

## CORROBOREE MODERNE

---

Dressed in a brown wool bodystocking specially made by Jantzen and brown face paint, an American dancer, Beth Dean played the young boy initiate in the ballet CORROBOREE at a Gala performance before Queen Elizabeth 11 and Prince Phillip on Feb 4 1954 .

*“On stage she seems to exude some of the primitive passion of the savage whose rites she presents” (1a)*

“If appropriations do have a general character, it is surely that of unstable duality. In some proportion, they always combine taking and acknowledgment, appropriation and homage, a critique of colonial exclusions, and collusion in imbalanced exchange. What the problem demands is therefore not an endorsement or rejection of primitivism in principle, but an exploration of how particular works were motivated and assessed.” (1)

CORROBOREE "announced its modernity as loudly as its Australian origins...all around the world" (2)

1: (BE ABORIGINAL !) (3) - DANCE A CORROBOREE!

The 1950s in the Northern Territory represents simultaneously the high point of corroboree and its vanishing point. At the very moment one of the most significant cultural exchanges of the decade was registered in Australian Society at large, the term corroboree became increasingly so associated with kitsch and the inauthentic it was erased as a useful descriptor, only to be reclaimed almost fifty years later. Corroboree became the bastard notion par excellence imbued with “in- authenticity.” It was such a popularly known term, that it stood as a generic brand for anything dinky-di Australian. (4) Corroboree came to be read as code for tourist trash culture corrupted by white man influence. I shall be using the word corroboree in a number of distinct senses; corroboree as descriptor and category of cultural exchange; Corroboree as the name of a suite of music by John Antill, CORROBOREE, as the event presented to the Queen in 1954 choreographed by Beth Dean after research in the NT and set to John Antill’s music. The Modernist project in dance and music in Australia was carried forward by various European and American artists who sought out Aboriginal culture. (5) Their endorsement clearly encouraged those Australian artists who were also interested in bringing to the foreground Aboriginal culture during the postwar period and positioning it as an exemplar of Australian national culture.

It is easy to dismiss the ballet, CORROBOREE as whitefellas dressing up as blackfellas and worse even, a white woman (6) – Beth Dean playing a male aboriginal, as an “elite version of the ransacking of aboriginal culture for motifs”(7) Besides there is very little of the ballet left, a few moments in a Cinesound documentary about the Royal visit and some embarrassing photographs of Dean and the company all painted up. When Beth Dean is remembered at all, there is a tendency to bracket her with Margaret Preston as a fellow cultural pirate and appropriator – (one took the art and the other got the rhythm!) Just as Preston has been sweepingly maligned, Dean is often patronized today (8) if her work is remembered at all. Mostly it seems to be too embarrassing to remember; as if CORROBOREE had never happened (9).

Lyn A. Riddett in her article on Settler Women Artists, describes the similarities between Preston and Dean. Both were important women artists who traveled to the Northern Territory with the express purpose of visiting Aboriginal communities to research their art form. However they encountered the Northern Territory Administration at different historical moments. Dean collided with Assimilation which had become official policy under Paul Hasluck in 1951. “Preston’s visit while noted, caused nothing like the bureaucratic consternation and furore generated by Dean.” (10) In this chapter I propose to examine CORROBOREE - the cultural exchange which took place and compare accounts of it with other anthropological accounts, comment on the furore and finally tease out its part in the development of contemporary Indigenous dance.

## 2: THEY CAME FOR THE CORROBOREE

In the 1950s a subgenre of literature about the Northern Territory emerged from artists and writers who were interested in Aboriginal culture and Black/ White relationships. Neither tourists nor anthropologists, these well informed travelers made artistic products from their encounter –broadcasts, paintings, photographs, films and dances. And they all wrote books about their trip- up North, to the Centre, across the Top, into the Outback. Filmmakers, Charles and Elsa Chauvel returned to the NT in the mid 1950s after the completion of their ground breaking film JEDDA , and wrote WALKABOUT published in 1959. Writers and ABC broadcasters Leslie and Coralie Rees came in the early fifties and published SPINIFEX WALKABOUT in 1953. They also made a series of programs on the influence of the missions. Another journalist and broadcaster, Colin Simpson came to the NT in 1948 and wrote ADAM IN OCHRE published in 1951. Artists Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale came as well. Nolan and his novelist wife Cynthia came in 1948 and Cynthia Nolan's OUTBACK was published in London in 1962. Drysdale spent six months traveling in Northern Australia in 1956. Drysdale did not write a book himself, but he kept a journal and Geoffrey Dutton wrote a monograph in 1964 quoting Drysdale's journal extensively.

The artist travelers were a group distinct from the tourists of the period. As Cynthia Nolan says, most of their fellow passengers on The Ghan in 1948 had come for the sun, a bit of winter warmth and were not the least bit interested in what was outside the window, be it Aboriginal life or even the changing landscape. Drysdale remarks that at Standley Chasm, "a wonderful deep place echoing with birds became suddenly filled with shouting hulloes and voices anxiously screaming, 'What exposure will I give it?' and 'You stand over there, Mum,where I can get you in the picture'".(Russell Drysdale p.58) The artist travelers had a different sensibility. Today such a traveler makes a special trip to an Aboriginal community to meet the artists, see them at work and buy Aboriginal art from the local art centre. Fifty years ago the travelers went to settlements, mission stations and homesteads and met the Blacks and saw a corroboree, staged for their benefit. Everyone saw a corroboree, it was the show they had come for, the lingua franca of cultural exchange. It was arranged and performed, and a transformation was witnessed and remarked upon. Payment was made one assumes, but it is not mentioned in these accounts as the corroboree arrangements are invariably handled by the go-betweens - missionaries, station owners or managers even policemen, who organised and brokered the event for the visitors.

At Urapunga station in the Roper River district, the Rees' report (11) – "at our request Mr Harris (a missionary) had taken advantage of the presence of the Arnhemland tribesmen to arrange a small corroboree for us." On the one hand, the Rees place much emphasis on the fact these natives were "beyond mission influence" and the dancing was "direct and uninhibited from the Stone age". Nonetheless the first series of dances consisted of "mimicking the ways of white man", including sawing wood, making a dress, rolling a cigarette. Then they saw some short dances drawn from nature – habits of birds and clouds. Finally they saw a "mermaid corroboree" which they seem to find only interesting in that it went for so long – two hours... The Rees are rather lead footed observers, especially considering, "we are students of theatre and ballet ourselves" and prove to be more receptive to visual art (Spinifex Walkabout p.232). (12)

By contrast, the Chauvels were old hands in the Territory. At a station in the Everard Ranges on the SA /NT border in "Pidjandari" country the Chauvels had a corroboree staged in their honour. Elsa Chauvel found the dancing oppressive "this heavy angry battle with the earth" and she was upset by the repetition and "insistent sameness" and relieved when it ended. However, "a surprise corroboree .... turned out to be the high spot of the evening". It certainly indicates a familiarity with the Chauvels and their work. "A different team of dancers emerged ...all wearing calico strips as masks to proclaim the wearer a white man. We could not fail to recognise the first one. His towering headpiece was unmistakably a native representation of a camera. His body painted with twining and intertwining white stripes supposedly meant to be lengths of curling film". Chauvel describes how every member of the crew was lampooned including herself – "I was the last to be portrayed, in the form of a short stocky native dressed as a woman, he carried a station ledger as a "script book' and followed the other three natives slavishly ...making imaginary stabs at the script book with a piece of stick for a pencil"(13) The corroboree as contact reflected back is a significant feature which is highlighted in Elsa Chauvel's description and routinely ignored when dismissing corroborees as playabout or muckabout , what is at stake is The Other answering back; and the cheekier the better.

Arguably the ultimate corroboree chasers were American dancer and choreographer Beth Dean, and her Australian husband, composer, musician and singer, Victor Carell. They were in the parlance of the time, folklorists who made the study, collection and promotion of ethnic or "primitive" dance and music their life work. They visited the NT in 1953 and created the ballet CORROBOREE, which was presented in 1954 as the pre-eminent offering of Australian culture. Dean and Carell wrote a book about their research trip and the making of the ballet, *DUST FOR THE DANCERS* published in 1955, as well as a documentary film, *CARRUMBO* (14) funded by General Motors Holden the suppliers of their utility truck. Dean and Carell sought out anthropologists before they set foot in the NT, and it was a meeting with C.P. Mountford in New York which had pricked their interest- "As Mountford told her about the corroborees and sacred dances of the aborigines, she realized that in the hinterland of Australia was a rich and hitherto untapped source of inspiration for the creative artist in dance .... she resolved that given the opportunity she would go to Australia and learn about aboriginal dancing" (15). Once in Australia, they met A.P. Elkin in Sydney and T.G.H. Strehlow in Adelaide. Beth Dean staged exhibitions of Aboriginal dance based on what she learnt from their anthropological descriptions and the films she had been shown. Dean performed her Aboriginal dances around Australia and overseas(16) and it was after a performance at the Museum of Sydney that she was invited by the nascent Arts Council of Australia to choreograph Corroboree for the Queen's visit.

