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‘... that keen interest we have for the strange and the rare ...’: The Radio Broadcasts of Adelaide Composer Hooper Brewster-Jones (1930–1933)

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In *Eleven Theses on Communicative Abundance*, John Keane (1996) astutely observes that, '[m]odern communication media since the invention of the printing press has been dominated by images of scarcity'. This tendency is particularly true of Australia, and perhaps more broadly of other settler societies, where the notions of time lag and belated access to information was a major contributor to what in Australia has become known as the 'tyranny of distance' (Blainey 1966), a significant agent in the shaping of the national psyche for many decades.¹ The trope of 'scarcity'—an unavailability of, or an inaccessibility to, information due to geographical distance—has shaped Australia's understanding of its own cultural history resulting in the well-rehearsed and much-questioned idea of 'cultural cringe', which still resonates in some areas of Australian culture including art music. Certainly, related anxieties over identity, originality and authenticity are still experienced by some Australian musicians. The expressions 'tyranny of distance' and 'cultural cringe', now almost cliché in Australian historical discourse, are a particular expression of the scarcity of which Keane speaks. And, as Keane argues, the idea of scarcity has been used in the promotion of a variety of particular agendas, both political and cultural. It has had a profound effect on historical understanding in Australia since 1788.

This article has three aims. By considering the ground-breaking radio broadcasts of Adelaide composer Hooper Brewster-Jones given in the early 1930s, it is offered firstly as a case study of early twentieth-century cosmopolitanism that challenges the notion of scarcity in relation to Australia. It will argue that British or 'second' world cosmopolitan artists, themselves a particular consequence of Empire, looked beyond national borders not only to continental Europe and America but also to non-Western cultures, and that in some instances they were advantaged by a closer geographical proximity to these cultures than their counterparts at the imperial centres.² Brewster-Jones's cosmopolitanism was made possible in part by the new technologies that transformed distances, geographical as well as temporal, much as the computer and satellite have done in recent decades. But radio broadcasting merely replaced an earlier, more languid, international communication system that had been sustained by the postage stamp and the steamship. Secondly, it adds a missing page to the history of Australian broadcasting and, lastly, provides an important addition to the history of Australian music and its encounters with the modern and the exotic.



Hooper Brewster-Jones is a significant composer who has subsequently been confined to the footnotes of Australian music history. Born in 1887 in the tiny settlement of Black Rock at the foot of the Flinders Ranges in outback South Australia, Brewster-Jones was the son of a country school teacher. He came to Adelaide as a fourteen-year-old to take up a scholarship at the Elder Conservatorium studying with the Welsh pianist and composer Bryceson Treharne. In 1906 he received an Elder Scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music which he undertook between 1906 and 1909, studying composition with Sir Charles Stanford. On his return to Australia, Brewster-Jones produced an enormous amount of music, particularly during the 1920s. Some of the music written during this decade, such as the *Formula Series*, a set of piano preludes, places him in the world of transnational modernism.³ Other series, such as his seven volumes of *Bird Call Impressions*, are the results largely of his close friendship with the painter Hans Heysen. The two men would spend hours in the bush together, one painting, while the other jotted down bird calls. The majority of his manuscripts are held in the Barr Smith Library at the University of Adelaide.

The capital of the free settler state, Adelaide, with its strong Germanic character had, in Andrew McCredie's words, a 'modest cultural environment' ([McCredie 1989: 19](#)). At one level the modesty of its cultural life was a consequence of its size. By 1937, both the populations of Melbourne and Sydney were over one million, while Adelaide was smaller even than Brisbane with a population of just over 300,000. Before the First World War, the large number of nineteenth-century European Lutheran immigrants had a pronounced effect on the local musical culture, as evident in the strong tradition of Liedertafel. Adelaide's conservative musical culture consisted of clubs, societies and performing bodies such as the Adelaide Music Salon, the Adelaide Bach Society, the Adelaide Choral Society, the Adelaide String Quartet Club, the Corinthian Club and the Orpheus Society as well as Heinecke's Grand Orchestra and later in 1920 the South Australian Symphony Orchestra.⁴ Brewster-Jones became a central figure in this musical world going so far as to found his own orchestra, the Brewster-Jones Symphony Orchestra, with the chief intention of championing the French and Russian moderns. This ambitious goal was ultimately thwarted. Adelaide of this time did not share his cosmopolitan enthusiasms. Inspired by the tours of *Ballets Russes* in the mid-1930s, he, with kindred spirits such as the dance critic Joanne Priest and the painter Ivor Hele, founded the Adelaide Arts Club to promote contemporary art of all kinds. A transgressive maverick until the end, Brewster-Jones refused to teach at the Elder Conservatorium and taught in a private studio until his death in 1949. Brewster-Jones embraced broadcasting, realising its enormous potential to reach out to a wide audience. He even went so far as to make, as one commentator recalled, a 'careful study of wireless programme building'. As a 'frequent lecturer at Station 5CL',⁵ his choice of subject was notable: 'from primitive instruments of native races to the symphony orchestra of today' (['Crescendo' 1935: 11](#)). There is little surviving evidence to provide a sense of how his broadcasts were received, however Adelaide around this time was being taken to task in the national music journal, the *Australian Musical News*, for its musical apathy ([Waters 1929: 5](#)). Fortunately for the historian, Brewster-Jones's granddaughter, Anne Bartsch, has typewritten transcripts of twenty lecture broadcasts all written between 1930 and 1933.⁶ The subject matter of these talks provides a sense of Brewster-Jones's aesthetic outlook and artistic temperament that was shaped by the roving tastes of the Edwardian era, and reveals an interest in many ideas central to the development of early modernisms. His interests included the music of ancient civilizations, forms of popular music—in particular folk and jazz—as well as modern French music and, above all, a fascination for the non-Western. Many of these lectures bear a strong similarity with the subsequent ABC lecture series of 1935 given by the better-known Percy Grainger. It is important to remember here that both men spent important formative years in Edwardian London. They were interested in many of the same things. Brewster-Jones had a deep respect for Grainger and covered Grainger's musical activities in Adelaide with great interest ([Brewster-Jones 1934a, 1935b](#)). Brewster-Jones's lectures provided rich sources that fuelled his musical fantasies and desires as well as the actual stuff of his own music. They show him to be an enthusiastic exoticist who was aware of, and participated in, contemporary currents of Western thought. Moreover, as a journalist he penned many lavishly illustrated feature articles for Adelaide's leading daily newspaper, *The Advertiser*, on the *Ballets Russes* (inspired by their Australian tours of the mid-1930s), as well as on modern film music and Surrealism ([Brewster-Jones 1936b, 1936d, 1936e](#)). In addition to broadcasting for 5CL, Brewster-Jones spent much of the 1930s writing for the journal, *Progress in Australia*, and *The Advertiser*. His broadcast on modern French music for example displays a broad knowledge of the younger generation, including some figures who have now been all but forgotten. The urbane sophistication and ironic detachment and the borrowing from popular musical styles that underscored the French neoclassical aesthetic held a strong appeal for him. The content of the broadcast is reflected in the contents of his personal library. He had been making much of the postage stamp and the steamship.



