

Exploring Tasmania’s History and Landscape in Music for Children’s Performance: Don Kay’s *There Is an Island* (1977)

*Holly Caldwell, Carolyn Philpott and
Maria Grenfell*

In a career spanning more than sixty years, Tasmanian composer Don Kay (b. 1933) has made a significant contribution to music in his island state and in Australia more broadly. Many of his works explore aspects of Tasmania’s landscape and history, especially its Indigenous life before and since invasion, and of his three hundred works, approximately ten percent are designed specifically for children to perform.¹ Through these latter works, Kay has made a substantial contribution to educating children about locally relevant topics, a practice often overlooked within the context of art music and education, yet one that warrants greater consideration.² Fellow composer Larry Sitsky observed that ‘Don Kay is an individual voice in Australian music. Since he has lived and worked in Tasmania almost all his life, the so-called “mainland” has yet to recognise his worth. But he has produced steadily and convincingly, the remoteness helping him to find his own language.’³ Kay’s works are regularly performed and held in high regard; however, his music has rarely been examined in detail before now.⁴

¹ Don Kay, survey response collected by Holly Caldwell, 31 Oct. 2018.

² Holly Caldwell, ‘The Composition of Art Music for Children’s Performance in Australia’ (MMus thesis, University of Tasmania, 2019), <https://eprints.utas.edu.au/32580>.

³ Larry Sitsky, *Australian Chamber Music with Piano* (Canberra, ACT: ANU E-Press, 2011), 133.

⁴ Brief discussion also occurs in Larry Sitsky, *Australian Piano Music of the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005) and in the following theses: Natasha Conrau, ‘The Contextualization of Peter Sculthorpe’s *Irkanda I*’ (MMus thesis, University of Melbourne, 2012); Elinor Morrisby, ‘The Role of Jan Sedivka in the Development of Australian Contemporary String Music’ (PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 2009); David Malone, ‘Bringing New Works to Life: Collaboration and Interpretation in the Performance, Recording and Editing of New Works for Guitar’ (MMus thesis, University of Tasmania, 2003). More substantial discussion is found in Chloe Sinclair, ‘Australian Identity Reimagined in Opera: Discovering Kay and Honey’s Tasmanian voice in *The Bushranger’s Lover*’ (BMus(Hons) diss., University of Sydney, 2019).

In this article, we begin to address this gap by examining one of Kay's most successful works for children to perform, *There Is an Island* (1977), within the context of his work as a composer and educator. Drawing on primary data collected from the composer via interviews and surveys, relevant existing literature, and our analyses of the score and recording of *There Is an Island*,⁵ the article aims to illuminate the processes Kay has employed to write music for children that connects them with Tasmania's landscape and history, and to demonstrate the ongoing relevance and significance of such work. In particular, we identify in Kay's composition the use of intertextual references to various existing repertoires, musical gestures that imitate elements of the natural world, thematic motifs that are representative of people or place, and the illustration of imagined emotional states of people described in the text. Through these devices, Kay makes reference to different cultural worlds, experiences of human travel and migration, and incidents of uncertainty and human suffering, and effectively evokes a sense of the Tasmanian landscape. The result, as we will demonstrate, successfully ties together text and music.

Background: Kay and His Music for Children's Performance

Donald Henry Kay was born on 25 January 1933 in Smithton, a town on the far north-west coast of Tasmania. He attended Launceston Church Grammar School before commencing music studies across the strait at the University of Melbourne. A subsequent immersion in the Victorian town of Colac as a high school music teacher, and as the founder of the Colac Town Choir, afforded Kay an introduction to Australian expatriate composer Malcolm Williamson by way of Williamson's cousin.⁶ At the time a self-professed anglophile, Kay left eagerly for England in 1959 to train in composition with Williamson, who encouraged him to engage rigorously with the European technique of serialism. Kay remained in London until the end of 1964, when he returned to Tasmania due to family commitments. He has since worked as a composer and educator in Hobart, lecturing at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music (University of Tasmania) from 1967 to 1998. He has held the position of Head of Department there from 1990 to 1993, and continues to teach and mentor composition students well into his eighties. Kay has composed widely for professional and amateur musicians alike; his output includes four symphonies, four operas, nine string quartets, twelve piano sonatas, and numerous works for chamber ensembles and soloists, theatre music, music for children to listen to, and music for children's performance.⁷ As mentioned earlier, many of these compositions reflect his deep and life-long interests in music education, and in the natural environment and history of Tasmania.

Kay's commitment to music education, first demonstrated when he took up the teaching position in Colac, intensified during his time living in England. He taught music at Peckham Manor School, a comprehensive boys' school in South London, where he also composed and

⁵ The recording analysed in this article features the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and the Rosny Children's Choir, conducted by Georg Tintner. It was recorded in 1982 at the ABC Odeon Theatre in Hobart, and appears on *Don Kay: There Is an Island*, ABC Classics, 2006, ABC 476 5253, CD. The same recording was first released on a 1993 CD by MOVE Records (MD 3116), coupled with George Dreyfus's *The Song of the Maypole*.

⁶ Don Kay, interview by Ruth Lee Martin, Australian Oral History Project, 21 Dec. 1999, 4 [transcript], online at: <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-217398363/listen>.

⁷ By 'Music for children's performance,' we refer to music that is composed specifically for children to perform, rather than music intended only for children to listen to or be entertained by. See Caldwell 'Composition of Art Music,' 9–11.

arranged music for the school's choirs and orchestra.⁸ According to Kay, it was here that he 'was able to connect [his] personal composition with teaching [which he] hadn't really been able to do hitherto.'⁹ His teacher, Williamson, also emphasised that writing music for children's performance was important composition training.¹⁰ While this was a few years prior to the time when Williamson began composing his own suite of 'cassations' (mini-operas) for children's performance, Kay was acutely aware of the work of English composers such as Benjamin Britten (a friend of Williamson's) and Peter Maxwell Davies, who were actively writing for children's performance at the time.¹¹ Their work added further weight to Williamson's point.