Dean made it a condition of the commission that they travel to the NT to do their own research amongst Aboriginal people. They grasped the opportunity to make their encounters with Aboriginal people a cultural exchange and offered exhibitions of their own skills wherever they went – Dean as a dancer and Carell as a musician and singer. They stayed at Mainoru station in Arnhemland with the McKay- Dodd family for three weeks and on their last Sunday afternoon they gave a concert to say thank you. Mrs Dodd at the piano and in very front "sat the critics, the best of the native dancers". Dean did a complete concert of "classical ballet, several ethnic dances" –Spanish and Maori and some "based on the legend stories of Central Australian aborigines." Both station Blacks and camp Blacks came: "They noisily liked the Spanish dances, wondered at the balance, technique and high leg extensions in the ballet numbers. As one of them put it, after seeing the splits for the first time 'Missus, that exercise might be bin makem bone soft'" Their effect on the whole community was considerable, The late Heather Dodd, a young girl at the time, recalled being very taken with Beth Dean (17) and Dean's gymnastic displays left many imitators. "The little children learned how to turn Catherine wheels ... the junior section of the tribe and made up a new corroboree song ... The words were an endless repetition of catherine wheel... and to this song the young dancers went round and round, turning head over heels continuously, with dogs running, barking madly after them " (p 69/70)

At Yuendumu, Dean must have done other performances for their Aboriginal friends although they are not described. Presumably they were more casual. Given that they departed Yuendumu, to follow the initiation party led by Nosepeg, its very likely they would have felt it inappropriate or insensitive to have responded with a farewell concert. However as they were leaving Yuendumu – "we went to the women to thank them for showing us their dances, they looked very shyly down at their feet, except Clara who said...'No more Missus-boss yu bin show us dance, you bin sing us song from 'nother country far away... Might be you show all that dance belong us Walbri longa big city...longa white people we bin hear all about'. 'That's right 'we answered.'We will try to tell those city people all about you, and your dances too'"(P.154)

Dean was commissioned to create the corroboree for the Queen. It was to be a new version of the ballet Corroboree; something more authentic and truer to the perceived spirit of aboriginality. The first version of the ballet was made in 1950 by the National Theatre Ballet choreographed by Rex Reid, with a painted backdrop of "The Corroboree Rock " by William Constable. The ballet followed the seven movements of Antill's score and his conception of a general rather than a specific representation of an Aboriginal corroboree.(18) It was well received as a ballet, but those in the know, were disappointed. Colin Simpson was especially piqued, the author of *ADAM IN OCHRE* had brought Antill and Constable together, and had high hopes. Simpson thought the "choreography and costume design completely missed the spirit of the real thing, in a riot of baseless representation, full of incongruous and extraneous elements." Simpson was critical of Australia's "rather ingenuous eagerness to borrow from him (the Aboriginal) in order to build our own culture". (Adam in Ochre p.196) His assessment of the Dean Carell version of CORROBOREE was positive – "the new version had infinitely more validity " though still "left room for improvement....but it was overall, incomparably better than we had seen before." Better because, Dean and Carell "had gone to Central Australia, and among the aborigines there, studied the nature of corroboree and its dance movements".(Adam in Ochre p.197)

For Simpson the issue was clear; deployment of "Aboriginal theme and motif in our arts is successful in proportion to the understanding which goes with it".(Adam in Ochre p.196) Simpson's confidence in assessing the competence and authenticity of the dancing arose because he had spent time in the NT as an ex officio member of the 1948 National Geographic Arnhem Land Expedition led by C.P. Mountford. His brief as a writer and broadcaster was to get some corroboree sound "on the wire" for the ABC because much to their chagrin, they were unable to supply it, although it was often requested by the BBC.

More importantly Simpson had clout as a corroboree critic because he actually saw the renowned Mosek/Mosik dance and he had written about Mosik's performance devoting a chapter to him in ADAM IN OCHRE. Mosik's dancing had garnered its world wide reputation when it was witnessed by a visiting American dance expert, Ted Shawn and written about extensively in an American dance magazine, *The Dance*, and Shawn's views were quoted at length in an article in *Walkabout*. Beth Dean was also a follower of Ted Shawn. "In the USA Ruth St Denis, her husband Ted Shawn and their Denishawn School ... were dance innovators who in eclectic sumptuousness focused western attention on ethnic sources of dance" ((19) Shawn visited Delissaville (present day Belyuen on the Cox Peninsula) in 1947((20) and he described Mosik's "individual quality" and his ability to "project his personality through the dance ... found only in great artists". Mosik was the benchmark. Afterwards, everyone who came for corroborees, mention that they didn't see Mosik (he died of cancer in 1950) but they saw another dancer who may or may not have come close to his artistry. Colin Simpson saw Mosik "in action about a dozen times".

When Dean and Carell arrived in Darwin, it was the eve of the Queen's coronation, and a big corroboree had just been staged in Darwin as part of the celebrations. Ironically because they had been out bush, they missed it completely. They did public performances in Darwin and Alice Springs which were well received and drew attention to their project.- "There is a tremendous story to tell in the dance of the Australian aborigine, and from what was seen of Beth Dean here few could be better equipped, in dance perfection or sincerity, to tell the story"(21) Sometimes they were very lucky, repairing a flat tyre in Katherine led to meeting the manager of Manbullo station who offered them, "the best Aboriginal dancing in the Territory" in the form of Wagait dancer, Gilligan, from "Mosik's tribe". They were not disappointed.

"The picture of Gilligan by day trying to do a whiteman's work was anything but impressive. Gilligan by night however was a great artist among his people. Dressed only in a nagye loincloth, he was a young god.... Gilligan's forte was the intensity of his sudden contrasts. He ranged in style from utter lyricism of the most feline softness to an extrovert virility that trembled and pounded into one's very marrow...to compare Gilligan with that other great Aboriginal dancer Mosik is to find Gilligan...equally fine an artist; but Mosik ...was also a great man." (p.26)

Five years earlier, Cynthia and Sidney Nolan also visited Manbullo and witnessed the best dancing they saw in their trip... They were told that " 'Roderick's boy from Coolibah' (bosses' first names were in general use) was visiting on walkabout and would be dancing...he danced superbly, every movement sure, every position a form of joy... ending each performance with an abrupt perfectly timed half-turn. ...We shall never forget his dancing ... not one fraction of his body was at any time apart from its inevitable relation to the forms he was creating. We were fortunate indeed to have seen him for there can be few his equal, Ted Shawn, the American choreographer who visited Arnhemland, wrote that there he had seen dancers second to none living" (Outback p.74) (22). Was Roderick's boy Gilligan, the Wagait dancer? The Nolans neither knew his name nor his tribe.

Dean and Carell went to Melville Island for a couple of days after meeting Ali a Tiwi dancer in Darwin at Larrakia barracks. They saw some spectacular dancing - sixteen different dances or Yois about sharks, pelicans, buffaloes and the Bombing Dance. "The highlight was Ali's own dance, the dance of Yiragabi, the crocodile" He was a "serious and truly fine actor-dancer... one could feel the water rippling past his body as he moved forward in a wonderful impersonation of that reptile." (p.79) They also saw part of a Pukamuni ceremony and met up with Professor Elkin who was recording it. Simpson also saw and recorded a number of Yoi under the direction of the head man, the same Ali who must have been a prolific dance maker as Simpson credits him with a shark Tatuwali Yoi. Simpson's descriptions of the Tiwi Yoi are very detailed and he was able to have the chanted songs translated on the spot by playing back his recordings. Russell Drysdale also went to Melville Island and was able to witness a full "Puckaminni" ceremony ... which became something of an epiphany for him - "my head full of the dance and imaginary compositions." (Russell Drysdale p.64)

### 3: AND AT THE COROBOREE THEY MET

Throughout *DUST FOR THE DANCERS*, Dean and Carell name all their "Aboriginal friends", however it is easy to dismiss this or even imagine they are generalised, since individuals only get one name and it is usually the English name or if it is a language name its orthography is anglicised and so at first looks unrecognisable. When I first read the book more than a decade ago, only one recognisable name leapt out - Nosepeg or Jungkata Nosepeg Tjupurrula the redoubtable Centralian identity - cameleer, soldier, legend of the silver screen, finder of Lasseter's grave. A decade later, more things struck me simply because I knew more. I was now familiar with the Mainoru story and I had recently read *Love Against the Law*,<sup>(23)</sup> the joint autobiography of Tex and Nelly Camfoo in the form of oral histories recorded and edited by anthropologist Gillian Cowlshaw, who fills in the gaps in Nelly and Tex's accounts of their lives from her reading. However Cowlshaw does not mention *DUST FOR THE DANCERS*, although Dean and Carrell devote almost three chapters to life at Mainoru. They focus on Nellie and her father Bulman Paddy who were their main friends and guides. There are many photographs and telling vignettes of Rembargga people. Comparing Cowlshaw's oral history of Nellie and Tex with *DUST FOR THE DANCERS*, shows great consistency and suggests that Dean and Carell were faithful and careful recorders.<sup>(24)</sup> This comparison alerted me to the possibility that there was valuable material in *DUST FOR THE DANCERS* which had been overlooked.