These lecture broadcasts together become an epic journey traversing all corners of the globe and visiting worlds past and present; they show us how rapidly the imperial world was shrinking so that even remote Adelaide, stranded on the southern coast of Australia hundreds of kilometres from another major city, could engage with current artistic trends. Brewster-Jones used his writing and broadcasting to move beyond his surroundings; developing a vivid transnational imagination he became in effect a virtual world traveller. His voracious appetite for difference took him all over the globe; the range and detail of information presented and the connections made are often bewildering and even at times bizarre. To borrow a term from Matthew Head ([2003: 221](#)), we can look upon Brewster-Jones's writing of these lectures as akin to going on an imaginary safari.

This vicarious desire for imaginary travel manifests itself throughout his writings, but is particularly prevalent in the transcripts of his broadcasts. For instance, the lecture with the seemingly innocuous title 'Drama' is actually a universalising enterprise in cultural comparison that covers a staggering array of nationalities and time periods (Bartsch Collection, 'Drama'). Beginning with a description of Indian dramatic tradition, he 'travelled' to China and Japan, from there he visited the shamans of the Finnis [sic] Tartaric races of Northern Asia, the medicine-men of North America, the Zulus and 'Figis' (presumably he meant Fijians) who appeared in a curious partnership, back then to the Greeks and Romans, and after a brief visit to the tribes of Aboriginal Australia and the Hopi Indians, he dropped in on the Mongols circa 500 B.C. before retracing his steps back to the Indians via the Chinese. His far-reaching curiosity collapsed all difference into the same category. 'Native Art Culture', takes us on another dizzying peripatetic journey; every corner of the globe is traversed. Beginning in Montenegro, we go on to Russia, Ireland, Japan, Australia, Malaya, India and the Middle East (Bartsch Collection, 'Native Art Culture'). In 'Musical Curiosities of the Past' the Chinese instrument, the *sheng* (or *cheng*) and St Petersburg, Russia, are brought together in an unlikely union via a Danish organ builder named Kirsnick. According to Brewster-Jones, Kirsnick was introduced to the *sheng* in St Petersburg and adopted the 'Chinese principle of a "free single reed"' in his development of free reed stops. In this account, the introduction of the *sheng* to fifteenth-century Europe is attributed to an Abbé Vogler, who apparently enjoyed performing the Chinese song 'Chew Tew' on the organ (Bartsch Collection, 'Musical Curiosities of the Past'). Even subjects whose connections to the exotic are tenuous indeed, such as 'German Folk Song', were spiced up by introducing other traditions; in this case these included the Russian, Hungarian and Finnish, the latter replete with its 'idiomatic five-tone minor scale' (Bartsch Collection, 'German Folk Song'). In a matter of minutes his disembodied voice conjured up virtual cosmoramas – sonic peepshows spanning all corners of the globe travelling willy-nilly through time and space. They speak to Brewster-Jones's hunger for difference; one so acute that it collapsed other cultures into one undifferentiated Other. It is in this broadcast that he speaks of 'that keen interest we have for the strange and rare' an earlier expression that was to be echoed later by Edward Said ([1991: 249](#)) when he spoke of the 'human need for the "foreign" and "different"'.

There was considerable discussion of non-Western scales and modes, particularly in the broadcasts. Brewster-Jones identified the importance of scales in the creation of a national music:

The scale or mode in which a folk song lies is one of the guides as to its country of origin, its period, or its antiquity ... The pentatonic scale which we have discovered has almost a universal use, is much more prevalent in some countries than others ... Any scale may and has become the heritage of the people who persist in its use (Bartsch Collection, 'Folk Song').

He concentrated mainly on the pentatonic and whole tone scale, two of the three non-Western scales that were absorbed into his own compositional language. The pentatonic scale is a particular point of focus in his two lectures on Chinese music. Explaining its hierarchical construction and its symbolic relation to Chinese society at large he told his listeners that it 'evolved':

from a series of bamboo pipes which were designed according to correct arithmetical progression. Their oldest musical scale, the pentatonic ... had the following titles: F was called Emperor, G Prime Minister, A Loyal Subjects, C Affairs of State and D Mirror of the World.

