

Australian Popular Music

Originally Australian popular music followed trends set in America and Britain. Songs in the 1930s and 1940s were written in the style of the then standard 32 bar pattern and used the general swing jazz style that was in vogue at that time. After World War II, the situation continued — when rock groups became popular in America and later England, Australia had rock groups; when folk music was the important influence in the 1960s, Australia developed a folk scene and had groups such as The Seekers. It was not until the 1970s that the Australian rock industry developed into an independent force within Australian popular music.

This development was linked to the 1970s promotion of an Australian identity and the resultant widespread demand to hear Australian groups. In the larger cities, the rock scene was boosted by developments in the recording industry, the creation of the pub rock circuit (in an attempt to attract customers) and the popularity of live music. By the 1980s the rock group scene in Australia was recognised as producing some of the best rock music in the world with groups such as Midnight Oil, Men at Work, and the Little River Band making successful tours of America — still considered by many bands to be an important career move.

As well as rock music, there are also the performers of pop music. Because pop music changes and fashions vary so quickly, it is hard to see 'stars' who have long success rates. One of the most famous of the late 1980s is Kylie Minogue ('Do the Locomotion') who has received worldwide fame.

A thriving country music scene is also part of Australian popular music. This too has its own mega-stars and its own annual awards at Tamworth. Important personalities in this music are Slim Dusty ('The Pub With No Beer'), Olivia Newton-John, who started out as a country singer and now owns a boutique in Los Angeles, and John Williamson ('Every Australian Boy Needs a Shed', 'True Blue' and 'Rip, Rip, Woodchip').

Overseas, Australian popular artists include Peter Allen, who is not only a performer but also composer of songs such as 'Tenterfield Saddler' and 'I Still Call Australia Home'.

Here is the music for a song from the group Men at Work. 'Down Under' was a big hit for them both here and overseas in 1981. Unusually for a rock group they included a flute in their lineup for this song. Notice the references to Australia (the land down under) and to things only Australians would understand: Vegemite; and 'chunder' (= to vomit). Except for two bars at the end of the chorus, this song is built over a bass ostinato two bars long. It uses the standard rock pattern of verse-chorus repeated a number of times.

Revision questions

1. The music of which countries did early Australian popular music imitate?
2. When did Australian rock music start to develop on its own?
3. Name three groups that successfully toured overseas.
4. What was the name of Kylie Minogue's worldwide hit?
5. In what style of music did Olivia Newton-John start her career?
6. Who wrote 'I Still Call Australia Home'?
7. How long is the bass guitar ostinato in 'Down Under'?
8. What group had a hit with 'Down Under'?
9. What unusual instrument was used in 'Down Under'?
10. What typical pattern is used to construct the song 'Down Under'?

(For answers, see page 132.)