The major section of the book, some seven chapters, is devoted to their time with the Warlpiri around Yuendumu. Dean and Carell stayed for two to three months and made many Aboriginal friends, who are named and photographed and extensive anecdotes and stories are told about them and by them. I noticed Dean and Carell said- "about this time two babies were born in the native camp. In honour of our visit the two native mothers had named them Beth and Victor respectively, fortunately there was one of each sex ". I looked in Vivien Johnson's *Aboriginal Artists of the Western Desert -A Biographical Dictionary* <sup>(25)</sup> almost idly but there they were- one Beth and one Victor - Beth Nungarrayi Patrick, born at Yuendumu c.1950 of the Warlpiri tribe, while Victor Jupurrula Simon is also from the Warlpiri and was born in 1945. It must be very probable that both were in fact born in 1953. They are both artists and community leaders today. Moreover they were now not resident at Yuendumu but at Lajamanu which alerted me to the fact that the Warlpiri were moved around the area, in fact after 1953, some Warlpiri were moved to Lajamanu.

Other individuals mentioned by first name and identified in photographs in *DUST FOR THE DANCERS* also appear in Johnson's Dictionary. Uni and Maggie, two young girls who appointed themselves Beth Dean's guardians on a bush tucker hunting trip so that Dean didn't get lost. Uni was a young woman of twenty, when she befriended Dean, she is Uni Nampijimpa Martin and a prominent painter as is Maggie Napangardi Watson who was a young girl of eleven or twelve when she met Dean. Both women are still resident at Yuendumu. They also met two young boys who similarly befriended them - "the boys, mostly about ten and eleven had a camp of their own. Two of them, Gordon and Charlie ...could speak a fair amount of English from their schooling at Yuendumu and could even read a little" (p.164) The two boys are, the late Charlie Tjapaltjarri Egalie, born at Pikilyi c.1940 schooled at the mission school in Yuendumu, and initiated at Haasts Bluff. He went on to be prominent among the Papunya painters with Geoff Bardon. His friend, Gordon is the late Gordon Tapanaka Campbell, or Gordon Egalie Campbell Tjapanaka, who was related to Charlie Egalie and born in 1941 and educated in part in Alice Springs at The Bungalow. Gordon was a very close friend of Michael Jagamara Nelson.

According to Vivien Johnson, Gordon spoke seven languages including English, and was highly intelligent, which is interesting in the light of an incident described in the book -

"Beth took up her notebooks and began writing. Immediately, Gordon her shadow was at her elbow, spelling out words. Since so much of her notes was of things taboo to uninitiated boys, she changed into French which intrigued and mystified him. A sudden gust of wind blew over her pages, and he caught a glimpse of a rough sketch of a tjurunga. Beth quickly shut the book but he had seen it. He called Charlie over and said, 'Missis, might be you showem Charlie what you got in that book' Doubtless a ruse so that he could get another good look for himself. 'I got nothing there', Beth evaded. Gordon announced to his friend in disbelieving, hushed tones. 'She got debbil debbil in there' ... 'All finish now' she said, determinedly keeping the book tightly closed. They took the hint and went off to play. Beth was amused to see that of all things, they were playing a game of stockmen and cattle droving" (p.168).

Even a young boy, Banjo they describe as attaching himself to them at Haasts Bluff and becoming their “camp boy” figures in Johnson’s Dictionary, Banjo Jampijinpa Patterson was born at Coniston in 1940 and is an Anmatyerr speaker. It is clear in the book that Dean and Carell understood everyone they met at Yuendumu to be Warlpiri unless otherwise stated, for instance they knew that Nosepeg was “Pentabi” . Yuendumu is in the border territory at the crossover of Warlpiri and Anmatyerr languages and as Tess Japaljarri Ross says in *The Yuendumu Doors* “Walpiri and Anmatyerr people share many ceremonies, dreamings and land.” (26) This explains the presence of people Dean and Carell took to be Warlpiri but whom we now know, identify themselves as Anmatyerr.

#### 4: THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRESENT TENSE

After the Arunta/Aranda/Arander/Arrernte, the Walbri / Walbiri/ Warlpiri are probably the most studied of the Central Australian tribes. In the 1950s two anthropologists, Australian, Mervyn J. Meggitt and American, Nancy D. Munn were studying the Warlpiri around the same time as Dean and Carell were at Yuendumu making friends with the Warlpiri. Meggitt studied the Ngalia Warlpiri around Yuendumu and other settlements at Hooker Creek (Lajamanu) and Phillip Creek during 1953-5 and published *Desert People* in 1962. Munn studied the Ngalia Warlpiri at Yuendumu during 1956-8 and published *Walbri Iconography* in 1973. Much later Australian feminist anthropologist, Dianne Bell studied women’s lives and rituals among the Lander Warlpiri at Warrabri from 1976-80 and published *Daughters of the Dreaming* in 1983.

According to Dean and Carell , the head old man at Yuendumu was “Miniona “ – “wise and dignified ... (with) the reputation of having been a powerful fighter and wonderful hunter in his younger days ... undoubtably still the most powerful influence in the tribe.” He was reputed to have tracked two mythical ancestral women to the highest point in the Haasts Bluff Range ... (but) after they had kept him with them for a while they had stolen away and floated out from the edge of the mountain and disappeared into the air. This experience of his ‘Dreaming’ brought Miniona added importance in the tribe.” (p.119)

Miniona gave them their skin names – he made Beth Nabuldjeri (Napaljarri ) wife for him and Victor, Djagamara (Jakamarra) brother for him. This Miniona is undoubtably the man at Yuendumu described by Meggitt (27) in *Desert People* as “Minjana Djagamara the senior man of the lodge responsible for the important dreamings at Ngama cave” Meggitt speaks of his “vast ritual knowledge and his personal charm” Dean and Carell contrast “the wild stories told of his fighting youth “ with his “gentle face”, “twinkling eyes and the wide humour of his mouth “ Meggitt says that by 1955, “he was old and blind and rarely stirred from his shelter ... but a few years earlier his intelligence and energy had extended his ceremonial authority” (*Desert People* p.248) . Dean and Carell were at Yuendumu in 1953, and even then Miniona did not lead or even go with the party of “forty to fifty initiated men who went on to the great Snake Rock about thirty five miles from Yuendumu.”(p.134)

In the book on the Papunya Tula painters, *Wildbird Dreaming*,(28) Dick Kimber identifies Minjana Djagamara as the grandfather of the Papunya Tula artist, Michael Jagamara Nelson. Kimber does not tease out this family tree further but Vivien Johnson (29) in her monograph on the painter identifies Nelson's father as Hitler Jupurrula, a man dubbed so by Bill Braitling the owner of Mt Doreen station. Meggitt also notes Hitler as Miniona's son.# In 1933, twenty years earlier this same "Minyina " had been regarded as a "real friend" by Olive Pink when she was first with the Walpiri at Yunmanji and he also named Olive Pink, Napaljarri (p. 98. *The Indomitable Miss Pink*, Julie Marcus UNSW Press, 2001) Miniona’s grandchildren and great grandchildren include amongst the current generation, many renowned artists. Michael Jagamara Nelson, arguably the most prominent of Aboriginal artists (30 ) his mother Daisy Napanangka. His half-brother the late Bronson Jakamarra Nelson who was married to Norah Nelson Napaljarri, his sister Bessie Nakamara Sims married to Paddy Japaljarri Sims, and another sister Liddy Nakamara Nelson and her daughter Jeanie Herbert Nungarrayi .All these artists have been important at Papunya Tula and with the painting movements at Lajamanu, and Yuendumu (31).

However, Paddy Tjupurrula Nelson, one of the main artists who began the painting movement at Yuendumu by painting on the doors of the school, is not mentioned by Dean and Carell. Yet one of the paintings – Door 26 is Warnakurlu/Snake. The painting is by Paddy Japaljarri Sims, but the story is owned and told by Paddy Jupurrula Nelson. In it he talks of the Yarripiri Dreaming and the big cave at Ngama. Dean and Carell were shown the Snake Rock place where there was a “ magnificent painting about thirty five feet long” large

painting and they were told it was named Yarrapi. They describe the ritual the men follow at Snake Rock including the bringing out and chanting over tjurunga . They also describe the painting as, "drawn in beautiful proportion for its huge size. The colours used were white, surrounded by yellow, with the whole outlined in red".(p.135) In DUST FOR THE DANCERS , there are two photographs of Snake Rock.

According to Meggitt, "At Ngama , about eighteen miles west of Yuendumu, rock-paintings depict the snake, dingo and wallaby dreamings whose tracks meet at the cave; all three dreamings belong to one djagamara-djuburla lodge" (*Desert People* p.68) Meggitt has a photograph of the site itself . The painting done on the school door at Yuendumu is clearly based on the Yarrapi rock painting. In Meggitt one finds the answer, Paddy Jupurrula was not at Yuendumu then, but at Hooker Creek, (Lajamanu ) and Meggitt even mentions Paddy's desire to visit his old father – "Paddy djuburula, married and aged about thirty five, had not seen his father for three or four years. The old man was then living at Haasts Bluff and Paddy often told me of his desire to visit him before he died". (*Desert People* p. 117) Meggitt has Minjana Djagamara living at Yuendumu, where Dean and Carell met him. The most likely candidate for Paddy's father is Bordjunga, Miniona's brother, an eighty year old man, whom Dean and Carell describe as living at Haasts Bluff. Meggitt has Paddy Tjupurula as the son of Jack Djagamara which might be a corruption of Bordjunga . Paddy's wife is Maudie Napanaka, but later he is married to her sister, Daisy the mother of Michael, Bronson and Liddy and Bessie. Daisy was possibly the widow of Wopartali Tjupurula one of Minyana's sons. My surmise is that Wopartali and "Hitler" are one and the same. The Nelson part of the family name was bestowed on them by a schoolteacher who named them after Old Bluey Nelson who ran the wolfram mine at Mt Doreen. Miniona also had "two very intelligent daughters" whom Dean knew as Lorna and Djuna. These are undoubtedly , the late Lorna Napurrula Nelson and her sister, Jorna Napurrula Nelson. They are also prominent Warlpiri artists and senior women.

