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EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MUSIC

E*ducational Leadership and Music: Lessons for Tomorrow's School Leaders* considers new territory for educational leadership by looking to music for lessons and inspiration that may inform the next generation of schools leaders. Each chapter focuses on an artist or group whose work serves to refine, extend, and challenge our thinking in regards to educational leadership. You will find a vast array of musical forms of expression analyzed and described by an equally diverse collection of educational leadership scholars and practitioners. There may be some who question the academic appropriateness or relevance of a text such as this one. Our response is that part of our ongoing mission should be to break ourselves out of academic silos and forge meaningful connections between seemingly disparate disciplines. Furthermore, educational leadership stands to gain more by drawing from the arts and specifically musical influences. Finally, music is an obvious part of most of our lives; why not explore the ways in which it impacts us on an academic level and not just a personal level?

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Educational Leadership and Music

**Lessons for Tomorrow's
School Leaders**

edited by

Terri N. Watson
The City College of New York

Jeffrey S. Brooks
Monash University

Floyd D. Beachum
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*I dedicate this work to my mother, Theresa J. Watson. Thank you
for unwavering love and support. I am because you are.*

— Terri N. Watson

*To the members of Team Rainbow: Melanie, Holland, Bronwyn, Clodagh,
and Jürgen—We are the music makers, and we are the dreamers of dreams.*

— Jeffrey S. Brooks

*This work is dedicated to George Suggs, Patricia Oates, Chester Beachum, Jr.,
and all of those family members who are no longer with us. You are not forgotten.*

— Floyd D. Beachum

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CHAPTER 7

BEYOND ROPAR BAR

Transcultural and Transformative Collaborations of the Australian Art Orchestra and the Young Wagilak Group

Leon R. de Bruin
Monash University

The Australian Art Orchestra (AAO) is a portable orchestra that meets the demands of the new millennium's explorations in improvised music. Exploring the meeting points between disciplines and cultures, musicians of the AAO imagine new musical forms that reflect the energy and diversity of 21st century Australia. Initially conceived as a contemporary jazz orchestra, it draws inspiration from Australia's vibrant local contemporary music scene and significant cultural diversity, "exploring the interstices between the avant-garde and the traditional, between art and popular music, between electronic and acoustic approaches, creating works that traverse the continuum between improvised and notated forms" (AAO, 2016). Central to this is an ongoing dedication to nurturing dialogues with artistic collaborators in India, Korea, China and Indonesia, as well as with deepening its connection with Australian indigenous cultures. The Orchestra is

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commissioned to create music perspectives committed to the notion of a future in which truly new music that integrates Asian and Western influences is part of the cultural fabric of our region.

Establishing a reputation for the breadth and quality of its ambitious cross-cultural collaborations, Crossing Roper Bar (CRB) is a visionary exploration of the musical traditions of Australia's first people by the Australian Art Orchestra in collaboration with the Indigenous Australian Young Wagilak Group.¹ The Wagilak speaking songmen of South East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, are custodians of one of the oldest continuously practiced cultures on Earth. Their songs are performed regularly in Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Groote Eylandt and surrounding areas where the strong Wagilak musical culture is admired. The Australian Art Orchestra began collaborating with the Young Wagilak Group in 2005. Based on an equal exchange of knowledge that began as a dialogue centered on music, CRB developed into a process of collaborative composition that retains the beauty and dynamism of both traditions. The Young Wagilak Group have worked closely with the AAO to create a contemporary interpretation of Wild Blackfella, a song cycle, which traces the journey of an ancestor through his country as he recounts lived histories, places, and events. A marriage of the ancient with the new, CRB is an exploration of ancestral spirits, country, ceremony, musical leaders, improvisers both indigenous and arrived, and of the power of music in building enduring bridges across cultures, time and place.

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH COLLABORATION

Rehearsals between the two groups occurred in both Ngukurr and Melbourne that established the beginnings of understanding each culture's musical meaning. Initial collaborations were characterized by imitation and a musical ebbing back-and-forth between the distinct groups. Continued interaction produced a refined understanding, sensitivity, and depth of awareness of each other's ways of being, making, and representing musically. Members of the AAO engaged in understanding the complexities of the Wagilak way, and the Wagilak grew to understand the processes, freedoms, and dialogic interplay of a Western art music improvising ensemble. Over several meetings, the AAO investigated the rich and complex tenets that construct the Wagilak song forms. To do this, they immersed themselves in an understanding of the Wagilak people: their customs, their beliefs, and their hermeneutics of society and culture.