His explanation of the scale's evolution was based '[o]n a perceived inability on the part of the 'refined' Chinese ear to tolerate the tuning of the fourth and seventh intervals of the scale. Or was the Chinese ear really so refined?' He seemed uncertain in his musings on the scale's origins:

'... THAT KEEN INTEREST WE HAVE ...'



Is the origin a primitive crudeness, which has not arrived at the full 7 note scale; or is the origin a refinement of ear which rejects the tuning of those two intervals which have been omitted to form the pentatonic scale (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 1').

Brewster-Jones extrapolated further that the Chinese 'developed crude theories which included octaves and fifths and they had evolved 84 scales each scale having some philosophical meaning'. Then, in an unusual and unsubstantiated claim, Brewster-Jones declared that, the Chinese, unlike Western musicians, 'never attempted to express feelings through their music', and therefore their music experienced 'no great development of the artistic imagination', again presumably in contrast to Western music (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 1').

A vast array of non-Western musical instruments came under consideration in these lectures. Over several broadcasts, he looked at instruments from Egypt, China and Japan. We even learn a little about their practitioners. The *nay* (an Egyptian wooden flute) was 'one of the oldest musical instruments in existence and has been played in the Nile Valley by the peasants called fellaheen', and Brewster-Jones informed his listeners that 'many young ladies of Egypt defied tradition by introducing this instrument (the *ud*) into their homes' (Bartsch Collection, 'Egyptian Native Music: Ancient and Modern'). He also described the *kamanga* (a stringed instrument) and the *quanoon*. In the broadcast, 'Native Art Culture', he provided a detailed description of several Japanese instruments, including the *kin koto*, *samiseng* (*shamisen*) and *bima* (*biwa*) again in the context of their societal function (Bartsch Collection, 'Native Art Culture'). Detailed description of instruments percussive and melodic are covered in his two broadcasts on Chinese Music including the *Yue-kin* or 'moon-faced guitar', the *cheng* ('a primitive form of fiddle'), the *Kin* (*shin*) and the Watchman's Rattle (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Parts 1 and 2').⁷ He demonstrated an awareness of contemporary Chinese society in the up-to-date section, 'Chinese music of today':

Mendicant musicians travel the streets of China with the 3 stringed guitars carried in a waterproof covering which makes them appear like large size tennis racquets slung over the shoulder. To attract the attention of the passers by they play a flute as they go. There are various types of guitars in China some have finer boards several feet long, others only a few inches in length. Blind musicians use one type and blind singing girls another type upon which they accompany themselves (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music. Part 2').

He went on to say that '[t]he curious so-called violin which looks like a croquet mallet with four pegs and strings attached is similar to the Tibetan violin' (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music. Part 2'). How he knew what a Tibetan violin looked like is yet another mystery.

Brewster-Jones's fascination with non-Western instruments persisted beyond his association with 5CL. Early in 1935 Brewster-Jones ran a nineteen-part series, 'Musical Instruments and their Origin', in his Saturday column of *The Advertiser*. Once again he was bitten by the travelling bug visiting Spain, Ceylon, China, Japan, India, Persia and Egypt on an excursion through the history of the violin. Burma, Malaya, Cambodia and Portuguese West Africa were other places cited in this unusual and idiosyncratic survey of European instruments. A wide array of ancient civilizations was necessarily brought into the search for origins, such as the Greek, Celtic, Roman, Egyptian, ancient Chinese, Hindu, Assyrians, Etruscans and even Oscan.⁸ The cello was linked to the Arabian *kermangeh*. The trumpet was likened to the Middle Eastern ram's horn trumpet, the *shophar*, and the French horn and the sousaphone were traced back to the Roman *bucina*. Twelve of the articles contain an illustration of a primitive or non-Western instrument to which they have been related: the *cheng* for the harmonium, the Oriental *rebab* for the violin, the Egyptian *nefer* for the Spanish guitar, the Chinese *kin kou* for the timpani, the jungle piano of Angola for the xylophone, the Assyrian drum for the kettle drum, the Chinese *So-na* for the oboe. Even those that are more difficult to primitivise, such as the piano, saxophone, slide trombone and the clarinet, nonetheless get an unorthodox provenance: he associates the piano with the Hungarian cimbalom, the clarinet and saxophone are connected to jazz, the trombone is loosely linked to unspecified 'Eastern nations'.⁹

This information begs the question: where was Brewster-Jones getting his information? The answer can only be partial. Constant Lambert's classic book on twentieth century music, *Music Ho!* (Lambert 1934), is constantly referred to throughout his writings on modern art music and jazz, as is Cecil Forsyth's book on orchestration (Forsyth 1914) in relation to his series 'Music Instruments and Their Origin'.



Brewster-Jones mentioned several sources in the broadcasts: general music histories by Hubert Parry (1925) and Stanford and Forsyth (1916), curiosities such as the travel book *Old Highways in China* by missionary Isabelle Williamson (of Chefoo, North China) (Williamson n.d.), *A Chinaman's Opinion of Us and Of His Own People (As Expressed in Letters from Australia to His Friend in China)* by Hwuy-ung (Mandarin of the Fourth Button), translated by J. A. Makepeace, M.A., and Cecil Forsyth's jingoistic *Music and Nationalism*. A.H. Fox Strangways' classic *Music of Hindostan* (Fox Strangways 1914) and the memoirs of a Frederick Kitchener, who had taught music in Cairo before the First World War, also helped him with his account of Egyptian music.

