



BURIED COUNTRY

The story of Aboriginal country music

Where black Americans turned to the blues, Aboriginal Australians found inspiration in country and western and created a style of their own. From the bush to the city, Aboriginal people have used country music to tell their stories of life and the struggle for justice. Featuring rare recordings, archival images and first-hand interviews with the singers and songwriters, BURIED COUNTRY traces six decades of this rich tradition. What emerges is not only a poignant record of indigenous Australia, but also a celebration of how music can lift the human spirit.

TEACHERS NOTES

Subject areas: Aboriginal Studies, Australian History, Music Studies, English, Cultural Studies, Studies of Society and Environment or Human Society and Environment, Health and Human Development and Media Studies

Levels: Secondary, Tertiary

Documentary viewing notes for teaching and learning prepared by Christopher John Kirkbright, learning consultant, Wagan Aboriginal Music Productions

BURIED COUNTRY narrated by Kev Carmody
directed by Andy Nehl, produced by Liz Watts,
written by Clinton Walker and Andy Nehl
Executive producer: Mark Hamlyn
Duration of video: 75 minutes Year: 2000
© NFSA

INTRODUCTION

BURIED COUNTRY reveals the largely untold story of Aboriginal country music to a broad audience. It is 'a story about storytelling', for Aboriginal people adopted country music to tell their stories in a way that could be understood by non-Aboriginal Australians.

Although the subject of the film is country music, the stories told by Aboriginal people are about the whole of the life experiences of Aboriginal people.

Not only has Australia effectively 'buried' Aboriginal country music, it has attempted to bury the entire Aboriginal history. The legal fiction of terra nullius, overturned in the Mabo decision, is just one example of this.

Along with burying the truth about the treatment of Aboriginal people, Australians have buried a wealth of Aboriginal talent as well. This is clearly evident from the archival footage of Aboriginal performances presented in the film. BURIED COUNTRY celebrates Aboriginal country music and presents some of this buried Aboriginal talent to a broader audience of Australians. Examples range from early archival film of an Aboriginal 'gum leaf' band and early Jimmy Little TV appearances to contemporary recordings of Aboriginal performers.

In addition to storytelling, the film shows that country music has been adopted by Aboriginal people as a means for artistic expression and as a source of entertainment as well. Aboriginal performers have been a source of inspiration for Aboriginal people. The film presents some of these role models and shows the high regard that Aboriginal people have for their musicians.

Narrated by Aboriginal singer-songwriter Kevin Carmody, BURIED COUNTRY begins with the roots of Aboriginal country music, dating back a century, and touches on the history of missions and the influence of the Christian Church. It also provides context to important historical events and developments such as the protests of the 1960s and 70s and the Aboriginal land rights movement.

BURIED COUNTRY highlights social attitudes and government policies of the past 100 years. A prominent theme of the film is that talented Aboriginal people have historically been prevented by racist attitudes from achieving a widespread audience and commercial success. The changes in attitude can be seen in the more recent successes of Aboriginal artists.



While showing that social attitudes and official policies have changed for the better, the film highlights the continuing legacies of past wrongs and the need for further improvements. It is noted, for example, that although Col Hardy won a Golden Guitar award at the inaugural Tamworth Country Music Festival, it was another 20 years before another Aboriginal performer, Troy Cassar-Daley, would win another Golden Guitar award.

The film also refers to the achievements of Aboriginal sports women and men and musicians from other fields of music such as Black Lace, the Warumpi Band, Yothu Yindi and Us Mob.

BURIED COUNTRY brings to light the significant impact that Aboriginal artists and audiences have had on the development of Australian country music. Slim Dusty, for example, explains that Aboriginal people were the main part of his audiences in his early days and that the first time he ever heard country music live was at the age of nine, performed by an Aboriginal artist on a homemade slide guitar.

SUGGESTED PREPARATION FOR STUDY

- watch the video Buried Country.
- Read the book Buried Country (see p 7).
- Listen to the Buried Country CD (see p 7).
- Find out about Aboriginal history during the 1800s and 1900s.
- Find out about past government policies.
- Read and discuss the glossary of terms (p 3).