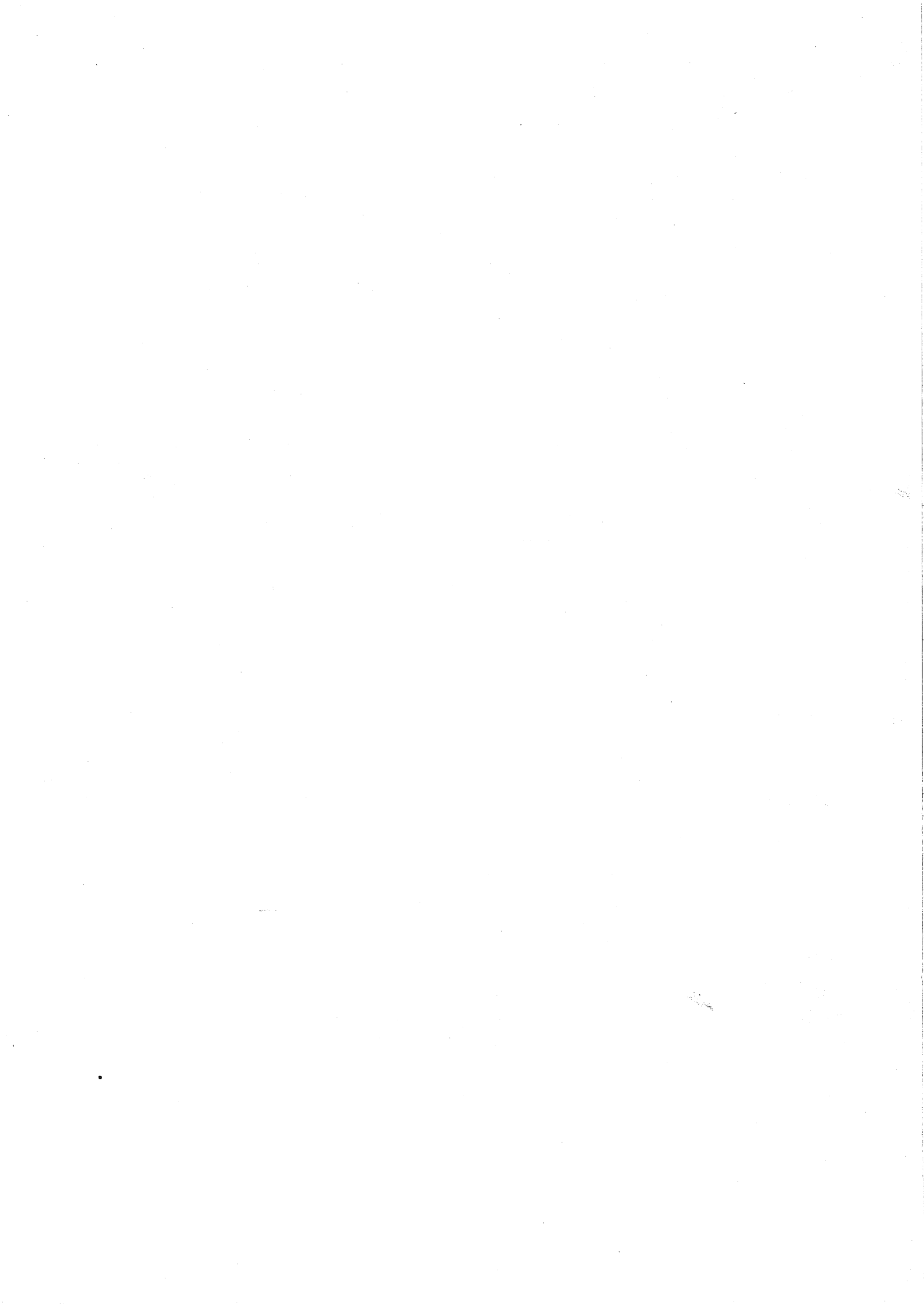
Aborigines have played music for many thousands of years. Their music has been passed down from generation to generation by mouth; no written notation is used. The music consists of usually one or more singers accompanied by percussion instruments and sometimes a didgeridoo player. The songs are many and varied and are often combined with dancing. The dancing, like the music, is learnt through imitation.

Before Europeans arrived, Aboriginal tribes tended to live within certain territories, and so Aboriginal music varied from tribe to tribe. For example, the Aborigines of Arnhem Land would have songs and ceremonies that were traditional to them and their area, and these would differ from those of Aborigines from further south.

The instruments Aborigines used were created using resources from the land. Here are some of them:

| Instrument | Description | Type of sound (tone) | Other information |
|-----------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Didgeridoo | A hollowed branch of a tree cut to length and stripped of bark, then painted | A deep rich drone-type sound | Is played continuously by a process called circular breathing , which involves the player pushing out air through the mouth while breathing in through the nose (can also be used when playing the trumpet) |
| Boomerang clapsticks | Two boomerangs grasped in the middle and brought together so the two ends hit | A sharp wooden sound | Are sometimes shaken together to create a continuous rattle |
| Sticks | Usually two sticks, one slightly flattened and the other rounded, but varies depending on which area of Australia you are in | A bright wooden ring | The flattened stick is held in the middle; the rounded stick is held towards one end and is used to strike the flattened stick |
| Skin drum | An hourglass-shaped drum with a single head | A rich sound | Either goanna skin or lizard skin is used for the head |
| Rattle | Seed pods held in the hand | A muted rattle sound | Originated from island-style songs on Cape York |
| Rasp | A notched stick scraped by a smaller stick | A wooden scraping sound | Sometimes the side of a spear thrower is used instead of a notched stick |

- 1 What is the one thing all these instruments have in common?
- 2 A didgeridoo player will often imitate noises made by different animals. Write down ten Australian animals that have distinctive sounds.
- 3 What European instrument requires the same breathing technique as the didgeridoo?
- 4 What is the difference between the boomerang clapsticks and the sticks?
- 5 On the back of this page, draw how you believe each instrument above would look as it is being played.
- 6 How did Aborigines pass on knowledge of their music from generation to generation? How does this differ from the methods used by Europeans over the last few centuries?
- 7 Which method do you prefer? Why?
- 8 Which Aboriginal instrument would you like to play? Explain why.



22 The Beginnings of Rock Music

Throughout the 1930s and the 1940s the **big bands** played the popular music of the time. Band leaders such as Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey were the heroes. Competition between bands was intense and focused on the singers and the saxophone players.

In the mid 1940s an ex-band singer, 'crooner' Frank Sinatra, became the first real pop star. Women fainted over him and fans rioted at his concerts. Other singers such as Dean Martin and Perry Como also emerged at this time.



Bill Haley

After the war the big bands broke up. Although the white audiences did not seem to miss them because they had their 'crooners' and romantic ballads, the blacks still wanted dance rhythms rather than slow tunes, and excitement rather than ballads.

Originally, when the blacks lived in the smaller towns or in the country, they sang a blues which was slow. But when they moved to the big city to find work, the blues became fast and loud. They added dance rhythms to blues emotions and developed the most important popular music since jazz—**rhythm'n'blues**. Muddy Waters and T-Bone Walker were two of the most famous performers.

In 1952 a D.J. called Alan Freed visited his local record store and saw white teenagers buying and dancing to records made for the black rhythm 'n' blues market. He started playing it on the radio. To avoid any racial stigma by calling it 'rhythm'n'blues', he used another phrase, heard on black dance records—'**rock 'n' roll**'.

At the same time, white groups were adding rhythm 'n' blues songs to their repertoires. One of these groups was called Bill Haley and the Comets. In 1953/54 "Shake, Rattle And Roll" and "Rock Around The Clock", both rhythm 'n' blues songs, became hits. Rock 'n' roll had now become known throughout the country.

Rock'n'roll became established in the mid 1950s when young singers and performers, who appealed almost exclusively to their own age group, arrived on the scene. The most famous rock'n'roller, the King, was Elvis Presley. He had a distinctive sound — a white man with a black man's voice. His many early hits included "Heartbreak Hotel", "Don't Be Cruel" and "Jailhouse Rock". There were also other important rock'n'roll artists, both black and white. Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly (with the Crickets) to name two.



Elvis Presley

QUESTIONS

- 1 Name three big bands in the 1930s and 1940s.
- 2 What is a 'crooner'?
- 3 Name three famous 'crooners'.
- 4 After the big bands broke up, what type of music did the white population listen to?
- 5 What is meant by the term 'rhythm 'n' blues'?
- 6 Name two famous rhythm 'n' blues performers.
- 7 What was rhythm 'n' blues called in the 1950s?
- 8 Why was the name changed?
- 9 Name the first white band to play rock 'n' roll.
- 10 Name the D.J. who began playing rock 'n' roll on the radio.

23 Rock Music in the 1960s

The Beatles began their rise to fame in the mid 1960s. They filled a gap in pop music which had been caused by the decline of American rock 'n' roll. This was partly due to Elvis Presley being conscripted into the army, the death of Buddy Holly and investigations into bribery in the American recording industry. The big record companies controlled the industry and for a while solo singers such as Fabian and Frankie Avalon, as well as some of the crooners of the 1940s such as Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra, became the most popular singers of the time. Their image was white and clean-cut as opposed to the earthy sound and image of black music.

The dance craze of the era was the

Twist—Chubby Checker sang about it and in Australia Johnny O'Keefe as well. The other popular dance was the Stomp and Little Patti had a hit with "Stompin' At Maroubra".

The Beatles took the world by storm in 1963 by making England rather than America the centre of the rock scene. Following the Beatles, English musicians began to dominate the rock industry. These included The Rolling Stones, Cliff Richard, Lulu, Cilla Black and The Who.

After this, pop music began to diverge into different areas. The Rolling Stones made rhythm 'n' blues popular again with such songs as "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" and "Hey, You, Get Off My Cloud". These songs introduced a heavi-



The Rolling Stones



Little Patti and the Beach Boys, 1964. L-r Al Jardine, Brian Wilson, Patti, Mike Love, Carl Wilson, Denis Wilson

ness to the music and lyrics which led to some of today's rock styles, e.g. heavy metal and heavy rock.

Folk music became popular for a time in the 1960s and was associated with the protest movement against the Vietnam War. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell were some of the singers who influenced rock music.

The Beach Boys popularised a style of music which became known as surf music. These songs were about surfing and its lifestyle. The music was simple with driving rhythms and close harmonies using falsetto voices (singing in high and unnatural voices). The Beach Boys' songs include "Good Vibrations" and "Surfin' U.S.A."

Motown and soul were also important. Motown is a style of black music made famous by Diana Ross and the Supremes, "Baby Love" was an early hit, and centres around Detroit (known as Motor Town, therefore Motown). Its sound is slick and it is arranged to appeal to a wide commercial market. On the other hand, soul is concerned with black rights and the 'Black is beautiful' movement in the U.S.A. Famous soul singers include Aretha Franklin and Tina Turner.

In the 1960s many rock groups experimented with drugs, especially L.S.D., which was also known as 'acid'. L.S.D. is a drug that causes hallucinations and was a part of the hippie movement. It gave rise to a style of music called acid rock or

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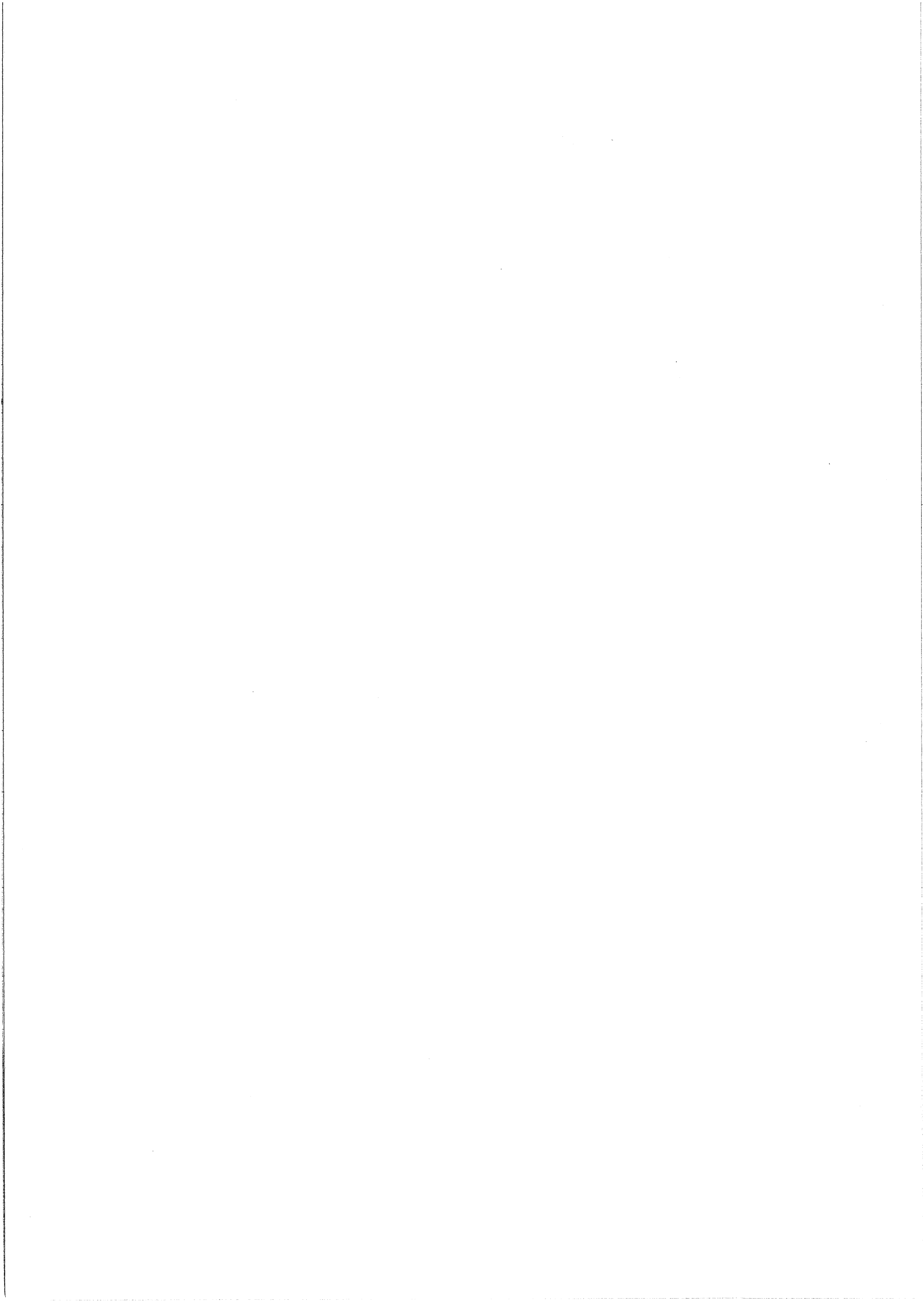
psychedelic rock. The Beatles were involved with this and some of their songs were thought to refer to drugs, for example "Norwegian Wood" and "Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds". Acid rock groups often performed in front of swirling light shows that were meant to imitate drug trips. Groups that played acid rock included Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, and The Grateful Dead (it became trendy for groups to have unusual or obscure names). The groups experimented with unusual sounds using tapes played backwards and electronic sounds.