Nonetheless, Brewster-Jones's accounts of other musics are littered with snippets of information not found in the sources he cites. A possible explanation for some of these odd remarks is found in Brewster-Jones's references to his personal ethnographic fieldwork tracking down live informants. He actively sought out non-Western communities within Adelaide for firsthand information. These sources included an Aboriginal elder at Point McLeay Mission who sang him indigenous music and a Miss Booth of the China Inland Mission who told him of the many uses of bamboo (Bartsch Collection, 'Folk Song'; 'Chinese Music, Part 2').¹⁰ During his preparation for his broadcast on Egyptian music, he visited the Adelaide Mosque on Little Gilbert Street and, as he told his audience, 'made inquiries as to any orientals connected with the mosque who might be proficient in the matter of instruments or songs' (Bartsch Collection, 'Egyptian Native Music: Ancient and Modern').¹¹

His willingness to conduct research resulted in some groundbreaking performances featured in the broadcasts. In his first presentation of Chinese music he played the *Chinese Sacrificial Hymn to the Imperial Ancestors* on the piano before going on to play a recording of a Chinese orchestra, warning the audience that it was 'not only like the hissing of geese but more like a whole zoological garden' (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 1'). The second instalment actually concluded with a live concert of some variety. It began with two examples of British orientalism, Granville Bantock's song, 'Yung Yang', and the song, 'Chinese Flower', by R.H. Bowers and finished with Brewster-Jones's seemingly un-Chinese orchestral work *Indian Serenade*.¹² Adelaide did, however get to hear some actual Chinese music for Brewster-Jones had gone so far as to find Chinese musicians and invite them to perform on his broadcast. And in between the two European instance of cultural translation Chinese musician, A. Toy, performed solo instrumental pieces; one for moonfaced guitar and one for Chinese dulcimer and J. Chenug, who once sang on the Chinese stage, sang Chinese songs, one with guitar accompaniment.¹³

Apparently Brewster-Jones could not find any live examples of Egyptian music and resorted to excerpts from Verdi's *Aida*. Using records from the Columbia History of Music he also introduced Adelaide's listening public to recordings of early European music including examples of organum from the *Musica enchiriadis*, English music from the sixteenth century including 'Sumer is i-cumen in' and Purcell's First Harpsichord Suite in the lectures, 'Early English Music with Illustrations of Medieval Music' and 'Clavichords and Harpsichords'.

Coming from the pen of a Western cosmopolitan musician, much of Brewster-Jones's writing, particularly that concentrating on non-Western music and culture, reflects many of the dominant preoccupations of this time. The terms of his engagement are important and they are embedded in his particular historical and cultural context and belong to a colonial discourse made possible by and filtered through British imperial networks. They betray many of the Eurocentric and Orientalist assumptions, ambivalences and essentialising processes typical of the period.

Much of Brewster-Jones's writing on non-Western music and jazz was strongly informed by the governing frame of Eurocentrism; it exhibits an unsurprising cultural chauvinism and is shot through with prejudice and racism. Eurocentrism, as defined by Bill Ashcroft, is the 'conscious or unconscious process by which Europe and European cultural assumptions are constructed as, or are assumed to be, the normal, the natural or the universal' (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1998: 90-91). The early twentieth-century primitivist enterprise was shaped by these assumptions. Brewster-Jones was no exception, and as we have seen, words such as 'primitive', 'savage', 'native races' and 'barbaric' pepper his prose. When he wrote that '[p]rimitive races clearly do not seem to be able to evolve a Shakespeare type so the stories they act continue for generations unaltered and unimproved' (Bartsch Collection, 'Drama'), Brewster-Jones was drawing upon what Michael Pickering has described as stereotypical notions of 'non-European peoples based on the generalised construct of the Primitive ...'; notions that dominated Western thinking at this time. Primitivism is then the conceptual opposite of the West: 'the ideological counterpart to modernity' (Pickering 2001: 51).



Although Brewster-Jones's writing is inescapably Eurocentric and coloured by the deeply flawed concept of Social Darwinism, it needs to be understood in its historical context. It does not differ markedly, for instance, from the 'evolutionary thinking' of many of the early comparative musicologists, the forefathers of what is now called ethnomusicology (Racy 1993: 83). Several from this group, including its founding father, Erich von Hornbostel, are considered early pioneers of a methodology based on diversity and equal value (Nettl 1983: 36). Keeping this in mind, it is interesting to note that when speaking of the Egyptians Hornbostel made racially inflected references to the 'metallic and dusky texture' of their voices and their 'feather light strides', even using the term 'barbarians' (Racy 1993: 84). Hornbostel may have upheld ideas of diversity and equality with regard to other musics but he, like Brewster-Jones, reflected the attitudes and prejudices of his period. Brewster-Jones certainly did not resort to the extremes of social evolutionism in the same way as one of his chief sources, Hubert Parry, for whom the singing of the 'natives of Australia' sounded like 'savage howls which hardly have any distinct notes in them at all', and who painted an image of the Polynesian cannibals 'gloating over their living victims, shortly to be devoured' (Parry 1925: 48).

Brewster-Jones was on occasion capable of making astute and thoughtful observations (couched though they are in now unacceptable language) as seen in the following comment: '[i]n native races there are sometimes evidences of culture in the performance of a song rather than in the song itself' (Bartsch Collection, 'Native Art Culture'). This realisation that the text has a direct relationship with its environment and that the cultural meaning is located in the actual act of performance points to what has become a fundamental precept of modern ethnomusicological practice. It is too easy from our vantage point to judge Brewster-Jones harshly for his prejudices. He was comparatively open-minded in his views on difference, exhibiting a strong tendency to idealise rather than to reject the unfamiliar.

A need to trace primitive and archaic origins saturates Brewster-Jones's writing — the more exotic in terms of ethnicity and distant in time the better. It excited him: 'This is the reason we find ancient history so attractive. It is full of surprises ... we discover a "curiosity of the past"; a creative idea; man in his primitive state discovering a new joy; and we are excited at the discovery' (Bartsch Collection, 'Native Art Culture'). Perhaps it helped satisfy not only his desire for the 'strange and rare' but also for an imaginary, impossible and unsullied purity. He was swept up in what Homi Bhabha describes as a 'fantasy that dramatises the impossible desire for a pure, undifferentiated origin' (Bhabha 1994: 81). Musicologist Daniel Albright has noted the importance of distance in both exoticism and primitivism, arguing that, '[e]xoticism is to space what Primitivism is to time: a search for meaning at great distances'. He then points out quite rightly that a firm line cannot be drawn between the two (Albright 2004: 248).

Brewster-Jones's treatment of this material reveals a direct correlation in his mind between the ancient and the oriental/primitive; he collapses time and space together. Occasionally this is made explicit: 'A comparison between the earlier stages of Greek Drama and the more advanced efforts of savage races in this art [drama] show several points in common' (Bartsch Collection, 'Drama'). Later in the same lecture he asserted that: 'Both the Greeks and the Savages worshipped a god of vegetation ...' (Bartsch Collection, 'Drama'). This was not uncommon for the time; Brewster-Jones was making what Louise Blakeney Williams has described in her study of early twentieth century English writers as the 'connection in the mind of these early Modernists between archaic and Asian art' (Williams 2002: 126). Pickering argues that '[p]rimitive peoples in faraway places were viewed as contemporary versions of Europe's own ancestry' (Pickering 2001: 53). Brewster-Jones was delighted in the resulting possibilities of this collapse:

The intriguing thought is, that 2000 years ago Chinamen were playing on their single free reed sheng which has given us all our modern free reed organ-like instruments; and Imperial Rome was being entertained by the water organ or hydraulus which has given us our magnificent pipe organ of today. China and Rome met when the principle of the free reed was combined with the principle of the open pipe, and both set in motion by the same wind chest (Bartsch Collections, 'Musical Curiosities of the Past').

There is a tension between the archaic and primitive: the archaic were 'Us' long ago in a primitivised form, whereas the contemporary 'primitive' is Other, but in a way represents 'Us' as we once may have been.



Brewster-Jones's interest to learn about and share his knowledge of other cultures was genuine, but it was driven by a desire for idealised Others. They were the site of his fantasies; fantasies of the unknown and unfamiliar. A sense of distance and separation from these other cultures created the fascination; they were 'understood from afar', and cut loose from their own location and culture. They could represent, as Ashcroft suggests, whatever was 'projected onto them by the societies into which they were introduced' ([Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1998: 95](#)). As Said, and many after him have noted, the Orient is 'constructed in European thinking ... for people who never went to the countries of interest they became largely a function of their own hunger for escape' ([Pasler 2000: 87](#); [Said 1978](#)). Although, Brewster-Jones's Others were, in the main, static objects subjected to his own primitivising gaze, he did however make some concerted and startling efforts to overcome the problem of 'scarcity' and to uncover and represent cultural difference at home. By staying home he possibly learnt more about other cultures than many privileged Australians who traveled the well-worn paths of the European Grand Tour. His ethnographic adventures stand as important and hitherto unknown contributions to the cultural history of Adelaide.

Although there is no doubt that Brewster-Jones researched his subjects, often providing unusual and specific detail, his language is at odds with the often highly technical and positivist writing of other scholars of non-Western music. He avoids the taxonomic approach of contemporary comparative musicologists, for example the entries by Fox Strangways and others in the early editions of the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musician* (ed. [Fuller-Maitland 1911](#); ed. Colles 1927), and although naïve and at times clumsy, his style tends towards the descriptive and metaphorical. In a whimsical way, he preferred to draw upon myths and legends to elucidate his musical points.¹⁴ His discussion of modification of the Chinese pentatonic scale to include semitones, does not, like Fox Strangways' treatment of Indian ragas, draw upon ideas of ratio and proportion, but rather turns to the legend of the mythical bird named Fung Hoang and his mate, who together were responsible for this altered form:

The whole tones, which represented to them things that were perfect and independent such as heaven, sun or man were invented by Fung Hoang: and his mate a mere female was held responsible for the semitones. These represented dependent and imperfect things such as earth, moon and woman (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 1').

Russian music provoked a similarly poetic response as seen in his evocative description of Tchaikovsky's *Marche Slav*: 'We are taken across the Steppes into that wild Asiatic region with its 'sharp beat of savage drums and its oceanic wastes of grass'; and there is an Oriental and peasant tang in the music' ([Brewster-Jones 1934b](#)).

This idealising of an exotic culture was commonplace. In one of Brewster-Jones's sources for the lectures, *The Music of Hindostan*, still considered a classic study from the period, Fox Strangways presents an example of the common essentialising trope of the serenity of the East in his invocation of:

the calm of the East, where a man's life is his own or at most his family's concert, rather than the State's, where there is time to live it, where truth is found neither in analysis nor compromise, and spiritual food is not contained in tabloids, we do not know what to make of music which is dilatory without being sentimental and utters passion without vehemence ([Fox Strangways 1914: 2](#)).