DISCUSSION POINTS

In regard to the use of the words 'buried' and 'country' in the title of the film, discuss the possible meanings intended. Discuss whether the meaning is clarified in the content and if so how does the title relate to the content of the film?

The word 'country' may have various special connotations for Aboriginal people. For example, one of the Wiradjuri (NSW language) words for country is 'ngurrumbang', this also means 'home' and is the word used for a bird's nest or animal hide. Explore the cultural context of the use of the word 'country' by Aboriginal people and compare and contrast the use of this word by other Australians.

Comment on whether the film is convincing in the proposition that Australia has 'buried' Aboriginal country music.

What is the aim or objective of the film? Does the film achieve its objective?

Does the film contribute to the student's understanding of Aboriginal societies and the Aboriginal experience in Australia? (Students should look for pertinent comments and words of songs.)

Compare and contrast the relationship between Aboriginal people and country music with that of Afro-Americans with jazz and blues.

Discuss the proposition that Aboriginal people have used country music to tell their stories.

Discuss the political content of the film and the value of presenting political issues through the medium of music. Have Aboriginal people used country music for political purposes?

Identify some of the political issues in Aboriginal affairs of the past and how these are presented in the film.

Discuss the use of Aboriginal English in the film, both in the interviews and in the words of songs.

Discuss the impact and influence of Aboriginal people on the development of Australian country music.

Regarding the increased acceptance of Aboriginal country music artists, discuss whether this indicates that all problems concerning Aboriginal people have been solved. What evidence is there in the film to support the conclusions reached in this discussion?

Discuss the implications of the film in regard to the policy of reconciliation. Does the film contribute to the contemporary debate on reconciliation?

GLOSSARY OF RELEVANT TERMS

This glossary of terms is based on those in the NSW Aboriginal Studies Syllabus.

Aboriginality

Aboriginality is not just a physical manifestation of Aboriginal identity, but includes a combination of cultural heritage, spirituality and an intrinsic link with the land.

Assimilation

A 19th century idea that Aboriginal people should be 'improved' by being 'civilised' and Christianised — learning the work ethic. From the 1930s, assimilation was government policy.

Country

A term used by Aboriginal people to refer to the land to which they belong and their place of Dreaming. Aboriginal English usage of the word 'country' is much broader than standard English.

Invasion

The forced takeover of land and the subjugation of its people.

Kinship

A key aspect of Aboriginal cultures and values. It includes the importance of all relationships, and of being related to and belonging to the land.

Land

From an Aboriginal perspective, land is the main spiritual basis of Aboriginal cultural heritage. The word is widely used to include sea, water and air.

Land rights

The evolving struggle of Aboriginal people for the absolute legal and moral acknowledgment of prior ownership of this land and recognition of all the accompanying rights and obligations which flow from this association.

Language group

An Aboriginal group identified by the use of a common language (both verbal and nonverbal) and identified with a particular territory. Often used in preference to the term 'tribe'.

Missions

Living areas for Aboriginal groups, established and governed by different religious denominations. 'Mission' is now widely used to refer to Aboriginal housing developments. See 'reserves' and 'stations' as these terms tend to be used interchangeably.

Native title

Form of land title which recognises Aboriginal people as rightful owners of that land.

Paternalism

The result of one group, after asserting its superiority, believing it has the right and duty to solve the problems of the other group.

Racism

A set of beliefs, frequently negative in character, held by one group of people about another group of people and based exclusively on the perceived racial characteristics of that group. Racism in Australia takes many forms — attitudinal, institutional and cultural.

Reconciliation

A Commonwealth initiative to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community and to redress Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, with the target date of 2001.

Reserves

Areas of land reserved by the Crown for Aboriginal people in the 19th century. Much of this land was later taken from the Aboriginal people again. Until the 1970s the remaining reserves were administered and controlled by government. See also 'missions' and 'stations' as these terms tend to be used interchangeably.