Beth Dean was particularly interested in women's ritual and sacred life., and at Yuendumu she saw women's secret and semi secret dances – "The women performed them near the Wagulbu hills, in which are the totemic spirit centres connected with the long journey of the culture heroines, the Maracutta women. These women were aboriginal ancestresses of great stamina, for they danced all the way on a very long journey. Part of their mythical route covers the area between Mt Doreen and Yuendumu ... The Maracutta women are part of a mythology, which speaks of women originally sharing and sometimes owning outright many of the prerogatives now allowed only to men. " (p. 125) In DUST FOR THE DANCERS, there is a photograph of a group of women painted up and dancing a Yowulyu (Awelye) at Wagulbu, or Wakulpa Rock Hill, which is quite close to Yuendumu . Meggitt also mentions the Wagulbu Hills. In the *Yapa* catalogue (32) there is a Dreaming story related by Maggie Napangardi Watson, one of Beth Dean's guardian girls, of the Two Digging Stick Women which in its detail is suggestive of powerful female ancestresses with more power than men. These women are known by the epithet as "men with vaginas", in the story they have spears and boomerangs for hunting, but the men only had digging sticks.... "the men did not know anything then. The women managed the initiation ceremony, which is today for men only." As for "maracutta " women, it is probably a rendition of mardukuja (women after the onset of menstruation) (33)

Dean and Carell say that the Yawulyu dancing at Yuendumu has a totemic symbol, the Wild Orange Tree or Guredji which grows in the area. "The dancing women spend much time painting the designs of the Guredji totem over their breasts and upper arms . One design is a series of white even circles, drawn one inside the other, with a central black spot representing the fruit. Often when we were out walking one of the women would see one of the trees and would tell us again the story of the ancestresses legendary wanderings." (p. 126) Dean and Carell seem to have confused Guredji or Kurdiji (current orthography) which refers to a shield (and a shield initiation ceremony) and mistaken the Wild Orange tree for the Sheild (wood tree) Mulga, *Acacia aneura* in Warlpiri, Wardiji or Manja. Peter Latz (34) in *Bushfires and Bushtucker* notes that Wild Orange trees and Mulga are found together.

Punayi(Jeanie ) Herbert Nungarrayi (35) says digging sticks were sometimes made from Manja/ Mulga trees which grow in " big clumps around the Mt Doreen area". She also describes a group of tall thin trees that look like young pine trees and says "those trees really look like the Ancestral women" These trees are young Desert Oaks. When her mother, Yijadurru (Liddy ) Nakamarra Nelson saw them, she began singing the Yawulyu about the Digging Stick Women. Only one artist, Daisy Napangaka Nelson paints the Wild Orange Dreaming amongst the artists at Yuendumu today but it is called Watakiyi . Meggitt gives Wadagi as the word for Wild Orange (Capparis Mitchelli ) (36) and Jauwagi for the Plum Bush (*Canthium Latifolium* ), which concurs with the current orthography ; Hale gives Wataki and Yawakiyi respectively.

From Yuendumu, Dean and Carell travelled to Mt Doreen station and stayed with the Braitlings. Mrs Braitling announced that “the camp girls were going to do a series of dances for us at the back of the sheds”. (p140) Dean and Carell describe the evening- “The women did a complete series of secret Yowulyu ‘women business’ dances that night. The large number of stanzas, sixty-nine in all, told in delicate stylization the full story of lovemaking – gradually evolving it from the first tentative manner of womenkind to coitus and its resulting langour. All was done symbolically, beautifully, modestly, so much so that we felt sure that Mrs Braitling had very little idea of what the girls were telling with their often gracious, sometimes oddly tense dance movements “ (p.141) The body paint they wore is more elaborate and differentiated than in the Yowayle they saw at Wagulbu hills- “ they were painted with black charcoal designs outlined in white. All the women wore different ‘paint up’ markings. One had a thick black collar necklace design curving round her neck and shoulders. One dancer had four designs of the orange tree dreaming – a sort of rose like pattern; another had six designs of concentric circles , one at each shoulder another at each breast, and small ones at the crook of each elbow on the inside of the arms. These were all joined together by parallel straight lines.” (p.140)

Munn(37) tells us that in 1954 at the time of her fieldwork around Yuendumu, there were four sets of yawagi berry designs, three referred to the Mt Doreen region, “the fourth had been brought to the Walbiri by a Yanmadjari (Anmatyerr) women and belonged to a yawagi berry in this woman’s country.” Munn(and later Bell) employ only one term Yawagi (Munn) and Yawakiyi (Bell) and it is used to mean all Bush Berries. Bell describes a number of womens ceremonies related to the Yawakiyi dreaming which are shared by Warlpiri and Alyawarra and Katayej women and relate to the Wakulpu area. (38)

Meggitt writes of “the few ceremonial activities that are peculiar to women- in particular djarada and jauwulju dancing of the Ngalia women at Yuendumu and Mt Doreen,” which he says he did not witness. Twenty years later we find Dianne Bell in *Daughters of the Dreaming* in her concluding chapter, “the problem of women” discussing at length different interpretations of women’s ritual life found in Meggitt’s *Desert People* and Munn’s *Walbri Iconography*. Bell notes that neither Meggitt nor Munn saw “Bush yawulyu” among the Ngalia Walpiri, and she proposes- “ The Walpiri had only recently settled at Yuendumu in the 1950s and the women had not yet had time, through interaction with the country, to explore fully and to confirm to the point of consensus, the nature of ancestral activity in the area. Without this knowledge they could not assert their rights and exercise responsibilities in land through the performance of large scale yawulyu ... This may also account for the apparent paucity of women’s ritual activity and women’s reluctance to stage bush yawulyu” (39). Bell asserts the importance of looking in other places for evidence of aboriginal women’s ritual and ceremonial lives, for instance station diaries and local histories, so it is ironic that Bell was unaware of Dean and Carell’s observations because they make a fascinating comparison with Meggitt and Munn’s work and as it happens focus on the very thing Bell was unable to find in their accounts twenty years later.

The other senior man Dean and Carell met and traveled with at Yuendumu was Djimidja, whom they describe as “head of the kangaroo totem of the Walbiri tribe”. He was “shrewd, cheerful and about fifty years of age”. Nosepeg was in charge of the initiation ceremony and he had invited them to witness it, but in the meantime, Djimidja “had promised us that, if we would take him on a trip to Vaughan Springs or Pikilyi, he would show us the exact spot where the kangaroo ancestor had rested or ‘sat down ‘ during his original wanderings. This would help us follow the story of the initiation ceremony.” (p.137) Djimidja told them the story of the kangaroo spirit men who at that stage had no tails traveled to the hill country, and one named Mitjeri sat down near the top of the cliffs and another called Pikilyi sat down near the base - “This sitting down caused the life-giving waterholes to fill ... Looking up towards the cliff tops the spirit kangaroos could see the long stems of spear grass growing out and pointing sharply to the sky. They climbed up, pulled out a spear each and stuck it on like a tail. Then they continued on their way hopping and using their new tails for support ... the kangaroos continued on their journey, passing much red ochre country called kargo where they had a big corroboree at Nirbi ” (p.147)



According to Johnson, Jimija Jungarrayi was born c.1908 around Yarrunkanyi / Mt Hardy west of Yuendumu, where he is associated with the Ngarrka Initiated Men Dreaming and the Mala Western Hare Wallaby Dreaming, she makes no mention of kangaroos, and amongst the Warlpiri material I have not been able to find an account of the Pikilyi kangaroos tail story, however this is presumably because the kangaroo story is enclosed within initiated men stories, which Djimidja was responsible for, and is therefore relatively restricted. As Meggitt says –“ throughout the kangaroo myths, songs and ceremonies, the symbolic equation of kangaroo tail, spear and novice’s penis is obvious”. According to Meggitt, “The Ngalia Walpiri stresses the gumbaldja complex of dreamings which includes the two kangaroos.” (*Desert people* p.61) It is, Djimidja’s portrait that is on the cover of Meggitt’s *Desert People*. #According to Julie Marcus (p 96) He was also among the Walpiri group Olive Pink met in 1933 and described as a brilliant young dancer who showed her sections of a Kangaroo Ancestor Dance.