According to Aboriginal belief, all life as it is today (human, animal, bird and fish) is part of one vast unchanging network of relationships that can be traced to the Great Spirit ancestors of the Dreamtime. An Aboriginal understanding of the world, the Dreamtime is the beginning of knowledge,

from which came the laws of existence and of survival. The Dreamtime is not simply a reciting of historical events, of retelling of religious significance and greatness. It is something directly experienced as it is encountered in the present; an encounter between a life and its existential animation as a life within a history, society, ecology, and body of knowledge.

The Wagilak identity is thus born into a world of tradition, history and culture, where *gurrutu* (kinship), *rom* (law, correct living), and hermeneutic systems of understanding and languages shape worlds. Wagilak came to be through ancient actions of Djuwalpada who danced when he founded the Wagilak homeland at Njilipidji, and Wagilak today dance this narrative when performing *manikay*. Ben Wilfred, Wagilak elder, speaks of this birth from the land:

Manikay bin coming out of that ground. Comes from that ground at Njilipidji. *Manikay* is for country, for leading new generation. *Manikay* is for using in funeral, *uata* [wind], smoking [purification ceremony]. Learn about country. *Manikay* means spirit for the country, and songs; where he walked, Wild Blackfella [Djuwalpada]. *Manikay* means for the land and for the ground, tree, no matter what animal. Everything. *Manikay* means for the countryside and for land, land and sea—no matter where you go. (Benjamin Wilfred in Curkpatrick, 2013, p. 78)

Ancestral law is carried into new contexts through engaging and dynamic interaction in performance. Deep knowledge of *manikay* is shrouded in secrecy and preserved by wise elders who ultimately regulate its transference, and the most restricted (*yärra*) interpretations held by senior men are the *yarakä* (bones) of a clan (Curkpatrick, 2013, p. 79). Highly protected and veiled, "only shortly before old men [and women] know they are going to die will they reveal to their successors the full extent of the meanings of what they have stored and guarded in their memories" (Williams 1986, p. 24). Likewise, only as Sambo Barabara² [Wagilak elder] was nearing death did he pass over to current elders Benjamin and Daniel Wilfred the authority to continue to perform Wagilak *manikay*: "Sambo come in my dream and give me that clapping stick" (Benjamin Wilfred in Curkpatrick, 2013, p. 79).

In ceremonial performance, *manikay* is a woven tapestry of sound, of dance movements, designs, images, language and time, past and present. Transmitting social, cultural, legal and religious "expressions of hereditary identities, knowledge and values" (Corn 2002, 17), *manikay* brings to life the cultural expression and celebration of tribal ancestors, country, law and congress. *Manikay* is an expression of these themes and influences, layered through generations building on the ancestral footprint of what has gone before. Through performance and iteration, congress and interaction, *manikay* continually evolves and progresses, replenished and rejuvenated by each new relationship and 'maintaining vitality and authenticity through

the passing from leader to leader of successive generations of Wagilak elder" (Caruana & Lendon 1997, 26). Benjamin Wilfred, an elder and leader of the Wagilak retells a story of learning, ownership and renewal:

All my grandfathers and my in-laws, they are all gone now. All our grandfathers, father's fathers, all passed away. We are the only people that know the culture and the secret singing. Only us mob now. Andy [Peters] is the only elder in the Wagilak clan. This is me talking. [Benjamin] Miyala. I'm doing this recording for all my children to listen and learn, and move along with our culture. And we always think about bush tucker when we are walking, I'm the only person that knows the traditional songs. All the rest are gone. This is for you mob; you mob got to listen properly, learn and carry on. Only then can I stop. (Benjamin Wilfred in Curkpatrick, 2013, p. 40)

