human animal. The absence of nobility in the history makes a tragic tone inappropriate. Sad, tawdry, sardonic, petty, with comic asides perhaps, but little evident nobility, except perhaps of the lone Aboriginal standing his ground with a



Robert Hughes (above): his tone in “The Fatal Shore” is not quite cynical, but rather ironic, knowing, and never sentimental, not acerbic but clear-eyed about the strengths and weaknesses of the human animal...

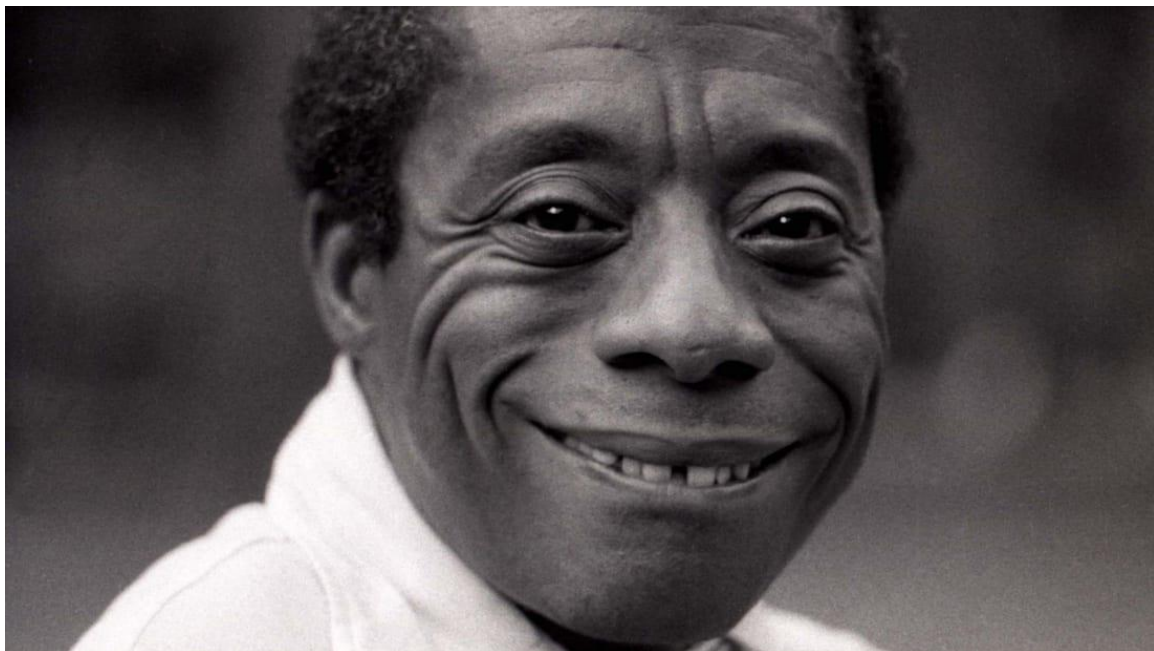
spear to defend his land. It's not enough just to say Jeremy Rose in his work *Iron In The Blood* gets the tone right - more significantly his music does justice to the work. In its scope it is operatic but, unlike classical opera, does not depend on melodrama, banal libretto, or powerful melodies. It is programme music but music which combines the power and discipline of an orchestra with the distinctive individuality of improvising musicians given voice throughout in concerto-like moments. It is moreover a work informed by the acute musical intelligence and a refined compassion of Jeremy Rose.



Jeremy Rose: “Iron in the Blood” is informed by his acute musical intelligence and refined compassion... PHOTO COURTESY THE AUSTRALIAN

In adapting a significant work such as *The Fatal Shore*, which title comes from a convict ballad of 1852-30, a sensitive adaptation would be difficult without reference to its poetic language. Rose uses judiciously selected excerpts which are narrated to great effect by Philip Quast and William Zappa. In his book Hughes used diaries, letters, novelists like Trollope, historians such as Australians Miriam Dixon and Manning Clark, official documents and much more as sources: he also uses song. *Iron In The Blood*, ironically, opens with a sea shanty with its clash between the jolly rhythm and the lyric which informs the theme of the opening track *The Marauder Within* (Rose), a reference to the British “criminal class” which is “destroying” British civilisation - the impetus behind transportation was, essentially, the protection of property including property such as clothes, shillings, bread or handkerchiefs.

