



(LYRCD 7442)

THE DIDJERIDU DHARPA: SONGS OF THE DREAMTIME BY SEACHNUSAIGH

INSTRUMENTATION

Yidaki, Bilma & Voice: Seachnasaigh

Yidaki (Didjeridu)

Bilma (Clapsticks)

Yadaki on the recording was made by Djalu “Willy” Gurruwiwi at Skee Beach, Gove Peninsula

DEDICATION

This CD is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather JCT who always understood me.

WHAT IS THE DREAMTIME

SEED OF THE EARTH

The Earth holds an infinite profusion of seeds. Seeds contain forms and worlds yet to germinate. The roots, leaves, and flower of the plant are invisibly enclosed in the seed. The Australian Aborigines speak of guruwari a seed power deposited in the earth. In the Aboriginal world view, every meaningful activity, event, or life process that occurs at a particular place leaves behind a vibrational residue in the earth as plants leave an image of themselves as seeds. The shape of the land – its mountains, rocks, rivers and canyons is a symbolic footprint of the spirit world whose actions created out world. As with the seed, the potency of our Earth belongs to the memory of its origin. The Aborigines call this potency the “Dreaming” or Wangarr – (a time in the very distant past when the Aboriginal cosmos was given shape and meaning) of a place, and this Dreaming

constitutes the sacredness of the earth. In Northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia, a group of Aboriginal people commonly referred to as Yolngu, have through their Dreamtime, created a Madayin (spiritual object) from the seed of a stringy bark tree. This Dharpa (tree) resembles that of a disfigured human. Inside the Dharpa the white ant is busy eating the soft fibrous tissue of the tree. The hollowed out tree is sought after by a skilled bushman to collect and bring back to his home. His careful craftsmanship turns a hollowed out tree limb into a musical instrument referred to as Yidaki (Didjeridu). The Yidaki is often used in Manikay (ritual songs). The earthy sounds of the Yidaki represent the primordial essence of our existence.

SONG SUBJECTS

The subjects of many aboriginal songs are deeply imbedded in their belief system concerning the origins of the world they call Wangar – a time in the very distant past when spirit forms existed and gave shape to the cosmos. There are songs that correspond to this dreamtime epoch and are songs that are totemic, paying homage to the spirit, animal, and plant worlds. The subjects of their songs are also property of the moiety (complex structured social groups). Each moiety has the responsibility to know what subjects are of importance and thus use the appropriate words that reflect their focus for each song. Many songs also pertain to actions carried out during certain seasons such as collecting wild honey, fruits, and nuts, or perhaps to cosmological icons such as the moon or stars. Most certainly there are many “dreamtime epochs” which depict spirit-beings delineating certain geographical areas to a particular people, and often many westerners are exposed to stories dealing with animals such as kangaroo, emu and brolgas. The focus of this compilation is a direct result of the author’s experiences living amongst his yolngu family, the Gurruwiwi’s, in Gove Peninsula. All of the artist’s impressions instilled in these pieces are of his own creation, but are based on actual stories and events he experienced while living and traveling in the Northern Territory. Each song is a reflection of his close affinity to and reverence for the Animal Kingdom.

TRACKS

1. BARRU (Crocodile) - 5:03

This piece pays reverence for one of the earth’s eldest creatures, the crocodile. Throughout the world many myths and stories portray this important member of the food chain. The crocodile or barru (Yolngu name - also known as “salties”) can grow quite large. Their size can often instill awe, fear and respect for an animal that has inhabited the earth for thousands of years. Northeast Arnhem Land boasts of some of the world’s largest barru. Most female crocodile give birth to their young during the barra marri or wet season, which is from December to March. By the time of the rrandharr – the meat hunting season, baby barru are ready to assume their new role as apex predator. If you are ever so fortunate to have a close encounter with a crocodile, you may notice how unpredictably fast they are. You may also notice the grunts and groans that are made by both the male and female crocodile. The vocalizations made by the crocodile or barru are imitated on the didjeridu played by Seachnasaigh. To imitate there sounds, the didjeridu player rolls his tongue while continuing with the drone notes. The exhalation sounds also represent the breather pattern of the crocodile. The beating of the bilma or clapsticks reflects their reptilian gate or walk.

