

## **Alyawarra Music at Gurlanda Camp**

Woodrow W. Denham, Ph. D.  
Retired Independent Scholar  
[wwdenham@gmail.com](mailto:wwdenham@gmail.com)

### **Contents**

TECHNICAL NOTES .....	1
RICHARD MOYLE’S BOOK .....	2
ACCESS RESTRICTIONS .....	2
ALYAWARRA MUSIC GENRE .....	4
SEGMENTATION .....	6
LINKS TO THE RECORDINGS .....	7

The Music folder in the DATA collection contains excerpts from recordings that I made of music performed by Alyawarra Aborigines at Gurlanda Camp, MacDonald Downs Station, Northern Territory, Australia, in 1971 and 1972. This brief article concerns those recordings.

### **Technical Notes**

I made the recordings using a battery-powered Panasonic cassette recorder that was designed for recording human speech, especially in the form of dictation. Its manufacturer in 1970 never intended that it be used to record music sung by as many as twenty people sitting around a campfire, clapping their hands and banging cups together, with dogs howling and kids screaming in the background. Nevertheless, the primitive recorder and hand-held microphone, pushed far beyond their normal limits, did a remarkable job.

My entire music collection from the Alyawarra includes approximately 13 hours of recordings. In 1985 I selected twenty tracks containing 77 minutes of music and made a compilation cassette that was “listenable”. I used four selection criteria. First I eliminated all recordings that were contaminated by my voice speaking over the music. Second I considered distinctions between public, private and secret; I included public and private music but excluded secret music. Third I considered the technical quality of the recordings, and included the better ones while excluding all else. Finally I considered musical diversity, opting always for more rather than less diversity.

On 27 July 2002, I had the “listenable” compilation tape processed further. I thank Anthony Cimino of Mojo Studios, Easton, New Hampshire, for removing all extraneous recording noises, setting all tracks to the same volume level, spacing the components evenly, and producing a CD that I could use to transfer the music to the World Wide Web. That product is available here.

I have setup the music folder using Microsoft Media Player to access and play the music files.

### **Richard Moyle's Book**

I am not a musicologist and did not go to Central Australia to study Alyawarra music. Consequently, I view these recordings as “fringe benefits”. I hope they will be valuable to somebody sometime, but I present them here with almost no explanation for I know very little about them.

Richard Moyle's (1986) *Alyawarra Music* is a valuable introduction to the music presented here. His research dealt exclusively with members of Ahrunga Country living at Amaroo Station approximately 160 km. northeast of my research site at MacDonald Downs Station, and he conducted most of his fieldwork there between October 1977 and December 1978, about six years after my fieldwork in 1971-72. I worked with many of the people with whom Moyle worked, but my group contained a broader representation of Countries reaching from Alice Springs, northward to Warrabri Settlement on the Stuart Highway, and eastward to Lake Nash Station on the Queensland border. Consequently my samples of people and music are larger than his, while his focus is considerably sharper than mine

Despite the merits of Moyle's work, the eight minutes of music that appear on the 45 rpm record published with his book are disappointing. Certainly the snippets are useful, but they are so short (17 seconds in one case) that it is impossible to use them to develop any feel for the various genre that Moyle describes in his book. I hope the longer selections included here, made possible in part by new technologies, will be useful in putting Moyle's recordings and ideas into a larger context.

### **Access Restrictions**

The Alyawarra restrict access to some of their music, art and oral literature. Generally speaking restrictions are based on sex and social maturity. Sex is a fairly obvious criterion, but social maturity is somewhat more problematic. Speaking specifically of males, the most conspicuous change in social maturity occurs when a boy is “made” into a man, i.e., when he is initiated. Finer shades of maturity among males derive from the amount of Dreamtime training a man has received. A young initiated man is not yet ready to see and hear some of the things for which older men are responsible.

In theory the restrictions probably constitute a finely graded continuum from most public to most secret, but for Moyle's purposes and mine the following three points on the continuum are sufficient: Public, Private and Secret.

Public music is performed in the presence of males and females of all degrees of social maturity. Much of the music that is performed during male initiation ceremonies falls into this category. Performances of these public songs may feature singing by men with women and children constituting the audience, or singing by men and dancing by women and girls. In either event, everyone in the community is present and most are participants.