Kay certainly carried Williamson's advice with him back to Tasmania, and he continues to assert that composing music for children to perform has been an important part of his development as a composer. For example, he stated in 2018 that it had been an 'excellent means of establishing basic techniques i.e., gaining understanding of the idiosyncrasies of voice types and instruments,' and had enabled the 'testing [of his] capacity to communicate through music, through rehearsal processes including comments made.'¹² Further, he noted that writing music for children's performance had taught him valuable lessons about 'the need to be flexible in certain practical matters, without compromising personal integrity,' and acknowledged the importance of being 'respectful of performer colleagues and trustful of their capacity to help realise your intentions or even exceed your anticipations by adding a new dimension,' all of which had led him to realise that 'each new work involves new learnings for the composer as well as the performer.'¹³ Ultimately, his primary aim 'always has been to contribute musically to the welfare of children—to enrich and extend their experience through music performance and listening.'¹⁴

Importantly, for Kay, the goal of extending children's experience relates not only to their musical encounters, but also to their learning about the world around them. This dual purpose is particularly apparent in his compositions for children within Tasmania (and Australia more broadly), which typically prompt young performers to broaden their musical skillsets whilst they are engaged in exploring thematic ideas relating to place and/or the natural environment. Examples of such works include several of his songs (or collections of songs) for youth choir, such as *Four Australian Folk Songs* (1971) for unaccompanied S.S.A. choir, which was commissioned by the Rosny Children's Choir; *The Wild Mountain Thyme* (1971) for S.S.A. choir with flute, composed for the Tasmanian Girls' Choir; *Song of Welcome* (1990) for massed youth choir and symphonic wind band, commissioned by the Mersey Valley Tasmania Music Festival for performance at the opening ceremony of the World Rowing Championships at Lake Barrington in the north of the state; and *Song of 'Greeting' and 'Farewell'* (1996) for unaccompanied S.S.A.A. choir, written for the Ogilvie High School's 'Overseas Choir' and performed on the group's 1996 tour. Similarly, several of Kay's educational works for young pianists that appear in the anthology series *Australian Piano Music*, edited by pianist and advocate of Australian

⁸ Don Kay, survey response collected by Caldwell, 16 Dec. 2018; Kay, interview by Martin, 5.

⁹ Don Kay, 'Thoughts Re the Evolving of my Composition Style,' unpublished handwritten document, 26 June 2020.

¹⁰ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

¹¹ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

¹² Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

¹³ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

¹⁴ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

music Sally Mays, explore topoi relating to the natural world, including *Stars and the Night*, *Morning Song*, and *In the Forest*.¹⁵ It is Kay's secular cantata, *There Is an Island*, however, that presents arguably the most obvious and substantial example of a work in which his dual goals of educating young performers about music and the world around them are evident, as will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Collectively, Kay's Tasmanian/Australian-themed educational works demonstrate his unwavering dedication to his homeland and its people since he returned in the mid-1960s. As he reflected in an interview in the late 1990s: 'I returned to the landscape of Tasmania and its history with a commitment ... to consciously do my bit to enable a Tasmanian musical culture to develop. And I haven't shifted from that.'¹⁶ Through these efforts, Kay has made a substantial contribution to music in his home state of Tasmania, and to his country more widely, including to the growing corpus of Australian art music for children's performance.¹⁷ While his work in this genre builds on the models of British composers such as Britten and Maxwell Davies, its focus on predominantly Tasmanian/Australian subject matter separates it from these earlier examples and places it firmly within the Australian tradition of writing art music for children's performance. Particularly since the 1960s, such works have tended to centre on topoi related to local history and features of the Australian natural environment. As observed in Caldwell's recent and extensive study of the composition of art music for children's performance in Australia, many Australian composers who have written music for children's performance have done so with the aim of deepening a young person's connection to place and their understanding of local history, in addition to educating them in musical matters.¹⁸ As she points out, a number of works in this repertoire engage specifically with aspects of Australia's Indigenous history and culture, such as George Dreyfus's two works *Song of the Maypole* (1968) and *The Takeover: A School Opera in One Act* (1969); Malcolm Williamson's cassation *The Glitter Gang* (1974); and Kay's *There Is an Island*, all of which explore the plight of Aboriginal peoples within settler society, and respond to issues that were gaining national attention at the time of their composition, such as Aboriginal land rights.¹⁹ While some scholarly work has been undertaken in recent years to investigate and draw attention to the work of composers in this space, the area remains largely understudied and ripe for further research.²⁰ The remainder of this article provides a detailed examination of *There Is an Island*, to highlight firstly the approach he has taken in composing music for children that connects them with Australian place/s and history, and secondly to contribute to the growing body of knowledge relating to the genre of art music for children's performance in Australia.

¹⁵ Sally Mays, ed., *Australian Piano Music*, vol. 1 (Sydney: Currency Music Press, 1990); Sally Mays, ed., *Australian Piano Music*, vol. 2 (Sydney: Currency Music Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Kay, interview by Martin, 15–16.

¹⁷ See Caldwell, 'Composition of Art Music.'

¹⁸ Caldwell, 'Composition of Art Music,' 59–60, 65, 85.

¹⁹ Caldwell, 'Composition of Art Music,' 49. See also Carolyn Philpott and James Humberstone, 'The Glitter Gang (1973–74): A Microcosm of Malcolm Williamson's Views on Social Inclusivity and His Australian Identity,' *Musicology Australia*, 38.1 (2016): 13. While teaching children to participate in music making has long been a part of Indigenous Australian culture, this article has necessarily focused on Australian art music due to space limitations.

²⁰ Perhaps the most substantial recent study of this kind is Philpott and Humberstone, 'The Glitter Gang (1973–74),' 1–28; see also Caldwell, 'Composition of Art Music,' 20.

***There Is an Island* (1977)**

Kay's *There Is an Island*, with lyrics by the poet, educationist and conservationist Clive Sansom (1910–1981), is a secular cantata for orchestra and children's choir that portrays the history and natural environment of Tasmania, focusing in particular on the plight of the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) people.²¹ Kay met Sansom while lecturing at the former Hobart Teachers' College in the mid-1960s,²² and the pair collaborated on various projects, including improvising with children through music and spoken text, and *There Is an Island*.²³

Commissioned by the Rosny Children's Choir, *There Is an Island* was first performed by this group and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra conducted by Gerald Krug in 1979. A recording of the work by the same ensembles, conducted by Georg Tintner, was made at the ABC Odeon Theatre in Hobart in 1982 with funding provided by the Australia Council for the Arts.²⁴ According to Kay, the conditions of the commission were that (a) the work be approximately thirty minutes in duration; (b) the work be composed for the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra with the Rosny Children's Choir (S.S.A. voices); and (c) that Kay collaborate with Sansom regarding the topic of the work and during the creative process.²⁵

Having previously composed *Four Australian Folk Songs* for the Rosny Children's Choir's visit to Wales in 1971, Kay already possessed an understanding of the young choristers' singing abilities prior to composing *There Is an Island*.²⁶ This knowledge gave him the confidence to compose far more complex music than he would normally for a children's choir, as he explains:

The Rosny Children's Choir had an established national reputation and were at their peak at this time. I knew [the] pitch and rhythmic challenges would be thoroughly mastered, as [choral director] Jenny Filby was very demanding. Therefore, I asked of them some quite challenging passages and took a few risks.²⁷

²¹ *There Is an Island* is scored for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in B flat, 2 bassoons, 4 horns in F, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, timpani, percussion (xylophone, cymbals, suspended cymbals, vibraphone, triangle, claves, side-drum, bass-drum, glockenspiel, tubular bells, large gong), harp, strings, and children's choir.

