



Greg Power (b.1974)
Ilan Blake, National Folk
Fellow 2007, in the premiere
performance of his work based
on the Library's children's
folklore collection, 8 April 2007

Gwenda Beed Davey reflects
on an innovative collaboration
supporting musical scholarship and
performance

Ilan Blake is a composer, performing musician, sound artist and record producer. He is also the 2007 National Folk Fellow at the National Library of Australia, and recently presented the results of his Fellowship at the National Folk Festival, held in Canberra each Easter.

Ilan describes his work as 'a meeting of chamber music and sound art'. He worked in the National Library with the children's folklore collections—using the guide to

Sound Detectives

THE NATIONAL FOLK FELLOWSHIPS

these collections entitled *Fish Trout, You're Out*, a title taken from one of the hundreds of children's counting-out rhymes in the Library's sound recordings. Using this, Ian 'composed' (his inverted commas) a suite based on children's folklore, particularly sounds such as children laughing and clapping, and singing skipping-rhymes. He used sounds from recent recordings such as those from Preston West Primary School in Melbourne (2005) and, from further back, adult recollections of childhood (for instance, from the 1950s). He also used instruments such as soprano saxophone, bass clarinet and strings (violin, viola, cello) plus electronic manipulation of sounds, to complete the work.

The National Folk Fellowships have been offered annually since 2004, as a joint venture between the National Library of Australia and the National Folk Festival. They aim to enable performers to research original folkloric materials held in the Library's collections, and to creatively adapt archival materials in innovative ways. To date, these 'innovative ways' have taken a number of different forms.

The inaugural folk fellows were Dave De Santi and Jane Brownlee, back in 2004. Dave is a well-known performer who also produced the magazine *Trad & Now* for several years, and Jane is a violin player undertaking doctoral studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Jane and Dave searched among unpublished sound recordings held in the Library's Oral History and Folklore Collection. Their particular interests were in recordings made from the 1950s onwards by John Meredith, Norm O'Connor, Alan Scott, Chris Sullivan, Rob



given to their brothers and sisters such as "Ryebuck Shearer", "The Old Bark Hut" and "The Wild Colonial Boy". During his four-week residency at the Library, Graham identified more than 30 'rough diamonds', and recorded 12 of them. He also performed these songs at the 2005 National Folk Festival, in a concert appropriately titled *Trawling for Rough Diamonds*. Graham described one of the most intriguing items uncovered as a beautiful Aboriginal song recorded by Hazel de Berg in the 1950s. The song, 'Yamba', was recorded at La Perouse in Sydney by a man from Arnhem Land. It laments the fact that 'all my people are gone ... and I am going too'. It refers to 'the scales of the serpent', thought likely to be smallpox, a disease imported by non-Indigenous incomers to Australia.

left:
Loui Seselja (b.1948)
Dave De Santi and Jane Brownlee,
2004 National Folk Fellows

below:
Greg Power (b.1974)
Graham Dodsworth on the
Budawang Stage, National Folk
Festival 2005

Willis and the Wattle Records collection. Despite their years of performance and activity in Australian folk music, Dave and Jane found numerous items unknown to them. They transcribed enough tunes to fill 18 CDs, and selected 51 items for a double-CD, *Australian Traditional Dance Tunes*. Writing in the April 2004 edition of the National Library's *Gateways* magazine (available online from the Library's website, as are all the back issues), Jane Brownlee described her 'joy at finding so many tunes and songs unknown to our generation'. She found Chris Sullivan's recordings of particular interest, as 'Chris's decision to record people several times gives a comprehensive insight into the memory of sometimes ageing minds.'

The 2005 National Folk Fellow was Graham Dodsworth, a performer and researcher with a rare Master of Arts in folklore from Monash University in Melbourne. Writing in the April 2005 edition of *Gateways*, Graham described his task for the duration of the Fellowship as being 'to trawl the field recordings for wallflowers, songs of beauty and potential that had hitherto slipped through the net of attention

Ben Stephenson and Adrian Barker were the 2006 National Folk Fellows, and focused on Australian dance music of Irish origin. They were able to 'identify patterns of change and development of styles of playing, and the means by which the tunes are learnt and passed on.' The pair produced a 13-track CD and booklet, *Undertones: Irish*





Loui Seselja (b.1948)
2006 National Folk Fellows
Adrian Barker and Ben
Stephenson

Music from Australia. Some of the titles of individual tunes are evocative: 'Rolling in the Rye Grass', 'The Skillet Pot', 'The Pretty Maid Milking her Cow', and 'What Would You Do if the Billy Boiled Over?' Stephenson and Barker's CD is currently available in the National Library bookshop.