Johnson describes Jimija Jungarrayi as one of the senior men at Yuendumu involved in the establishment of painting. She says he collaborated with Paddy Jupurrula Nelson, Paddy Japaljarri Sims and his younger brother, Larry Jungarrayi Spencer on the famous 1985 canvas variously known as Munga Star Dreaming or Star dreaming. Wally Carauna’s *Aboriginal Art* (40) features the painting on the cover and he has Jimija not as a collaborator on that painting but as the supervisor who did not paint. #Dean and Carell had asked people to make drawings of Dreaming stories and they found Djimidja “had been most prolific in making totemic drawings on our sheets of brown paper” (p.137) If we follow the marvelous exegesis given by Francois Dussart of the big group painting commissioned by Kluge in 1996 (41) called Karrku(Kargo), after the ochre site mentioned by Djimidja in his story, many cross references emerge and so they should, because among the thirty plus artists who painted it, are Uni and Maggie, and Miniona’s daughter Joma (Djuna/Jorna) Napurrula Nelson, his nephew Paddy Jupurrula Nelson and his wife Daisy Napanangka Nelson and her daughter Bessie Nakamara Sims and her husband Paddy Japaljarri Sims. Dussart tells us why the site Karrku was chosen as the subject of this important painting, and explains that it was second best, the default choice as the Yuendumu community much preferred Pikyili or Vaughan Springs but ultimately had to reject it because it was the place of an unsuccessful land claim over Mt Doreen station.

Given the above it would be useful to compare the lengthy accounts of initiation given by Meggitt and Dean and Carell. Meggitt saw five initiation ceremonies, at Phillip Creek, Hooker Creek (Lajamanu) and Yuendumu. Dean and Carell saw one at Yuendumu; or rather it emanated from Yuendumu, because it followed the model described by Meggitt, of “the grand tour” where the novice is accompanied by his guardian and an elder brother and visits neighboring Warlpiri communities and other communities. As Meggitt says, “these tours still occur today in southern Warlbiri country. Novices from Yuendumu for instance, visit Mount Doreen, Mount Dennison, Coniston and occasionally Haasts Bluff.” (*Desert People* p.285) Djimidja took Dean and Carell on their Pikilyi detour while they were waiting for the initiation proper to start as “Nosepeg and the boy initiate and their party were waiting for some other important men to arrive from Mt Dennison” Meanwhile as Meggitt says – “the actors mime various exploits of the two kangaroos , such as their meeting with the wallabies, their fight with the dingoes, their making a new tail “ (*Desert People* p.287) or as Dean and Carell saw, “Night after night the story of the kangaroo went on and on, chapter after chapter, tableau after tableau ....a playlet which we eventually saw three times in all. In it, the Kangaroo ancestor was furiously attacked by a Wild Dog Ancestor, but eventually triumphed over the dog” (p.153)

After these kangaroo ceremonies at Yuendumu and Mt Doreen over some weeks, Nosepeg announced the departure of the party for “the sacred grounds at Mt Larry to enact the more important and final weeks of the ceremony” (p.153). As Dick Kimber says, “the early 1950s saw Nosepeg Tjupurrula as a leading ceremonial figure... established in a large camp north of Haasts Bluff at Warunpi , the Honey Ant Dreaming hill ....where he traveled to Yuendumu on foot, by camel and donkey for ‘Mens Law Business’” Dean and Carell describe the scene- “The boy initiate sitting on top of a donkey with his guardian led a cavalcade of tribal men “ (p.153) Mt Larry or Unabuna (Umbungarra) was beyond Haasts Bluff and the place they came to which they understood to be “the valley of the kangaroo” was surrounded by hills and a spring called Kapi. Given that Meggit says by 1953 it was rare to travel as far as Haasts Bluff, the initiation ceremony they were invited to seems to be a particularly elaborated and complete one at a Pintubi “appulla” ground. In an article by David Lewis on Western Desert map making, (42) there is a detailed map of the Pintubi dreaming site on the Muranji escarpment showing Kapi, the rockhole and the big cave.

Although it is not spelt out in Dean and Carell's account, it is probable that such a full initiation ceremony was entrepreneured by Nosepeg because of the material assistance provided by Dean and Carell, they had a utility truck and ferried people and supplies; the easy relationship between the manager at Haasts Bluff, Les Wilson and the people there (43), the general cooperation of Wally Langdon(44) the superintendent of Yuendumu and Ted Evans of Native Affairs in Alice Springs, the filming(45), and also presumably significant gifts of money and food. The prestige of Dean and Carell's project to make a corroboree for a Queen would have had sway as well(46). This major Warlpiri initiation ceremony became the basis for the dance drama of CORROBOREE. The ballet choreographed and danced by Beth Dean. "Initiation is at once a pageant and the height of stern discipline ...its corroborees deal with the heights of human emotion. Corroboree in this sense is an expression of the utmost feeling and purpose that pervades aboriginal life. "(p.184) (47)

#### 5: HOW DARE SHE DANCE THAT COROBOREE!

Beth Dean had a very particular interest, which was not shared by any of the other travelers and by very few anthropologists at the time (Phyllis Karberry being the notable exception.) She was interested in the existence of Aboriginal women's ritual life and their dances. She wanted to confirm her belief that it existed (many commentators asserted it didn't) and she wanted to study and document it. From a close reading of her comments it is not unreasonable to infer she would have liked nothing better than to have danced a spectacular solo woman's dance if she had found one. Beth Dean was a virtuoso dancer in her prime as a performer, she had to dance. Would our sensibilities today be less offended if she had invented a female dance role that did not exist at all? I am convinced, Dean knew exactly what it meant to be dancing the part of a male and an aboriginal male at that. It is significant that she took on the role of the young boy on the brink of initiation, not a senior man, not a custodian or guardian, not a man to use Elkin's term, "of high degree". The other female dancers in the troupe she choreographed (and she was at pains to point this out) were present on stage witnessing only the stages of initiation women were allowed to see. "But when the bull-roarers call, all the women must flee from its voice, just as the women dancers simulated the event in CORROBOREE. 'Simulated' is the operative word. This was true theatre - a translation in dance language from one culture to another"(48). Or as we might put it, an expressive fallacy of conforming to the Aboriginal custom.

In terms of the cultural protocols of the day and the advice they got from Mountford, Elkin and Strehlow, Dean and Carell were culturally sensitive. There are many incidents which show the care they took not to offend their Aboriginal friends ie: realising the initiate couldn't speak; that some people did not like seeing photographs of dead people; the incident described of the boy whose horse bolted into the women's dancing ground; the precautions they took in recording and playing back men's songs so that women and children didn't overhear; Dean's ensuring that her notes were not seen by young uninitiated boys. The story of Beth and Victor learning to play the didge reveals their easy attitude. They were told women didn't play and that if Dean did it would make her have many children. Everyone found this very amusing and she went on learning to play. Generally their attitude is not one of ridicule, they take the Aboriginal beliefs seriously, but as not applying to them (49)

DUST FOR THE DANCERS is written in the third person and only rarely distinguishes between Beth Dean's experiences and Victor Carell's, however in *Twin Journey*, their joint autobiography, it is abundantly clear that all the sex related protocols were observed at Yuendumu by the Warlpiri. Victor went to the Snake Rock with the men, while Beth went off to the Wagulbu Pools with the women. Beth only attended those parts of the initiation ceremony that women were present at. There can be no doubt that they were conscientious in their desire to get the right information from the right people, this was both the basis of their personal integrity and their commitment to artistic authenticity. Their attitude to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal business is very striking; they are remarkably un-selfconscious and unapologetic. They don't think it is odd to take Aboriginal culture and belief seriously, at a time when the general public did not, and perhaps more importantly they treat Aboriginal people as individuals and attribute full agency to them at a time when Assimilationist administrators were denying it.

During their time in Central Australia, Ted Evans from the Native Affairs Department who arranged their permits, asked them to give a lift to a young Danish documentary filmmaker, Jens Bjerre. Bjerre is with them for some of the time at Yuendumu and they meet up with him again at Ayers Rock. There are a few problems mentioned in the book that indicate Bjerre was not particularly sensitive, but it all becomes horribly clear in *Twin Journey*. They reveal that Bjerre's behaviour at the time was so bad that Nosepeg would not allow Bjerre to accompany them to Haasts Bluff for the initiation ceremony. Later they are appalled to read his book entitled the *The Last Cannibals* which has a chapter about Yuendumu where he describes them as "American anthropologists". As they say Nosepeg was a "highly intelligent and very shrewd man", and his distrust of Bjerre proved prescient. Nonetheless Bjerre had the imprimatur of Ted Evans and by extension Wally Langdon, the Superintendent of Yuendumu. After their return to Sydney Wally Langdon accused Dean and Carell of not having permission for the photographs they had taken of the Initiation ceremony, events described in detail by Ridett(50). In the light of this, I suggest that it is possible that Dean and Carell unwittingly stumbled into a minor power struggle between Ted Evans, Wally Langdon and the Manager at Haasts Bluff, Les Wilson who was sympathetic to the natives and helpful to Dean and Carell.