2. DHARPA (Tree) - 3:10

This piece reflects the symbolic connection between the didgeridu, the land from which it grows, and the individual who performs on it. Dharpa is a generic Yolngu term meaning tree. Many types of dharpa inhabit the coastal areas of the North-East Arnhem Land, particularly the stringy bank variety or eucalyptus tetrodonta. It is often referred to in Yolngu as gardayga. As a tree, gardayga gives life unto the world by exchanging precious oxygen for carbon dioxide. The yidaki player brings life to the transformed tree limb by blowing carbon dioxide into it, thereby creating a complete energy circle. Gardayga has many medicinal values and is highly prized by the Yolngu. Young red leaves are crushed and mixed with water and applied to infected skin-sores. The inner bark when soaked in water, makes an effective remedy for treating cold sores. There are also many benefits from playing yidaki. The technique of circular breathing requires long breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth, thereby acting as a yoga breathing technique. This Zen way of breathing promotes cell oxygenation, aiding and calming the mind and body. The author can attest to the fact as many yidaki players can, that playing yidaki for certain lengths of time creates a sense of euphoria.

3. BARNUMBIRR (Morning Star) - 7:13

This piece makes reference to the celestial heavens that watch over the Yolngu people. There is one star referred to as a barnumbirr – the morning star whose paths follow in the direction in which many spirit-beings traveled during the dreamtime epoch. As with many stars that appear in our skies, there is always a twinkling that is caused by the atmosphere. This flutter is reflected in the words sung in this song birrirri-birrirri.

4. BROLGA (Dancing Bird) - 6:49

In many parts of Northern Territory there are different interpretations for the rhythmic and melodic structure that symbolizes the sounds and walking rhythm of the brolga. Quite often this piece is executed with a lively rhythmic pattern and mouth sounds that usually win the smiles of many children. In the epoch story of brolga recounted by K.L. Parker, brolga teaches her exquisite dancing to a group of cranes. These birds perform their intricate dance without a leader. Aboriginal society functions similarly without a leader. Both are in tune with the invisible spiritual forces of nature.

5. DJARADA (Love Chants) - 6:51

The meaning of djarada comes from the Kunapipi mythology and the munga-munga women. Most djarada consists of a long series of chants, which are usually sung by both men and women. The version sung here on this track is from southern Arnhem Land. The purpose of the djarada is to cause a member of the opposite sex to respond either verbally or by physically approaching the singer.

6. GUNBALANG (Gossip) - 7:00

In many societies around the world, the social structure and relations between male and female vary to some degree. Inherent in all is the ability to create erotic tales of deception. Gossip seems to be the focal point of many conversations amongst both men and women. The songs also serve of social commentary and lessons to be learned by

children to avoid scandalous situations. The rhythmic pattern of this piece can either be one of suppressed excitement or notable rhythmic alterations.

7. WUYUNUNGU (Dolphin) - 3:01

Dolphins have a strong connection to the Yolgnu in the spiritual and physical worlds. The species of Wuyunungu, which inhabit the coastal areas, are slightly red and purplish in skin tone. One of the first yidaki pieces I heard was Dolphin cycle played by Djalu (my teacher & wawa – brother). The cycle resembles that of a dolphin diving and then rising to the surface to breathe.

8. DINEWAN (The Emu) - 5:52

This dreamtime legend speaks of a man who is wrongfully killed in a battle between warring tribes. Each tribe then begins to insult the other by calling out the names of the murdered. In turn each tribal songman has committed a major infraction of the dreaming law – not to speak of the deceased family by calling their Aboriginal name. I can remember traveling through some homesteads of deceased family with my Aboriginal family who would only describe such a place using the person's English name. The belief is that when a person passes on into the next realm in the sky they must be greeted by their deceased elders. If their name is called they might be tempted to stay on Earth as disembodied spirits. Eventually the young man killed by accident is reborn into an Emu. This process of death and resurrection is predominant throughout many religions and mythologies of the world. Birds are considered symbols of rebirth for they experience a double birthing from an embryo to an egg and from an egg to a chick.