Yolngu³ advocates for the sharing of culture through a bicultural approach between autonomous Yolngu cultural systems of Arnhem Land (Morphy & Morphy 2013). The Yolngu seek difference as a way of perpetually revitalizing their culture; difference is seen as complementary (Yunupingu, 1993). For the musicians of the AAO, the CRB project avails an opportunity to engage in intercultural music making that gives further meaning to their music-making and life-long learning as improvisers. The AAO musicians bring vast knowledge of jazz and improvised music and embarked upon this exploration of the Yolngu cultural system with respect and inquisitiveness. Both entities combined with a willingness to collaborate, to absorb and be absorbed in the essence and meanings of newfound dialogic discourse. As George Lewis explains:

In performances of improvised music, the possibility of internalizing alternative value systems is implicit from the start. The focus of musical discourse suddenly shifts from the individual, autonomous creator to the collective. (Lewis, 2002, p. 294)

The CRB project challenges music making in several ways. Through interaction, space is given to individual voices in open engagement that allows personal articulation of ideas, narratives and feelings. Yet, central to CRB is the resonance and unity of the collective. The improvised collective is a paradox to these musicians: every player must lead and every player must follow and respond to both the immediate situation and a sense of greater musical development or course of events. Effective improvisation requires fluidity and flexibility of response, a musical reflex shaped from our past histories and experiences elicited "in the moment." Far beyond the demands implicit in genre-specific jazz performance, the CRB collaboration synthesises in performance both groups' histories and stories, shaping new forms, structures and vocabularies. A vehicle for articulating possibilities

of equality, freedom and agency, in which "artists sought to mediate social and individual necessity, to bring them into an ever-dynamic state of equilibrium" (Saul, 2003, p. 19). The ongoing innovative "action that propels the possibilities of jazz is conspicuous in both the creative, transformative thought of its practitioners and the diasporic intercultural and collaborative possibilities evident in the genre's evolution." (de Bruin, 2016a, p. 94).

Cross-cultural collaborations are delicate situations, demanding for the AAO sensitivity and willingness to explore a truly shared music meeting point. By interrogating theories of intercultural engagement, these musicians questioned their personal assumptions about meaningful collaboration, and respectful, artful music making. Leader Paul Grabowsky elaborates:

In an age where the term "world music" has come to disguise a multitude of musical crimes and in which sampling technology has resulted in wide spread looting of cultural artefacts, reducing everything to the status of the "found object," the onus on our creative team has been to approach the composition process as a partnership. (Grabowsky in Curkpatrick, 2013, p. 310)

Thus, in the creating of CRB, traditions of both cultures play with and against each other, sorting between past and present, individuality, and interplay. Collaboration between different individuals and cultures is enacted through a positive and productive tension, allowing unique voices to emerge as the collaboration evolves through new manifestations.

It is not only collaborative processes at play in the formation of this CRB collaboration. The demands upon the individual in embarking on self-reflective practice, a self-interrogation of one's history and perspective that is at the core of both sets of musicians' fulfilling of the projects' possibilities. AAO musician Tony Hicks elaborates on his journey of intercultural engagement and dealing with the musical implications he and the collective saw in this collaborative venture. Hicks explored his own development in great detail. Tracing his decades-long improvising interactions, an enduring and pervasive goal for him remains the liberation of performance from old "codes of production," that seek to allow "for more contextually sensitive contributions within a range of unconventional music making contexts" (Hicks 2011, p. 65). Development reflected on 2009 and 2011 CRB recordings confirm Hick's process of evolution. He elaborates further on the musical processes inherent in the CRB project:

Musically, this project [CRB] forced a further redefinition of my improvisation conceptions and musical philosophies by revealing the habitual nature of Western musical constructs such as tonality and temperament. A new language was required that could express the raw power and transcultural potential of this collaboration. Improvisation can exist to drive evolving creative

processes, leading to profound creative transformations and the development of new languages.' (Hicks 2011, pp. 2–3)

Transformative experiences through collaboration were experienced from both AAO and Wagilak musicians. Manikay song subjects discussed and rehearsed in workshops originated from the collaboration, but were not exclusively a result of the collaboration. AAO musician Tony Hicks recalls an example of the unexpected cultural processes experienced while on tour with the group in 2008:

Well, the first thing that I knew was that they said, "We have to go to the beach." We're in Broome, it's six o'clock in the morning: "There's a new song!" "Where's the new song come from?" "I dreamt it. My grandfather gave it to me, last night." (Tony Hicks quoted in Curkpartick, 2013, p. 174)

Through collaborative work in rehearsals, the organizing and sorting out of responses to melodic and rhythmic complexity sometimes captured unexpected and new levels of communication. Wagilak musician Daniel Wilfred responds to such a moment.