Wally Langdon's accusations led to Hasluck refusing permission for Nosepeg to attend the Royal Gala performance of Corroboree. In advising Hasluck, the Acting Administrator R.S.Leydin wrote- "I am still of the opinion that Nosepeg should not be permitted to proceed to Sydney as requested by Mrs Carell. His contribution towards the successful presentation of the ballet Corroboree would be negligible and secondly I am advised that Nosepeg himself will not be unduly disappointed. He is a semi-nomadic native and he has most likely forgotten that it was suggested"(51). From everything Dean and Carell tell us of Nosepeg, (let alone what else is known about him) nothing could be further from the truth. (He was) "the most intelligent and thinking aborigine we met and conversation with him was clear, because he was forever trying to express himself in real English eschewing pidgin words entirely, the moment he heard the correct version"(p. 132). Nosepeg of all the aboriginal people they could have met at that time, was the most familiar with European ways, and in particular the ways of artists and filmmakers and arguably the person most able to give informed consent to their enterprise. Moreover Nosepeg Tjupurrula Tjunkata, was the man in charge of the initiation, the proper ceremony man. He was the most prominent guide and performer in the NT during that time. He was in *Jedda* and various other films and he was invited to travel to Brisbane to meet the Queen. I agree with Riddett's surmise that Dean and Carell (with assistance, I suggest, from Charles Chauvel and Bill Harney (52) and no doubt the full awareness of Nosepeg) ignored the directive and Nosepeg was present at least for the final rehearsals of CORROBOREE as was only appropriate (Aboriginal way) and polite (by anyone's standards) in such a momentous and profound cultural exchange. "On several days, some old Aboriginal friends and Bill Harney came to watch. They approved of what we were doing. Then all too soon the rehearsals were over"(53). How ironic that Dean and Carell were forced to deny and hide the identity and individuality of the "old aboriginal friends" so as to protect them and themselves from the arrogant and possessive behavior of the Northern Territory Administration!

In Dean's CORROBOREE company half were ballet trained, the others had a background in creative modern dance. "The Aboriginal movements came more easily to the moderns but the ballet dancers all worked hard to accept, for example, the concept of a wide reaching – a lengthening outwards – of arm movements. It was not easy for them to accept the concept mentally and to physically express the feeling of either intense contraction of the body or its opposite, to touch the infinity of a far horizon, or to dig deeply into the fecundity of the earth, to establish that sense of rapport with the earth, that feeling of 'belonging' ... Theirs is an awareness that can be felt so the task was to make the audience feel it. Therefore we held intensive sessions on Aboriginal points of view, on their manner of thinking and the resultant dance expression. One cannot dance 'the soul of a people' unless one knows well the thoughts of that people" (54) However as Colin Simpson noted there were still problems eliminating "certain 'rubbery' dancing that is so alien to the aboriginal with his hard, lean, super-agility of movement- and I realize how difficult it must be to get that from white dancers" (55) In, *The Lie of the Land*, Paul Carter (56) criticizes Dean and Carell for mistranslating something which had never existed - "a collage of different dance movements observed among the Tiwi, the Wongga, the Warlpiri" and trying to make a "continuous line direct from the aborigines of Central Australia to Sydney"

Dean had expressly “decided that the ballet had to be based on as wide a variety of authentic aboriginal steps as possible, that it must have a theme sufficiently universal to appeal to the widest possible public, but also that it must bring into focus the truth of the aboriginal mind ... the theme we chose was initiation.” (p. 11. *The Many worlds of Dance* ), The ballet was based on the initiation ceremony they had witnessed. “As the old men agreed, the movements of ceremonial dance – presented out of context, without traditional chanting - were often seen by women and children in the extemporaneous camp dancing” (p.145 *Twin Journey*). Dean was engaged from the beginning in a complicated cross cultural task, at the very heart of corroboree making, to observe and make a new version to show it to the Other. She took up a position on that unstable middle ground between the two cultures.

Ultimately what is most interesting about CORROBOREE is that it mimics exchange and it returns what was observed and learnt in a new form, and the very imperfections (57) of CORROBOREE vindicated Beth Dean's belief in the complexity, uniqueness and difficulty of Aboriginal dance. It could not be mastered!.

## 6: POSTSCRIPT : THE CORROBOREE CONTINUES

After the success of CORROBOREE Beth Dean and Victor Carell were in demand. They filled a niche in the cultural market. Widely regarded as the best people and the obvious choice for any national event that could be lent authenticity with some display of national (ie. Aboriginal) dance, they were commissioned to produce (and perform) the *Pageant of Nationhood* staged for the 1963 visit of Queen Elizabeth. In 1965, a shortened version, which became the series *Dreaming Time Legends* was commissioned by the ABC with music by John Antill. For the ABC series Dean performed alongside a talented young Afro American dancer she had recruited. Ronne Arnold like Dean, had arrived in Australia with a Broadway show.(58) For the 1968 Cultural Olympics in Mexico, Dean was invited as the choreographic representative of Australia to mount an ethnic or cultural ballet using the dancers from Mexico's national company, Ballet Folklorico. She used material they had recorded in Arnhemland in 1953 and based it on a story written by Victor Carell, Kukaitcha, the Emu Man. Russell Drysdale was commissioned to paint the stage cloth.

In 1970, as part of the Pacific wide Cook Bi-centenary celebrations Dean and Carell presented - “the unique Aboriginal Dancers of Australia . These artists were chosen by us from areas in the north - which included Port Keats, Bathurst Island, Millingimbi, Yirrkala and Mornington island. They were superb dancers..” (59) Under the banner, *Ballet of the South Pacific*, Dean created a Cook pageant with the Aboriginal Dancers and a troupe from the Cook Is. Reviewing for the *Sun-Herald*, Leslie Walford wrote- “a group of Aborigines trained to perfection(sic)...these painted other worldly creatures that stamped and danced at us out of a dreamtime- how could they be part of our country as we know it ? They seemed to come from another place, not only another time...Here was pre-history, the misty rituals gathered over 30,000 years. These nomadic creatures wove their magic movements in an empty land. The painted bodies with the extraordinary designs, the facial expressions ... What have they let loose upon this stage? ”(60)

During 1970 Dean also remounted CORROBOREE on the Ronne Arnold Dancers and afterwards Ronne Arnold took CORROBOREE to the Perth Festival. In 1972, Dean staged the *Ballet of the South Pacific* at the South Pacific Arts Festival in Fiji. In the same year Afro American dancer, Carole Johnson arrived in Australia with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company to perform at the Adelaide Festival. Johnson was persuaded to stay on and work with Aboriginal youth in Redfern in a skills development program, and from that beginning the National Aboriginal Islander Dance Association and school was formed in 1976. One of the first teachers engaged was Ronne Arnold and he is still working with NAISDA today.,2004. In 1989 Bangarra Dance Co was formed by graduates of NAISDA under the artistic direction of Stephen Page and in 2001 They produced a dance programme called *Corroboree*.(61) And in 2002 Page choreographed *Totem* a tribute solo work for the Australian Ballet's Stephen Heathcote with music by David Page and Djakapurra Munyarryun. What began with Beth Dean, has over a period of nearly fifty years and within her lifetime been totally transformed. Dean and Carell's work and the Modernist project of which they were a part is complete.

The Corroboree continues.

END

Corrected draft May 2004

SUZANNE SPUNNER

---

A Melbourne playwright, Suzanne became interested in these issues when she wrote her first play NOT STILL LIVES in 1983 about the artists Margaret Preston and Thea Proctor. In 1987 she moved to Darwin where she lived for the next ten years. She has written a number of plays about the NT including DRAGGED SCREAMING TO PARADISE 1988 and THE INGKATA'S WIFE 1990 about the Strehlow story. She makes frequent visits back and is writing a book on NT Art since Land Rights.

Word count 10,00 plus endnotes and bibliography 3,200 total 13,200

## ENDNOTES-----

1 . Be aboriginal! Dance a Corroboree!

1a People, August 12, 1953

(1) Thomas , Nicholas, 1999, Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture, Thames and Hudson ,London , p141

(2) Margaret Preston's (in)famous injunction to the Australian artist.

(3) Ford, Andrew, 2002, Dots on the Landscape, episode 1:The Colonial Quadrille, ABC Radio

(4) "Corroboree" functioned as a brand name similar to the use of "Dreamtime" today. See also, Motif and Meaning: Aboriginal influences in Australian Art 1930-1970, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, 1999. In, Aboriginal Motifs in the Decorative Arts, Glenn. R.Cooke, states that in the 1950s both The Wentworth Hotel in Sydney and the Chevron Hotel Broadbeach installed "Corroboree Rooms"

(5) Dean and Carell first heard the Corroboree Suite by John Antill on radio in Canada in 1947, in a performance conducted by Eugene Goosens. Appointed as the first Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Goosens requested an Australian work and he subsequently premiered the Corroboree Suite with the Cincinnati SO in America, and the Berlin PO at the 1949 Edinburgh Festival. Novelist Inez Barnay in her fictionalized account of the Goosens' scandal describes the first performance of The Dreaming (Corroboree) -"And they played an unsettling piece called The Dreaming and gave birth to an astonishing notion: the Australian Composer. .. The Dreaming, played on European instruments and with European melodies, captured the vastness and eerie timelessness of the country's distant interior, and the ancient songs of its native people... Was there a possibility of a distinctly new Australian idiom? Could the music of the Aborigines be another source for this new Australian music? "Inez Barnay, 'Pagan', p 43.