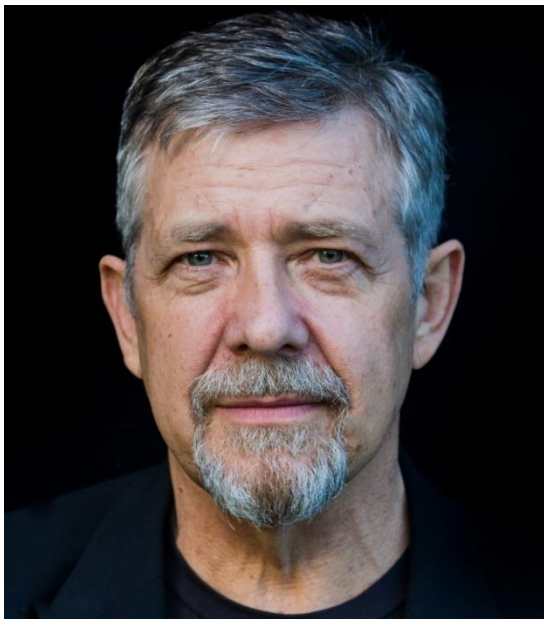
Hughes' writing style is potent. Lifted at random from the book I give you this from a wharf scene “the caged cockatoos and rosellas shrieking among the overflowing fruit stalls, and the silent caged men” (*The Fatal Shore*, Hughes, Pan, London, 1987, p.323). Not purple prose but prose that at times may be described as evocative, musical, and beautifully balanced. An Orson Welles, John Gielgud or Jack Nicholson can make “good morning” sound resonant and important. Equally, the greatest poetry can be destroyed by poor recitation. The speech of Welles - cadence, sonority, music - has inspired many, including jazz artists. Some artists use the voice of the writer as the foundation of a work as does William Parker in his work *James Baldwin* from the album *The Majesty Of Jah*, Album 3 in the collection *The Music of William Parker Migration of Silence Into And Out Of The Tone World Volumes 1-10* (Centering/Aum Fidelity) 2020.



James Baldwin: he has an appealing and clear speaking voice which is well paced and varied... PHOTO CREDIT ALLAN WARREN

Baldwin has an appealing and clear speaking voice which is well paced and varied and he is effectively backed by the trumpet of Jalalu Kalvert Nelson with Parker on

percussion and live electronics. Duke Ellington had both a mellifluous, and measured voice of some depth as well, combined with a poetic sensibility and high intelligence. So when he enunciates *Madame Zzaj* (jazz backwards) as he does in his longer work *A Drum Is A Woman*, it's effectively musical and memorable. Ellington's voice is first heard on his masterpiece *Saddest Tale* (Ellington) in 1934. Amiri Baraka reads his work with considerable effect on *Blak Dada Nihilismus* on an ESP disc of the New York Art Quartet. Narrators Philip Quast and William Zappa do justice to the words of Hughes in *Iron In The Blood*.



Narrators Philip Quast (left) and William Zappa (below): they do justice to the words of Hughes in "Iron In The Blood"...ZAPPA
PHOTO CREDIT SAHLAN HAYES



Ten pieces comprise the suite with *Time Immemorial* in two parts. *Time Immemorial Part 1* and *Tyranny and Van Diemen's Land* are the longest works, each over ten minutes. The opening track *The Marauder Within* (Rose) may be seen

as a form of Overture as it traverses the range of elements that make up the suite: song in the form of a sea shanty; narrative excerpts from *The Fatal Shore*; hints of the Asian antipodes with the sound of a large bronze gong; orchestral drama; an anguished piercing alto sax solo suggesting a cry of an individual voice distorted in part by anguish and pain; an orchestral sound melange of sensations or impressions of the disordered meeting between old and new civilisations, the hurly burly if you will of the new settlement on the shores of Port Jackson; and the orchestral climax of inevitability of the new force meeting the old natural world dominated by nature and an society of humans adapted to that nature.

What seems to be a bass trombone opens *Tyranny and Van Diemen's Land* where the narrative libretto speaks of stupidity, laziness, starvation occurring around the second year of the invasion. A bass solo is segued into an orchestral statement and the sounds are enlivened by drumming both representing perhaps the martial elements and the ritual flogging that regularly occurred. Thomas Botting and his double bass are impressive backing pianist Joseph O'Connor on *The Melancholy Bush (Wild Colonial Boy)* (Rose) or behind the harpsichord *Time Immemorial pt 2* (Rose) - it's like the throb of life. Rose uses the bass to impressive effect in *Iron In The Blood*.