Private music is performed by either males or females, and adult members of the opposite sex are not present at these performances. Sometimes small boys are present when men perform private music, and often both small boys and small girls participate when women perform private music. This music commonly is performed within or adjacent to camps where multiple families live, and members of the opposite sex and all degrees of social maturity may be in the camp and free to hear the music even though they are technically absent from the performances.

Secret music certainly is performed by adult males isolated from all women and children, and may be performed by adult females as well but I am not qualified to speak on this point. Men's secret music includes some of the most dramatic parts of initiation ceremonies and some of the most esoteric teachings about the Dreamtime that are reserved for men who have been initiated and have successfully completed their early training. Minimally, secret music may be performed at an Agiewa or men's business camp located away from the nearest residential camp and outside the hearing range of others, while maximally secret music may be performed at isolated dance grounds that are designated as strictly off limits to women and children, with unauthorized intruders running the risk of capital punishment.

To the best of my knowledge, no secret music appears in the files included in this online Archive. I recorded a number of secret performances that are available for research purposes from the AIATSIS in Canberra, Australia, but it would be inappropriate to make them available here.

I recorded the first four women's performances at an alugera (HH24) in Gurlanda Camp. No men were present at the alugera, but many were present elsewhere in the camp and could hear the music easily. I recorded the fifth women's performance at a location just outside the main camp which provided privacy but no secrecy.

I recorded fourteen of the men's performances at the ngundy (HH11) in Gurlanda Camp. No women or girls were at the ngundy, but they were present elsewhere in the camp and could hear the music easily. Uninitiated boys were present at the ngundy during some of the performances.

I recorded the slow men's chant on Track 10 at the Gurlanda Agiewa (HH13) that was located outside Gurlanda camp. It provided considerably more privacy than the ngundy, but none of the secrecy required by some components of initiation ceremonies. Nevertheless, since some people might reasonably prefer that this recording not appear here, I have deleted the link to it. To gain access to it, please contact The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, ACT, Australia.

**Alyawarra Music Genre**

I base the following outline of Alyawarra music genre on Moyle’s work, but have taken some liberties with his comments to make them reflect my own experiences with the Alyawarra at Gurlanda Camp in 1971-72.

While working at MacDonald Downs Station, I heard examples of most of the genre that Moyle found at Amaroo Station, but I did not record their names or attempt to analyze what I heard. Here I summarize Moyle’s list of categories and frequencies of occurrence (Moyle 1986:153, Figure 37) to provide an overview of music at Amaroo. Frequency of occurrence refers to the number of acts of singing of each genre that Moyle recorded. The precise relationship between the composition of Moyle’s sample and the composition of everything that the Alyawarra sang while Moyle was there is unknown, but as order of magnitude estimates of the way the Alyawarra allocate their effort and time to the various genre, Moyle’s numbers are at least plausible. I suspect (hope) that the table applies reasonably well - but not precisely - to my experiences at MacDonald Downs.

Row #	Genre	Description	Performers	Access	Frequency of Occurrence	
					<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Apulha	Initiation	Men + Women	Public	1390	23.9
2	Apulha Restricted (a-e)	Initiation	Men	Secret	2033	34.9
3	Ngirtilingkwa	Dreaming instructions	Men	Private or Secret	217	3.7
4	Mwaltja	Dreaming instructions	Men	Private	117	2.0
5	Wantjirra	Songs using music sticks	Men	Private	477	8.2
6	Itminta	Songs using music sticks	Men	Private	192	3.3
7	Restricted (f-g)	Main increase ceremony	Men	Secret	464	8.0
8	Ltarta	“Show tunes”	Men	Public	48	1.0
9	Awulya	“Women’s ceremonies”	Women	Private	884	15.2
10	Awulya (men’s)	Campfire Songs	Men	Private	n/a	n/a
11	Ngirtilingkwa (modified)	Child’s Coroboree	Men + women	Public	n/a	n/a
				<b>Total</b>	5822	100.2

Music genre and their relative frequency of occurrence at Amaroo Station 1977-79. Items 10-11 do not appear in Moyle’s book. See text; based on Moyle (1986:153).