9. GOONUR (Woman Doctor) - 6:56

Here is yet another Dreamtime legend that depicts the mother as healer/shaman. In this story she heals her son who has been mortally wounded by his two abused wives. The son avenged his own death by plotting to kill his two wives. In doing so they both succumb to his deceit. Goonur, the shaman, restores both of them through the stings of insect bites and heals the relationship between the wives and the husband, her son. She exclaims at the end, that “now you are both mine.” She has taken possession of their spirits for having restored life to them. How poetic it is that we, with all our knowledge, also surrender our bodies and minds to radical drugs and surgical procedures in an effort to restore youth and vitality. This story illustrates the darker side of a power hungry leader while there are many healers who empower the will to recover; this is a true healer. Women as mother or wife have always retained an ability to heal. We can all recount times when our mothers came to our aid to help us feel better in times of sickness. Even through as grown-ups our mothers still care for us in the same role as Goonur did for her son and his wives. Her power to heal came directly from the plant and animal kingdom. Many herbal plants are used as remedies and hallucinogens, as insect venom is also consumed to gain an experience for deeper self-exploration. This analogy to preparation of infusions can also be compared to the ceremony preparation of Aborigines, for entering into a ceremony is in fact a deep healing process. In ceremony the dancer and didgeridu player often dance and play a repetitive trance-inducing pattern, which serves as a passageway into other realms.

10. DHULUDUR “Rain” - 5:46

In central Arnhem Land the year begins with Dhuludur, from October to November at the end of the dry season when sprinkling rains cause burnt out grass plants to shoot. The male thunder shrinks the waterholes and the female thunder brings the rain called Dhuludur. The huge tides cover the flood plains for the first time since the end of the wet in late March/early April. The arrival of the white-breasted wood swallow signals the coming of rain. The Kangaroos and Wallabies give birth. As waterholes fill, broilgas dance together and jabirus begin to next. This time of year symbolized growth and renewal. These cyclical patterns of nature are firmly seated in the cosmology of Aborigine people. In the North, science describes two predominant systems; the wet and the dry. In the aboriginal view there is a strong interconnectedness between the seasons, plants and animals. The appearance of a species marks the beginning of one season and the end of another. This expansive view of the natural world affords Aborigines the skills to maintain a peaceful coexistence with nature, as they have done for thousands of years. This piece depicts the natural forces at work with the vocalizations on the didjeridu representing the many aspects of the unique Australian ecosystem and environment.

THE DIDJERIDU (YIDAKI)

The instrument commonly referred to as Didjeridu is actually a balanda (European) ornamonapoetic word which was used to describe the sound emitted by this hollowed out tree limb. It is also known by several other traditional names such as magu, kanbi and in North-East Arnhem Land, Yidaki. The Yolngu (people) of this region are comprised of traditional landowners and the Gumatj & Rirratjingu clans who have lived on and looked after this land for the last 40,000 years.

The instrument itself is made from several varieties of String Bark Dharpa (trees), which inhabit the coastal areas. White ants that eat only the interior of the fibrous tree eat the tree limbs. What is left is a partially hollowed out limb. A skilled bushman knows exactly where to go to find these hollowed limbs. He taps on the Dharpa to see if it is ready. If so, he begins cutting the Dharpa at the base and then again at the desired length at the top of the Dharpa. He then brings back these limbs for the final stages of tailoring a Yidaki to fit the needs of the player. The didjeridu played by Seachnasaigh heard on these tracks were made for the artist by Djalur Gurruwirri (Wawa Willy), a master artisan who makes Yidaki and tree bark paintings and who lives in Gove Peninsula, North-East Arnhem Land.

Aside from the Yidaki (Didjeridu) the Yolngu also make use of a very dense wood for making Bilma (clapsticks). Bilma are often played by the songmen who determine what songs to play – cult, clan or individually owned songs. Bilma keeps time and accentuates the rhythm cycle. Despite the popular focus on the Yidaki, it is the songman who takes priority and decides what songs will be heard, when they start, and when they finish. Therefore most recordings of Aboriginal music reflect this hierarchy, and the Yidaki is often barely audible.