The Earshift Orchestra performing "Iron in the Blood"... PHOTO CREDIT KAREN STEAINS

Phrases used by Hughes are adapted as titles and *An Ineradicable Stain* reveals the justification for the genocide (Tasmania) and massacres of indigenous people being derived from the racial superiority of being "white", regardless of the nature of that "whiteness". So the ravaged, despairing convict had at least some status in this hellish world - he or she was white. The music has staccato dramatic flourishes by the orchestra and an elegiac alto solo dissolving into dissonance. In *Beyond The*

Seas it is as if the voice is the instrument in a concerto at times mimicked by the talking trumpet sounds. There is contrast between the melodic backing and the narrative about lashing which becomes rhythmic and climactic in *A Strange Lottery*. *Norfolk Island* is replete with martial overtones including the drum, with the knowledge that a convict singing a song could be awarded 100 lashes. The irony of this is symbolically relevant to the Australian psyche which is noteworthy for its restrictive love of the arts and its reverence for the miner and the mythical “man of the land”. The work ends with the words “Nature as a prison had to be expunged” ringing in our ears.

If ever there was a work worthy of performance at the Sydney Opera House this is it: not just because of its outstanding artistry but because it addresses the profound issues that formed our national psyche which are yet to be properly addressed. That John Howard was incapable of saying “Sorry” is indicative of the widespread ignorance and racism that still pervades our culture. The bickering between right wing “historians” and others, that profit out of these culture wars, like Andrew Bolt and Alan Jones, is evidence of the potent mythology that lingers about our nation and the deep resistance that prevails even about a new flag.



Former Australian prime minister John Howard: that he was incapable of saying “sorry” is indicative of the widespread ignorance and racism that still pervades our culture...

Sitting a few feet from acoustic bass player Lloyd Swanton on Saturday evening the 13th March 2021 at Foundry 616 in Sydney, Eric Myers and I realised once again what a privilege it is to be in the same room as some of the masters of music when they are at their creative best. He was performing with pianist Matt McMahon and vocalist Virna Sanzone. The bass has such a powerful impact on my sensibilities. Post WW11 was the era of Charles Mingus, Charlie Haden, Paul Chambers, Ray Brown, Percy Heath, Eugene Wright, Miroslav Vitous et al. I guess the bass didn't figure as significant until Jimmy Blanton, Oscar Pettiford, and especially Charles Mingus. Since the 1950s (*cf* bass amplifier) it has really blossomed. Swanton is carrying on this magnificent legacy on this amazing instrument (yes, magnificent! yes, amazing!).



Australian bassist Lloyd Swanton pictured here in 2016 at Jazzit Musik Club, Salzburg: what a privilege it is to be in the same room as some of the masters of music when they are at their creative best... PHOTO CREDIT MARKUS LACKINGER

Since its blossoming there have been long bass solos (Jimmy Garrison with Shepp or Coltrane) or even whole albums dedicated to bass solos such as Peter Kowald's *Was Da Ist* (1994) FMP. For a contemporary instance of the astonishing musical power and beauty of the bass you can no better than listen to Michael Formanek's Very Practical Trio (Intakt) and the work *Even Better* (2019) which is performed almost as a suite of ten pieces. Very Practical Trio is a drummer-less group of Formanek, bass; Tim Berne, alto saxophone; and Mary Halvorson, guitar. Each piece is imagined by Formanek as a song with a lyrical structure but no arrangement and the musicians improvise on the song - out of it then back into it. It is a remarkable instance of three improvising masters of their instruments at a creative peak with the bass contributing melodically, harmonically, rhythmically to profound effect.



Michael Formanek's Very Practical Trio, L-R, Mary Halvorson, guitar; Formanek, bass; Tim Berne, alto saxophone: three improvising masters of their instruments at a creative peak with the bass contributing melodically, harmonically, rhythmically to profound effect...