Kevin Bradley, the Curator of Oral History and Folklore, and Director of Sound Preservation at the National Library, describes Adrian Barker as having an international reputation as a fiddle player (especially in Ireland), and Ben Stephenson as a 'multi-instrumentalist extraordinaire'. Kevin believes that *Undertones* is 'stylistically distinct—giving added authority to the performance of Irish music in Australia by showing a continuity'.

The National Folk Fellowships are among several awards and grants offered by the National Library of Australia. The most recently established (2006) is the National Library Japan Fellowship, which aims 'to promote the National Library's collections as a national resource for the study of Asia'. In 2002 the Library began offering the Norman McCann Summer Scholarships for tertiary students, to assist younger scholars undertaking research in Australian history and literature.

The best known of the National Library's awards are the Harold White Fellowships, established in 1984, and made annually. These awards aim to promote and publicise the Library 'as a centre of scholarly activity and research', with its immense

collections of books, journals, newspapers, maps, music, manuscripts, pictures and oral histories. Originally created by the National Library Council as the National Library Fellowships, they were renamed in 1985 in honour of Sir Harold White CBE, a former National Librarian. It is of interest that four Harold White Fellows have been folklorists, including Dr Sandra Dolby-Stahl (USA) in 1985, only the second year of the fellowships' operation. Other folklorists have been myself in 1989, Professor Carole Carpenter (Canada) in 2000, and Dr Keith McKenry in 2003.

Other awards and grants offered by the National Library are the Community Heritage Grants, and the National & State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) Honorary Fellowships. Funding offered by awards and grants varies: the National Folk Fellowship offers travel to and from Canberra within Australia, accommodation in Canberra if needed for up to four weeks, and living expenses up to \$2000. Funds are provided jointly by the National Library and the National Folk Festival.

Kevin Bradley believes that it is of particular importance that the National Folk Fellowships offer access to the sound recording studios and full staff access. They are distinct from other fellowships in that they provide a performance-based outcome from research, instead of producing written material alone. He said that 'this makes the Library's rich and exciting collections relevant to more people who would otherwise not be aware of them'.

The recently retired curator of Oral History and Folklore at the Library, Mark Cranfield, was actively involved with the folk fellowships from the beginning, and saw the catalyst for their formation as being the visit to the Library in 2000 of a Dutch film crew making a documentary about 'Waltzing Matilda'. Margy Burn, Assistant Director General (Collections and Reader Services), Robyn Holmes (Curator of Music) and Mark Cranfield discussed the desirability of a music fellowship, and in 2001 folk performer and researcher Dave de Hugard was employed for 12 weeks to work on sheet music and recordings. In 2002–03 the then program manager of the National Folk Festival, Graham McDonald, proposed that the Festival and the Library jointly fund a fellowship, and agreed that the Festival



featuring 'pioneer performers' brought by Rob Willis to the National Folk Festival. It was also subsequently agreed that the Australian Folklore Network would hold its annual convention at the Library on festival eve. A popular Library event at the Folk Festival is *Live@theLounge*, where recorded interviews with major performers are transmitted live to a festival audience, as well as being recorded for preservation within the National Library. At the 2007 National Folk Festival, *Live@theLounge* interviewees included Hector Cosmos from *Apodimi Compania*, Sean Doherty (a pioneer Irish fiddle player from Western Australia), and Anne Kirkpatrick.

Further information about the National Folk Fellowships, including application details, can be obtained at <http://www.nla.gov.au/library/awards/folkfestival.html>

left:
Greg Power (b.1974)
Dave de Hugard in 2003

below left:
Greg Power (b.1974)
Keith Potger, founder member of The Seekers, being interviewed by Robyn Holmes as part of *Live@theLounge*, 2007 National Folk Festival

below right:
Greg Power (b.1974)
The National Library's *Live@theLounge* marquee, Budawang Pavilion, National Folk Festival 2007

would guarantee a concert at the National Folk Festival for all fellows.

The National Library had for some time seen its participation in the National Folk Festival as an important outreach activity. The Library's tent in the Budawang Pavilion at the Festival has been a popular venue for some years, and from 2000 foyer concerts on 'festival eve' were held in the Library,

DR GWENDA BEED DAVEY AM is a Research Fellow in the Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific at Deakin University, Melbourne, and a former Harold White Fellow at the National Library