(6) CF Le Brun Holmes, Sandra,1999, Faces In the Sun, Viking ,Sydney. There are photographs of Holmes in Perth in 1956, dressed in homage to the Aborigines (and in emulation of Beth Dean) in black body stocking, body paint, mask and feathers "doing an Aboriginal dance" . Holmes subsequently became involved with the conditions of Aboriginal people firstly with Don McLeod in WA. Later she lived in the NT and began documenting and preserving Tiwi art and the work of artist Yirrawala, "the Picasso of Arnhemland".

(7) Richard White, The Australian Dream, in Design of the Fifties, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney p 39

(8) In Dots on the Landscape, Aboriginal composer David Page, speaks of the artists in CORROBOREE as "naïve and ignorant back then"

(9) In The Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia which has entries on "corroboree" and the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, and Contemporary Dance, there is no mention of Beth Dean or CORROBOREE, only a glancing reference to "choreographers inspired by Aboriginal dances and movement " which mentions Boravansky's Terra Australis (see below) The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art also has entries on "corroboree" and National Aboriginal Islander Dance Association, but no mention of Dean or CORROBOREE. TERRA AUSTRALIS, 1946 was Edouard Boravansky's first Australian work. A one act ballet set to music by Australian Modernist composer, Esther Rofe, it portrayed the relationship between "beautiful young Australia, her lover the Aboriginal, the intruding explorer and the timeless maternal earth." The Spirit of Australia was danced in the second production, by the young Kathleen Gorham and The Aboriginal was danced by Vassilie Trunoff.

Boravansky was interested in the symbolism of the conflict rather than anthropological or first hand research of Aboriginal dance and no attempt was made to represent Aboriginal dance. However he later offered dancers from his company to Beth Dean for CORROBOREE. Jill Sykes, dance critic for the Sydney Morning Herald hails Bangarra's 1994 work, Ochres as the first truly Australian dance work-" a blend of indigenous Australian dance with modern dance techniques" The Australian, Sept 6, 2003 special supplement on Dance

- (10) Riddett, Lyn. A.,1996, Be Aboriginal!- Settler Women Artists Inspired by Aboriginal artists, Northern Perspective , Vol 19, No 1 p53

## 2. They Came For the Corroboree

- (11) Rees, Coralie & Leslie, 1953, Spinifex Walkabout, Ballet in the Bulldust, p232.
- (12) The Rees' devote a chapter to Hermannsburg -meet the Paraloutja brothers, see them painting and discuss their work with Rex Battarbee and finally meet Albert. Namatjira.
- (13) Chauvel, Charles & Elsa, 1959, Walkabout, W.H.Allen, London, p.195
- (14) Neither The National Film and Sound Archive, nor GMH (Aust) has any record of the film. The National Library Dance archives has no record of it either and it is not listed amongst Dean's material deposited with the Museum of Australia. Information supplied by Dr Michelle Potter, Curator of Dance, National Library of Australia.
- (15) N.A.,1953, From Primitive to Ballet : Famous for her Strange Dances, (Cover story on Beth Dean) PEOPLE, the magazine of real life stories, August 12, 1953
- (16) British balletomane and critic, Arnold Haskell wrote of Dean's performances of aboriginal dance in London in 1950 -"Through her we see for the first time the Stone Age dance of the aboriginal.." quoted in PEOPLE, August 12, 1953
- (17) Heather Dodd, pers. comm.
- (18) "It's not authentic Aboriginal music, of course, I wouldn't dare write authentic aboriginal music,that's for them " - John Antill speaking in Dots on The Landscape, ABC Radio. The basis of Antill's music was thorough research in archives and libraries. He never expressed any interest in visiting the Northern Territory. In The story of Corroboree (program notes to the recording) Vincent Plush, 1977 says- "Struck by the impact of this spectacle (a corroboree at La Perouse) ...It was to become a life-long occupation, as he assembled a large library of books and sound recordings, many on Edison cylinders"
- (19) Dean, Beth, n.d.c1975, The Many Worlds of Dance,Murray, Sydney p.102."
- (20) "We had some fun one time at Delissaville with an American dancer named Ted Shawn ... On the first night Ted walked down the hill from the settlement homestead to the corroboree ground. The deep bass of the didgeredoo was already filling the air with its rhythmic beat and the Songman was chanting an overture while the dancers prepared to go into their act. As Ted approached we could see that he was absorbed by the primitive melody. We knew he was a famous man so we decided to give him an unusual welcome. When he was a few yards from the didgeredoo Shawn stopped in his tracks and said, "Listen!" What's that thing saying? " ... His face had drained white. His flesh was covered with goose pimples. His eyes were staring ahead as though he didn't see. He was enraptured. Listen! " He demanded again. "What's it saying? " And then we told him. The two beats to a bar plainly resolved themselves into Ted Shawn! Ted Shawn!" "My God " Shawn said. I'm back with my ancestors This is terrific" The simple explanation was that the didgeredoo in the hands of an expert can be made to articulate one syllable words . This was our tribute to a great white dancer - but Shawn had gone primitive. He believed in that moment that his spirit was linked somewhere in the past with the spirit of the aborigines who were now calling to him through their music. Later he danced for us - to the drone of the didgeredoo." The Musician: Wargite Tribe, Darwin NT, from, 'We, The Aborigines', Douglas Lockwood,

1963, Cassell, Australia. "where direct speech is attributed to any of them it is mine, not theirs".(sic)

(21) The Centralian Advocate, July 28,1953

(22) Nolan, Cynthia, 1968, Outback, Methuen & Co. ltd London. P. 74 Cynthia Nolan seems to assume that Delissaville was in Arnhemland.

### 3. And at the Corroboree they met

(23) Cowlshaw, Gillian, 2000, Love Against the Law: the Autobiographies of Tex and Nelly Camfoo, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

(24) Dean and Carell cite Nelly's Rembarrga name ,Bardaluna and tell us that her father Bulman Paddy was a prominent artist. Information apparently not available to Cowlshaw.

(25) Johnson, Vivien, 1994,Aboriginal Artists of the Western Desert: A Biographical Dictionary, Craftsman House, Sydney

(26) Warlukurlangu Artists, 1987, Yuendumu Doors, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

### 4. The Anthropological present tense

(27) Meggitt M J , 1962, Desert People : A study of the Walbiri Aborigines of Central Australia, Angus & Robertson, Sydney , p 248

(28) Amadio N & Kimber R G, 1987, Wildbird Dreaming: Aboriginal Art from the Central Deserts of Australia, Greenhouse Publications, Melbourne.

(29) Johnson, Vivien, 1997, Michael Jagamara Nelson ,Craftsman House, Sydney

(30) Michael Jagamara Nelson won the inaugural National Aboriginal Art Award in 1984. He was the first Aboriginal artist who participated in the Sydney Biennale, designed the forecourt mural for Parliament House, Canberra, and was presented to the Queen at the opening of Parliament House. His painting was on the cover of the Dreamings Catalogue ed. Sutton

(31) See, Ryan Judith, 1988, Paint Up Big:Warlpiri Women's Art of Lajamanu; 1989,Mythsapes:Aboriginal Art of the Desert, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

(32) Maggie Watson Napangardi, Lajamanu 1984, Digging Stick Dreaming- Single Women, in Glowczewski, Barbara (ed),1991, YAPA: Aboriginal Painters from Balgo and Lajamanu , Baudoin Lebon Editeur, Paris, p133

(33)) Hale,Ken., 1995, Warlpiri Dictionary, IAD Press, Alice Springs

(34) Latz, Peter ,1999, Bushfires & Bushtucker, IAD Press, Alice Springs

(35) Another version of the Digging Stick Women Dreaming covering the beginning of the journey and stressing the women dancing and meeting up with the snake men is found in, Napangardi Dorothy, 2003, Dancing Up Country: The Art of Dorothy Napangardi ,Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

(36) See various plant guides- King, Peter(ed),1986,Plant Identikit: common plants of Central Australia, Conservation Commission oif the Northern Territory; Isaacs, Jennifer,1987, Bush Food- Aboriginal Food and Herbal Medicine,Weldons, Sydney; Aboriginal People of Central Australia,1995,Desert Bush Tucker Identikit:Common native plants of Central Australia, Parks & Wildlife Commission of the NT

(37) Munn, Nancy D, !973, Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society, Cornell University Press, Ithaca



- (38) Bell, Dianne, 1983, Daughters of the Dreaming , Mc Phee Gribble, Melbourne, Chapter iv We Follow One law- sometimes we dance together p 186ff
- (39) Bell, 1983, Daughters of the Dreaming, p287
- (40) Caruana, Wally, 1993, Aboriginal Art, Thames & Hudson, London
- (41) Dussart, Françoise, What an Acrylic can mean: The meta-ritualistic resonances of a central desert painting , in Morphy, Howard & Smith Boles, Margo, 1999, Art from the Land: dialogues with the Kluge-Ruhe Collection of Australian Aboriginal Art. University of Virginia, P.193ff
- (42) Lewis, David, 1978, The Way of the Nomad, Hemisphere , From earlier Fleets, p 77-81
- (43) Les Wilson is remembered very fondly by many Aboriginal people from Haasts Bluff including the artist, Long Tom Tjapananaka (cited in The Artists Stories, Strocchi, Marina (comp), Ikuntji: Paintings from Haasts Bluff 1992-1994, IAD Press, Alice Springs
- (44) Wally Langdon was not invited to the initiation Ceremony, Nosepeg only invited Beth Dean and Victor Carell.
- (45) Nosepeg first appeared in a film in 1946 and went on to be a ubiquitous presence in Australian films.
- (46) When Nosepeg met Queen Elizabeth in 1954 as a representative of Central Australian Aborigines , he introduced himself as "Nosepeg- King of the Pintubi"
- (47) Dean, Beth & Carell, Victor, 1955, Dust for the Dancers, Ure Smith, Sydney p 184