Perhaps the bass symbolises earth, heart, blood, whilst the horns symbolise sounds of living creatures. The drums and the piano mirror the rain, movement, machines, and the reeds the wind. Who knows the connections music makes with us? And even in a larger setting, an orchestral setting, the bass has a presence, a palpable presence that enlarges the music. In this regard, I'm thinking of Don Bagley's presence in the Stan Kenton Orchestra - Bill Holman wrote *A Study for Bass*, and *Bags* to feature Bagley. If you take a listen to the album *Kenton In Hi Fi* you can see how Bagley's bass is so important to the drive, and the feel of that orchestra. Enough already! Rant concludes: a bass player is the most significant artist now leading the music: William Parker is having an impact in a different way but as tellingly as Charles Mingus.



Don Bagley (left): his bass is so important to the drive, and the feel of the Stan Kenton Orchestra...

Whereas Mingus was a member of the young jazz lions coming of age in the immediate aftermath of WW11 during which 1.2 million African Americans served their country but came home to entrenched Jim Crow laws, a new artistic awakening was exploding from the 1940s with the likes of Charlie Parker and Charlie Christian. William Parker was born on 10th January 1952 amidst the greatest advances in material wealth the USA had ever known. He spent the first 23 years of his life in the Bronx, New York, in a safe but economically modest enclave of some 25,000 African Americans. He couldn't fail to be aware of the signs of material splendour with huge automobiles, technicolour movies like *Ben Hur* (1959), *Cleopatra* (1963) and *Planet of the Apes* (1968), and the space race. But he also came of age during a dramatic period of conflict, the Vietnam War, the assassination of Martin Luther King, as well as the turbulent student uprisings of the time.

The election of Jack Kennedy presaged a new era which was cut short by his assassination in 1963. There were some striking musical role models such as Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Mingus, Max Roach, Albert Ayler and Ornette Coleman among them. But a major local disruption to the life of his family was the physical division of the South Bronx by the Cross-Bronx Expressway at great social cost to the lives of mainly African Americans. This powerful urban event may have contributed to Parker's intense reverence for nature. Little William Parker got much succour through his Dad's records and especially the music of Duke Ellington. "There was a tremendous power in music. It was the thing that accompanied the great ceremonies in life. By ceremony I mean the sun rising and setting, ocean waves moving towards the shore as birds take off in flight." (*Universal Tonality: The Life And Music Of William Parker*, by Cisco Bradley, Duke University Press, Durham, 2021, p 49).



A young girl in the 1980s, pictured where the Cross-Bronx Expressway divided the South Bronx in New York City... PHOTO CREDIT PERLA DE LEON

William Parker was the bass player for Cecil Taylor for 11 years. He has composed over 4,000 works. His work is grounded against the backdrop of the “afterlife of slavery”. His attitude to music is suggested by these comments: “Only magical formulas that will bring the dead back to life will be alive in this world of tones and vibrations and the word *interesting* will be banned from the vocabulary.” (Notes to *Wood Flute Songs Anthology Live 2006-2012* AUM Fidelity, 8CD 2013).

His attitude to art is suggested by these words accompanying *Raining on the Moon*, AUM Fidelity, 2012: “I was never interested in Arts for the sake of Art. Art is the blood of the people whether they are aware of it or not. Both the artist and art have been coopted by corporate business and the entertainment industry. The pasteurization of musicians through music education has turned out crops of musicians who have been homogenised. It is still the role of the musician to incite revolution, spiritual and human change.”



William Parker: art is the blood of the people whether they are aware of it or not... It is still the role of the musician to incite revolution, spiritual and human change...

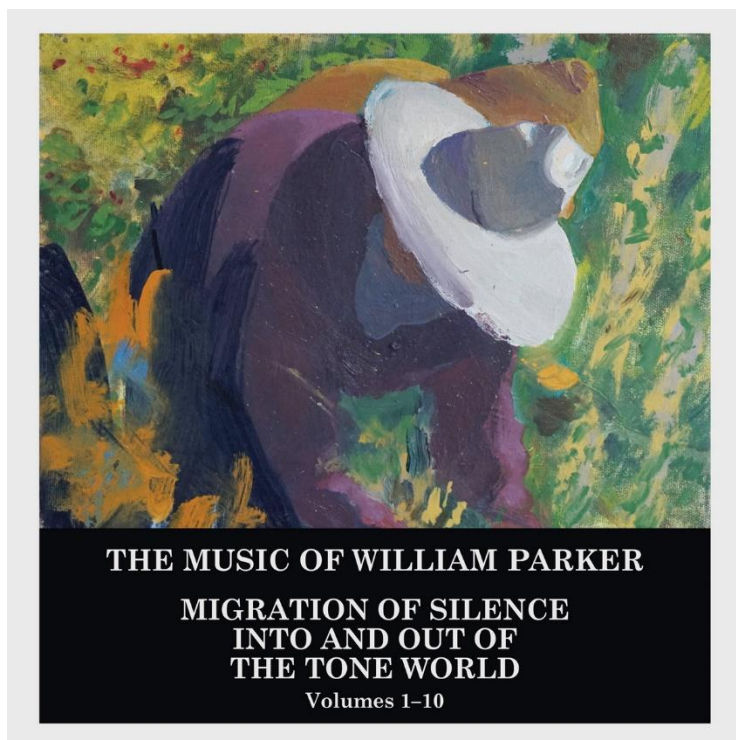
Simplicity of beauty or the beauty of simplicity may have been Lloyd Swanton's devotional incantation so to speak, throughout his artistic life and the group The Necks and the rhythmic power of the group The Catholics attest to that. Phil Slater's document *The Dark Pattern* also is a focus on elegant simplicity and beauty of sound at the expense of technical complexity or inventive improvisation. Indeed, such approaches augur a shift in the bebop holy grail. William Parker talks of the imprisonment of musicians in the chord changes of bebop. It's possible too that the influence of double bass player and producer Manfred Eicher has helped in this regard, where outstanding technical recording facilities have drawn out a focus on the sheer beauty of sound of instruments not least the bass and piano.



Phil Slater: His document "The Dark Pattern" is a focus on elegant simplicity and beauty of sound at the expense of technical complexity or inventive improvisation...PHOTO CREDIT REUBEN WHITE. Double bass player and producer Manfred Eicher (below) has helped ... outstanding technical recording facilities have drawn out a focus on the sheer beauty of sound of instruments...



True to his principles, William Parker has not only written music, but has produced it and arranged it as well as having been in complete control of many recording documents . Take for example the anthology *The Music Of William Parker Migration Of Silence Into And Out Of The Tone World Volumes 1-10* (AUM Fidelity 2020). The ten CDs were all produced, arranged and composed by Parker. With some minor exceptions, he wrote all texts associated with the production. He is featured at various times on the following instruments: double bass, donso ngoni, percussion, voice, bass duduk, fujara overtone flute, guembri, balafon, Serbian flute, gralla, kamele ngoni, cornet, keringot, hochiku, shakuhachi in D&A, stereophonic bamboo flute, Ojibway overtone bass flute, pocket trumpet, malakan flute, Chinese shakahuchi, Navajo flute, and the khaen.



Some examples from the anthology include *Freedom* from *The Majesty Of Raj* (2010) which is a nine-minute performance, having its genesis in writing in response to the election of Ronald Reagan, considered by Parker as one of the worst Presidents in history. In this work, Parker’s bass provides the foundation in playing as powerful as that of Mingus or Haden in its resonance and depth. The work swings relentlessly and features narrative, voice, choir, shouts, symphonic elements, percussion, and instrumental solos. It’s as if the title of the piece is reflected in the composer’s determination to have its imagining in as wide a source of musical sound as possible away from the strictures of Western diatonic music or even African tribal music or so called “jazz” music even though it is in the tradition of that musical genre.

Listen To The Sky from *The Fastest Train* (2019) has flutes opening the piece with scratching percussion responding. One flute remarks, the other responds, one in deep resonance, the other higher. Coen Albert provides cricket sounds, bamboo brushes and drums with Klaas Hekman on bass indian flute. Parker is probably on keringot, hochiko or shakuhachi flutes. This document recalls to some extent

Keith Jarrett's *Spirits 1 & 2* (1985) which was an exercise in spiritual rehabilitation for the pianist unintended for release. Whilst Jarrett's was more art for art's sake, Parker's is anything but in its motivations. In *Recall from Blue Limelight* (2018) the double bass and voice alone prevail. *Cosmic Funk* is a groove similar to hiphop with swinging violins, and percussion, simple lyrics voiced by Raina Sokolov-Gonzalez and solo violin inspired by a homeless man dressed in four overcoats encountered on the subway by the composer whose odour was so powerful he emptied the carriage - the most powerful "funk" of all - the lyric is "Cosmic funk will save the world."

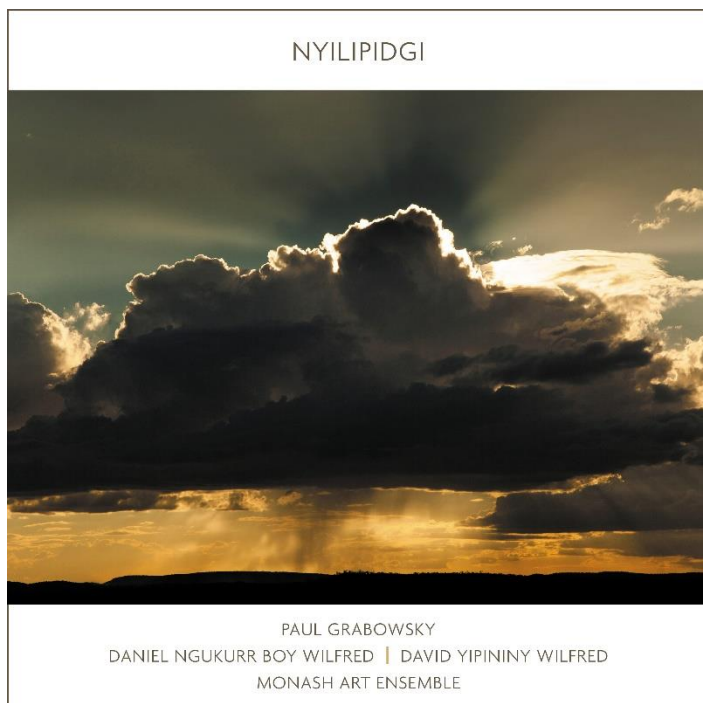


Raina Sokolov-Gonzalez: simple lyrics are voiced by her and solo violin inspired by a homeless man dressed in four overcoats encountered on the subway by the composer...

Whereas *Iron In The Blood* (Rose) is a work whose theme is national identity, historical realities and the destruction of myth, Parker's themes may be inspired by daily encounters with the ordinary. Like Rose, Parker also uses narrative as he does on Baldwin from *The Majesty Of Jah* (2019) with the narrative being responded to as spoken by improvising musicians such as superb muted trumpet of Jalalu-Kalvert Nelson and Parker on donso ngon. Baldwin, however has a mellifluous sonority which is quite musical and gives his spoken thoughtful words considerable power. The work ends with Baldwin's words: "It doesn't matter what you do to me.....you've already done it.....the problem now is how are you going to save yourselves?the problem now is how are you going to save yourselves?"

Parker's music is so potent, that the simplest or the most elaborate works reek with the composer's deep and wide-ranging musicality. He is within the tradition of Mingus in his involvement in the world he finds surrounding him, but he is an evolutionary artistic leap beyond that great artist. And not just in the genre called "jazz" but in music generally across all genres and across all instruments and forms. Parker's creativity is such that he can take simple daily encounters as springboard for art or can address the grandest of themes with equal facility and commitment and relevance: a reminder of the observation sometimes made that the universe is revealed in a grain of sand. His imagination, creativity, spiritual dimension, political awareness, intelligence, musicality place him amongst the greatest of modern artists.

Neither an historical and literary work, nor concerning the nature of the everyday, *Nyilipidgi* (ABC Jazz 2016) by Paul Grabowsky and the Monash Art Ensemble is referencing some of the oldest music on earth. For nearly 20 years the composer, pianist and conductor has been pondering, composing, working with and inquiring into ceremonial musicians from Ngukurr, Roper River, Arnhem Land. Two of the musicians are featured on the document, Daniel Ngukurr Boy Wilfred, *bilma* and vocals, and David Yipininy Wilfred on *yidaki* (didjeridu). The former are percussion (clapper) sticks and the latter rhythmic movement of air through a long tube. The nature of these two instruments is central to all music but it is in jazz that the significance of rhythm has been given its important place in modern music. It's fitting that Grabowsky, whose inspiration and work has been grounded in jazz, but not limited to that genre, should be addressing such music in a major way, not simply as an entertainment, nor a moment in a ceremony opening a facility or in Acknowledgement of Country.



Duke Ellington was the first musician to reference the didjeridoo in a major work - the eight-part suite *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse* (1971) - but the composition *Didjeridoo* (Ellington) is not played on that instrument but by baritone saxophonist Harry Carney. *Nyilipidgi* may be the first major work with the didjeridoo featured throughout this suite along with *bilma* (clappers): both these instruments along with voice are central to Aboriginal culture and its music. I think it's fair to say, though purists might resist, that the jazz tradition is at the heart of this work by composer Paul Grabowsky and the Monash Art Ensemble. In that tradition, improvisation and rhythm are the distinguishing features. The didjeridoo and clappers are at the least rhythm instruments but may add drama and atmosphere and contribute body and resonance to voicings. Grabowsky has integrated these instruments well into the music palette so that the curiosity value that may have arisen is dispensed with. Equally, there is no suggestion of concerto-type movements. It's a substantial artistic achievement.

In terms of themes, is there a more important single theme at this present moment than recognition that we humans are an integrated element of the natural world and our survival is co-dependent on that world? Is it not the case that it is possible we Australian invaders and destroyers of nature may learn something about sustainable living from the original peoples of this land? Where a musician like Sculthorpe seemed to focus on the mystery and power of landscape, Grabowsky traverses a range of moods with a focus on the human and his relationship with nature, including energetic celebration; joy; wistful yearning for the distant paradise (water in nature); the emotional pull of place; and the unsettling ever-present wind of voice and nature.

The relative silence and space can be mind expanding or unsettling. I recall Japanese tourists being unsettled by the plains of Western NSW where the thin, bleak, flat land disappeared into infinity and the pale blue white lit sky filled one's vision, causing mild panic for those used to congestion, enclosure, and the detail of objects within an ordered and often enclosed environment. The tall structures which feature in cities like Tokyo (pop 15m) allow glimpses of sky, whilst thousands of young single people rarely venture outside their tiny apartments away from their screens. On the other hand, the Australian desert land celebrated in *Nyilipidgi* allows for heightened sensitivity to the smallest breath of wind and the tinkled tic of insects as well as the sounds of silence gently throbbing in our ears.



David & Daniel Wilfred in performance of “Nyilipidgi” at the Stonnington Jazz Festival...PHOTO COURTESY ROGER MITCHELL

Nyilipidgi is in twelve parts. It begins in silence with *First Dawn* and the gentle entrance of wind allowed by the electronics of Peter Knight. Wind rushing, water tinkling, sudden dramatic shafts of sun, the earth fracturing sounds of trombones suggesting the energy of creation, then chaos of exploding elements followed by a lone voice, clapping sticks and didgeridoo. A fine trumpet solo backed by drums concludes the opening. This piece prefigures the approach taken throughout.

The medium tempo *Cycles* opens with the acoustic bass which leads proceedings throughout. Piano chords punctuate the bass with the clapping sticks, and voice naturally integrated into the music. The limited musical reach of the indigenous instruments is effectively and naturally integrated into the works throughout. The unique nasal quality of Aboriginal voice is sometimes used to dramatic musical effect. The violin of Lizzy Welsh is featured in *First Dance* and the piece ends with Aboriginal narrative. The trombone chorus in *Warp and Weft* is especially effective - growling, expressive with voice riding on top - at times featuring a swinging orchestra and a rollicking, joyous momentum. There is a very fine expressive and vibrant trumpet solo by Peter Knight on *Dimensionality* backed by bass. *In The Bag* might also be titled *In The Pocket* as it is an up-tempo small group swinging work which features a conversation between the tenor of Arin Grigg and the voice of Daniel Ngukurr Boy Wilfred which also has the orchestra seemingly echoing the melody inherent in the vocal in a superb climax. Musically, the periodic dramatic or climatic shout outs don't always work.



L-R, Paul Grabowsky, David Wilfred, Daniel Wilfred...

Nyilipidgi is a remarkable example of how music thousands of years old not only resonates still but fits so easily into the great evolutionary leap into modern times with the renewed appreciation and understanding of the importance of rhythm in music. For many centuries music in the West became more and more dissociated from the lived experiences of most people. The individual voices of the soloists, the sensitive voicings of the arranger and composer, and the rhythms of the ancient instruments and jazz instruments give a power to this very fine work by Paul Grabowsky.

Any insistence on a fixed literal way to live, or play, or create, or govern, is, ultimately, doomed. The reason the English language, “jazz” and “democracy” will survive, is because they are all, as we are, works in progress. William Parker and Paul Grabowsky may be entering their senior years so to speak, which may be no brake on their creativity, but with the likes of the younger Jeremy Rose (39) entering prime time we have grounds for considerable celebration that this great music has a fertile, compassionate, empathetic and blazingly intelligent soil in which to flourish and thrive.