One other trend in the 1960s was the influence of ethnic music on rock music. This came about when rock musicians became interested in adding new sounds to their music. The Beatles used Indian instruments, like the sitar and tambura, in their songs and this is related to their interest in Eastern religion. The sitar can be heard in the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood".

Overall, the 1960s was a period in rock music from which many styles emerged. It is from this time that the amazing range of rock styles that we have today started.

QUESTIONS

- 1 When did the Beatles start to become famous?
- 2 What three things caused the decline of American rock 'n' roll?
- 3 What image did Frankie Avalon, Dean Martin etc. portray?
- 4 What were two popular dances in the 1960s? Who sang about them?
- 5 Name the English musicians who followed the Beatles in dominating the music industry.
- 6 What style did the Rolling Stones use? Name two of their songs.
- 7 Name three famous folk singers in the 1960s.
- 8 What style of music did the Beach Boys sing?
- 9 What is meant by a 'falsetto' voice?
- 10 Name the two types of black music in the 1960s. Name a performer of each.
- 11 What is the other name for acid rock?
- 12 What is unusual about the names of acid rock groups?
- 13 What new sounds appeared in acid rock?
- 14 Why was ethnic music an influence on 1960s rock?
- 15 Name a Beatles song that uses an ethnic instrument. What is the instrument called?



Australian folk-songs

Australia has an extremely rich store of songs from the past. These include songs about convict settlements, colourful and notorious characters, and outback life—in fact songs about every aspect of life that shaped the development of our nation. Although these songs are usually called “folk-songs”, technically speaking they are really “national” songs since it is known who wrote many of them. Not only this, but many of our most “Australian” songs, such as “Botany Bay”, have Irish or English melodies and words that have been adapted from overseas texts to suit Australian situations.

However, most of the characteristics of folk-songs do apply to Australian songs: they were originally transmitted orally, some being spread hundreds of kilometres by drovers and swagmen; they were changed as they were passed on (which explains why there are so many versions of some songs); they were memorable and simple to sing and were sung for a purpose (for example to ease the pain of imprisonment, to calm restless cattle at night or to accompany bush dances).

In the late 1880s the old bush songs began to be printed. This meant that no longer were they in oral circulation—an important requirement of folk-songs. Any changes to texts or melodies of these printed songs were now an infringement of copyright, and thus illegal. This means then that most of our hundreds of folk-songs were composed in the relatively short space of about a hundred years, thus showing the creativity and love of music of our pioneering ancestors.

Types of Australian folk-songs

The huge number of Australian songs that exist today include the following types:

convict songs, many of which are laments—sad songs bemoaning the harsh penal conditions or separation from loved ones

sea shanties—work songs sung by the sailors or convicts on the ships bound for Australia

gold-rush songs, sung by the “diggers” on the goldfields

bushranger songs—ballads which often glorify the bushranger as a romantic or heroic figure

pastoral songs, dealing with all aspects of the sheep and cattle industries and so on

songs of the wanderers: drovers, shearers, bullockies and canecutters—all those who had to travel long distances in their employment

swagmen songs—often romantic ballads, full of self-pity

Australian Folk-Songs

➤ Read the passage on 'Australian folk songs' and 'Types of Australian folk-songs'. Answer the following questions in your music book in FULL sentences.

1. What topics can the lyrics of Australian folk songs be about? Define any words that you don't know the meaning of.
2. What are Australian folk-songs technically called? Why?
3. Where have many of the melodies and words come from?
4. List the characteristics of folk-songs that also apply to Australian folk-songs.
5. Why are there so many versions of some folk-songs?
6. Describe 3 purposes Australian folk-songs had?
7. What changed in the 1880s and how did this affect Australian folk music?
8. List the types of Australian folk-songs that exist today.
9. Choose 3 types of Australian folk-songs and define them.
10. Make a list of any Australian folk-songs you know of.