²² Kay, interview by Martin, 8. For further information regarding Clive Sansom, see Ralph Spaulding, 'Sansom, Clive Henry (1910–1981),' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sansom-clive-henry-15760>.

²³ Kay, interview by Martin, 8.

²⁴ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018. The Rosny Children's Choir was a successful Tasmanian choir that had previously performed at the prestigious International Musical Eisteddfod in Llangollen, Wales in July 1971—the first choir from the southern hemisphere to do so. Upon the death of its founder, Jennifer Filby, the choir became known as Australian Rosny Children's Choir. See Alison Alexander, 'Rosny Children's Choir,' *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, ed. Alison Alexander (Hobart: Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, 2005), https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/R/Rosny%20choir.htm.

²⁵ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018. Kay had previously worked with children in the performance of cantatas; for example, he conducted the Colac Town Choir performing Bach's secular *Mer hahn en neue Oberkeet* (BWV 212), known as the 'Peasant Cantata,' in the 1950s. It was Kay's knowledge of secular cantatas by composers such as Bach and Britten that encouraged him to write his own: first *There Is an Island*, and later *Conflagration: The Tasmanian Bushfires, Summer, 2018–19* (2019), a cantata in eight episodes with text by John Honey, which premiered on 10 July 2021 at Federation Concert Hall, Hobart, in a performance conducted by Simon Reade as part of the Tasmanian Festival of Voices. Don Kay, interview by Caldwell, 1 June 2021.

²⁶ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

²⁷ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

As a result, Kay's writing for S.S.A. choir in the cantata requires the performance skills of advanced choristers; in the case of the Rosny Children's Choir, these highly trained singers were aged between eight and eighteen at the time the work was composed.²⁸

When preparing for the premiere of *There Is an Island*, the choir and orchestra initially rehearsed separately, and according to Kay, 'by the time the choir came together with the orchestra the preparations enabled a smooth collaboration between the two ensembles.'²⁹ He admits that his 'personal role in the whole performance preparation was minimal except to accept invitations to attend rehearsals and make comments.'³⁰ While the composer downplays his own involvement in the performance preparations, it is important to acknowledge that his presence and feedback no doubt would have been meaningful to the young choristers, giving them the experience of meeting and working alongside a professional composer. Kay divulges that during his working life he has 'tried to demonstrate, through example ... the rewards of composition for young people in a very inclusive way,'³¹ and his active involvement in rehearsals and meeting the choristers shows evidence of his commitment to this goal.

The remainder of this section aims to show the ways in which Kay and Sansom foreground Australian themes in *There Is an Island*, namely through the exploration of the landscape, history, and people of Tasmania. As the scope of this article does not permit an in-depth analysis of the work, it will focus on examining the primary ways in which Kay has responded to these themes in his setting of the text, and how he has written for the young performers in ways that enable their successful engagement with and performance of the work and its key messages.

There Is an Island is approximately thirty-six minutes in duration and consists of ten movements: I. 'The Island'; II. 'Song of the Aborigines'; III. 'The Coming of the Great Swans'; IV. 'West-Country Seamen'; V. 'Free Settlers'; VI. 'Convicts'; VII. 'Hobart Town'; VIII. 'The Black War'; IX. 'Lament of the Aborigines'; and X. 'This Land We Share.'³² The first movement, 'The Island,' introduces the landscape of Tasmania and acknowledges the Aboriginal people who have lived there for tens of thousands of years. The movement begins with sparse instrumentation: minor second trills are voiced by the wind section, and a short, sharp motif is heard from the xylophone (see Fig. 1). Soon afterwards, a second, bright motif, constructed primarily from thirds, appears in the flute section (see Fig. 2):

Figure 1. Xylophone motif in Don Kay, *There Is an Island: A Cantata for Children's Choir and Orchestra*, text by Clive Sansom, handwritten score, April 1977 (available from The University of Tasmania's Carrington Smith Library and the Australian Music Centre), I. 'The Island,' b. 3



²⁸ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

²⁹ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

³⁰ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

³¹ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

³² Throughout this article, movements from the work will be referred to using only their title and will generally exclude their movement number. The tenth movement appears in the handwritten score as: 'This Land We Share,' which is the title used throughout this article. The movement is listed as 'The Land We Share' on the two CDs.

Figure 2. Flute motif in Kay, *There Is an Island*, I. 'The Island,' bb. 7–8

These opening musical ideas convey Kay's perspective on the Tasmanian landscape as a vast and harmonious environment with pockets of vibrant life, and are used throughout the cantata as the story of the island develops.³³ The children's voices then enter on a unison note, before diverging into unaccompanied four-part harmony to sing of the 'island in the southern seas.' As the orchestra re-enters, the children sing about Tasmania's coast, its penguins and parrots, mountains and streams—a place 'home to an Island race,' referring to the Palawa people.

Kay regularly adopts the technique of word painting to musically illustrate Sansom's text. For instance, when the children sing of Tasmania as the place 'where breakers crash on a rock-lined coast,' and where 'the roaring forties blow,' the composer evokes the roaring winds and waves by using glissandi in the strings, timpani and trombone sections, accentuated by *fortissimo* cymbal crashes, and descending and ascending chromatic sextuplet semiquaver passages in the clarinet, bassoon, and trumpet parts (see Fig. 3).³⁴ Interestingly, and conflictingly, however, Kay then uses descending melodies in the choral parts for the lines 'Parrots *fly* from the tree' and 'Mountains *lift* their peaks to the sky.' Although the descending melodic lines here suggest the opposite of 'flying' and 'lifting,' the composer immediately follows each passage with ascending glissandi in the horn section to musically depict these ideas (see Fig. 4).

Even more fittingly, the next segment of text, 'And streams flow *down* to the sea,' is set to a descending melodic line, and is followed by descending glissandi phrases in the harp, and descending melodic passages in the flute and string parts (see Fig. 5). The vocal parts in this example are supported by the strings, each beginning on the pitch D and fanning out briefly to four-part harmony, before closing in first to three-part harmony, then two-part, and then returning to unison on the final note, E. Providing a destination note of E in the lower strings and harp gives the voice parts some guidance out of the harmonic section to the unison note at the end of the phrase. Other than the large octave leap in voice part one—perhaps made slightly more challenging by the inclusion of a passing note—all motion is small and is either repetitive, stepwise, or involves a leap of a major third leading safely to the tonic note. Here, Kay's writing cleverly provides a sense of security for the young choristers as they sing this well-supported passage, while still portraying a majestic image that is rich in texture, and amplified by the subsequent orchestral section.

