



SUMMARY

Exploring the use of Grimwade Collection art objects to accompany live and recorded musical performances in an effort to enhance audience engagement with historical Australian music.

Author

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Echoes and Reflections

Creating a Multimedia Experience of Historical
Australian Music

Art collections can never fully reflect the diversity of our creative past. For how can one wrap the live sound of a violin in soft tissue paper, catalogue the articulations of an actor's voice or preserve a dancer's wild gestures in archival boxes? The performance arts cannot be stored in the manner one employs for etchings, botanical sketches, oil paintings or written documents, and therefore these collections are generally silent and still. Exhibitions featuring collected art objects will occasionally introduce music to the exhibition space, so breaking this silence and providing an aural context designed to enhance one's visual appreciation of the items. This project reverses those roles through its use of physical art objects and digitised images from the Grimwade Collection to accompany live and recorded performances of historical Australian music.

As a violinist and music researcher with a background in fine arts, I wish to explore the creative and educative benefits of uniting visual art objects with historical music in an effort to bring Australian sound heritage to a diverse public. The musical material chosen for this project focuses on a selection of compositions drawn from 19thC Scottish-Australian music collections. I have studied these collections extensively as part of my ongoing PhD thesis, conducting practice-led research, recordings and live performances of the many hundreds of short pieces they contain over the last three years. I have perceived a consistent need to accompany these recordings and concerts with information on the historical narratives associated with the musical material: Who were the collection owners? Where did they live and work? What was the music used for? Is it Scottish music, Australian, or both?

Given the multilayered and sometimes conflictual versions of Australian history carried by the diverse audiences of today's Australia I find that it is impossible to work with an assumed general knowledge in this field. Audiences who are part of the country's First Nation or recent emigrant populations, city folk, or those who live in rural environments or are elderly, are likely to identify with a vision of the past which is unique to their immediate or chosen community. I've come to accept that my role as a programmer and performer of historical Australian music is partially non-musical in-so-far as it requires me to contextualise the repertoire with enough historical information to guide a unified listening experience. Music is, after all, a language of emotion and not a vehicle for historical detail.

The *Echoes and Reflections* project is one example of my recent experimentation in this area which has taken the form of multimedia 'padding' around performances and recordings. I have previously used texts, artwork, images, costuming, videos, blogs and venue staging in an effort to convey historical narrative and develop a shared sense of musical meaning with diverse audiences. In the case of *Echoes and Reflections*, two prints, a sketch and a painting from the Grimwade Collection will be physically present in the venue where I will perform music from the Baillie Collection (NLA), Findlay Collection (private coll.) and Laing Collection

(Tas. Archives). Digitised images of collection artworks will also be used as slides and in the form of a video.

The live performances will focus on the music of the Baillie family and played on a 1777 *Carl Schneider* violin gifted to me by the Baillies in 2020. A short overview of Robert Ballantyne Baillie's (1886-1954) life will be juxtaposed with photographs from Russell Grimwade's (1879-1955) personal photo album, the aim being to highlight the stark contrast of the two men's lives despite the fact that they lived through the same period in Australian history. Both were creative and industrious but Grimwade's decision to pursue science, and Baillie music, meant that the two World Wars and Depression had very different effects on the reliability of their work and the health of their finances. Baillie also had a complex cultural identity being a British-born exponent of European art music, bearer of his family's Scottish fiddle tradition and gypsy (traveller) culture, as well as an Australian citizen.



Image 1: Photo of a travelling entertainer at 'Harleston', 17 February 1899, Russell Grimwade's personal photo album.

The Findlay Collection will be presented through recorded musical material. James Findlay (1821-1905) shared Russell Grimwade's passion for Australian flora and this is represented by coupling photos of Grimwade's flower specimens and other collection items with a recording of Findlay's music. The music is played by Findlay's great granddaughter, Jill Findlay, and myself, and the duo is layered with environmental, voice and sound samples. Oral history passed down to Jill tells how Findlay would ride his horse slowly while reading a book on botany, calling out the Latin names of species as he identified them from the saddle. A renowned horticulturalist from Trentham, Simon Rickard, has added to this project by recording himself reciting the names of plants from the Upper Murray region where Findlay lived. A close friend of Ferdinand von Mueller, Findlay collected his own samples of Australia's

native plants and flowers from the alpine regions of the Snowy Mountains which he would send to the Melbourne Botanical Gardens to add to their collections. Grimwade's copy of von Guérard's print, *North east view from the top of Mt Kosciusko N.S.W., [1867]* , will be displayed during the performance as Findlay himself was reputed to have led von Mueller through these regions. Von Mueller named a plant after Findlay, *Bertya Findlayi*, and one can also find a peak close to Mt Kosciusko named after him—*Findlay's Lookout*.



Image 2: Eugene von Guérard 1811—1901, *North east view from the top of Mt Kosciusko N.S.W., [1867]*

When Findlay first arrived in Port Melbourne in 1842 he took up employment on a station at Ballangeich in southwest Victoria. Reports on the great fire of 1851 depicted by Strutt in his sketch for *Untitled (Sketch for "Black Thursday, February 6th 1851")*, state that the smoke and heat waves from the fire were felt across Victoria, including in the Ballangeich district. A renowned horse breeder and experienced bushman, a second piece from the Findlay collection, *Fire in the East* (also known as *The East Neuk of Fife*) is performed alongside the two following images.



Image 3: George Lambert 1873—1930, Untitled (Landscape with man and horse), [c. 1923]



Image 4: William Strutt 1825—1915, Untitled (Sketch for "Black Thursday, February 6th 1851"), [c. 1864]

Alexander Laing's (1792-1868) life as a convict, then police constable, in the colony of Van Diemen's Land is reflected in many of the early colonial prints collected by Grimwade a century after Laing's death, such as von Guérard's *Hobart Town* and *South end of Tasman's Island*. Thanks to a lengthy memoir written by Laing in 1867 (the same year von Guérard produced his prints) many of the colourful details of his life are known to us today. I chose to bring together his music and digitised images of Grimwade artwork—chosen in accordance with their relevance to the historical and geographical circumstances of Laing's life—in the form of a video. I constructed the instrumental suite from three of the 243 tunes in the collection, recording them in an arrangement for violin, double bass and Scottish small pipes.

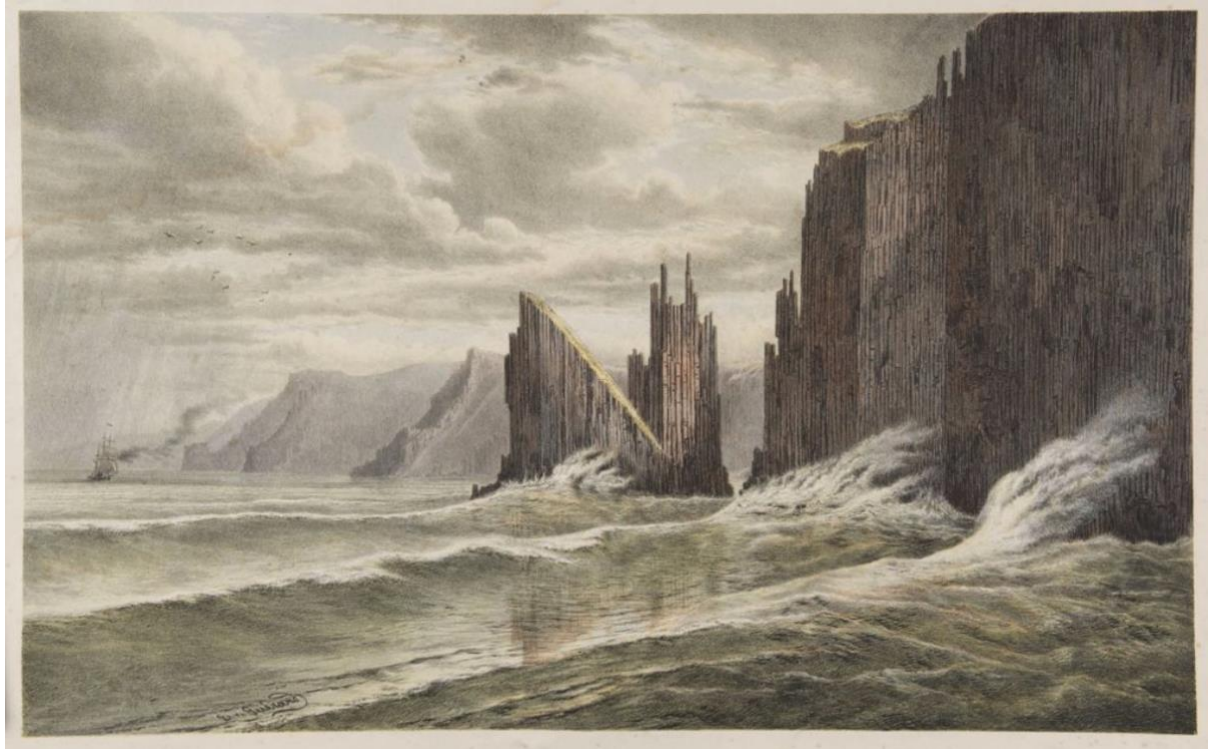


Image 5: Eugene von Guérard 1811—1901, South end of Tasman's Island, [1867]

Having recorded Scottish repertoire for numerous other projects in the past I was aware that no amount of stylistic interpretation or arrangement on my part could convey the level of historical detail I wished to attach to the chosen pieces from this collection. I wanted the listening experience to be firmly rooted to Australia—specifically Tasmania—and for the listener to be left with an impression of Laing's intriguing life. I asked friends with Scottish, Irish, Manchester and French accents to record snippets from Laing's memoirs, layering them with BBC sound samples and nature recordings done by Andrew Skeoch to create sound vignettes. The tracks featured in this video are therefore already a curated experience of music, voice and sound, for which the art images from the Grimwade Collection are visual accompaniment. VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/Xd6AqSuoJA4>.

For those who are well versed in Australian art and photography, it is immediately apparent that not every image in the video is a perfect fit within its new context. My aim has simply been to use images which help to advance Laing's narrative. In the video, reference is made to Laing's memories of fighting in the Scottish army, his transport to Australia as a convict, his participation in the Black Wars with the indigenous people of Tasmania, and his deep love of the bush and passion for music. A voice reads from his memoirs, and the horrible scenes of violence he describes are juxtaposed with his own pompous martial airs. The video evidently contains material which opens up old colonial wounds. It was impossible for me to ignore the fact that Laing was directly involved in the massacre of aboriginal people. He arrived in Van Diemen's Land at a time when white folk were the minority and died thinking that the local aboriginal population was a phenomenon of the past. The next chapter of this project involves

a creative collaboration with a young Jaadwa composer and songman, James Howard, who will write and record a reactionary response to the historical narratives associated with Laing's music.

As L.P. Hartley famously said, 'the past is a foreign country', one which we can only glimpse through the 'echoes' and 'reflections' of history preserved in collections such as those of Grimwade, Baillie, Findlay and Laing. It is my hope that this multimedia project is capable of breathing new life into artistic practices from centuries past, enabling them to resonate meaningfully with audiences of today.

GRIMWADE ART USED IN THE *ECHOES & REFLECTIONS* PRESENTATION

(Image 2)

Eugene von Guérard (lithographer)

Hamel & Ferguson (printer)

North east view from the top of Mt Kosciusko N.S.W. [1867]

colour lithograph

31.4 x 49.0 cm (image)

46.6 x 59.3 cm (sheet)

The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973.

1973.0666.000.000

(Image 3)

George Lambert

Untitled [Landscape with man and horse] [c. 1923]

oil on board

29.2 x 39.0 cm (sight)

30.5 x 40.7 cm (board)

38.7 x 49.0 cm (frame)

The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973.

1973.0037.000.00

(Image 4)

William Strutt

Untitled [Sketch for "Black Thursday, February 6th 1851"] [c. 1864]

pen and ink

16.2 x 31.0 cm (sight)

37.5 x 47.5 cm (frame)

The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973.

1973.0145.000.000

(Image 5)

Eugene von Guérard (lithographer)

Hamel & Ferguson (printer)

South end of Tasman's Island [1867]

colour lithograph

29.6 x 48.3 cm (image)

50.7 x 68.5 cm (sheet)

The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973.

1973.0665.000.000