

***KINDRED CHORDS: Australian Musical Families***, by Loretta Barnard.  
Published by Shooting Star Press, Charnwood ACT, 2020. ISBN 978-1-925821-53-6  
PRINT; 978-1-925821-54-3 EBOOK, 325 pp.

**Reviewed by Ted Nettelbeck\***

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I am aware of a small but well-established field of study within Psychology that is concerned with the role of parental influences on the development of music abilities in children. For the most part, this work has focussed on how parents' behaviours can direct or guide their children's involvement with music although, as outlined below, there has also been some interest in how behavioural genetics can answer questions about the extent to which musical abilities can be advanced by inherited characteristics. However, as far as I know, Loretta Barnard is the first to address these topics as they apply to established Australian musicians of note. She has done this while interviewing these musicians about their lives, by seeking the opinions of the musicians themselves and of their family members, about how they became involved in music and what they think were their main influences.



*Loretta Barnard: perhaps the first to address such topics as the role of parental influences on the development of music abilities in children, as they apply to established Australian musicians of note...*

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I really like the title *Kindred Chords*. It not only captures nicely what this book is about – the stories of several Australian musical families across generations – but its homophonic associations hint at the unusually strong links and ties within such families, which may be the consequence of shared talent across generations. Loretta Barnard is a writer and columnist, and a member of one of Australia’s most famous jazz families -- the daughter of Bob Barnard, a giant of the Australian jazz scene for some 70 years. Loretta is not only an avid consumer of diverse forms of music; as the Introduction establishes, she is also a passionate advocate for the support of live music, with an insider’s knowledge of the struggles, hardship and sacrifices that many musicians face in pursuit of their art.



*Loretta Barnard is the daughter of Bob Barnard (above): a giant of the Australian jazz scene for some 70 years... PHOTO CREDIT GEORGE KRUPINSKI*

The book comprises 27 short essays (2000-3000 words), each an account of an Australian musical family, some member(s) of which have gained public recognition. Strikingly, so many of these stories are characterised by strong sibling relationships centred on music, generally with one sibling emerging as a predominant influence, and usually with the musical commitment found across generations. This pattern is the same, or very similar, irrespective of the style of music played within the family.

And many different kinds of musical genres are represented in this book; Rock (the Barnes-Campbell family; the Young brothers of AC/DC fame; the Findlay sisters Amy, Hannah, Sarah, Holly and their band Stonefield; Chrissy Amphlett); Folk, Country, Soul, R&B (John Williamson; Kasey and Nash Chambers; guitar virtuosi Phil and Tommy Emmanuel; Brooke, Samantha and Mollie McClymonts; the Steele family; the Donovan brothers and Casey Donovan, daughter of Mervyn); World Music (oud specialist Joseph Tawadros and his percussionist brother James); Indie

Pop (siblings Angus and Julia Stone); children's entertainment (Anthony Field, sundry family members and The Wiggles); Pop (twin song writers/performers Jess and Lisa Origliasso and The Veronicas; Little Pattie Amphlett); Vaudeville, Variety Entertainment, Musical Theatre (Toni Lamond and her son Tony Sheldon. The story of Toni's equally successful sister Helen Reddy of *I am Woman* fame is also included here although her music repertoire of Jazz, Pop, Cabaret and light Rock was very different).



*Bill Chambers (left) with his daughter Kasey Chambers... PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK*

Other chapters cover a mix of jazz, flamenco, popular and World Music (Victor Martinez Parada and his sons); Classical Music (the Olding family centred around violinist Dene Olding and his wife the viola player Irina Morozova); Modern Western Art Music (the moving story of Nigel Westlake, a major Australian composer of music for symphony orchestra, chamber groups, film, jazz, and his family); Classical guitar (Slava and Leonard Grigoryan); and even crossover classical composed and improvised jazz music (cello and viola da gamba artist Jennifer Eriksson and her son Siebe Pogson).





*Violinist Dene Olding and his wife, viola player Irina Morozova... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

I was particularly taken with the stories presented in Chapters 5 and 19, both describing the lives and music of Indigenous Australian musicians. The first tells the story of members of the band Yothu Yindi, which has aimed to advocate strongly for the promotion and celebration of Yolngu culture. The latter is the story of opera singer and composer Deborah Cheetham, a member of the Stolen Generations, who was only able to reconnect with her birth family during adulthood. As it transpired, her uncle Jimmy Little was a very successful and much honoured Country and Pop singer whose music career spanned some 60 years; a rare achievement for an Aboriginal man during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Opera singer and composer Deborah Cheetham, a member of the Stolen Generations, who was only able to reconnect with her birth family during adulthood...PHOTO COURTESY LIMELIGHT MAGAZINE*

I will not expand further here about these stories because Barnard makes clear in Chapter 5 that permission from that family was necessary for her to include their story; Yolngu culture prohibits using the name or image of a person no longer alive. I am uncertain whether similar circumstances applied to Chapter 19 (involving Yorta Yorta culture); and I am in any case uncertain about whether any such permission would extend to a review of her book. However, these are fine chapters; and I have very much appreciated their inclusion.

Five chapters will have special appeal to those particularly interested in Australian jazz history. Chapter 7 provides a brief sketch of Graeme and Roger Bell's historically important pioneering contributions to the establishment following World War II of enduring jazz scenes in Melbourne and Sydney.



*Roger Bell (left) with his younger brother Graeme Bell: historically important pioneering contributions to the establishment following World War II of enduring jazz scenes in Melbourne and Sydney... PHOTO COURTESY NIGEL BUESST COLLECTION*

Other essays cover the stories of husband (pianist) and wife (singer) Dave MacRae and Joy Yates and their children Jade and Moses; and, in what is a most extraordinary example of musical talent maintained across at least five generations, the careers of members of the Daniels-Falson families.



*L-R, Jade MacRae, Dave MacRae & Joy Yates... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

Ron Falson was, for some 50 years, one of the leading trumpet players in Sydney, working continuously in jazz, studio and club settings. But, in the opinion of his singer wife Gill, the music careers of their children and grandchildren are actually linked to the aptitude of her parents and grandmother.



*Trumpeter Ron Falson, with his wife Gill: the music careers of their children and grandchildren are actually linked to the aptitude of her parents and grandmother... PHOTO COURTESY GILL FALSON*

Chapter 17 provides a short account of early familial influences on the Morrison brothers John and James, particularly their Mother's regular organ performances during Sunday Methodist services led by their Father. Both boys were precociously proficient on several different instruments but it was James' astonishing talent, recognised and aided by Don Burrows' mentoring and coupled with James' astute management skills, that has turned him into a household name as the best-known jazz musician in Australia. Along with their many accomplishments, both brothers are also dedicated to and heavily involved in the advancement of jazz education; and their children are now emerging as the next generation of Morrison musicians.



*James Morrison (left) and John Morrison: both boys were precociously proficient on several different instruments... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

The book's final chapter is essentially a tribute to Bob and Len Barnard, the influence throughout their childhood of their actively gigging parents, and the brothers' emergence as central to Melbourne's post-war jazz scene, Bob's move to Sydney in 1962 to join the Graeme Bell band, and his subsequent stellar national and international career with multiple honours. It also briefly tracks the commitment to music of the next two generations within the family; Bob's sons became musicians, Loretta's cousin Rebecca (Len's daughter) is a professional singer and Bob's and Len's grandsons are now successful established musicians.





*A shot featuring three generations of Barnards, Front L-R, Stan Valacos, Rebecca Barnard (Len's daughter), Adam Barnard (Bob's son), Casey Golden & Beau Golden (sons of Loretta Barnard), Back L-R, Bob Barnard, Tony Barnard (Bob's son)...  
PHOTO COURTESY BARNARD FAMILY COLLECTION*



*On the occasion of Bob Barnard's 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, (L-R) Beau Golden, Bob, Casey Golden, Adam Barnard (Bob's son). Beau and Casey are Loretta Barnard's sons...  
PHOTO COURTESY LORETTA BARNARD*



Throughout, I found two common themes that appeared to run through the histories of most of these musical families and that struck me as likely to generate further consideration. First, and most immediately salient, the author has frequently referred in some way to the question of whether the music accomplishments that she has described are “in the genes”, in the sense of inherited from forebears. Several of those interviewed for the book have shared their beliefs about this question. Interestingly, opinions are divided, mostly expressed as principally favouring either a pro-inheritance explanation or, alternatively, pro-environmental influences – but sometimes too acknowledging the importance of both.

Insofar as I have some training in this field, I will assert that, although both extreme opinions are in part correct, neither provides a sufficient explanation without the other. A number of commentators in the book have reached this conclusion. As Bill Chambers, father of Kasey and Nash, has been reported as believing “...music can be in the genes but...personal environment is equally important” (p 154).



*A shot of Kasey Chambers' son Talon (left) taken in 2019, against a shot of her father Bill Chambers (right), taken in 1963... PHOTO COURTESY FACEBOOK*

On the one hand, it is highly plausible that inter-generational musical accomplishments within families are influenced by genes. It is now well established

that different kinds of music behaviours like memory for pitch and music sensitivity are strongly heritable; that is to say that individual differences in these aptitudes are substantially explained by genetic variation. This knowledge therefore supports those holding a pro-inheritance conviction.

Note, however, that accepting this does not mean that a musical talent cannot emerge in the absence of any evidence of prior familial talent; almost certainly, no single gene for music exists – and any genetic combination underpinning the manifestation of high music aptitude must be so complex as to be unknowable, given current understanding. In any case, inheritance in and of itself does not determine anything; the expression of potential requires that genes and environment work together.

In short, what all of the families described here have provided is an environment that has stimulated and encouraged the development of potential; and those contributors holding opinions about the importance of parental example, guidance and encouragement are also right on the money. As becomes clear from consideration of this collection of fascinating life stories, none of the successes of this widely diverse group of musicians could have been possible without the years of dedicated commitment that has characterised the careers of each and every one. A related question raised by some of the participants interviewed for the book is whether desire and practice alone will be sufficient to produce a musician. In my opinion, only in a very limited sense; and certainly not to a level commensurate with the skills of those who are the subjects of the stories in this excellent book. The opinions of some notwithstanding, not everyone is capable of becoming a musician, in the same way as not everyone can be an elite athlete.

My second observation is that a compelling interest in music shared across generations, while a key motivating factor that can influence children to follow their parents' lead, appears also to be something more. Importantly, this shared commitment seems to have provided opportunity for deep engaging connections across generations. I must be careful here; I certainly do not intend to imply that most non-musical families do not experience strong connections between adult children and their parents and grandparents. Of course they do. But the stories revealed here by Loretta Barnard do suggest that where a passion for music is shared within and across generations, this provides the basis for a close form of communication that draws members of a family of all ages together in a way that creates special bonds.

In summary, Loretta Barnard's exploration of influences and ties within Australian musical families offers some fascinating insights into the lives and achievements of a large number of Australian artists. Her book is both well written and engaging; and it is gratifyingly well organised, including informative Endnotes to each chapter, an excellent Index, a comprehensive list of References, a very useful list of major awards recognising Australian musicians, together with an Appendix of recipients, and more than 50 photographs contributed by members of the families represented in the book.