As these examples illustrate, 'The Island' conveys a strong sense of the Tasmanian landscape through a close marriage of text and sound, while taking into consideration the vocal capabilities of the children. In the final section, Sansom declares that Tasmania is the Palawa people's 'ancient land,' acknowledging them as the traditional owners, and asserting a position that resonates through the remainder of the work.

³³ For example, these motifs also appear in 'West-Country Seamen' and 'The Black War.'

³⁴ The 'roaring forties' refers to the strong westerly winds that blow between latitudes 40° and 50° in the southern hemisphere. For reference, Hobart (in the south) is situated at 42° 52' S and Devonport (in the north of Tasmania) at 41° 10' S.

Figure 3. Word painting in the clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, percussion and string parts in *Kay, There Is an Island*, I. 'The Island,' bb. 31–32

The musical score for Figure 3, titled 'The Island,' spans measures 31 and 32. The score is for a full orchestra and choir. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 80c$. The score includes parts for Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets in Bb, Bassoons, Horns in F, Trumpets in Bb, Trombones, Timpani, Cymbals, Harp, Choir, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass.

Key features of the score include:

- Flutes:** Measure 31 features a triplet of eighth notes with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note.
- Oboes:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note.
- Clarinets in Bb and Bassoons:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a sixteenth-note triplet.
- Horns in F:** Measure 31 has a sustained note. Measure 32 has a sustained note.
- Trumpets in Bb:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a sixteenth-note triplet.
- Trombones:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes.
- Timpani:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic.
- Cymbals:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic.
- Harp:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note.
- Choir:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note.
- Violin I and II:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic and a tremolo (*trem.*) effect.
- Viola:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic and a tremolo (*trem.*) effect.
- Violoncello:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic and a tremolo (*trem.*) effect.
- Double Bass:** Measure 31 has a sustained note with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a pizzicato (*pizz.*) effect. Measure 32 has a sustained note with a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic and a tremolo (*trem.*) effect.

Figure 4. Ascending glissandi in Kay, *There Is an Island*, I. 'The Island,' bb. 38–39

'Song of the Aborigines' explores life from the imagined perspective of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people before European settlement. It begins with light eight-part unaccompanied singing in E Dorian mode, with short overlapping lyrical phrases including the words 'Spring time,' 'Wattle time,' 'Sunlight,' 'Forest,' and 'All the world dancing.' In Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, blossoms of yellow wattle signal the beginning of the warmer seasons, and music and dance ceremonies have long been performed to convey Palawa stories of origin.³⁵ These ideas are presented in the following passage featuring three-part vocal harmony (see Fig. 6). This passage also occurs in the finale, 'This Land We Share,' suggesting that here spring is a metaphor for promising new beginnings.

Kay then introduces a musical motif that is used throughout the work to represent the presence of the Palawa people. This five-note motif is first heard in the viola, cello and bass parts (see Fig. 7). Augmented and diminished intervallic and rhythmic variations of this motif subsequently appear; for example, in the passage from the third movement shown in Figure 8. The variations of this motif later in the work effectively underpin the developments in the text, as the lives of the Palawa people become negatively impacted by European settlement.

In 'Song of the Aborigines,' there is also an acknowledgement of the Aboriginal mythological figures who 'gave us the sea ... the sun for heat by day, and fire at night,' before describing traditional activities such as hunting wallaby, possum, and bandicoot, and diving for crayfish. To support the Indigenous themes in the text, Kay employs claves in this section to suggest the sound of Aboriginal paired sticks being struck together. While the text is simultaneously strong and peaceful in character, drawing attention to the rich traditions of Aboriginal Tasmanians prior to European settlement, and recognising that 'some places were sacred to the tribal spirit,' Kay's setting is more foreboding and anticipatory of what lies ahead.

³⁵ Patsy Cameron, 'Aboriginal Life Pre-Invasion,' *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/A/Aboriginal%20life%20pre-invasion.htm.

Figure 5. Descending glissandi and melodic passages in Kay, *There Is an Island*, I. 'The Island,' bb. 43–45

The musical score is for Kay's *There Is an Island*, I. 'The Island,' measures 43-45. The score is in 4/4 time and features a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 80c.$. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score includes parts for Flutes, Suspended Cymbal, Harp, four vocal parts (1-4), Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The vocal parts have the lyrics: "And... streams flow down to the sea...".

Key musical features include:

- Measures 43-45:** The Flute part features descending glissandi (marked *gliss.*) and melodic passages. The Harp part features descending glissandi (marked *gliss.*) and melodic passages. The Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass parts feature descending glissandi (marked *gliss.*) and melodic passages.
- Measures 44-45:** The Flute part features descending glissandi (marked *gliss.*) and melodic passages. The Harp part features descending glissandi (marked *gliss.*) and melodic passages. The Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass parts feature descending glissandi (marked *gliss.*) and melodic passages.

Figure 6. Kay, *There Is an Island*, II. 'Song of the Aborigines,' bb. 7–11

Figure 6 shows the musical score for the 'Song of the Aborigines' in Act II, measures 7 through 11. It consists of three staves. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 64c.$ and the dynamics range from *mp* to *pp*. The lyrics are: 'Spring-time, wat-tle time, all the birds sing-ing. Sun-light, for-est light, all the world danc-ing, danc-ing, danc-ing.' The music is in 2/4 time and features a melodic line in the upper staves and a rhythmic accompaniment in the lower staves.

Figure 7. Motif in the low strings representing the presence of the Palawa people. Kay, *There Is an Island*, II. 'Song of the Aborigines,' bb. 11–15

Figure 7 shows the musical score for the motif in the low strings, measures 11 through 15. It features three staves: Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 64c.$ and the dynamics are *pp*. The motif is characterized by a slow, sustained melodic line in the low register, with a final measure ending in a fermata.

Figure 8. A variation of this motif. Kay, *There Is an Island*, III. 'The Coming of the Great Swans,' bb. 35–38

Figure 8 shows the musical score for a variation of the motif, measures 35 through 38. It features three staves: Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 136c.$ and the dynamics are *mf*. The motif is characterized by a faster, more rhythmic melodic line in the low register, with a final measure ending in a fermata.