That song came from nowhere, that Malka one. Him really fast! I don't know what's going on there, we bin follow you mob. That's from you, wawa (my brothers). New one. That's the Malka. New one. Manyak (good)! Followed you mob beat. That sound comes from the bass. New song, for you mob. Manyamak! That music come in from nowhere, even for the didj. (Daniel Wilfred quoted in Curkpartick, 2013, p. 236)

The first performances in July 2005 placed the Wagilak group singing first, answered by a solo improvisation by an AAO member. The manikay song was then performed by the full orchestra. Though triumphantly acclaimed, these performances provided reflection of the musicians on the processes involved, and the communicative power with which this collaboration resonated with both Indigenous and immigrant audiences around Australia.

We did that with seriousness of purpose, albeit total ineptitude. I was talking to one of the elders this morning and he said it was enormously significant that we did that last night. It was a sign to them that we were willing to go wherever, do whatever, be whatever. (Paul Grabowsky; Australian Broadcasting Commission 2005)

I'm really, really excited. It nearly made me cry one time because professional musicians are actually playing the music from the people, rather than musicians arranging music for didj or clapssticks. (Archie Roach; Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2005)

As coparticipants, the musicians share in the responsibilities, endeavor, and possibilities of outcomes. Through conversation with another individual or culture, perspectives are transformed because we do not exist on our own. To "reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were." (Gadamer 2006, 371). This cross-cultural musical experience created by the Wagilak and the AAO reveal a unity and commitment expressed through the creative act: we are one, not rhetorically but in fact. CRB represents possibilities of transformative cultural renewal and vitalization that illuminates the past in the present together in unique experience that shapes the future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

The AAO and Wagilak collaboration in CRB is an astounding approach of creative music making, capturing the diversity and engagement possible between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The collaborative artistic efforts of the AAO and Wagilak to absorb and breathe the inherent complexities of each other's histories beyond mere superficial interaction offers compelling insights into the developing of personal relationships, languages, and understandings, from which deeper engagement can facilitate transformative change. The experiences of this collaboration offer much to understanding interpersonal relationships; the distribution of leadership, knowledge, and shared engagement in activity within communities of practice (Wegner, 1998), and of the developing of productive, collaborative conversations that potentially shift our own situated understandings of heritage and/or culture.

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

The dynamics within an improvised music collective compels the distribution of leadership (Brookes & Grint, 2010) and the evolving conceptualizations of the division of labor that develop through shared understandings (Timperley, 2005). Rather than the attribution of specific leadership roles or responsibilities to individuals, distributed leadership concerns the practice of leadership that is shared, collective, and extends leadership practice that builds the capacity for change and improvement.

In this highly creative, dynamic and productive setting, leaders' practice (both as thinking and activity) can be viewed as distributed across various situations of leadership that emerge and weave through interaction with other people, context and environment. In the CRB project we observe

cross-cultural collaboration that organically evolves leadership practice as distributed, and conceptualized from within the organization. The CRB project offers critical reflection and comparison to current leadership practice and perspectives, challenging prevailing notions of shared experience, collaboration, and interactive discourse. Distributed leadership mobilizes leadership expertise at all levels within an organization that generates further opportunities for change and builds the capacity for improvement. Based on levels of trust, transparency, and mutual respect, the emphasis of distributed leadership is upon interdependent interaction and practice rather than individual and independent actions associated with those with formal leadership roles or responsibilities. (Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). We can draw from the CRB collaboration that organizational influence and decision-making is governed by the interaction of individuals rather than individual direction, privileging all perspectives and forms of knowledgeability (Wenger, 1998). Distributed leadership is about collective influence and shared knowledge and intelligences; it is not just some accidental by-product of high performing organizations, but rather is a contributor to organizational success and improved performance (Hargreaves, Boyle, & Harris, 2014). The implication revealed from this musical collaboration is that those in formal leadership roles have a key role to play in creating the conditions for distributed leadership to occur. They have to create the opportunities for others to flourish and lead.

DISTRIBUTED KNOWLEDGE

The CRB project reveals that through relationships we co-construct knowledge that facilitate the expansion of distributive cognition and organization (Harris, 2009; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, 2004). It opens a space within which we can reflect on the ways in which we have been made, and challenges us to reflect on the cultural conditions within which new self and social understandings might emerge. Distributing knowledge and leadership can nurture the active cultivation and development of leadership abilities within all. Distributed knowledge that is gained from purposeful and focused collaboration develops skills that are acquired and refined in context and draw directly on the personalized experiences of the organization. The distribution of knowledge can initiate innovation through a focus on action and culture building. Metacognitive strategizing beyond the individual that include shared regulatory processes constructively unite and align organizational thinking and connectivity (de Bruin 2016b; Hadwin, Järvelä, & Miller, 2011).

Effective learning from ongoing, dynamic, and shared knowledge production can propel an organization to powerful, transformative acts.

Shared knowledge and accountability in leadership holds the potential for the act of creating a sharing of visions and aims that facilitate a "fusion of horizons" in our educational organizations and communities of practice (Gadamer, 2006; Wenger, 1998).

DISTRIBUTED UNDERSTANDINGS

Exceptional organizational performance is not a random event, but is instead achieved through careful planning, design and "discipline" (Collins & Hansen, 2011). It requires organizational alignment, mutual understanding and flexibility, rather than rigidity, prescription or coercion. By engaging in dialogue with tradition on respectful and critical terms, we are positioned to examine our own prejudices that may be entwined with our situation. Discerning a reality of multiple perspectives, our situation gives us the possibility of grounding understanding and beginning the process of reaching greater understandings through dialogue. The ongoing evolving musical unification of the AAO and Wagilak encourages perspectives and possibilities beyond the short-term in producing meaningful and lasting collaborative practice.

This significant creative, organizational and artistic synergy between AAO and the Wagilak musicians compel us to continue to learn, adapt, and move toward more fundamental forms of collegiality and empowerment that are endemic within effective organizations. It challenges us to act critically to existing formalistic and constraining aspects of leadership and organizational practice. Such collaborations encourage us to explore knowledge-based networks both intra and interorganizational that expand concepts of affinity and connectivity.

For organizations seeking improved performance and better outcomes, the challenge is to create the conditions where professional knowledge and skills are enhanced, where effective leadership exists at all levels, and where all members feel valued and are working interdependently in the collective pursuit of better learner outcomes. The transformative collaborations of the AAO and Wagilak demonstrate that visionary leaders and the educational systems they create must facilitate fundamental change, not inhibit it. This profound musical collaboration reveals that through developing mutual understanding, trust in shared processes and a confluence of goals, transformative rewards can far exceed conventional practices and yields. As Michelangelo stated, "The great danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it" (Isaacson, 2007, p. 106). It is time to set our sights higher.

NOTES

1. Recent accolades awarded to the AAO and Wagilag Group collaboration signify the importance of *CRB* as a part of jazz histories. These include: *Best Jazz Ensemble* 2010, Australian Bell Jazz Award; *Best Jazz Group* 2011, New York City Jazz Record.
2. The Wagilag clan (or *mala'* group) referred to is one particular patrilineage within the greater Wagilag linguistic and cultural grouping. The *bapurnu* (father's group) is descended directly from Sambo (Djambu) Barabara, whose *wananaraka* ('bone country'; clan estate) is at Niliptidji, South East Arnhem Land. The majority of this group currently reside in the town of Ngukurr, NT.
3. Yolngu society is divided into two moieties: Dhuwa and Yirrija. The Wagilag *manikay* series represents one of dozens of repertoires across Arnhem Land. While the songs tell of the foundation of the estate at Niliptidji and *wagilag* public law, the series ties into larger Dhuwa moiety narrative sequences, linking together related estates and clans, parliamentary ringij (embassies) and sacred sites across the region in a complexity of intercultural relations.

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