CULT, CLAN & INDIVIDUALLY-OWNED SONGS

The traditional music of Aboriginal Australians is divided into three categories: Cult, clan and individually-owned songs. Cult songs are believed to have come from Ancestral Beings whose name and spiritual journeyings identify a particular cult or set of religious beliefs, and are celebrated in many kinds of ceremonies. In these Ancestral "Dreamtime" songs there are song cycles or songlines, and it is important that place names are sung in their correct geographical reference point. Such reference may be a land structure or a Ringgitj, a site of pre-eminent religious significance. A place that is Madayin is a most highly valued, most sacred property and is most often visited by men and women of high degree. The songs that are Manikay (ritualistic in nature) are also delineated by region. There are seaside manikay and land-side maikay; collectively it is referred to as Manikay mala, which includes all those groups that are linked together by a particular "Dreamtime" myth. Cult songs and ritual songs provide the main focus as well as intertribal ceremonies, many of which are connected with initiation. Most of these large gatherings, "Corroboree," define particular roles the participants play. Women, for example, are usually allowed to dance, but not play didjeridu or sing. In these large ceremonies there may be special song sessions that only initiated men are permitted to attend. These men of high degree are said to have achieved an extensive religious knowledge. This is called "Ngaraka," which means "backbone." "Bundurr" refers to a name identified with stewardship of a sacred piece of land. It is dualistic in nature, meaning: it signifies the site itself and the act of land bestowal, and it signifies one attribute of the most sacred ritualistic object, "Ringgitj" that remains in the water or earth at that site thereby symbolizing the spirit-being whose essence it embodies.

CLAN SONGS

Each clan in the North-East Arnhem Land, albeit the Djapu, Rirratjingu and Gumatj, to name a few, have strict codes as to what is "Ringgitj" or shared amongst the clans. Quite often cooperation is a given between clans particularly when it comes to the performance of rituals. This is also true of clan songs. Many of the clan songs are closely associated and it is not uncommon for members of associated clans to be seated side-by-side during a ceremony. Pieces on this CD such as Brolga and Djambidj fall into this clan song category. These songs are performed in honor of the original owners and clans to whom the songs belong. The performer, being non-aboriginal, has no wish to misrepresent the clan to whom the songs belong, and therefore the interpretation of each piece does not seek to replicate the structure of the original.

INDIVIDUALLY OWNED SONGS

Some songs belong to individual owners. These songs are said to have originated in a dream during sleep, or perhaps when the song-owner was out hunting or performing some other activity. It is up to the individual song-owner whether the song is presented during the ceremony.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very thankful to my wife Mary (Maganda) for her continual love, support, and understanding of this labor of love of mine – music. Thank you Mom and Dad for keeping a roof over my head and food on the table, thank you to my family in Malaysia,

and the Gurruwiwi's in Gove: you will always hold a special place in my heart. Thank you Jorge for your guidance in this project, and to Ronnie "Nyogetsu" Seldin for bringing us together. Thank you Nick and the staff at Lyrichord. Thank you God for giving me the guidance and strength to persevere in times of doubt.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Seachnasaigh is a nomadic musician who has journeyed to many different lands and cultures to share in and experience music as a living art form. He has lived amongst the Yolngu in North-East Arnhem Land with his aboriginal brother Djalu Gurruwiwi. Seachnasaigh's view of the world is of an extended brother and sisterhood. This view reflects the sentiments he expresses in the music he creates with his wife, Maganda, who is a native of Malaysia. Together they have a group called Kinabalu, which brings together many cultural styles and musical instruments. Seachnasaigh is also a sound healer and works with people from all walks of life, using the Didjeridu (Yadaki) as a sound archetype for introspective knowledge and as a vibratory healing force. He has established a healing center called Earth Sound Therapeutics, which offers workshops in relaxation, meditation and stress management and is currently working on a project called "The Sensory Experience." When not traveling he makes his home with his wife in New York and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

PRODUCER'S NOTE

"I consider myself to be a very lucky producer. Not too often do you come across musicians who have the courage to assimilate an almost extinguished culture and be truthful to their ways. This is the case with Will, who is considered to be one of the family within the Yolngu people. I'm very pleased to work with such a high level of artistry. Enjoy! Rev. Jorge Alfano, Producer/Sacred Sounds Institute

CREDITS

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