An interaction between the Palawa people and the European settlers takes place for the first time in 'The Coming of the Great Swans.' This movement focuses on the Europeans who were early explorers of Tasmania, including the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman; the French seamen Marion Du Fresne, Bruny D'Entrecasteaux, and others; the English Captains Cook and Flinders; and the early European settlers who established homes on the island. The members of the children's choir play two roles in this movement: through unaccompanied spoken words, they convey information about the explorers, and through song, they convey the experience of the Palawa people seeing the 'Great Swans,' or the European ships. The movement is interjected with side drums, bass drums, and brass passages, representative of European military-style music, and the motif shown in Figure 8 (above), representative of the Palawa people, is heard many times. The singing is in two-part harmony and, for most of the movement, is centred on the interval of a perfect fifth. The voices move in a contrary and mostly stepwise motion, returning to a perfect fifth at the end of each line (see Fig. 9).³⁶ These devices create the effect of an oscillation between consonant and dissonant harmonies, which in turn creates tension and a sense of uncertainty. Although the sound can be heard as complex, particularly due to the recurring dissonant sonority

³⁶ This technique is also used in 'Song of the Aborigines' and 'Lament of the Aborigines.' Within the cantata, it signifies the voices of the Palawa people in the first person. That the voices drift in and out of dissonant and consonant harmonies perhaps represents the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

of a major seventh, the vocal parts utilise only three notes each, and are both anchored by the regular return of a perfect fifth. Again, Kay's skilful writing offers the choristers support to find their assigned notes, which are doubled by the violin lines of the orchestra.

Figure 9. Kay, *There Is an Island*, III. 'The Coming of the Great Swans,' bb. 15–25

Choir

From the rim of the world came two great swans white swans riding up on a
 calm sea. They came, and they went a-gain, and the wide sea covered them.

As shown in Figure 9 (above), the word 'Swans' is sung throughout the movement using consonant perfect fifths, while the word 'Calm' is sung to the dissonant interval of a minor seventh, perhaps suggesting the complexity of the arrival of the Europeans from the perspective of the Palawa people.³⁷ In addition, the composer employs musical quotations in this movement to illustrate the nationalities of the explorers and early settlers. For example, after the choristers speak of the French explorers, a manipulated, off-kilter excerpt of 'La Marseillaise' the French national anthem, is heard (see Fig. 10). While 'La Marseillaise' was only composed and adopted as the French national anthem shortly before French explorers arrived in Van Diemen's Land (the early European name for Tasmania), its strong modern-day association with France would be immediately apparent to most contemporary listeners and performers.

Figure 10. A manipulation of 'La Marseillaise' in Kay, *There Is an Island*, III. 'The Coming of the Great Swans,' bb. 32–35

Trumpets in Bb

Trombones I+II

Trombone III

Side Drum

Similarly, an excerpt from 'Rule Britannia' is heard after the choristers speak of the English seamen. Paul Watt notes that the use of national anthems in popular songs appeared as early as 1862 in Verdi's *Hymn of the Nations*, which quotes both 'La Marseillaise' and 'Rule Britannia,' and that excerpts of these anthems and other well-known tunes were later heard in Australian popular songs of the First World War.³⁸ It is possible that exposure to this trend inspired Kay's inclusion of these anthem fragments, and confirmed for him the audience's ability to recognise

³⁷ By 'complexity', we refer to how the peaceful image of a swan—the image that the boats appear to resemble—contrasts heavily with the disastrous reality of European colonisation from the perspective of Aboriginal peoples.

³⁸ See Paul Watt, 'Music, Lyrics and Cultural Tropes in Australian Popular Songs of the First World War: Two Case Studies,' *Musicology Australia*, 36.1 (2014): 90–105.

the use of intertextual referencing in this style. Either way, these thematic inclusions emphasise the text's illustration of the moment of a first encounter between cultures, and no doubt also appeal to children who perform the work.

Musical quotations are also heard in the fifth movement, 'Free Settlers,' in which references to Irish, English, and Scottish folk music signify the nationalities of the different cultural groups that settled freely in Tasmania. Kay's setting of Sansom's text, which describes the oppressed and/or lower-class Irish, English, and Scottish peoples finding freedom in 'this other land in the far south,' uses recitative-like sections for the voices accompanied by low strings, providing a strong contrast to the other movements. These sections are artfully interjected with quotations from three folk songs: first, from the traditional Irish song 'She Moved through the Fair' (played by solo clarinet in bb. 24–37); second, from the English nursery rhyme 'Tom He Was a Piper's Son' (played by solo muted trumpet in bb. 60–68); and third, from the Scottish folk song 'The Wild Mountain Thyme' (in three-part harmony, played by two violins and one viola, bb. 88–98).³⁹ Together, these quotations emphasise the nostalgic nature of the text, which describes settlers who have left their homelands.

In addition to musical quotations, Kay adopts certain song styles in the cantata to help convey the meaning of Sansom's text. 'West-Country Seamen' depicts the journey by ship of seamen from Bristol, Portsmouth, and Plymouth Town to Van Diemen's Land. With its regular beat and motivational lyrics, the movement is strongly reminiscent of a sea shanty, a traditional work song sung by sailors before ships were steam powered.⁴⁰ It is in an *allegrezza* 3/4 metre, which creates the feeling of a rocking boat, and includes small group verses and semi-choruses, as well as tutti choruses, with melodic piccolo passages that resemble a fife, including the motif shown in Figure 2 (above). While uplifting in character, the movement refers to the lengthy, 'fifteen weeks journey' to the 'South of the Seven Seas,' highlighting the European perception at the time of Australia's vastly distant geographical placement and the amount of time required to travel there. This movement effectively explains the story of these seamen and their journey to a new land, both through its text and its musical setting.

The sixth movement, 'Convicts,' also marries text and music through song style, telling of the convicts' experience through the first person. Kay uses quick, mixed metres and discordant harmonies to convey the unsettled feelings of those who were separated from their families by the decisions of judges, for not behaving 'as a citizen should,' and who were transported 'for our country's good.' Collectively, the ideas conveyed through text and music in this and the preceding movements highlight the extraordinary experiences of the early European explorers, settlers, and convicts who travelled to Van Diemen's Land, shedding light on their perspectives of this period in the island's history, which saw forty-five percent of convicts in Australia (approximately 75,000 people) serve time in Van Diemen's Land, and many more arrive as free settlers.⁴¹

For the first time in the work, the movement 'Hobart Town' suggests what the European settlement in the south of Van Diemen's Land might have been like to encounter during the

³⁹ See Kay, *There Is an Island*, 'Free Settlers' (mvt V), bb. 24–37, 60–68, 88–98.

⁴⁰ Norm Cohen, 'Work Songs,' *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁴¹ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, 'Convicts,' *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/C/Convicts.htm.

early years of the colony. The choristers sing of 'Millers and Bakers, shipwrights, sailmakers, visiting Quakers all sailed into town!'; of 'Farmers and dealers, crafty sheep-stealers, whalers and sealers'; and 'Grocers and tailors, pensioned off sailors, convicts and jailers, the bound and the free!'. While the text paints an impression of the diverse range of people who occupied Hobart during early settlement, the accompanying music suggests a bustling town through a lively tempo, repeated rhythmic patterns, and a repeated rhyme scheme. In contrast, a final description of sealers and whalers as 'Scum of the Sea' and as those who 'hunted men like whales' offers a fitting segue into the eighth movement, 'The Black War.'