Resistance

One of the responses of Aboriginal people to invasion, including violent and/or political resistance.

Self-determination

Aboriginal people controlling all aspects of their lives. Proclaimed government policy. Aboriginal self-determination is the stated policy of the Commonwealth. Self-determination must, by definition, involve the consultation of Aboriginal people and their effective participation in all decision making on Aboriginal issues.

Sovereignty

The legal recognition of original Aboriginal ownership of land and territory. Implicit in the concept is the right of self-government. Aboriginal peoples have never conceded their sovereignty over Australia. The High Court's decision to recognise the existence of Aboriginal native title has reactivated the currency of Aboriginal claims to sovereignty.

Stations

Living areas established by governments for Aboriginal people on which managers and matrons controlled and 'cared for' those Aboriginal people. See also 'missions' and 'reserves' as these terms tend to be used interchangeably.

Survival

Refers to the survival of Aboriginal Australia during and after invasion.

terra nullius

A concept in international law meaning 'a territory belonging to no-one' or 'over which no-one claims ownership'. The concept is related to the legal acceptance of occupation as an original means of peacefully acquiring territory. However, a fundamental condition of a valid occupation is that the territory should belong to no-one. The concept has been used to justify the civilisation of Australia. The High Court decision of 1992 rejected terra nullius and recognises Aboriginal native title.

Traditional

A term widely used to refer to pre-invasion Aboriginal life, culture and social organisation. The term 'traditional' must be used with care.

Tribe

Individual Aboriginal groups which share a common purpose, language and culture. Some people regard this term as Eurocentric, with connotations of a derogative nature.

RECOMMENDED LEARNING RESOURCES

Books

—, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997)

Breen, Marcus (ed.), *Our Place, Our Music* (AIATSIS, 1989, Canberra)

Brennan, Peter & Latta, David, *Australian Country Music* (Random House, 1991, Sydney)

Clark, Mavis, *Pastor Doug* (Rigby, 1972, Melbourne)

Craven, Rhonda (ed), *Teaching Aboriginal Studies* (Allen & Unwin, 1999)

Edwards, Ron, *Overlander Songbook* (Rigby, 1971, Sydney)

Egan, Ted, *Sitdown Up North* (Kerr, 1997, Sydney)