The following briefly summarizes my perceptions of music in each genre at MacDonald Downs:

*1-2 Apulha* Initiation music is a huge genre that contains numerous sub-genre. The public sub-genre that Moyle describes are easily recognizable at MacDonald Downs. Moyle's Restricted (a-e) sub-genre probably correspond to the secret music I heard at MacDonald Downs, but Moyle's descriptions are deliberately too uninformative for me to recognize anything.

*3 Ngirtilingkwa and 4 Mwaltja* The distinction that Moyle makes between these two categories is too fine for me to handle. The Dreamtime teaching genre *Ngirtilingkwa* (which I heard as *angerdelungwa*) may contain a broader range of stylistic variation than Moyle suggests, but his sample was quite small. I didn't hear anything that I can recognize many years later as belonging to the *mwaltja* genre, but that may say more about me than it does about the Alyawarra. I probably would have heard *Mwaltja* as a sub-genre of *Ngirtilingkwa* since both are used in the same way.

*5 Wantjirra and 6 Itmintia* I heard and recorded a good bit of men's music accompanied by music sticks. Moyle says these genre do not belong to Ahrunga Country, and he classified them as "foreign" and did not focus much of his attention on analyzing them. I have no reason to doubt his conclusions for Ahrunga Country, but at MacDonald Downs I heard such music as one of many variations on the *Ngirtilingkwa* genre.

In other words, as a naïve layman treading in an alien area of expertise, I probably would have folded *Ngirtilingkwa*, *Mwaltja*, *Wantjirra* and *Itmintia* into a single super-category of Dreamtime teaching music. All of it is performed primarily at the Agiewa or business camp well away from the residential camp and all of it has the same basic use in teaching young men about their Dreamings.

*7 Restricted (f-g)* Again Moyle provides only a very superficial description of this secret increase ceremony music. I too missed the 1971 ceremony to which Moyle refers, so to the best of my knowledge I failed to here any music in this genre.

*8 Ltarta* Moyle heard the "show music" that defines this genre at public performances for visitors at Warrabri Settlement. I heard nothing that resembled the genre at MacDonald Downs.

*9 Awulya (female)* Moyle uses this term to refer to "women's ceremonies" and says the genre does not include specific references to the Dreamtime. At MacDonald Downs, I heard and recorded music that seems to match both Moyle's description of the genre and his recording of it that appears on the 45 rpm record included with his book. However, at least some of the music I recorded dealt specifically with Dingo Dreaming at Warrabri Settlement. Maybe what I heard does not belong in Moyle's awulya genre, or maybe the awulya genre can encompass women's songs that deal explicitly with Dreamings. Since Moyle uncovered only two songs representing this genre, I suspect that the category definition needs to be refined. All of the music I heard in this category was performed at an alugera within Gurlanda camp or at a temporary location corresponding to a men's Agiewa located just outside the main residential

camp; hence it was private but not secret. Dancing around a pair of decorated poles standing vertically in the ground commonly occurred in conjunction with singing these songs.

*10 “Awulya” (male)* To accommodate much of what I heard and recorded at MacDonald Downs, I must add another category of men’s music to Moyle’s list. All of the male music genre that Moyle describes are used in initiations (*apulha*), teaching (*ngirtilingkwa*) and increase activities, with the exception of *Ltarta* which I did not hear at MacDonald Downs. My proposed addition to Moyle’s list can be described best at a male equivalent of the women’s *Awulya* whose definition has been expanded to encompass songs that deal explicitly with Dreamings. In fact, most of the music I recorded at MacDonald Downs falls into this category.

This proposed category might be described colloquially as “campfire music”, the kind that groups of men sing in the evening while sitting around the campfire at the ngundy, beating the rhythm with music sticks or boomerangs or metal cups, often belting out the music with great gusto. Since the performances occur at the ngundy, women and children are absent, but anyone with ears can hear the music from anywhere in the camp. The performances are private but definitely are not secret.