The title, 'The Black War,' refers to the intense frontier conflict between Europeans and Tasmanian Aboriginal people in the early nineteenth century, which saw the deaths of around one thousand people, as well as the destruction of many aspects of local Indigenous culture.⁴² The confronting text: 'They hunted men like whales / Clubbed them to death like fur-seals / Shot them like Kangaroo / They stole their women for slaves / Murdered defenceless tribesmen / Threatened the Brown Race,' refers to the sealers who ignited a war after sexually violating Aboriginal women and children.⁴³ These disturbing lines are supported well by Kay's musical setting, which employs accentuated chords in the brass, and loud percussion including xylophone, bass drum, and tamtam, is decorated with high woodwind passages. The vocal harmony for the words 'whales,' 'fur-seals,' 'kangaroo,' and 'slaves' is in four parts; the outside voices are an octave apart; and the unison inside voices are either a diminished fifth or augmented fourth from the outside voices, creating strong dissonance, as shown in Figure 11. Similarly, 'Tribesmen' is sung using a diminished triad, before 'threatened the Brown Race' is sung in unison over a broken augmented triad (see Fig. 12). Kay's harmonic writing in these passages would certainly extend the abilities of young choristers; however, he has adeptly used techniques that simplify the singing: stepwise motion, octave intervals in the outer voices, returning to unison at the start of a two-bar phrase, or carrying over the same notes used at the end of a previous phrase as a reference point. Additionally, the choir is accompanied by doubling in the string section or brass section, thus altering the timbral quality of the phrases while ensuring the choir is well supported in pitch.

The string section supports the choir rhythmically and harmonically throughout the movement, and roaring brass or soaring strings and wind parts are heard in between each line. Kay's use of syllabic writing of text to rhythm in this section also conveys and heightens the effect of Sansom's depiction of violence. The motifs as shown in Figures 1 and 2 are heard, but undergo pitch transposition a number of times, encouraging the listener to recall the landscape that was illustrated in 'The Island,' but in a new light. The final thirty seconds of the movement softens to sustained strings with two solo woodwind calls, signalling the quiet of death and providing a segue into the ninth movement, 'Lament of the Aborigines,' which incorporates the use of vibraphone chords, giving the impression of funeral bells. The relationship between text and music in 'The Black War' creates an unsettled and unnerving effect, encapsulating the horrors of the conflict and the ongoing trauma that ensued.

⁴² Nicholas Clements, 'Tasmania's Black War: A Tragic Case of Lest We Remember?', *Conversation*, 24 Apr. 2014, <https://theconversation.com/tasmanias-black-war-a-tragic-case-of-lest-we-remember-25663>; Ian McFarlane, 'Frontier Conflict,' *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/F/Frontier%20Conflict.htm_

⁴³ Clements, 'Tasmania's Black War.'

Figure 11. Kay, *There Is an Island*, VIII. 'The Black War,' bb. 2–12

Con ira $\text{♩} = 128$

1 They hunt - ed men like whales, clubbed them to death like fur - seals, _____

2 They hunt - ed men like whales, clubbed them to death like fur - seals, _____

3 They hunt - ed men like whales, clubbed them to death like fur - seals, _____

4 They hunt - ed men like whales, clubbed them to death like fur - seals, _____

7 shot them like kang - a - roo. They stole their wo - men for slaves, _____

8 shot them like kang - a - roo. They stole their wo - men for slaves, _____

9 shot them like kang - a - roo. They stole their wo - men for slaves, _____

10 shot them like kang - a - roo. They stole their wo - men for slaves, _____

11 shot them like kang - a - roo. They stole their wo - men for slaves, _____

12 shot them like kang - a - roo. They stole their wo - men for slaves, _____

Figure 12. Kay, *There Is an Island*, VIII. 'The Black War,' bb. 13–18

$\text{♩} = 128$

13 murd - ered de - fence - less tribes - men, threat - ened the brown race. _____

14 murd - ered de - fence - less tribes - men, threat - ened the brown race. _____

15 murd - ered de - fence - less tribes - men, threat - ened the brown race. _____

16 murd - ered de - fence - less tribes - men, threat - ened the brown race. _____

17 murd - ered de - fence - less tribes - men, threat - ened the brown race. _____

18 murd - ered de - fence - less tribes - men, threat - ened the brown race. _____

In response to the devastation brought by the Black War, Kay and Sansom reflect on a way for non-Indigenous Australians to pay respect to those Palawa people who lost their lives as a result of colonisation. The final movement, 'This Land We Share,' is musically more uplifting and hopeful, with a brighter harmonic palette and gentle orchestration that builds to a climactic chord with glissandi in the brass and harp, before dying away to a somewhat pensive ending. The text calls for those who presently live on the island of Tasmania to care for the land out of respect for the Palawa people, ending with the words (sung in unison and octave unison): 'Let no man's greed for money destroy this place / Nor bring again in the world's eyes a new disgrace / But let this living land around us speak for the lost race.' The phrase 'Lost race' is repeated four times using four overlapping rhythms on notes D and B, creating a blended, fading-out effect. These two words are more reflective of past (non-Indigenous) perspectives on the survival of Tasmanian Aboriginal people than of modern-day understandings and

recognition of the ongoing existence of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. However, their repetition and use as a conclusion emphasises the message that many Indigenous lives were lost as a consequence of European settlement—a message that should not be forgotten. Finally, the orchestra returns to an excerpt of the tune and accompaniment heard in the first movement, ‘The Island,’ suggesting that we as people do not own the land, but rather the land owns us.⁴⁴ Simultaneously, Kay and Sansom invoke the idea through their work that the Palawa people have cared for the land for tens of thousands of years, and that if present-day inhabitants of the island do not do the same, there will not be a natural environment that is able to sustain life.

While some of the ideas explored in this final movement are now outdated, especially the notion of a ‘lost race’, it is important to acknowledge that they represented views commonly held and expressed by non-Indigenous Australians at the time of composition. In 1977, when *There Is an Island* was composed, there were no established protocols surrounding the use of Aboriginal stories and themes in art by non-Indigenous individuals. In recent years, whenever Kay has sought to incorporate Indigenous stories and themes within his works, such as in *The Bushranger’s Lover* (2012), he and his librettist have consulted with the local Aboriginal community to ensure that the material is presented accurately, and treated with appropriate sensitivity. However, the erroneous belief that the Tasmanian Aboriginal people were extinct was widespread in 1977 among non-Indigenous Australians, and like many at the time, Kay and Sansom believed that Truganini was the last ‘full-blooded’ Tasmanian Aboriginal.⁴⁵ This situation can be contextualised more broadly within the so-called ‘Doomed Race’ theory. Russell McGregor asserts that, within the framework of Australia, this theory explains the belief that ‘for the greater part of the past two hundred years, white Australians believed the indigenous inhabitants doomed to extinction.’⁴⁶ He adds that ‘it was not that extinction was considered possible, or probable, or contingent upon certain courses of action,’ but rather that extinction was ‘regarded as the Aboriginals’ inescapable destiny, decreed by God or by nature.’⁴⁷ Regretfully, this set of beliefs has led to a tendency to view Palawa people as belonging to the past, or in the words of Sansom, as a ‘lost race.’ Therefore, while Kay and Sansom sought to address issues of colonisation in Tasmania, and although we the authors believe that, at the time of writing *There Is an Island*, the pair was genuinely saddened by the war and genocide perpetrated against Palawa people, their response was nevertheless based on a set of inherited beliefs that are nowadays considered part of the structure of colonisation.

⁴⁴ This concept is important within Aboriginal culture and is encapsulated in a well-known quote by S. Knight: ‘We don’t own the land, the land owns us. The land is my mother, my mother is the land. Land is the starting point to where it all began. It’s like picking up a piece of dirt and saying this is where I started and this is where I’ll go. The land is our food, our culture, our spirit and identity.’ See S. Knight, ‘Our Land Our Life,’ colour illustrated card (Canberra: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1996), cited in Sharon Wall, ‘Closing Remote Communities: Effects of Aging in Place: A Report on the Fourth National Workshop of the Australian Association of Gerontology Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing Advisory Group held on 3 November 2015 at the Alice Springs Convention Centre Northern Territory,’ Nov. 2016, 17, online at: <https://www.aag.asn.au/documents/item/1281>.

⁴⁵ Kay, in conversation with Caldwell, 1 Feb. 2022; Greg Lehman, ‘The Palawa Voice,’ *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Palawa%20Voice.htm.

⁴⁶ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939*, (Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1997), ix.

⁴⁷ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, ix.

For Kay, the extra-musical lessons in the cantata were all part of the plan for the work. He recently admitted that he hoped that the young musicians who have performed *There Is an Island* 'will feel more knowing of the historical events that took place; that curiosities will be aroused to fill out that knowledge more; that they are more understanding and sympathetic regarding the plight of Aboriginal people; and that they experienced a rewarding musical event.'⁴⁸ However, performers today might be encouraged to engage more critically with the content, particularly with regard to the changing nature of historiography. In later years, Kay considered altering Sansom's text to exclude notions of a 'lost race,' as he acknowledged the notion could be hurtful to Indigenous peoples; however, he decided to leave it unchanged so as to provide an example of the thought pattern at the time.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, for the young musicians involved in the premiere and first recording, *There Is an Island* operated as an educational tool that sought to provoke thought and further dialogue regarding their island home and its dark history, whilst expanding their musicianship and experience with professional artists. In terms of the composer's approach to writing for children's performance, Kay clearly took into consideration the singing abilities of the choristers in the Rosny Children's Choir by using the knowledge he had gained through working with them previously. The choristers' exposure to a local composer would also have helped to shape their understanding of Australian composers and music, in line with Kay's aims outlined earlier.

There Is an Island has had numerous performances within Tasmania, and has reached wider audiences through its release and re-release on CD. Since 1982, excerpts of the cantata have been performed with piano accompaniment by the Rosny Children's Choir; for instance, at the dockside in Hobart for the arrival of the Tall Ships during the 1988 Australian Bicentennial event.⁵⁰ A further performance was given by the Ogilvie High School Choir with the Derwent Symphony Orchestra conducted by Myer Fredman on 4 July 2004 at Federation Concert Hall in Hobart. This concert, which also featured Sculthorpe's *Sea Chant* for choir and orchestra, was titled 'Homage to "Our Fellas"' (referring to the two Tasmanian composers). *There Is an Island* was again performed by a massed choir and the Hobart Chamber Orchestra conducted by Jean-Louis Forestier at the opening concert, 'Welcome to Tasmania,' of ChoralFest 2006 on 10 July of that year.⁵¹ Additionally, a choir comprising boys from the Hutchins School Junior Choir and adult female singers performed the work at the 2011 Festival of Voices in Hobart, accompanied by piano and string quartet (arranged by Mark Buys), and conducted by Joan Wright. Moreover, the original recording by MOVE Records of *There Is an Island* was re-issued by ABC Classics in 2006, coupled with Kay's *Tasmania Symphony: Legend of Moinee* (1988), another work exploring Tasmanian Indigenous themes. Through these performances and recordings, the cantata has reached audiences of all ages, particularly within Tasmania, where its messages have likely had the deepest impact.

Connections and Conclusions

As the above discussion has indicated, *There Is an Island* is an important work within Kay's oeuvre and within the genre of Australian art music for children's performance. As arguably

⁴⁸ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

⁴⁹ Kay, in conversation with Caldwell, 1 Feb. 2022.

⁵⁰ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

⁵¹ Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018.

his most prominent work in the genre, it provides an excellent case study for investigating the approach and techniques Kay has adopted for writing music for children to perform. The examination of *There Is an Island* detailed above has shown that he sought not only to provide a rich musical education for the children involved, but to offer a springboard for discussion of topics such as local history, culture, and the environment. Additionally, it is clear that Kay has taken a proactive approach to providing these multifaceted learning experiences by working closely with young performers during the composition and rehearsal stages.

As our investigation of the work has shown, *There Is an Island* is rich in material representative of Australian themes, namely the concepts of place, history, and people in Tasmania, as well as key subthemes such as the environment, war, and social justice issues. Through this work, performers and listeners alike can discover a wealth of information across a broad range of topics, such as insights into the pre-contact life of Palawa people; their spirituality and connection to country; what life was like for explorers, convicts, and free settlers in Van Diemen's Land; the brutality of war; historical pursuits such as whaling; Australian animals; Hobart as an early settlement; and the Tasmanian landscape. We have demonstrated that Kay conveys the meaning of Sansom's text through various compositional techniques, such as the use of incongruous harmonies that create tension and discomfort, through word painting, the employment of particular song styles, musical quotations, spoken words, and recurring motifs that are representative of people or place. Importantly, the work not only provides a potted history of Tasmania, it conveys a strong viewpoint regarding the injustices that have been carried out against the land's traditional owners. It calls for an acknowledgement of these injustices by non-Aboriginal peoples, and for greater awareness of the rights of Aboriginal peoples. These ideas were timely in the 1970s—the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* were passed only shortly before *There Is an Island* was commissioned—and are still highly relevant today.⁵² In this way, the work bears similarities to Williamson's cassation *The Glitter Gang* (1974), in that it speaks to issues of Aboriginal rights through the voices of Australian children, although Kay does not claim to have been aware of *The Glitter Gang* prior to composing *There Is an Island*.⁵³