- Elder, Bruce, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788* (New Holland, 1998, Sydney)
- Ellis, Catherine, *Aboriginal Music: Education for Living* (UQP, 1985, Brisbane)
- Gilbert, Kevin, *Because a White Man Will Never Do It* (A&R, 1973, Sydney)
- Gilbert, Kevin, *Living Black* (Penguin, 1978, Melbourne)
- Gilbert, Kevin (ed), *Inside Black Australia* (Penguin, 1988, Melbourne)
- Graham, Duncan, *Dying Inside* (Allens & Unwin, 1989, Sydney)
- Grissim, John, *Country Music: White Man's Blues* (Coronet, 1970, US)
- Guralnick, Peter, *Lost Highway* (Penguin, 1979, UK)
- Harrison, K, *Dark Man, White World: Harold Blair* (Novalit, 1975, Melbourne)
- Henson, Barbara, *A Straight-Out Man: FW Albrecht and Central Australian Aborigines* (MUP, 1992, Melbourne)
- Horton, David (ed), *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994, Canberra)
- Hoskyns, Barney, *Say It One Time for the Brokenhearted: The Country Side of Southern Soul* (Fontana, 1987, London)
- Isaacs, Jennifer (ed), *Australian Aboriginal Music* (AAA, 1979, Sydney)
- Johnson, Colin, *Wildcat Falling* (Angus & Robertson, 1965, Sydney)
- Jones, Leroy, *Blues People* (Payback, 1995, UK)
- Kelly, Aidan, *Floods, Sweat & Beers: Rockin' Round the Northern Territory* (Moonlight Publications, 1995, Bendigo)
- Langton, Marcia, *After the Tent Embassy* (Valadon, 1983, Sydney)
- Lockwood, Douglas, *I, the Aboriginal* (Rigby, 1962, Sydney)
- Lomax, Alan, *Mister Jelly Roll* (Pan, 1952, UK)
- Lomax, Alan, *Land Where the Blues Began* (Minerva, 1994, UK)
- McFarlane, Ian, *Encyclopedia of Australian Rock and Pop* (Allen & Unwin, 1999, Sydney)
- McNally, Ward, *The Angry Australians*, (Scope, 1974, Victoria)
- Miller, James Wilson, *Koori: A Will to Win* (A&R, 1985, Sydney)
- Murray, Neil, *Sing for Me, Countryman* (Sceptre, 1993, Sydney)
- Oliver, Paul, *The Story of the Blues* (Penguin, 1978, UK)
- Perkins, Charlie, *A Bastard Like Me* (Ure Smith, 1975, Sydney)
- Reed-Gilbert, Kerry (ed), *Message Stick* (Jukurrpa, 1997, Alice Springs)
- Rintoul, Stuart, *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History* (William Heinemann, 1993, Melbourne)
- Roberts, John S, *Black Music of Two Worlds* (Morrow, 1974, US)
- Roberts, John S, *The Latin Tinge* (Oxford University Press, 1979, UK)
- Rowley, Chip, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Penguin, 1972, Melbourne)
- Rutherford, Anna (ed), *Aboriginal Culture Today* (Kangaroo Press, 1988, Sydney)
- Schwerin, Jules, *Got to Tell It: Mahalia Jackson, Queen of Gospel* (Oxford University Press, 1992, US)
- Shaw, Bruce, *Banggaiyerri: The Story of Jack Sullivan* (AIATSIS, 1983, Canberra)
- Shapiro, Nat & Hentoff, Nat, *Hear Me Talkin To Ya* (Penguin, 1962, UK)
- Shestack, Melvin, *The Country Music Encyclopaedia* (Omnibus, 1977, UK)
- Sidran, Ben, *Black Talk* (Da Capo, 1983, US)
- Smith, Jazzer, *Book of Australian Country Music* (Berghouse Floyd Tucky, 1984, Sydney)
- Tonkin, Daryl & Landon, Carolyn, *Jackson's Track* (Viking, 1999, Melbourne)
- Tosches, Nick, *Country* (Dell, 1977, US)
- Toyne, Phillip & Vachon, Daniel, *Growing Up the Country: The Pitjantjatjara Struggle for Their Land* (Penguin, 1984, Melbourne)
- Tucker, Margaret, *If Everyone Cared* (Ure Smith, 1977, Sydney)
- Ward, Russel, *Penguin Book of Australian Ballads* (Penguin, 1964, Melbourne)
- Watson, Eric, *Country Music in Australia, Volume 1* (Cornstalk, 1975, Sydney)
- Watson, Eric, *Country Music in Australia, Volume 2* (Cornstalk, 1983, Sydney)

Articles

- Andrews, Shirley 'The Co-Existing Folk Culture' (*Australian Tradition*, July 1965)
- Bradley, Kevin, 'Leaf Music in Australia' (*Australian Aboriginal Studies #2*, 1995)
- Hands, Ian, 'Ambassadors of Country Music' (*Queensland Country Style*, 1984, Brisbane)
- Jackomos, Alick, 'Gumleaf Bands' (*Identity*, July 1971)
- Lowenstein, Wendy, 'Jabbi: The Aboriginal Contemporary Songs' (*Australian Tradition*, December 1969)
- Walker, Clinton, 'The Emergence of Black Music' (*Rolling Stone*, June 1984)
- Walker, Clinton, 'Aborigines Express Their Hope in Urban Corroboree' (*The Age*, 23 November 1984)
- Walker, Clinton, 'Black Bop Rocks Sydney and the Bush' (*The Age*, 1985)
- Walker, Clinton, 'Black Music: Roots, Rock & Reggae' (*The Age*, 30 May 1986)
- Walker, Clinton, Archie Roach: His Song Cycle' (*Rolling Stone*, March 1993)