*11 Child’s Coroboree* Finally I must add another category based on only two experiences that do not seem to fit anywhere else. The label I use here is the one I received from the performers. Both examples were very brief ceremonies held at dusk, and each was performed to introduce a small child to its own Dreaming. One dealt with Dingo and Kangaroo, the other dealt with a small Lizard. In each case the ceremony was held in the middle of the residential camp, the music was performed by several men in conjunction with a fleeting ritual drama concerning the Dreaming. The music sounded like that which I associate with Moyle’s *Ngirtilingkwa* genre which ordinarily is performed by men in private, but in each Child’s Corroboree a large number of women and children actively participated.

## **Segmentation**

Generally speaking each piece of Alyawarra music is a series of short segments separated from each other by pauses ranging in duration from a few seconds to a few minutes during which participants select, discuss and plan the next segment. All pieces presented here have this general structure, with the number of segments ranging from 3 to 18. The pauses between segments have been reduced to about three seconds each. In most songs, the segments that are included here are discontinuous; i.e., I skipped some of the segments because of poor recording quality. In three cases (Tracks 5, 15 and 16), the series are continuous but not necessarily complete; i.e., no segments were skipped within the sequences presented here, but additional segments may be missing from the beginning or ending of the pieces.

**Links to the Recordings**

To play the pieces individually, click on the Track Numbers in the following table.

<b><a href="#">Track 1</a></b> (Track 1 is damaged)	<b>Alyawarra Women</b>
Timing	2:56
Number of Segments	5
Title	None
Caption	Women's song.
Moyle's Genre	Awulya
Performers	Lady Lewis, Angeline Clark, Mary Morton, Kathleen Morton
Date / Day Recorded	2 September 1971, Day 094
Text Descriptions	Day 095
Photographs	None

<b><a href="#">Track 2</a></b>	<b>Alyawarra Women</b>
Timing	2:51
Number of Segments	6
Title	None
Caption	Women's song.
Moyle's Genre	Awulya
Performers	Lady Lewis, Angeline Clark, Mary Morton, Kathleen Morton
Date / Day Recorded	2 September 1971, Day 094
Text Description	Day 095
Photographs	None

<b><a href="#">Track 3</a></b>	<b>Alyawarra Women</b>
Timing	1:16
Number of Segments	3
Title	None
Caption	Women's song.
Moyle's Genre	Awulya
Performers	Lady Lewis, Angeline Clark, Mary Morton, Kathleen Morton
Date / Day Recorded	2 September 1971, Day 094
Text Description	Day 095
Photographs	None

<b><a href="#">Track 4</a></b>	<b>Alyawarra Women</b>
Timing	4:09
Number of Segments	8
Title	None
Caption	Women's song.
Moyle's Genre	Awulya
Performers	Lady Lewis, Angeline Clark, Mary Morton, Kathleen Morton
Date / Day Recorded	7 September 1971, Day 099
Text Description	Day 099
Photographs	None

<b><a href="#">Track 5</a></b>	<b>Alyawarra Women</b>
Timing	9:16
Number of Segments	18; uninterrupted series of segments

Title	None
Caption	Women's Dingo Dreaming song from Warrabri
Moyle's Genre	Awulya
Performers	Lady Lewis, Angeline Clark, Mary Morton, Dolly Jones
Date / Day Recorded	5 October 1971, Day 127
Text Description	Day 128
Photographs	Pr54, Pr55, Pr78, Pr79, Pr80, PR81, Pr82, Pr83, SL369, SL370

<b><u>Track 6</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	1:36
Number of Segments	2
Title	Yurnainday (yur.nain.day)
Caption	Men's vigorous vocal
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Jacob Jones, Marnie Norman, Larry Jones, Brian Ross
Date / Day Recorded	20 July 1971, Day 050
Text Descriptions	Day 051
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 7</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	1:46
Number of Segments	2
Title	Wadayjernada (wa.day.jer.na.da)
Caption	Men's vigorous vocal
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Jacob Jones, Marnie Norman, Larry Jones, Brian Ross
Date / Day Recorded	20 July 1971, Day 050
Text Descriptions	Day 051
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 8</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	4:12
Number of Segments	5
Title	Yuarabandinaynai (yu.a.ra.ban.di.nay.nai)
Caption	Men's vigorous vocal
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Jacob Jones, Marnie Norman, Larry Jones, Brian Ross
Date / Day Recorded	20 July 1971, Day 050
Text Descriptions	Day 051
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 9</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	2:32
Number of Segments	3
Title	Gundabila (gun.da.bi.la)
Caption	Men's vigorous vocal
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Jacob Jones, Marnie Norman, Larry Jones, Brian Ross
Date / Day Recorded	20 July 1971, Day 050
Text Descriptions	Day 051
Photographs	None

<b>Track 10 (no link)</b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	4:21
Number of Segments	7
Title	None
Caption	Men's slow chant recorded at agiewa; perhaps related to Amy's death
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Ngirtilingkwa
Performers	Jacob Jones, Johnny Crow, Charlie Morton
Date / Day Recorded	2 December 1971, Day 185
Text Descriptions	Day 184
Photographs	

<b><a href="#">Track 11</a></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	5:11
Number of Segments	7
Title	None; see Track 5 above.
Caption	Men's Dingo Dreaming song from Warrabri; done "just for fun".
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Group including Willie Nothing and Jacky Diese
Date / Day Recorded	30 September 1971, Day 122
Text Descriptions	Day 124
Photographs	Print 077,Pr84,Pr85,SL371

<b><a href="#">Track 12</a></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	4:22
Number of Segments	6
Title	None; see Track 5 above.
Caption	Men's Dingo Dreaming song from Warrabri; done "just for fun".
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Group including Willie Nothing and Jacky Diese
Date / Day Recorded	30 September 1971, Day 122
Text Descriptions	Day 124
Photographs	Print 077,Pr84,Pr85,SL371

<b><a href="#">Track 13</a></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	3:00
Number of Segments	4
Title	None; see Track 5 above.
Caption	Men's Dingo Dreaming song from Warrabri, done "just for fun", featuring music sticks made of mulga wood.
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Group including Willie Nothing and Jacky Diese.
Date / Day Recorded	1 October 1971, Day 123
Text Descriptions	Day 124
Photographs	Print 077,Pr84,Pr85,SL371

<b><a href="#">Track 14</a></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men (with women and children)</b>
Timing	2:24
Number of Segments	5
Title	None
Caption	Men's song with women participating in the ceremony. A drama about Dingo and Kangaroo Dreamings that introduces a small child to her own Dreamings.
Moyle's Class (Modified)	Child's Coroboree
Performers	Alec Lee, Billy Timms, Billy Moss and others.

Date / Day Recorded	20 January 1972, Day 234
Text Descriptions	Day 235
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 15</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	2:54
Number of Segments	7; uninterrupted series of segments.
Title	None
Caption	Men's song. White Cockatoo Dreaming
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Solo by Jacob Jones
Date / Day Recorded	21 June 1971, Day 021.
Text Descriptions	Day 022
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 16</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	5:47
Number of Segments	11; uninterrupted series of segments.
Title	None
Caption	Men's song. Albaidja Dreaming (Bird)
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Jacob Jones, Billy Moss
Date / Day Recorded	21 June 1971, Day 021.
Text Descriptions	Day 022
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 17</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	3:39
Number of Segments	8
Title	None
Caption	Man's song. Mala Dreaming (Kangaroo)
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Solo by Jacob Jones
Date / Day Recorded	21 June 1971, Day 021.
Text Descriptions	Day 022
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 18</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	7:01
Number of Segments	9
Title	Yuarabandinaynai (yu.a.ra.ban.di.nay.nai)
Caption	Men's vigorous vocal
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Jacob Jones, Marnie Norman, Larry Jones, Brian Ross
Date / Day Recorded	20 July 1971, Day 050
Text Descriptions	Day 051
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 19</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	3:56
Number of Segments	7
Title	None
Caption	Man's song. Possum Dreaming

Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Jacob Jones, Billy Moss
Date / Day Recorded	21 June 1971, Day 021.
Text Descriptions	Day 022
Photographs	None

<b><u>Track 20</u></b>	<b>Alyawarra Men</b>
Timing	3:44
Number of Segments	9
Title	Yurnainday (yur.nain.day)
Caption	Men's vigorous vocal
Moyle's Genre (revised)	Men's Awulya (campfire song)
Performers	Jacob Jones, Marnie Norman, Larry Jones, Brian Ross
Date / Day Recorded	20 July 1971, Day 050
Text Descriptions	Day 051
Photographs	None