This trope is palpable in Brewster-Jones's writing. He describes the 'soothing quality' of the stone chimes and flutes 'when sounded together', quoting a line of Chinese poetry as an example: 'The bells and drums sound in harmony; the sounding stones and flutes blend their notes' (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 2'). Said's distinction between Orientalist and Orienteur is illuminating here. Brewster-Jones, unlike Strangways, could be understood as 'a man more interested in a generous awareness than in detached classification' ([Said, 1991: 250](#)).

Brewster-Jones's essentialising, idealising approach to his Others is shot through with ambivalence. Again this was a typical outlook at the time. As Albright observes, '[modernist] Primitivism tends to be ... a mixture of fascination, disgust, and something like terror ...' ([Albright 2004: 235](#)). Bhabha offers a thoughtful discussion of the role of ambivalence in the process of stereotyping. He sees ambivalence as central to the stereotype that manifests itself in 'coexisting meanings and values about, or emotions and attitudes towards, stereotyped



figures which are contradictory ...'. The stereotype is itself an 'arrested, fetishistic mode of representation' — at once phobia and fetish — which provokes both delight and fear in the "otherness" which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity'. Ambivalence contains great force and is, according to Bhabha, 'one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power' ([Bhabha 1994: 66-76](#)).

Brewster-Jones's lecture 'Dance Music of the Nations', which pretends at the outset to be a survey of something as tame as the three-time dance rhythms including the waltz, mazurka and minuet makes a sudden unexpected turn to the modern dance band:

Now for a criticism of the dance band of to-day when it attempts the waltz. Modern dance bands which are permeated with negro influences such as slides and slurs[,] crooning and other devices perfectly suitable for creating the atmosphere of the blues, lose the grace and classical quality of the waltz. That delicacy of rhythm and charm of nuance which belongs to the best orchestral performances of dance music 30 years ago is clouded in a jumble of effect which ill suits the waltz and similar dances (Bartsch Collection, 'Dance Music of the Nations').

His ambivalence of course works both ways, and he here felt it necessary to remind his listeners of the legitimacy of the blues:

Serious composers who realise this will naturally ignore much of the dance music of today as a medium of serious musical expression excepting the blues which is legitimate because its idiom is suitable to its subject and it has a natural primitive strength because it describes a definitely human impulse (Bartsch Collection, 'Dance Music of the Nations').

Despite his resolutely highbrow musical upbringing, jazz held a genuine interest for Brewster-Jones. He devoted several articles for *The Advertiser* to scat, swing, even crooning ([Brewster-Jones 1935a](#), [1935c](#), [1936a](#), [1936c](#)). But when the dance band transgressed his boundaries and dared to attempt the waltz, the waltz itself became illegitimate, even degenerate. The sensual physical appeal of the 'negro' elements held great allure, but it had to remain subordinate to that which was Western.

It is the hybrid nature of jazz that sparked this ambivalent reaction, the impure mix of the primitive with sophisticated European art music. It at once fascinated and disturbed him. This dislike of cultural intersection comes through clearly in his discussion of modern Egyptian music. The ancient was safer than the modern for Brewster-Jones. Whereas his discussion of ancient Egyptian music is untroubled, and he quite happily traced the modern symphony orchestra back to the murals of Egyptian musicians on the walls of pyramids, he was far more ambivalent about the modern. He applauded the Egyptians who, in defiance of Islamic laws, established an Oriental Music Club to preserve their traditional music. His description of this is laden with ideas of progress and modernisation:

There were of course certain advanced [read Westernised] people who insisted on progressing with the times and introducing art works to their homes. These people were considered modernists and criticised accordingly by the bulk of their fellow Egyptians. It was these progressive spirits who formed themselves into an Oriental Music Club which had as its object the raising of the standard of native music in Egypt (Bartsch Collection, 'Egyptian Native Music: Ancient and Modern').

At the same time, Brewster-Jones heaped scorn on those who try to 'ape' Western ways. He drew from Frederick Kitchener's account of 1914:

Most primitive ideas of European music are entertained by some of the people who wish to be smart. Once a year comes the great Muhammadan festival of Kourban Bairam. I have been in Cairo during four of these yearly feasts, and upon each one of these the Pasha who lives near here has enlivened everyone around by engaging a band of three performers to play upon his lawn, the band consisting of a cornet, a drum, and a piccolo. We have heard some very thin bands but never anything to compare with this for a ludicrous ensemble ... [it] defies written description, and must be heard to be thoroughly appreciated (Bartsch Collection, 'Egyptian Native Music: Ancient and Modern').



He then added his own disparaging voice commenting on Kitchener's account:

... one can see from this pseudo European appreciation of music by the modern Egyptian that his musical intelligence is sadly wanting. As a contrast let us go back 5000 years and take the beginnings of Egyptian musical culture when Egypt was the home of science and led the way in all the arts including music (Bartsch Collection, 'Egyptian Native Music: Ancient and Modern').

The purity of the ancient is assured, but the modern becomes tainted by striving to be Western. Although he claims that Egypt is where East meets West, the modernisation (read Westernisation) of Egyptian music makes him uneasy. In this he was not alone. This wish for authentic, pure music unsullied by Western influence was shared by many comparative musicologists of the day such as Hornbostel and another founding father, Curt Sachs. A discussion of this trend is found in Ali Jihad Racy's examination of the 1932 Congress of Arab Music held in Cairo attended by both Sachs and Hornbostel. It was, according to Racy, 'a significant landmark in world music history' and took place coincidentally in the same year that Brewster-Jones presented his lecture (Racy 1993: 68). Racy draws the interesting conclusion that the Egyptians embraced modernity and sought uplift and progress whereas the Europeans were interested in authenticity and preservation of tradition. After all, something Westernised lost its exotic allure.