As with *The Glitter Gang*, *There Is an Island* has been expertly written to extend the musical abilities of the young choristers for whom it was written. Through Kay's previous experiences as a music educator, and in working with the Rosny Children's Choir, he developed and refined his skills in writing for children with advanced musical training. In particular, the work calls on the children to sing challenging melodic lines and harmonies, but typically it does so after introducing short melodic and rhythmic motifs. Kay also provides the singers with support from the orchestral accompaniment at times. Additionally, he gave the members of the Rosny Children's Choir opportunities to learn more about the role of a professional composer through meeting and working with him, which was no doubt an invaluable experience in

⁵² Kay acknowledges that 'the challenge to suggest the contrast between Indigenous and European cultures in the music language (particularly when we have so little knowledge or understanding of Aboriginal music in pre-European Tasmania) were [sic] demanding of me. Regarding the latter, I made no attempt to demonstrate an Aboriginal music as that would have been quite phony. I chose rather to try to evoke mood and atmosphere in a sympathetic manner using the mechanics of my own music culture' (Kay, survey response, 16 Dec. 2018).

⁵³ Philpott and Humberstone, 'The Glitter Gang,' 25; Don Kay, interview by Caldwell, 1 June 2021.

addition to performing and recording with a professional orchestra and conductor. In these ways, Kay has provided meaningful art music for children's performance, and has supported its performance and dissemination.

Following *There Is an Island*, Kay composed numerous other works that further engage with his understandings and imaginings of Tasmania's history and/or natural environment, most evidently from the 1980s onwards. These include *Hastings Triptych* (1986), *Northward the Strait* (1987), *Piano Trio: The Edge of Remoteness* (1996), and *Conflagration* (2019), as well as a series of works that connect with Tasmanian Aboriginal themes, most notably his Symphony No. 1, 'Tasmania Symphony: The Legend of Moinee,' *Mathinna in the Red Dress* (2007), and *The Bushranger's Lover* (2012). Such works demonstrate Kay's ongoing aims of exploring diverse aspects of Tasmania through music, and raising awareness of the stories of Indigenous Tasmanians. This latter aim was shared by Kay's fellow Tasmanian composer Peter Sculthorpe in his String Quartet No. 14 (1998), and *Quamby* (2000) for orchestra, two pieces that respond to the reported massacring of Tasmanian Aboriginal people by Europeans during colonial times.⁵⁴

While the aforementioned works were no doubt written with the best of intentions, Australia has a long and complex history of non-Indigenous composers writing music centered on Indigenous themes and stories; thus, it is imperative to acknowledge that hurtful and harmful misappropriation of materials has occurred, and still occurs today. While we are highlighting Kay's work as a superb example of music for children's performance, and as a springboard for discussion on a range of topics relating to Tasmania, we are also underlining the datedness of the work and its context within the notion of the 'Doomed Race' theory. Dharug academic, performer, and composer Christopher Sainsbury discusses the use of Indigenous themes in non-Indigenous composition practice in his extended essay 'Ngarra-burria: New Music and the Search for an Australia Sound,' revealing that at least sixty Australian composers who are promoted by the Australian Music Centre are influenced by 'Indigenous themes,' adding that 'these practices are something of a default position for some of our composers.'⁵⁵ Sainsbury uses the terms 'Indigenous referencing' for the use of Indigenous music, culture, themes, or narratives, and 'Indigenous posturing' when used for a body of work.⁵⁶ He details ten examples of works that use Indigenous referencing and Indigenous posturing, and gives two contrasting examples of instances where composers have engaged respectfully with Indigenous peoples, proposing that further remedial work in this area is required.⁵⁷ Sainsbury also offers a range of strategies for the new music sector, including the recommendation that historical works that reference Indigenous music, culture, themes, or narratives be reframed by way of a new foreword, or by retrospectively seeking permissions, which is useful when considering works such as *There Is an Island*.⁵⁸

While Kay's work has yet to receive full attention from scholars, his contributions have been acknowledged publicly through the awarding of various honours. For example, in 1991,

⁵⁴ See Carolyn Philpott, 'Peter Sculthorpe's String Quartet No. 14: A Musical Response to Social Injustice,' *Context: Journal of Music Research* 27/28 (2004): 83–96.

⁵⁵ Christopher Sainsbury, 'Ngarra-burria: New Music and the Search for an Australia Sound,' *Platform Papers: Quarterly Essays from Currency House* 59 (Strawberry Hills, NSW: Currency House, 2019), 20.

⁵⁶ Sainsbury, 'Ngarra-burria,' 20.

⁵⁷ Sainsbury, 'Ngarra-burria,' 25–32.

⁵⁸ Sainsbury, 'Ngarra-burria,' 60–61.

Kay was appointed a Member of the General Division of the Order of Australia for his service to the Arts, and in 2001 he received the Centenary Medal for his outstanding contribution to music, music education, and composing in Tasmania. Kay's oeuvre, over six decades in development, represents a unique and substantial contribution to Australian music. His work has impacted countless young musicians, composers, and audiences, and much of his output continues to be performed and remains highly topical today. The impact of his music for children's performance can also be seen in other works in the genre composed since, especially in works that address Indigenous themes / issues, such as Judith Clingan's *Nganbra: a Canberra canticle* (1988) and Dindy Vaughan's *You Can't Put Out the Flame* (2008). As with Kay's work, many such compositions have not yet been investigated in detail in the literature. However, it is hoped that in time they will receive the scholarly attention they deserve. Such works can contribute in meaningful and impactful ways to the formative education of Australian children in areas of music, Australian history, culture, place, and environment—areas that are arguably just as critical for young performers (and their audiences) to engage with today as they were almost half a century ago when Kay composed *There Is an Island*.

About the Authors

Holly Caldwell is a PhD candidate in musicology at the University of Tasmania's Conservatorium of Music, researching the natural environment and history of lutruwita/Tasmania within the compositions of Don Kay. Her research interests are in the intersection of music and place, as well as the composition of art music for children's performance in Australia.

Carolyn Philpott is Senior Lecturer in Musicology at the University of Tasmania's Conservatorium of Music, where she is currently Chief Investigator on two Australian Research Council grants. She is the author of *Composing Australia: Nostalgia and National Identity in the Music of Malcolm Williamson* (Lyrebird Press, 2018), co-editor of *Performing Ice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), and has published widely on the topics of music, place and the environment, including in *The Musical Quarterly*, *Musicology Australia*, *Popular Music* and *Organised Sound*.

Maria Grenfell is a composer and academic living in Hobart, Tasmania. An Associate Professor at the University of Tasmania, she is widely commissioned by orchestras and chamber ensembles in Australia, New Zealand, and internationally, and has served on the Board of Directors of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.