Other materials

- CAAMA press kit (1983, Alice Springs)
- Reconciliation—Songs of the Heart, Sounds of the Rock*, CD (CARITAS Australia, ANTaR & Catholic Mission, 2000)
- Gummow, Margaret, 'The square dance song as an Aboriginal performing arts', typescript (1987, Armidale)
- Lomax, Alan, *Alan Lomax Collection*, liner notes (Rounder Records, 1997, US)
- Onus, Bill, 'Corroboree Season', program notes (Wirth's Olympia Circus, April 1949, Melbourne)
- Parbury, Nigel, Plater, Diana & Redmond, Dani (eds), *Getting It Right: A Journalists Guide to Working With Indigenous Communities During the Sydney 2000 Olympics* (NSW Dept of Aboriginal Affairs & SOCOG, 2000, Sydney). This useful reference and contact list can be downloaded as a pdf file from www.daa.nsw.gov.au
- Robinson, Christopher, *1788 The Great South Land*, a contemporary musical and education kit (see www.asa.nsw.edu.au)
- Ulman, Rick, *Hillbilly Jazz*, liner notes (Flying Fish Records, 1974, US)

Filmography

- Aboriginal Girl Scores as Singer* (Cinesound Review, 1946)
- Brown Skin Baby* (ABC-TV, 1970)
- A Changing Race* (ABC-TV, 1964)
- Come Out Fighting* (Nigel Buesst, 1972)
- Country Outcasts* (Film Australia, 1975)
- Forgotten People* (Aboriginal Advancement League, 1967)
- Fringe Dwellers* (Damien Nolan Production, 1986)
- Hermannsburg Mission* (Arthur Murch, 1934)
- Lousy Little Sixpence* (Ronin Films, 1983)
- Malbangka Country* (AIAS, 1975)
- In Song and Dance* (Commonwealth Film Unit/Film Australia, 1964)
- Sister, If You Only Knew* (Film Australia, 1975)
- The Squatter's Daughter* (Cinesound, 1933)
- Tjilla Trail* (BP, 1962)

Discographies

- Crotty, George, 'Festival Singles, 1961-1969', typescript
- De Looper, Michael, 'The Australian W&G Catalogue', typescript
- De Looper, Michael, 'Australian EMI 45s and 12 Inch Singles, 1968-1979', typescript
- Dunbar-Hall, Peter, *Recordings by Australian Indigenous Artists 1899-1998* (ScreenSound Australia, 1999, Canberra)
- Spencer, Chris, *An Australian Discography of Folk & Associated Artists* (Moonlight Publications, 1995, Bendigo)

ABOUT THE WRITER

Christopher John Kirkbright is a learning consultant with Wagan Aboriginal Music Productions. He has a legal background, having graduated in law and jurisprudence from the University of NSW in 1979. He has also had extensive experience in teaching and lecturing at universities and TAFE colleges in NSW. He has written an Aboriginal language learning kit for the Wiradjuri language of NSW, and designed an indigenous language syllabus for use in schools.

BURIED COUNTRY BOOK AND CD

The book BURIED COUNTRY by Clinton Walker (ISBN 1 86403 152 2), published by Pluto Press.
Tel: 02 9519 3299 Fax: 02 9519 8940
Email: admin@socialchange.net.au/pluto
<http://media.socialchange.net.au/pluto>

The BURIED COUNTRY soundtrack, a two CD set (D46509) on Larrikin Records through FMG.
Available from your record retailer.

ORDERING THE VIDEO

To order BURIED COUNTRY, or to find out more about Film Australia programs and teachers notes (including an extensive collection of titles on indigenous issues), please contact:

For information about Film Australia's programs, contact: National Film and Sound Archive of Australia

Sales and Distribution | PO Box 397 Pyrmont NSW
2009 T +61 2 8202 0144 | F +61 2 8202 0101
E: sales@nfsa.gov.au | www.nfsa.gov.