Two further Orientalist strategies common to this period were the tendency to speak for the other culture in an act of ventriloquism and the process of translation enacted upon the material brought about by the placing of oneself in 'their' place. This process is, as Roger C aelestin writes, 'an individual's attempt at translating an exotic otherness for Home' – the dominant discourse (C aelestin 1996: 4). Both these strategies are found in Brewster-Jones's writing. He had on one occasion reminded his listeners, 'Of course we must not forget that to the Chinaman our music is considered barbaric and horrible. So perhaps we may not be able to appreciate the beauties of his art' (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 1'). Speaking on behalf of Chinese women, he asserted: 'It is not that they would find it difficult to sing naturally but the fact is that a Chinaman or woman who had any respect for themselves would not dream of being so vulgar as to sing with the natural voice' (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 1'). Jann Pasler, also observes that, '[u]sing the other as a site for self-criticism is a typical Orientalist tactic' (Pasler 2000: 101). This is seen in Brewster-Jones's use of Chinese impressions of Western speech from *A Chinaman's opinion of us and of his own people (As expressed in letters from Australia to his friend in China)*:

At present when I hear this tongue ... I can grasp at nothing. I am like one clutching at a mist, ten parts perplexed. The people here do not open their mouths; they whisper through their lips, which makes it difficult to discover variety in the sounds. And these sounds, what are they but as the twittering of distant birds and the quacking and hissing of geese (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 2').

Brewster-Jones supports the Chinese man's opinion, saying '... we do not speak frightfully well in Australia and a cultured Chinaman has a keener ear for beauty of sound in speaking' (Bartsch Collection, 'Chinese Music, Part 2').

The inability of the Western notation system to deal with the microtonal intervals of Middle Eastern music is raised in 'Native Art Culture', and another reference to Middle Eastern scales is made in the talk on Egyptian music:

We now know of course that these songs are built on a scale which our ears do not readily assimilate and really it is our ears which are out of tune with the scale – not the singer who is out of tune. Our ears are limited to those intervals which we can produce on the piano. The orientals' ears are not [sic] (Bartsch Collection, 'Egyptian Native Music: Ancient and Modern').

Although C aelestin's idea of translation refers to the process of exoticism as a whole, an overt example of self-conscious translation can be found in one of Brewster-Jones's sources that demonstrates how the act of translation from one language into another mediates between the actual words spoken and the 'Home' audience's expectations. J. A. Makepeace, the translator of *A Chinaman's Opinion of Us* writes the following:



On my part, I have been encouraged to assist in the arduous task of translation by the conviction that the opinions of a cultured man regarding our own not always irreproachable mode of life — of a man of a race whose characteristics are often the antithesis of our own — cannot fail to be both interesting and instructive ([Hwuy-ung 1927: vii](#)).

His deliberate style of mis/translation becomes caricature as it attempts to capture the foreignness of the protagonist, becoming a kind of pidgin as seen in his translation of the protagonist's sorrow at leaving his lover: 'ai-ya! Is difficult leave her, as for the thirsty traveller to take the cool drink from his lips' ([Hwuy-ung 1927: 296](#)). Makepeace is giving his audience what he thinks they expect. This extreme example is suggestive of what may have been happening in more subtle ways throughout Brewster-Jones's writing on non-Western art.

Brewster-Jones's 'keen interest in the strange and rare' — his amateur ethnography and voracious reading of scores and books—went some way to compensate for his sense of geographic isolation. They provided a virtual engagement with both West and East. There is a direct relationship between his sense of dislocation and dissatisfaction and his desire for the strange and unfamiliar. Brewster-Jones's Others were, to borrow Pickering's words, 'drawn into fantasies of desire, longing, envy and seduction in the interests of compensating for some perceived deficiency of cultural identity or estrangement from inherited cultural values' ([Pickering 2001: 49](#)). The following observation of C aelestin is helpful in understanding Brewster-Jones's growing sense of alienation:

Exoticism may constitute a potential means of leaving or escaping Home and, as such, it does create a rift between individual and culture. Yet it is also a mode of representation; this is why the subject who would practice exoticism can never really leave Home, since Home is also audience, just as this subject can never really go Home again once the exotic has become part of his (self-constituting) experience ([C aelestin 1996: 2](#))

John Docker argues that in Australian cultural history, at least since the 1890s, 'Orientalism and exoticism have been related to a suspicion and dislike of a perceived English provincialism' which, he determines, 'could also emerge as cosmopolitanism and interest in multiculturalism ...' ([Docker 1999: 126](#)). This assessment throws light on the case of Brewster-Jones.

What is of chief importance however, is not the quality of Brewster-Jones's writings on modern and non-Western art, but the fact that he wrote about them at all. Many of his attitudes and undertakings may seem at times from our vantage point deluded but his genuine desire to know and attempt to understand other cultures is admirable. They should be understood in the historical context in which they were written. His interest in non-Western music transformed his own music. His decision to publicly broadcast on it, to inform and educate a broader Australian audience of other musics past and present, revealed a cosmopolitan desire to transform his own culture. There is no strong sense of civilising mission, underscored by moral or ethical considerations in either branch of his output. By seeking out different cultural communities within his own city he showed that it was possible to be cosmopolitan, to look beyond cultural borders, without physically leaving home. In a city that had in the years before been denigrated as parochial and culturally stagnant ([Waters 1929, 1938](#)), Brewster-Jones staged his own intercultural encounters, with indigenous as well as Chinese and Middle Eastern Australians. The particular brand of second world cosmopolitan artist of which he is a representative questions the argument advanced by anthropologist Peter van der Veer that unlike the new cosmopolitanism, the 'old cosmopolitanism separated the colony and the metropole both spatially and intellectually' ([Veer 2002: 23](#)); the multiculturalism of the early twentieth-century settler society metropolises contests this assertion. His was, however, unquestionably a cosmopolitanism rooted in Western thought, one that placed European culture at the top of the evolutionary ladder.¹⁵

Although there was not the immediacy of the virtual world at our fingertips as we have today, these broadcasts, and more generally, his entire output, shows that there was a constant flow of information across national borders within and beyond the British world. While perhaps not abundant by today's standards, although many including Keane have argued that we are experiencing a saturation, an over-abundance, of information, Brewster-Jones's public output is one particular instance of many possible examples demonstrating that Australian culture was hardly suffering the malnutrition, the enforced deprivation, that even at the time was believed to be an unavoidable part of being on the margins of Empire. These fragile pages now brittle with age are evidence of a story of a rich, if fleeting, moment in Australian broadcasting history. Brewster-Jones's 'keen interest for the strange and rare' dominated his artistic life, shaping not only the music he wrote and the subjects he chose to write about, but the way he understood the world.



ENDNOTES

¹ The expression 'tyranny of distance' has been widely invoked since it first appeared in the mid-1960s as the title of Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey's important work, *Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History*.

² A little-known example of the advantages this geographic proximity could offer can be found in the travels of the Adelaide composer Elsie Hamilton. In 1937 Hamilton departed Adelaide to return to London, her home of many years, but stopped off en route in Indonesia to collect some Balinese pipes for her friend and colleague, the music theorist Kathleen Schlesinger. See Bowan (2009a).

³ For a detailed discussion of *Formula Series* see Bowan (2009b)

⁴ For the history of Adelaide see (ed. Prest 2001); (ed. McCredie 1988); (Pitcher 1977); (Pike 1957).

⁵ 5CL had begun as a privately owned radio station in 1925 and was absorbed into the Australian Broadcasting Commission at its inception in 1931. See Inglis and Brazier (1983).

⁶ *5CL Radio Broadcast Transcripts*, Hooper Brewster-Jones Papers, Private Collection in the possession of Anne Bartsch. Hereafter the individual broadcasts will be identified by Bartsch Collection followed by the individual title. There is no evidence to suggest that these transcripts represent the complete lecture series that went to air. In fact, they are almost certainly incomplete.

⁷ Somewhat mysteriously, given these were radio broadcasts, Brewster-Jones went so far as to pencil in little pictures of the instruments in the text. Perhaps the pictures acted as aids to help him describe the instruments to a listening audience?

⁸ This desire to excavate the origins of things was a more general impulse towards evolutionary explanations felt in much comparative scholarly work conducted around this time. It is evident in the works of contemporary comparative musicologists such as Curt Sachs and Erich von Hornbostel. See Toner (2007).

⁹ The series, 'Musical Instruments and Their Origin', ran every Saturday in *The Advertiser* between 12 January and 4 May 1935.

¹⁰ Brewster-Jones was not the only South Australian musician to conduct research into indigenous song. Ironically it was his arch enemy, E. Harold Davies, the Director of the Elder Conservatorium, who also undertook more thorough ethnographic studies of indigenous music. For published ethnographic works by Davies see E. Harold Davies (1927, 1932), See also the Papers of E. Harold Davies on Aboriginal Music held in Special Collections at the University of Adelaide Library.

¹¹ The Adelaide Mosque was built in 1888 on Gilbert Street only two years after the first London mosque. It was the first in Australia. It was built by Middle Eastern camel drivers who were first brought out in the 1860s to assist in opening up inland Australia. They came mostly from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. It is unlikely however that any of the 'orientals' Brewster-Jones spoke to were actually Egyptian. For a history of the Afghans in Australia see Stevens (2002); Jones and Kenny (2007).

¹² Brewster-Jones graduated from the Royal College of Music in 1909 with this work. It precipitated a row with Stanford, who complained bitterly of its 'audacious "duodecuple" harmonic effects'. This work takes its place in a larger body of Edwardian music inspired by exotic themes. Other better-known examples are Granville Bantock's *Omar Khayyam* and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha*.

¹³ Scholarship on the history of Chinese in Adelaide is scant (Rendell 1952). For further related reading on Chinese music in Australia see Zheng-Ting Wang (1997). For the Chinese in Australia more generally see Ryan (1995).

¹⁴ The early editions of the *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* stand as fascinating microcosms of the changing tastes and interests of the British musical world.

¹⁵ For a critique of Western cosmopolitanism see Kahn (2001).

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ABSTRACT

The surviving transcripts of Adelaide composer Hooper Brewster-Jones's lecture broadcasts given in the early 1930s on Adelaide's recently established ABC radio station 5CL reveal a cosmopolitan Australian composer eager to engage with other cultures. His cosmopolitanism is very much a rooted even provincial one, clearly embedded in his particular historical and cultural context. Nonetheless, the story of Brewster-Jones's broadcasts helps to destabilise and complicate the picture of early twentieth-century Australian musical history. His encounters with musics modern, ancient and exotic add a missing page to Australian broadcasting history and challenge the received orthodoxy of Australian music from this period as a pale imitation of English pastoralism.

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