5. How dare she dance that Corroboree!

- (48) Dean, Beth & Carell, Victor, 1983, Twin Journey : An Autobiography, Pacific Publications, Fiji, p 147
- (49) "(Mountford) took her to the Department of Information film studios at Burwood to view films he had taken of sacred male dances no woman is allowed to witness", quoted in, People , August 12, 1953
- (50) Riddett, 1996, p 54
- (51) R.S.Leydin, Acting Administrator, to Secretary Department of Territories, 16 November 1953
- (52) Beth Dean and Bill Harney helped on JEDDA in Sydney while she was rehearsing CORROBOREE. In Bodyjamming, by Jenna Mead, historian Anne Curthoys describes being at a Womens Interdisciplinary Studies Congress in 1996 where the love magic scene in JEDDA was shown and discussed. Linguist, Christine Nicholls and a group of Warlpiri women from Yuendumu were also present. Their response to the film surprised Curthoys. What interested the Warlpiri women was seeing their relatives who are in the film and laughing at the speed with which Jedda is lured away by Marbuk's love magic song. Curthoys describes how the Warlpiri women were concerned that no men heard the song and they were worried about its effect on two transsexuals who were present at the screening. The love magic sequence was choreographed by Dean in Sydney and she "chanted alongside " Bill Harney and the two Aboriginal men (one of whom presumably was Nosepeg) the mens' song in Warlpiri.
- (53) Twin Journey , p148 .
- (54) The Many Worlds of Dance, p 13
- (55) Simpson, Colin, 1951, Adam in Ochre, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p 197

- (56) Carter, Paul, 1996, *The Lie of the Land*, Faber & Faber, London. Paul Carter implies that Wongga is a tribal descriptor like Tiwi and Warlpiri. It is not. See, Dean's glossary to *DUST FOR THE DANCERS*. "Wongga: The Wagaitj and other tribes of the Moyil plains in the northwest corner of the Northern Territory dance Wongga ceremonies. A boy is called Wongga during his initiation in that area. Wongga dance movements range from harsh stamping of vitality and strength to soft cat like sinuous movements."
- (57) CF Nicholas Thomas in *Motif & Meaning*, 1999, p28. *Dangerous Territory: Indigenous Reference in Australian Art*. Thomas argues that because appropriation is also often acknowledgement foregrounding the indigenous, "the end point of the process may not be some successful 'appropriation' (however that might be measured) but an interest in the 'original', and a loss of interest in the 'adapted' or 'appropriating' form."

6 Postscript: The Corroboree continues

- (58) Beth Dean came to Australia to dance the lead role in *ANNIE GET YOUR GUN*.
- (59) Dean & Carell, 1983, *Twin Journey*, p 290
- (60) Op cit , p 292
- (61) Journalist Phillip McCarthy writing from New York in *The Age*, 29Oct 2001, about Bangarra's American tour of Corroboree ,under the heading, "Americans take it literally" noted that "Corroboree is something of an umbrella term in Bangarra's vocabulary". McCarthy commented that Americans both critics and audiences expected Bangarra to be an indigenous dance troupe "rigorously adhering to the grammar of a centuries-old form " and not drawing "from all sorts of contemporary influences...where cultural or ethnic purity is for better or worse an anachronism...several audience members mused that most of the company did not 'look' as Aboriginal as Bangarra's resident elder, Djakapurra Munyarryun"

NOTE- Some of these ideas were first presented at the Strehlow Conference in Alice Springs in 2002 and I am grateful for the comments and advice of Dick Kimber, Jenny Green, Anne Mosey and Wayne Eager.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aboriginal People of Central Australia, 1995, Desert Bush Tucker Identikit: Common native plants of Central Australia, Parks & Wildlife Commission of the NT

Amadio N & Kimber R.G, 1987, Wildbird Dreaming: Aboriginal Art from the Central Deserts of Australia, Greenhouse Publications, Melbourne

Attenborough, David, 1963, Quest Under Capricorn, Lutterworth Press, London

Bell, Diane, 1983, Daughters of the Dreaming, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne

Caruana, Wally, 1993, Aboriginal Art, Thames & Hudson, London

Carter, Paul, 1996, The Lie of the Land, Faber and Faber, London

Carment, David & others (ed) 1990, 1992, Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, two volumes, NTU Press, Darwin

Chauvel, Charles & Elsa, 1959, Walkabout, W.H.Allen, London

Congreve, Susan, 1997, Painting up big: Community Painting at Yuendumu, Art and Australia, Vol No

Cowlshaw, Gillian, 2000, Love Against the Law: the Autobiographies of Tex and Nelly Camfoo, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

Dean, Beth, 1953, From Primitive to Ballet / Famous for her strange dances, People, Vol 4 No 12, August 12, 1953 (Cover story, the magazine of real life stories)

Dean, Beth, n.d. c1975, The Many Worlds of Dance, Murray, Sydney

Dean, Beth & Carell, Victor, 1955, Dust for the Dancers, Ure Smith, Sydney

Dean, Beth & Carell, Victor, 1983, Twin Journey: An autobiography, Pacific Publications, Fiji

Ford, Andrew, 2002, Dots on the Landscape, episode 1: The Colonial Quadrille, ABC Radio

Glowczewski, Barbara (ed), 1991, Yapa: Aboriginal Painters from Balgo and Lajamanu, Baudoin Lebon Editeur, Paris

Hale, Ken, 1995, An elementary Warlpiri Dictionary, IAD Press, Alice Springs

Isaacs, Jennifer, 1987, Bush Food-Aboriginal Food and Herbal Medicine, Weldons, Sydney

Johnson, Vivien, 1994, Aboriginal Artists of the Western Desert: A Biographical Dictionary, Craftsman House, Sydney

Johnson, Vivien, 1997, Michael Jagamara Nelson, Craftsman House, Sydney

King, Peter (ed), 1986, Plant Identikit: common plants of Central Australia, Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory,

Latz, Peter, 1999, Bushfires & Bushtucker, IAD Press, Alice Springs

Latz, Peter, 1999, Pocket Bushtucker: a field guide to the plants of Central Australia and their traditional uses, Jukurrpa, IAD press, Alice Springs

Le Brun Holmes, Sandra, 1999, Faces in the Sun, Viking, Sydney

Lewis, David, 1978, The Way of the Nomad, *Hemisphere*, p 77-81

Lockwood, Douglas, 1963, We, The Aborigines, Cassell Australia, Melbourne

Marcus, Julie, 2001, The Indomitable Miss Pink: A Life in Anthropology, UNSW Press, Sydney

Mead, Jenna (ed), 1997, Bodyjamming, Vintage, Random House, Sydney

Meggitt, M.J., 1962, Desert People: A study of the Walbiri Aborigines of Central Australia, Angus & Robertson, Sydney

## Corrected draft May 2004

Motif & Meaning: Aboriginal Influences on Australian Art 1930-1970 , Catalogue, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, 1999

Munn, Nancy.D, 1973,Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society, Cornell University Press, Ithaca

Morphy, Howard & Smith Boles, Margo, 1999, Art from the Land: dialogues with the Kluge-Ruhe Collection of Australian Aboriginal art, University of Virginia, Virginia

Napangardi, Dorothy, 2003, Dancing Up Country: The art of Dorothy Napangardi, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Nolan, Cynthia, 1968, Outback, Methuen &Co. Ltd, London

Plush, Vincent, 1977, The Story of Corroboree (recording notes) , Sydney

Rees, Coralie & Leslie, 1953, Spinifex Walkabout: Hitch-hiking in remote North Australia, Australasian, Sydney

Ryan, Judith, 1989,Mythscape:Aboriginal Art of the Desert, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Ryan, Judith, 1988, Paint Up Big: Warlpiri Women's Art of Lajamanu, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Riddett, Lyn.A, 1996, Be Aboriginal- Settler Women artists inspired by Aboriginal Artists, Northern Perspective, Vol 19, No.1 1996

Salter, Frank, 1980, Borovansky: The Man Who Made Australian Ballet, Wildcat Press, Sydney

Simpson, Colin, 1951, Adam In Ochre, Angus & Robertson, Sydney

Strocchi, Marina, (comp) 1994, Ikuntji: Paintings from Haasts Bluff 1992-1994, IAD Press, Alice Springs,

Sutton, Peter (ed) , 1988, Dreamings: The Art Of Aboriginal Australia, Viking, New York

Thomas, Nicholas, 1999, Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture, Thames & Hudson, London

Warlukurlangu Artists, 1987, Yuendumu Doors, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra