

INLAND

AND

THE FRENCHMAN'S GARDEN

by Gretchen Miller

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AND  
  
THE FRENCHMAN'S GARDEN

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Thesis submitted in part fulfilment of a  
Master of Arts in Writing  
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## CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP / ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Plate I      Inland





**Plate II      The Frenchman's Garden**

# Abstract

My submission for the degree of Master of Arts in Writing from the University of Technology, Sydney, presents and discusses two radiophonic works made for broadcast on The Listening Room, ABC Classic FM. These are *Inland*, and *The Frenchman's Garden*, both of which explore a listening approach to the Australian landscape.

There are three components to the submission.

The first consists of compact disc recordings of the works. They were written, composed, produced and partially performed by myself and include location recordings I made around the inland regions of Australia, alongside performances by actors and musicians.

*Inland* tells stories of mythic figures moving through a vast, Australian space, suspended in a landscape which is continually shifting and metamorphosing.

*The Frenchman's Garden* is a radio documentary of an eccentric French botanist named Albert De Lestang, who planted a botanic garden in the Gulf Country of far north-western Queensland, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The second component of the submission is a written version of each work. Neither is intended to accompany the listening to the radiophonic version. This version of *The Frenchman's Garden* is a record of a radio production. But the text of *Inland* is intended to be read as a fictional work and a piece of writing in its own right. Thus I have indicated character and documentary names in *The Frenchman's Garden*, but not in *Inland*. Instead variations in tempo and tone are shown through indentations and italics. References to sounds the reader will hear are indicated on the left hand page in both scripts.



The third component of the submission is an essay, *Composing Radio, Writing Sound*, which examines the development of an artistic approach through *Inland* and *The Frenchman's Garden*, in the context of radiophonic practices as they are found in the Audio Arts Department of ABC Radio. The programs were produced in this department, and its working style was a considerable influence upon the productions.

I look at some guiding principles – the radiophonic diary and mimesis and the body – and consider these through the work of four other works made for this department. I also examine the approaches of composers to radio and the 'writing with sound' tradition, and I discuss place and space as they are manifested in the work of contemporary Australian radio makers. In so doing I find a place for my own work within the Australian radiophonic milieu.

# Production Texts

Inland



# Immersion

Rocking double bass.

A woman's voice hums the same tune, softly

Water is lapping

wind

something metal is clanging

two men are running over rocks, through a reverberant tunnel

*If you enter an abandoned wooden house through the back door – you may find yourself transported to another place – a boat, with a man named Robert Ward, who is dreaming of a pipeline through a mountain... and twenty, no thirty, one hundred men and more, dead and naked, clutching at the ground.*

I have oceans of water in my ears

atoms

*hydrogen, oxygen*

swirl inside my eardrums

I am dizzy, my hands are

rooted to the ground but my head is floating, the sky

spinning.

I have lost my sense of balance.

The hammer beats wildly, the cochlear curls and uncurls.

And I am helpless, drawn along by the current, sucked

through tunnels deep underground...



fingers swirl over a drum

wind

a crow calls.

a double bass enters

a vibraphone plays a simple tune

a crows calls

water is slipping past

*In the kitchen of the house you find a thing. A narrow  
cylindrical length of copper, not thicker than a wrist.*

*And when you put it to your ear, you hear...*

The windiest day in the high country...

The lyre birds are kaleidoscopes

Mirror birds, stealing your voice.

Through their cries I can look out and see lavender hills.

Immersed in colour

*floating... diving...*

The pleasure of that sense – limbs and hair awry.

Dusky blues,

flashes of silver surface.

The water is rough and I, am fearless.

double bass chords with vibraphone

*If you hold a small round shell, which you see in the corner of an empty room*

*feel the shell's slip and sound*

*a creak,*

*a poem*

*one water splash.*

*In the house, a piece of sodden, blackened wood.*

wood is knocking, creaking

a double bass slides

water rushes

wood is creaking

It is water on soaking wood

wood soaked with salt

dark wet wood in splinters

angular shin barking dark

sodden fabric

scraping skin

stillness

it is a boat's curve not fitting spine

it is creaking bones

wet hair

wood

salt

rust

water slipping past

a boat lunging forward

leaving

some small birds call

salt is ground between fingers

a woman's voice sings

birds cry



*Take a walk through the corridors of the house and smell the drifts  
of salt gathering over the lintels, the moisture in the air.*

Six months chained on the rusting hulk

*Phoenix...*

180 days

and no relief from the smell of blood and iron.

Fetid water, ankle deep, stinking and still,

turns the feet to something white and coiled and soft.

180 days for the water to make its way through my veins and teach me

how to swim...

salt is ground between fingers

a drum beats, far away

small birds chirp

a man releases his breath

the vibraphone returns

*The house feels like it's rocking. The man whose name is  
Robert Ward has made it from the timbers of a small boat,*

*Aquila...*

*a stolen boat, in which he escaped*

*'a particular death of the soul'*

*on a penal island, far offshore.*

Floating... Sleeping...

hallucinating different kinds of water

– an Inland China, utopia on the dry Columbian plains.

a double bass bow lightly kisses the strings

in a reverberant chamber

pipes are struck and ring out with a long decay

*The house has curved walls and is far from the sea.*

A kiss and nothing more will do it,

A kiss and water will flow

backward

A kiss and water will turn back on parent ocean

Turn away for

A kiss water will pass through stone

A kiss and a hundred thousand men

And water will flow through mountains

To the whispering grasslands

And be lost

fingers swirl over a drum skin

grasses rustle

water swirls and laps

a double bass plays without vibrato

a percussion solo – triangle, woodblocks, bamboo shakers

an intense call of many crickets

a double bass is plucked in unison with the vibraphone and voice humming

*The house floats over grasses*

*Cattle swim by*

*Brumby manes flash on the surface, their hooves create a current, stir it around.*

In the night sky a flicker of water's light, a glimpse of  
something, a thread from the sun...

*hydrogen*

*fusing*

*to helium...*

And a thousand mechanical things, clatter in its force.

I'll be transparent, when I grow old, and flow like water through stone.

*The wooden sided house, built from the sweet curved hull of a boat, holds the man  
who is sleeping, rocked by water.*





# Flight

A bass clarinet slides from its highest note to its lowest, and then settles,  
hovering like a butterfly

Wind, buffeting

Two women breathe throughout

a whistling kite calls

Imagine

this:

Breathe in...

let gravity take your breath out....

Breathe in...

Your tired muscles shaking at this little effort

your chest unwillingly filling like a sail.

Think of drawing air as you would, into your arms' embrace

the corners of your mouth lifting slightly as you take her in.

Cradle her.



Now relax, and let

*it fall out of you*

the air fall from you

But

You can't stop. You must force your chest to rise again

muscles pulling

stiff

bones

apart

air rushing in.

Just so.

a crow calls, fence wire reverberates

buffeting increases

a woman laughs

A vibraphone is bowed in open fifths



Now.

stop.

no dramatic final gestures

no last gulp of air like a drowning woman

no blissful slipping through to euphoria

under soothing water depths

Just a single breath out

and then no more.

*How long can you last?*

without sounds

*It's called*

*dead air*

the fence wire hums

buffeting fades

I painted a picture, as a teenager, which had long been in my mind's eye. There was a woman floating, her arms and legs outstretched, hair and skirt streaming backwards. Flying, not floating – she was flying fast, over the land.

Well, I used to ride a lot, and I used to ride a lot alone over the hills and the mountains and the country around the Manning River and there seemed to be something rather marvelous about riding to the top of the hill and looking out over the landscape. And on a very good day sometimes a stray aeroplane would come a little bit inland and I would see it in the sky. And there was always a magnetic attraction to me of an aeroplane in the sky. It was as if there was a straight line between me and that aeroplane – and I just knew that was what I wanted to do.

The smooth desert sands were lit up golden by moonlight, the sky that particular blue between day and night, and there were faint prickles of stars. It wasn't any good. The plants as I imagined them were brown and red squiggles placed uncertainly on the paper.

But that was the beginning of my flying dreams.

fingers are swirled around a drum

an impatient drumming of fingers

a woman giggles

a double bass slides down the string, vibrating

a double bass note becomes a ferry horn across water

*She*

*Flies*

Airhostesses must weigh less than 53.5 kilograms. They must not chew gum or sleep on duty. Their reading during flights must be restricted to the book of regulations and while it is not essential for them to be teetotallers, alcohol in any form is banned the day before the flight.

*I am trying to vibrate fast enough to make motion invisible.*

Her laughter is always at the wrong moments in conversations

Millicent Maude got her A-class pilots licence in 1927. She said:

'One is not hampered by roads when one is flying ... or policemen...

or anyone saying 'stop'. She drowned in the Greycliff Ferry

accident later that year.

a voice hums, transmitted through fence wire

*Argon*

*krypton*

*xenon*

*helium*

*carbon dioxide*

*nitrogen*

*oxygen*

anima.

soul.

breath.

wind.

a whistling kite calls

a cymbal is bowed

a rattle, shaken

the voice hums in the wire



*I am thinking of  
a bird  
with bones so large  
the spaces inside  
have currents of their own,  
whirling and whirling  
until the creature falls from the sky  
ancient bird bones scattered  
across a thousand miles of desert floor  
(half buried under pale orange sand)*

She leaves a trail of scent, something like a horse's skin; leather and  
sweetness.

wind is whistling through a small crack

a bass clarinet whistles in the same register

salt crystals are ground between fingers

fine glass shatters

Think about the troposphere – seven miles up, a turbulent mess of winds  
and storms and water vapour and clouds...

*When I hold the air in my breath  
my body seems to float  
ever so slightly upwards*

Look up to the stratosphere, 30 miles above, stiller than the  
stillest day, with ice crystals that form, then shatter...

*When I release it I plummet  
to meet the birds which strain to remain under the atmosphere's surface.*

a woman sighs

a military snare drum, in the distance

a bass clarinet imitates a whistling kite

a triangle rings out, once,

twice,

three times

In the mesosphere it is minus 110 degrees centigrade, and fifty miles of silence...

*I sometimes think my own bones will crack and the air seep out*

and above it, in the thermosphere, the molecules move so fast that the temperature would be 3,000 degrees, if the air's density were only the same as it is on the surface.

*I am catching secret waves of energy from trees, water and small country towns*

Here is the Aurora Australis

Here the molecules never collide

Here are particles charged by the sun.

a bowed cymbal becomes

an aeroplane, disappearing

flames crackle, faintly

In 1939 Mrs Lores Bonney's plane, *My Little Ship*, was destroyed by fire in its hangar. By then she had made several record flights to other lands, none of which were recognised.

*There's a dead horse  
a thousand feet below  
its scent making marestails  
through the sky  
With putrid vapours  
that drift across the sands*

...

a double bass plucks and scrapes

a bass clarinetist breathes through his reed

a woman laughs

METEOROLOGICAL REPORT AS HEARD OVER CB RADIO



Nancy Lyle got her licence in 1929. She bought a Hornet Moth and dropped flour bombs on Melbourne to prove how badly the city was defended.

Damper could easily be made with a little flour, water from the clouds, and the heat of friction as it fell through the air.

*A woman's hairclip  
a delicate curve  
with steel teeth  
goes tumbling down  
and lands like bomb twisted metal*

Gertrude McKenzie had a red Moth Minor she called MOBA – My Own Bloody Aircraft.

METEOROLOGICAL REPORT

wind buffeting

Fragment of METEOROLOGICAL REPORT

Wind whistles through a small crack

CB RADIO NOISE

a bass clarinet begins a pitch slide

Her body lies broken

*fractured rib cages*

*cracked bones*

air leaking from her, turning her to stone.

*This is a bubble with no sound*

*I am breathing like a fish*

*floating through the sky*

*There are invisible currents*

*nothing here is as it seems*

a double bass and a bass clarinet play slow open fifth chords

a woman breathes,

ecstatic

She turns her craft around  
looks the earth's curve in the eye  
dips the nose towards the horizon  
holds it  
for one breath

straightens and flies towards the sun

she presses down hard on the  
joystick  
lurches earthwards  
feels her stomach flip  
sees the world like the head of a pin  
wrenches the joystick up.

She stops shaking  
She touches it once more  
caresses the leather

the fence wire hums and moans

wind buffets

a vibraphone bows open fifths, in the far off distance

and forces it downwards

with gravity

against her instinct

She feels the wings start to vibrate

She takes the howl of distressed fibreglass

into her body

the moisture forced from her eyes

the air from her chest

muscles from bone

(She's flying straight at the ground).





Stone

A descent into the ground on a mechanical lift

faint voices call...

Righto....

Righto....

RIGHTO!

a bass clarinet without vibrato

a double bass with a fragment of a windless moaning

The building...

of fixation.

*He learnt about opal at his father's knee. He learned to name their slippery colours,  
their classes, their prices...*

low register double bass

fragmented, hesitant bass clarinet

a double bass and a bass clarinet breathe and tap on wood

And when I was very young we had a house, dad built a house on Bellevue Hill. He used to go to the opal fields and bring the rough opal back and we used to clean it up and grade it and so on and in the school holidays I used to help him.

I used to make up 140 ounce boxes – weigh it up, wrap it all up and send it to Ceylon, India, at 7 pence an ounce. So I learnt from those early days – I learnt from my father's knee, virtually speaking.

And then after school I went to the Airforce. I was there for four and a half years and I came back from the Airforce a bit of a scatterbrain, here today gone tomorrow – I wanted to go out and enjoy myself. And dad got a bit angry with me and he said: 'Son go overseas and learn to stand on your own two feet. I'll give you some opal and you go to America you sell opal for me in America.' Ok dad, I said, what do I do? 'You find out!'

Where do I get a passport? 'You find out!' Ohhh, ahhh, I found out how to get a passport, and there was no shipping in those days in 1946 – the war had just finished. Eventually I got on a war bride ship – the Marine Falcon.

a lyrical tune of double bass

a bass clarinet with multiphonics

bass clarinet key clicks, reverberant

Stones pass through hands

Bones of Afghans

Bullet holes

knives...

*sweet silver traces*

*fine as a line of blood.*

A savage-eyed cripple

drags himself along the earth on his elbows.

There are opals in his eyes.

*Red, flame, orange, green gold, firestone, pinpoint...*

the suck of air through a large pipe

a sudden rush of dirt

a bass clarinet

and sand is poured



The Black Prince, also known as the Harlequin Prince – 1915.

Dug up at Lightning Ridge by Brown and Irwin and bought by Ernie Sherman as part of a set of three, including the Pride of Australia and the Empress. Sold in England and disappeared for several years.

Reappeared in 1947 when it was bought by the director of the New York Museum of Natural History, Dr Frederick Pough, from an American GI who had hoped to make his fortune selling it to the Du Ponts – a famous opal collecting family. £2,000 the set, \$US1,500, the stone.

*catacombs and whisky stills...*

His body's stiff with alcohol – every cell the texture of a sea creature

Which moves by means of elaborate tensions and release

But still, through a trick of fate

Is imprisoned by rock



*He is dirty  
with the debris of  
fractured rib cages,  
others' cracked bones.  
He is a fighter.*

*Shin cracker, potch, opal dirt, common opal, mug stones ...*

*you can leave, but you will come back.*

rocks are thrown across a vast, windy space

A windfall,  
air turned to glassy rock  
pelican blood,  
Flaming coals from the Gidgee tree,  
sunk through earth strata  
to settle in seams and nobbys

*they don't own the stones, the stones own them.*

a double bass is tapped

a bass clarinetist breathes through his reed

rocks are being thrown

Pride of Australia – 1915.

A double sided gem in its natural shape had two distinct and different colour and pattern bars – a blaze of red, orange and peacock green.

Sold by Ernie Sherman to Percy Marks, whose son Rolf Marks sold it to Dr Hubert Eaton, the president of the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Los Angeles, in the early 1950s. Stolen from there some years later and not seen since. £1,400 pounds, £6,000, £10,000, \$US50,000, stolen.

Thousands of pounds pass through his hands

But his brow's sweating and his pockets are full of worthless pebbles

*fire, peacock, cherry, blue-bottle, serpentine, beer-bottle, crockery, carnelian...*

sinuous melodic lines on a double bass and a bass clarinet

a man breathes

a woman breathes

picking at earth, underground

earth is falling



*overnight*

ratters slide down mineshafts

A line of shimmering silk

disappears

*overnight.*

*Or*

A stone can gleam with a thousand refractions

and by morning shatter to worthlessness.

But

says his mate Tom

You know, your luck's changed

And tomorrow he finds another thread

a seamstress has left lying,

a fault, which leads as a matter of course to a sweet

flirtation in the dirt, a frowning girl with a resentful

eye, taking his fancy and driving him mad with

a disease cured only by alcohol.

a woman's voice is heard singing, in a tunnel, but from a long way away

water is dripping nearby

A windlass moans in the distance and mixes with the woman's voice

I know the history of the Pandora, but my dad didn't have an opportunity to buy it because he was not at Lightning Ridge at the time. He saw it afterwards of course. I think it was Prosper Rawson, a Canadian guy, he tried to buy it one time. He was known as the man with a harp. He loved opals and he had opals inlaid all around his harp and in England he had this exhibition like an opal cave, and he had opals stuck around it and at the back of the cave he sat there and played the harp. Prosper Rawson, the man with the harp – he tried to buy it at one time, whether he bought it I can't remember what the story was, but it's just disappeared again, we lost track of it some time ago.

Tom thinks of desert drift  
and flesh rotting the only place it can  
– the coolness of an abandoned mine shaft

*bodies litter the labyrinths...*

a bass clarinet imitates the windlass

a double bass sighs on the strings

a windlass is slowing down

Even so the cripple is blessed by memory  
and on good days,  
with foresight.

*and he remembers*

lying in the stinking dirt  
eyes aching, opal black  
deep in the crevices of his face  
lips reddened from thirst

*despite one last week on the piss*

*floaters, angel stone, toe dirt, dog stone...*

a bass clarinet plays a sliding melody

a double bass plays an ostinato

He remembers loss

He remembers feeling the loss of his senses, climbing from his feet

to his swollen knees,

and settling in the cavern of his vast and angry chest...

weighing there, heavily.

he remembers crazy-paving the street with the marks his dragging boots left

in the dust

*he remembers a chicken bone*

thrown by a friend

The longing

for deep, dark, hand-hewn tunnels

And the nurse whose eyes said

Not only will you never walk again

but you'll die sure enough

before this summer's through.

His anger

gives rise to all sorts of things...

a woman sighs, far away

a windlass has slowed right down

water is dripping

a knife scrapes across stone

a bass clarinet plays a slow, simple melody



*Down below, in a million years of timelessness*

*A submarine dancer*

*has grown butterfly wings*

*20 foot of vertebrae from tail to head*

*arched around a sea*

*of warm, shallow rock*

*a neck that curves in supplication,*

*an erotic predator,*

*heavily fleshed.*

there are crickets chirping loudly

in the background water is splashed

Eastern European accents are murmuring

a double bass and a bass clarinet are crickets

So the cripple drags himself to the midst of the Narran Lakes

The opals

*stars and sun*

have led him to the cure.

Points of fire massed on swelling, senseless flesh

Prehistoric insects to suck with neutral fury, the life back into his veins.

Actually, it's not uncommon to find opalised shells and opalised bone. It's really strange how it happens. Some say the carapace changed to opal, other people say the shells have disintegrated and left a cavity and the liquid opal fills up the cavity, but which is right we don't really know.

water trickles away

And then

says Tom

He is down there again for one last find.

He's speaking of dying

not here

but up there, outside,

somewhere,

north

a double bass plays the same simple melody

But one drink sodden sleep  
memory quietly  
tells him  
of the butterfly creature  
now made stone...

*Plesiosaurus*

*Her under water flight's curtailed by falling words.*

He will find her the day after tomorrow

And so he does.

far away, a woman breathes outwards

men are talking from away down a tunnel

a woman is singing, near to the men

water is dripping, melodically

a knife is scraping across stone

a single wind of the windlass echoes across a barren landscape



The Pandora – 1928.

Mined on Bald Hill by Jock McNicol it sprang from a tossed coin and a reckless dig, and was seven hundred carats worth of the fossilised blade bone of a plesiosaurus. Black with a line of bright red, a peacock tail at one end. An opal dealer offered McNichol ten £100 notes and a new Chevrolet for the Pandora, but McNichol said the offer was ‘an insult to a man’s intelligence.’

£800, £1,750, £2,000, £1,500, disappeared.

The cripple sets her free to stretch her neck again  
To reach up for a second, to nibble a coiled ammonite  
which had frozen beside her.  
then,

*Man,*

*Plesiosaurus,*

*Ammonite.*

*All grow wings and glow with refracted light.*

earth is poured

crows call

wind

a bass clarinet plays the same simple melody

a single windlass moan

stones are thrown across a windy space

tapping on an iron water tank

a wind comes up

a double bass and a bass clarinet intertwine at close intervals

But she can't bear the weight of air after rock  
and in the space of a second  
she falls and falls  
and he hasn't the will to fly  
or to think of heading north.

*Her value increased exponentially. The buyers, with slippery tongues, talked the  
freakish opal up, but talked her down again.*

*agate, beige, wax, magpie potch, grey, resin, dirty white, silica, slurry  
...harlequin, topaz, hyacinth, sandspotted, pinfire, milky, flower, fish scale...*

*black.*



# Heat

a person is walking past through dry grasses

a woman is humming, gently

a cymbal is tapped softly

a woodblock, tapped

the voice is humming, a triangle is tapped three times

a whistling kite calls

the woman hums, a woodblock is tapped seven times

walking through long grasses

a military rhythm on snare drum

a bass clarinet plays an English folk tune:

'Oh soldier, soldier will you marry me...'

They used to walk down from a place called Iltur and from Fregon they used to walk down to Ooldea, and from Mimili, they used to walk from there in the old days.

From the north west to Ooldea

From Ooldea to the north west

Ooldea to Tarcoola, Anna Creek, Maree

From Yalata to Coober Pedy

Yalata to Cundeelee

Ooldea to Watson

Coober Pedy to Lake Phillipson, Panthanne, Tietkens Wells.

From Yalata to Coober Pedy, Granite Downs, Mabel Creek.

From Granite Downs, Mabel Creek, Coober Pedy to Yalata.

*Making tracks.*





You must wait

*two minutes*

wait

*five minutes*

wait

*24,000 years*

Before you kick up the dust.

Ride in the tray of a ute

Wait.

water is swirling,

walking continues

A woman's voice hums

water dries out,

turns to fire...

children playing

Ooldea to Tarcoola, Anna Creek, Maree

a bass clarinet plays a short, atonal melody

The fire turns to

earth being poured

If you  
fling particles into the air  
if you are a child playing  
if your tiny lungs breathe so fast  
you pick up more Dose per Unit Intake  
than a grown man

if you put your thin and dusty foot  
within 100 kilometres of the Taranaki

A woman's voice hums

Kampurara, wirinywiriny, tawarl tawarl, they're in that same family.

parka parka, ngantja, wangunu, wakati, kaldu kaldu, kunakanti.

*bush raisins, mulga, mistletoe, woolybutt, seeds for damper*

put your hand into a basket of fine particles and scatter them to the left  
to the right.

From Yalata to Coober Pedy

Yalata to Cundeelee

A bass clarinet plays a melody of open fifths

a fence wire hums, the earth pouring stops

a cymbal is bowed, once

twice

three times



If you...

drop a pinch of sand onto a drum

If a feather plume

a trace of the sun

floats your way

If wild horses should toss the earth with sharp little hooves...

Kaltu kaltu, kunakanti, puya, kupata, wangunu, yultukun, kalinykalinypa.

north

north west

north east

a vibraphone plays a simple melody

a triangle is struck

a woman's voice hums

a cymbal is bowed

woodblocks

If a flash of light should consume  
The fin bone of an ancient creature

*Plesiosaurus*

a woman's twisted hairclip  
the hull of an abandoned boat

Ooldea to Watson

A road.  
A patch of clarity.  
A clearing.

kalaya, kalaya

*Emu*

leaves are rustling

a cymbal is bowed, softly

the leaves transform to fire

a bowed cymbal

woodblock, triangle

Then there's punti, mulga, it's very popular one ...the mulga grows anywhere – its very good wood for fire, and, yeah, and for cooking, it's good wood for cooking. And they treat the fire – one fire for warmth, to make yourself warm, then there's another fire they use for cooking, to cook food, but like I suppose a kitchen and a living area, something like that. And to have a wind break, you can use branches from the mulga to stop the wind, and sleep with a little fire going, when you go camping, and in old days on a cold night they'll have three fires going – fires like that on the side, windbreak here, fire there and the fire near your feet, and sleep that way.

woodblocks

bowed cymbal

Pick up a souvenir – a piece of wire, a rusty steel plate  
a scrap of lead, of yellowed plastic, a piece of metal  
that floats in your hand.

puti, puti, karukaru, milpali, you know, apu, karukaru, pila, milpali, pila,  
karukaru, ngintakas, girbungirbun, minytjinka, minytjinka, doaldoal,  
wirinywiriny, kumpurara, yankunytjatjara, jumajatjara, mmm, milpali,  
milpali, kalaya, milpali, ngintaka, waru, wapar or tjukurpa, wapa,  
waruinma, waru, waru, yeah, ngintaka, yeah, maku, apu and kupata

*thickly timbered land, watercourse, sand goannas, spinifex country, perenti,  
wildflowers, bush fruits, low bushes, fire, perenti, emu, bush plums*

a bell tree is struck, once for each naming of an element

a woman's voice hums gently



*hydrogen*

*strontium 90*

Cooper Pedy to Lake Phillipson Panthanne, Tietkens Wells.

*plutonium 239*

*americium*

*cobalt 60*

*europium 152*

*europium 155*

*caesium 137*

a military drumming

a woman sings softly

'Oh soldier soldier will you marry me...'

a knife is ground on stone

three cymbals, bowed

a woman's voice hums

sticky paper at strategic points

a tower

a flash of light

stars seen through the bones of your hands

flesh gone

stars shining through

A ceremony

An explosion

A manipulation

A lie across cultures

Coober Pedy to Lake, Phillipson, Panthanne, Tietkens Wells

From Yalata to Coober Pedy, Granite Downs, Mabel Creek

a bass clarinet plays a melody,

a drum beats, softly

a fence wire hums softly in the wind

a rattle is shaken in circles

a drum beats

A theodolite

waru

*fire*

two hydrogen atoms becoming helium

a photosphere

a chromosphere

a corona

waru-inma

*fire story*

spicules, threads, splinters of heat

a woman's voice hums

a cymbal is bowed unevenly

pulsars click

wire clangs and hums

a cymbal sings out and reverberates

from Granite Downs, Mabel Creek, Coober Pedy to Yalata

a ball of gas that spins unevenly

the poles turning slowly

the equator hurtling round

this star

sounds

Five minute sound waves

The fundamental tone of the sun.

a woman's voice hums

a man walks through grasses

wire hums in the wind

apostle birds are chattering

a bass clarinet plays multiphonics

a wire is scraped

a cymbal, bowed.



From the north west to Ooldea

From Ooldea to the north west

Kurkunyjungu, it like a honey, you can see it towards the sun, on a sunny afternoon, you can see it shining on the branches of the mulga and that, you can see this honey thing running down and we had that last two weeks, there was plenty – and the birds love it, and we were there too...

Walking into the sun – a woman, a man, two children, two dogs.



# The Frenchman's Garden



# Voices

- ALBERT                      Albert De Lestang, an eccentric French botanist who developed a botanic garden in the Gulf country of north-western Queensland, from the 1920s to 1952. The letters are real and from a collection maintained by Barry Kubala. The remainder is fiction.
- BARRY                      Barry Kubala, owner of Adel's Grove Campground, on the site of Albert De Lestang's garden.
- MAUDE                      Maude Foreshaw, long term resident of the Gulf country, knew Albert De Lestang as a child.
- JOYCE                      Joyce Wright, now living in Sydney, spent several of her teenage years with her mother and sister tending De Lestang's home and garden, in the early 1930s.
- OTHER VOICES              The voice of the garden  
The narrator.

A wire brush slides around a steel drum

botanic names are whispered

leaves rustle

birds are calling in a reverberant space

a creek murmurs

a fax is sent

# I

MAUDE

He went on his own. He came through on the mail. They gave him a cup of tea and something to eat, and he kept going.

*Charters Towers Cemetery 2, Section 49, Grave: 12557.*

*Name: Albert De Lestang Died: 18/11/1959 Age: 75 Minister: Father Smith.*

Thank you for your email to Dr Flather about Albert De Lestang, which I am now investigating with the university archivist. We will be in touch again shortly.

MAUDE

The first time I knew he was there Henry Stirling came out to our camp on Lawn Hills. I was only a kid then. He had two saddlebags filled up with oranges... from the Frenchman's garden. They were good.

the creek murmurs on

walking on rocks and through grasses

the walking fades away



BARRY

He had quite an extensive botanical garden and he was into not only experimenting with trees or bushes of produce value but also of ornamental value and perhaps even some timber types. And he was into hybridisation of various species etcetera so it would have been a big loss to him, to have lost his records.

One story that kept cropping up from different sources was that he used to fly a flag, and that flag flew over his shop, I don't know if it was the tricolour or what it was, but when that flag was flying it meant that he was down in the Grove part working and come hell or high water you couldn't encourage him to come up and sell you anything from his shop, that was just a no no...

a wire brush slides around a steel drum

a pigeon calls across a gorge

a fence wire rattles

a woman's voice is heard through the wire

*When you leave, your eyes are drawn behind you, and you crane your neck, you are hungry for a last taste, you want to take it inside you, bring it with you. The sun is shifting and you look at each rock, here it glows bright, there the sun throws minute shadows, darknesses; it is cast out of the light. You look at each pebble and each angle of the range as you fly through, too fast, too fast. And you start to panic (because you haven't been down to the creek today, you've been planting up on the hill), and there has been no time, and you are fishing for an image to call out to, goodbye.*

*You are crying out goodbye but already as you hit the plains you are forgetting and all that remains is a fleeting feeling of red and lush, lush green. An unbidden memory of the first time you smelt the water, the warmth, the limey smell that stole up on you when you first descended into the gorge. That first faint smell, a stroke, a nudge, nothing more, and then you are overcome with the magnitude of the loss, your whole emotion, connection, evaporating – it is as if you are already dead and the sun has been put out and all that green, that red, has vanished.*

A vibraphone is struck, bell-like

birds call across a gorge

a rhythmic suck and clang of something mechanical...

Without the hall, and close upon the gate,  
A goodly orchard-ground was situate,  
Of near ten acres; about which was led  
A lofty quickset. In it flourished  
High and broad fruit trees, that pomegranates bore,  
Sweet figs, pears, olives; and a number more  
Most useful plants did there produce their store,  
Whose fruits the hardest winter could not kill,  
Nor hottest summer wither. There was still  
Fruit in his proper season all the year.  
Sweet Zephyr breath'd upon them blasts that were  
Of varied tempers. These he made to bear  
Ripe fruits, these blossoms. Pear grew after pear,  
Apple succeeded apple, grape the grape,  
Fig after fig came; time made never rape  
Of any dainty there.

(from Chapman's *Homer*)

JOYCE

He started there about 1930 and he was just getting the place organised.  
He built all the house, which was like a house I've never seen before. He  
got saplings about that big, you know, from the trees and he tore all the  
tea tree bark off the trees and the roof was tea tree bark, wired down,

a fence wire is humming

the mechanical suck, clang continues...

and you could see through the slats and, you know, it was an earthen floor...

BARRY

One story was that some miners or some ringers in the area and I haven't sorted out which because the story appears from a couple of different places with different characters, were sort of walking through to Camooweal to pick up their next round of work or whatever, and old De Lestang wouldn't sell them any gear because his flag was flying. So they ended up tying him to one of the trees there on the lawn, and they took what they wanted and carried on, and the mailman came through a couple of days later and untied him.

JOYCE

He was sort of getting the garden going then, but it was all by hand and he had little wells from the creek and then he had these ditches, irrigation channels that he put in, and he'd bail the water out and let the water run along to the vegetables. But there wasn't a lot there, when we were there...

BARRY

He'd never accept paper money, he liked the jingle of coin and he used to bury that in four gallon kerosene tins around the property...

leaves are rustling

a fly buzzes



Albert De Lestang

Trader, naturalist.

Prospector and scientific

Collector of

Butterflies, botanical

Zoological and

Oological specimens.

Somewhere.

Post office

Burketown.

a groan of wet fingers across a drum skin

leaves are rustling in the breeze

water slips past

water is slipping over a boat's prow

leaves are rustling, louder

A stick slides harshly across a drum skin

ALBERT

*Here, somewhere...*

*is dust*

*sweeter than sea water*

*finer than fishmeal*

*and when the waves and waves of grasses roll*

*the desert is nothing like the ocean*

*but tresses of hair*

*slipsliding over skin*

*with proper pause*

*and ebb and flowing*

*to the distant palest ranges*

*where something is hidden*

*a waterless secret*

*that fills each thing*

*– driest rock, sharpest grass, stunted tree*

*– and makes it*

*reach towards me*

*and drag me*

*in.*

a box of tinned food is unpacked

MAUDE

He didn't go anywhere. He just stayed on his garden most of the time. But when he went out, he went out on the mail truck, that goes from Burketown to Camooweal. He must have went to Camooweal and from there down to Charters Towers. He did end up in the old people's home in Charters Towers and we heard a few months later he'd died. He would do too, I reckon they should have left him there, I mean even the police shouldn't be allowed to say you've got to go into a home if you don't want to... it's enough to kill anybody, isn't it, when they're old and they've lived out there for a fair part of their lives...

JOYCE

He was short, and he had a fairly square face and he had a, not a mole, but some little growth there, and he had this terrible accent you could cut with a knife... He had brown eyes, I'm not sure about that. And he was short and thick. After he had his bath at night he'd change into white pants – he had white pants and a small check sort of shirt, but he used to work in not jeans but something like – jeans weren't in then – drill, navy blue. And he had a flannel on all the time, and he had braces to keep his pants up, and he had big boots, you know, those big boots...

a pen is scratching across paper...

water is slipping across a boat's prow

ALBERT

Dear Mr Trickett,

Your letter of 20/9/45, airmailed at 7.15pm on that date, came to hand last night, six weeks and one day on the way. At this fast rate of air traveling I am afraid lily tubers would perish on the way...

*she ...*

Now about that virgin-garbed beautiful nymph you desire.

*is there...*

Beware of her fascinating beauty.

*in the trees...*

I will see what can be done about luring the beauty out of her watery home or robbing her babies, seeds, to be airmailed to you, if the fare is within my purse. Will try to get in touch with the blacks there and get them to collect the seeds if available; also will inquire from the roving blacks if white lilies are seen in other parts. Here only the blue *N. gigantea* occurs.

With kindest regards,

Albert de Lestang.





BARRY

You see in the very early years when he was there, there was another garden further over on Louie creek, a place called the Chinaman's Garden, run by a bloke called Sam Ah Bow. And he, Sam Ah Bow, had married into the Waangi tribal system, so there was not only a Chinese small community over there, but there was also an Aboriginal camp there, and a white fellas camp over on Louie creek, on the same road. But obviously when you read the likes of that white water lily article there, obviously he had rapport with the Aborigines there who were searching out seeds or bulbs of that plant for him, and probably other things as well.

a steel drum sounds like water dripping

ALBERT

*earth*

*grinds through my veins*

*and through my finger tips*

*dust to earth*

*is turned*

*and turned again.*

*When earth cracks open*

*my heart cracks too*

*chambers split*

*blood dries black*

*muscle turns to withered leather.*

*So*

*I take care*

*to keep the black soil*

*flowing*

*and my fingertips*

*to the ground.*

apostle birds are chirruping, arguing...

a wind whispers across a plain

a fence wire rattles

wet fingers groan across a drum skin

a few notes of a vibraphone ring out

JOYCE

He had good rapport with the blacks, the blacks used to call him Abbey,  
Abbey, you know...

Then there was a Chinaman that lived six miles away, and we went up there  
and got a goat and brought it back and so we had fresh milk.

MAUDE

He had goats there, for milk and meat and we had goats too, at Riversleigh.  
Everyone had goats then, for milk, and meat. The biggest problem was  
trying to keep them home. Every time the south wind blows the goats walk  
into it...

Do you want to show me your garden? I'd love to see it...

a few notes of a vibraphone – bell-like

wet fingers groan across a drum skin

## II

*The man moves slowly  
He is heavy set and his face is closed.  
he is holding...  
a spade by his side,  
to his chest, a small stick of green;  
and a dream.  
In his head, he sees only this:  
Four strong fences,  
to keep the roving cattle out,  
and on the fifth side,  
a garden spills  
into the creek  
a garden is flowing down a  
wide, shallow valley,  
cool winter sun flicking the grasses  
an insect hum  
and trees.*





*Thousands of trees, each eternally ripe with fruits,  
each speaking to him of paradise  
each holding Eden in its veins  
and the sum total of those trees  
being god  
and he,  
knowing all their names,  
is Adam before the fall.*

a flicking of pages in a file

MAUDE

We had a grape fruit tree and it was beautiful but the white ants ate it...

It doesn't take long for the country to take over the land again, not long at all...

So you can imagine what happened at the Frenchman's place after he left with nobody looking after it.

Unfortunately I have drawn a blank on all fronts. There are no records in the archive of anyone of that name attending the University at that time.

an insect is chewing at something

birds call, away in the gorge

a man is walking through a garden...

ALBERT

24 March, 1939.

Dear Mr White,

Acknowledging the receipt of your letter January 6<sup>th</sup> just to hand by our first mail since December 30<sup>th</sup>, over 12 weeks of isolation. Last year you requested that I send you a list of the introduced plants in these gardens. I am taking the liberty of posting it now direct to you in England. I also attach a synopsis of the cultivated plants in the lower produce gardens; in it I omitted to mention the Olives – all attempts to establish them on the alluvial have failed. Remembering the Olive groves of Spain and of the South of France always found on the hillside, I do not wonder at my failure to establish them on river flats here.

I trust you are finding your new surroundings pleasant ones and enjoy your stay at the Royal Gardens. I have pleasant recollections of these most beautiful and great of all botanic gardens elsewhere. I spent many happy hours of my school days trying to learn a little of botany.

As this is being typed rain appears to set in. So, probably, it will be a long time before it reaches you.

With best wishes and kind regards,

Albert De Lestang.

he stops to inspect a plant

seeds are poured from hand to hand

*My words to you,  
dear Monsieur,  
my words...  
read them and you will  
smell my world...  
the sweetest water,  
earth deep and cool  
and seeds in rows on shelves;  
wattle seeds which pour like Eastern silk through your hands;  
seeds which rattle like bones in a creek's curve –  
pandanus fruit.  
They promise me time.  
And outside  
are growing the largest mangos you ever saw  
on trees that would keep you dry  
in wet season's deluge  
should you suddenly need  
to take  
shelter.*

Water is trickling past



*I am busy,  
dear Monsieur,  
from dawn to midday siesta  
and into dusk.  
And then at night  
I write  
to men like you  
and try to send you  
little pieces of my garden.*

water trickles and drips from stone

a steel drum sounds fluid...

*Here is water*  
*here is water dripping through rock*  
*here is water taking its time*  
*taking 26 million years*  
*water dripping over bone*  
*water capricious*  
*leaving its trace*  
*white and salt crisp*  
*smoother than ceramic.*

*And here is water running out of earth*  
*flowing quickly*  
*out and through rock*  
*water dancing over cliff edge.*

*Here is water channeled*  
*under control.*

*Water drowning in the wet*  
*water tearing up trees and rushing away earth*

*water which flings the wilderness*  
*straight into the garden.*

girls are laughing, swinging on a metal gate...

shhhhhh.....

something is scratching at the floor

frogs and crickets are chirruping

### III

Dear Ms Miller, The Paris Gendarmerie are unable to help you. I have forwarded your request to the Services Historiques, Minister pour L'Interior, Paris.

JOYCE

The letters that he used to write to mum ... he used to write to me in Camooweal too. He typed – he had a funny finger, he'd got a splinter in it and it went funny – but he used to sit there till 11 or 12 o'clock at night in his little office, and type. You'd hear him, tap tap tap tap... He'd be writing I think all about these plants and things.

It wasn't only in Australia that he wrote, he used to write 'cause he started us on stamp collecting too, and I thought that was quite good. But he used to write overseas, to all these people over there, botanists, and I think he knew quite a lot. But to me he didn't have any friends, not a single friend.

two girls burst into laughter

the gate squeals

I remember once he wanted me to write to this girl in Canada...

And I said 'what will I say?'. And he started off. 'I am a well developed bush girl...' Mum said to me, 'you're not sending THAT.'

I can still remember him saying 'develop-ed', 'develop-ed' that's it you see, that's how he mispronounced it. ...often he'd sort of help you and it would be sort of... to us it was sexy at that time, it wasn't the thing that you did then.

a military beat is played on a soft drum



## IV

BARRY

In fact there was a guy came through a lot of years ago, maybe six, eight years ago now, who was the secretary to Mr. C.T. White, the government botanist of the day. And this old gentleman remembers quite vividly corresponding regularly with De Lestang.

ALBERT

*I had a fiancée*

*look, a ring*

*a love*

*a rustle of dresses and later*

*laughter.*

*pleasure in deception and getting away with it.*

*I don't miss her now*

*I'm telling you this*

*so you know*

*so you remember*

a wire is humming

*so you never forget that*

*I was loved.*

*look, a ring, a love.*

*Stay here.*

*This could be yours.*

*have it.*

*(so you remember, so you never forget)*

a bass clarinet is crickets

a rustling of fabric

a man is digging in earth

JOYCE

He had to get out of France for some reason...

He did tell us that he was going to become engaged to a girl there and the police were after him and she hid him in her wardrobe and they couldn't find him. That's what I remember as a child – of course to me it was all a lovely story.

*In the garden*

*inside the fence*

*a short fat man*

*sweating*

*dancing with the termites*

*digging furiously*

*muttering...*

a man, digging

ALBERT

Dear sir,

here are termites.

Oranges, mandarins, lemons, limes, grapefruit, limequat cumquat,

Custard apples, Granny Smith

hybrid pears, all varieties.

Termites.

Japanese plums...

*oh, I knew a girl with Japanese plum eyes*

nectarines and Chinese peaches,

Termites

pecan nuts and almonds

*an almond-skinned girl*

figs and passionfruit,

and

termites.

JOYCE

That was his castle there, his territory. And they wanted it, they didn't want him to be there, the people around, 'cause they hated him. And he was terrified... well he wasn't terrified but he had a thing about the police. He said the police would get him out quick and lively, if they could.

a rhythmic suck and clang of something mechanical

a fax machine beeps.



Albert has disappeared from French police records

Albert is nowhere to be found

Albert is nervous of men in uniform

Albert has a past and it's

locked in a trunk.

Albert hid in his fiancée's skirts

which rustled in the cupboard

he fingered them surreptitiously

and nearly giggled as the

gendarmerie pushed through the door

Albert is on the run

But he's not talking about it.

a creek is murmuring

bamboo pipes tonkle

JOYCE

He was very upset. Mum and Mavis and I went over the other side of the creek to where the blacks were, and we saw down in the creek, a skeleton. And, you know, mum was feeling all over it, to feel which bone was which and we went back and we said we saw a skeleton there, in the creek, near the blacks' camp, and he was very cross about it.... And there was a complete skeleton in the water. He said, oh we were mad, there was no skeleton there. He said, 'no, you didn't see it'. We went back and we could never find the skeleton again.

And I can still remember mum, feeling all the bones, knowing where they were. ...Oh, yes, I remember that as plain as can be, and that's always puzzled me, where did that skeleton come from, and where did it go?

a whispering of botanic names of plants in a garden

a wire brush is scraped across a steel drum

## V

Paris on the 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1998.

Dear Madam,

The Parisian Prefecture de Police has just given me your letter concerning a certain Albert de Lestang. And today an official told me that the research would be long.

I must say how deep was my surprise to learn this story. At first glance it seems to have nothing to do with my family, despite the fact that I could have been honoured to be related to such a brilliant figure (but less in certain aspects of his life).

Unfortunately nobody around me or in the family books has told us of this individual. But nothing must be excluded because at those times the honor of the families was a very important value. I will try to find more clues about this fact in order to help you.

Best Regards,

Yours truly,

M. d L-P.

a double bass is crickets,

fingers caress a drum's skin

ALBERT

*Air visits me in my sleep*

*soft*

*wattle*

*scent*

*makes me think of her*

*but the air now is drier than I remember in 30 years*

*and scorches my heavy, begging, lungs*

*and makes my long-gone girls cry for water in their sleep.*

*My trees cry for water too*

*an unutterable call*

*their silver leaves turn brown around the edges*

*and drop without warning*

*pale and dulled by hot dust.*

*This is air I cannot breath*

*this is wind which brings no rain*

*and so now*

*I am writing to you*

*the words which will take so long to reach you*

a small fire fades in and out of earshot

a boat is rowed across a creek



*I must speak  
of my plants which are parched and dying  
of my girls who have left  
of this air which takes even my words away.*

#### BARRY

There's about a dozen different exotics. There's not only African but there's South American stuff there, there's one growing just behind the shop, behind our little dining room sort of area there, a Nicaraguan cocoa, further over near the tank stand there's one from tropical America which is the henna bush, the one they take the hair dye from.

You've seen the mango trees that are there of course. He had something like 28 different varieties of mangos so I believe and there's 15 or so trees there now, and they're all different when they do fruit.

the fire fades up

botanic names of plants in a garden are whispered

MAUDE

And there's been two fires there, there's not much left of the original garden really. I think there's a lemon tree, that's all that's left of his fruit trees. And he used to graft trees, and send them all over the world.

JOYCE

I think that was sort of a home for him, and he wanted to make a settlement, and I really think he wanted someone to leave the place to. He wanted an heir to the place because I know, not long after I was married there was a piece, on the bottom of *The Herald*, I can still see it; he wanted some young people, a young couple to go and live up there. *How did you know?* Well, I think he spoke about that.

the names fade away

fingers caress a drum's skin

a bass clarinet is insect-like

the fire grows louder

ALBERT

*Dear Sir,*

*I had another dream...*

*And in this one my trees were covered with strangling creepers*

*When I tore them away the trees were*

*skeletal and amongst the bones*

*soft white insects crawled and crept*

*to hide away from the light.*

*the river had dried up*

*a thick mud sat where cool green water had raced*

*the ground was barren underfoot,*

*blackened and charred*

*the soil cracked and full of rocks*

*Eden.*

*burned.*

and fades away

the flames fade up, and away

*I tore my hair and shouted for the girls to come  
but no-one heard me  
and no-one wanted to come here.  
I dreamed and struggled to wake  
and ran outside in a sweat  
to tear the flag down.*

BARRY

That's a *Cassia*, *Cassia siamea*. Some of them have gone downstream,  
but they're not fire tolerant and occasionally we get fires that'll go right  
down that creek so that tends to clean them, up keep them controlled.

wet fingers groan across a drum

a fence wire hums in the wind...

a steel drum sounds like water



ALBERT

*she...*

*is there.*

*in the trees*

*moon green thighs*

*flicker in the undergrowth...*

MAUDE

And there's been two fires there...

JOYCE

I thought when I heard of that, well, somebody's done that because it would go up like a matchstick, with all that paperbark, you know, those tea tree sheets, about like a big sheet of corrugated iron...

ALBERT

*she has*

*riverweed straight hair*

*the colour of a grass snake's underbelly*

*goat's eyes.*

two girls giggle and run with bare feet down a sandy path

two girls are running past

JOYCE

...and just imagine how that would burn. And those saplings that he had on the side. Everything would just go up like anything.

ALBERT

*she...*

*flickers from my reach*

*skin soft damp moss on the rocks at*

*river's edge*

*we are laughing*

*she is sliding*

*through me*

BARRY

It was caused through a young fellow, I believe, burning rubbish in a little mine near Louie Creek called the Wooden Duck. And I assume that there had been a good wet season, and there was a lot of fuel, like there was this season...

wet fingers groan across a drum skin

the whispering of botanic names from a garden

water slips past the prow of a boat

ALBERT

*And...*

*just when I grasp her*

*slipping sex*

*blunt fingers claiming blue green flesh*

*she slaps me*

*back.*

*knocks me,*

*like flood waters,*

*choking,*

*flings me into the air...*

the botanic names are whispered louder, more urgently

BARRY

...and that maybe big winds sort of took the fire away from him...

ALBERT

*free fall...*

BARRY

...and it came right across and burnt old Albert out.

ALBERT

*wind hissing*

*earth spitting*

*how*

*dare*

*you*

*touch*

*me*

*there...*

wind is whistling through a gorge

fire crackles louder, closer

a fence wire is scraped

seeds are flicked from hand to hand



MAUDE

Nobody ever got anything again after he left. He might have come back and burnt it himself. I mean, his ghost might have come back and burnt it...

ALBERT

*And then*

*she is absence*

*trees snapped off at the base*

*dull metal dust in my mouth*

*I can see nothing. Smell nothing. Taste nothing.*

*I lie*

*despairing*

a fence wire is scraped

botanic names are whispered

a fire grows and burns out of control

wind whistles through grasses

a wire hums

*I feel*

*such helplessness.*

*such loneliness.*

*such*

*fury*

*that I could...*

*strike a match.*

sweet birds calls are heard emerging from the wind

BARRY

That's the story I have, and its from a couple of old blokes who came in to see me, one night, I can't remember their names, but they seemed to know it quite well, they even named the fellow who lit the match for the rubbish dump, and I can't remember his name either, but I've got it written down there somewhere.

an insect is chewing and tearing at something

crows call

crows call

ALBERT

18/9/52

Dear Mr Gordon,

Although a warm welcome await you at anytime you wish to call, great would be your disappointment for botanically it exists but in name. How could a botanic collections be maintained without equipment, labour and money; and what would be the use of such a collections with all records lost? Within a few weeks of my death, any day now, the place will be a wilderness. The priceless botanic collections of over 2,000 varieties have been abandoned, the gardens over run by saplings, kunai grass and sword tussocks; what the fire left of the fences is wrecked, yards gone, home site bare of buildings but the flimsy shack I live in. Plagues of bush rats have invaded the whole locality, destroying all ground crops and playing havoc , worse, killing a number of trees by ring barking; in the wild all grasses have been rooted out, flowers, fruit and seeds and tender leaves devoured. What still stands of the one-time glorious gardens is the fruit plantation I try to maintain for a living. Have cut all experimental works – too old and weak to carry-on alone, failure to find one to take over from me at death. Since the place is destined to revert to wilderness better now than later. Your own invitation is greatly appreciated and very much regret not being in the position to accept, I am chained to this spot.

Yours most sincerely...

an office is humming in the background



## VI

Queensland Archive

Dear Ms Miller

Thank you for your email of 20 July requesting research information relating to Albert de Lestang. A search of our database Guide to Record Holdings located the following records which may be of interest.

Personal files for nominated immigrants –

Nominator: Mr A De Lestang Date 1947, departmental number 174/1947

CT White ASA location number A/54013

Lands Department – could not locate a selection file.

Two girls are running

birds are chirruping close by

JOYCE

Yes, he wanted somebody to work there...oh he was a slave driver

*a space between tea tree posts*

*a fireplace*

*a tin pannier*

*a water tank, outside*

he drove us, and mum we had to water all the plants

*here is water, channelled*

my mother had one of those yokes, and she carried two kerosene tins on that  
yoke

*a mother, trapped*

*by a Frenchman*

poor old mum must have been driven to distraction

*Two pre-pubescent girls*

*bare feet down a sandy path*

and she said to us, she said:

*water from the creek*



He agreed

*a mother*

that she could go away

*a hot sun*

and leave us there – that was the thing, she'd have to come back

*potatoes and cabbage*

*a dream of mangoes*

*and a stand of bamboo*

she went on the mail, into Mount Isa and she got a job straight away because  
she was a good cook

*water in the irrigation ditches*

She was going there to get some money to pay the mailman to get us back.

*a mother*

And then straight away the police came and took us away.

*a plan...*

See he wouldn't let us go.

*and a Frenchman.*

a ratchet is turned slowly

a stick is scraped hard across a drum skin

ALBERT

*Madness is a termite.*

*Madness is chewing all day and night*

*a stale taste*

*of sleep saliva.*

*Madness is*

*fire.*

*burning.*

*water*

*washing away my channels*

*trees*

*closing in and*

*creepers grabbing hold,*

*taking root.*

two woman's voices are heard

intertwining, singing through a fence wire

and continue through to the end of the section



*An unseen fear climbs dripping  
from the riverbank  
and shouts out suddenly in the night:  
'lunatic!'  
A dead cow  
scorched,  
bloated and twitching in the water.*

*The girls are gone  
and even the blacks  
avoid me now with my seared, bloody eyes  
breath  
panic laden.*

*The charred flag flutters on the floor  
uselessly.*

the women are humming

a fence wire is humming too

MAUDE

In the end, he was 80 and I don't know, people were getting worried about him or something. I don't think he was sick, he was just getting old. And the police ended up coming out and making him move. And so he went into the old people's home in Townsville, Charters Towers, I mean, and he died there.

BARRY

The story I have was that he did turn a bit gaga, and the coppers came from Camooweal and took him across to Charters Towers to an old people's home where he died a couple of years later ...

MAUDE

He went on his own. He came through on the mail. They gave him a cup of tea and something to eat, and he kept going...

a vibraphone is bell-like

## POSTSCRIPT

ALBERT

25 August, 1928

Dear Sir,

As my case is rather unique as an applicant for a Certificate of Naturalization. 1<sup>st</sup>. being born abroad during my parents travels. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Running away from my relatives as a youngster, and being disowned by them. 3<sup>rd</sup>. Having travelled continuously in various parts of the World as a hunter, prospector, and scientific collector, almost always in localities beyond civilisation...

*When you leave...*

...and being of a care-free nature and with independent means,

*...your eyes are drawn behind you*

... I have kept no record of the date of entry or departure from each of the countries and colonies I travelled in all my years of wandering prior my coming to Australia.

*you are fishing for an image to call out to, goodbye...*



I have a notion that my name was registered as Albert de Lestang-Perade, but I have always known myself by the name given in the Statutory Declaration. The last portion of my surname, Perade, I dropped...

*already as you hit the plains you are forgetting*

...and substituted De for de. Thus cutting off the nobility sounding of the name.

*An unbidden memory, that first faint smell...*

I conscientiously believe that I was born as stated, but I cannot ascertain the fact. I am told that the registration records at Mendoza, where my birth is alleged to have been registered, were destroyed in 1886.

My mother died at or soon after my birth, being taken by her maid and brought up by her at a nearby Indian village. My mother was either French born from South American parents or a native of South America. I cannot recollect that I was ever told by my relatives whom I deserted when only a youngster.

*...and then you are over come with the magnitude of the loss.*





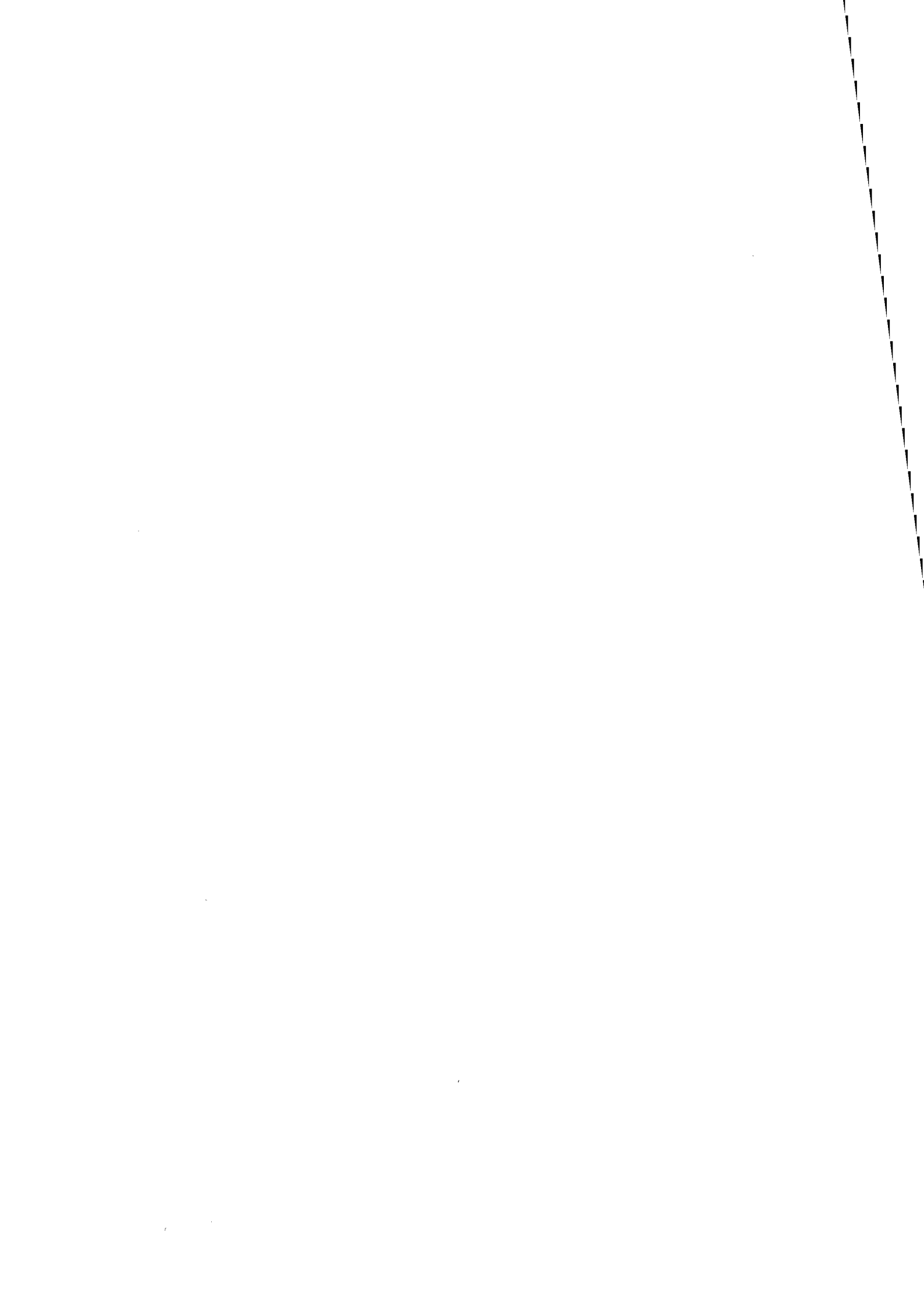
After leaving the Argentine I prospected or hunted in North America, the West Indies, in various colonies of Africa, and the Eastern States of Europe.

I landed in Sydney unobtrusively, and immediately struck for the interior, just like I did in all the other countries I wandered, not keeping record of the date of landing.

I wish to own the piece of land on which I live at present, near-by the perennial stream known as Lawn Hill creek, Lawn Hill Mineral Field, Burketown district, Queensland. Hence, my request for naturalization.

Trusting that you will not put any obstacle in my way to get naturalized a British subject, and thanking you in anticipation, I remain, Dear Sir,  
Yours Faithfully,

Albert De Lestang.





# Composing Radio, Writing Sound

An Essay

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*Our native country is less an expanse of territory than a substance; it's a rock or a soil or an aridity or a water or a light. It's the place where our dreams materialise; it's through that place that our dreams take on their proper form...*

GASTON BACHELARD

*L'Eau et les Rêves. Essai sur l'imagination  
de la matière.*

## Places of My Own Invention

Venturing, in adulthood, over the Great Divide and out into the vast and various territories of inland Australia, I have found a rich source of inspiration for radiophonic imagining. Settlement culture was negative and silenced the land. Painterly, filmic and photographic representations of bush and country inevitably added to this impression of a landscape without sound.<sup>1</sup> Clearly that silence has had much to do with the refusal to allow the country's indigenous inhabitants to speak.<sup>2</sup>

Recordings reveal a different sense – the blustering, moaning, scratching, buzzing, burbling, chirruping, squawking of the land's inhabitants: animal, vegetable, mineral and elemental, give voice to a living, breathing environment. Several works have sprung from my own recording forays. I am submitting two of these works towards a Master of Arts in Writing from the University of Technology, Sydney. Titled *Inland*,<sup>3</sup> and *The Frenchman's Garden*,<sup>4</sup> both are deeply embedded in place.

*Inland* tells four stories of mythic figures that move through a vast, imaginary, Australian space. *The Frenchman's Garden* is also partly fictional, but fenced in a specific location, a garden near the Gulf of Carpentaria – and a more material figure inhabits this environment. What was important in the development of both works was to form a certain approach to the landscape – a listening approach, which challenged the widespread cultural privileging of eye over ear.<sup>5</sup>

My intention was to attempt to channel an Australian sound – or rather, to find my own expression of what an Australian sound might be. Having spent time in particular locations listening, recording, processing and

absorbing the form of the sonic landscape, I created the spaces of the works from a subconscious awareness of and intuitive response to the actual space of the place.

In this essay, I would like to consider the development of my radiophonic practice through these two works, in the context of a number of pieces by Australian producers working in the Audio Arts department of ABC Radio, for *The Listening Room*, on ABC Classic FM.

I will begin by briefly exploring some guiding principles for my work and then look at the artistic and production processes of *Inland* and *The Frenchman's Garden*. In discussing pieces by Tony MacGregor, Ion Pearce, Jane Ulman and Kaye Mortley I consider a number of influential radiophonic approaches, including the work of composers and the act of composition, writers and the intimate voice and the fragmented, diary-like work of those who 'write with sound'.

## **Mimesis and the Diary**

Two notions were present in the development of the aesthetic of *Inland* and *The Frenchman's Garden*.

Firstly I have kept in mind Paul Carter's writings on the nature and form of the early Australian explorer's journal – an early indicator of a certain approach Australians have made to their environment. He has shown how the narrative of these journals does not

proceed smoothly towards the longed for denouement of an inland sea or a navigable river, but consists of a multitude of fragmentary asides,



speculative observations, scraps of dialogue... they strangely resemble the country they describe ... The journals offer a fertile site of meditation.<sup>6</sup>

Carter's observations of the explorer's diary provided me with a methodology with which to think about the soundscapes contained within the landscape. I was not looking for a story with beginning, middle and end, but to listen to the 'fragmentary asides' of the landscape, take the 'scraps' and make my own 'speculative observations', to be restructured in stories of my own telling.

As I will discuss later, this technique underpins much of the methodology of Australian radio makers who also gather, in various ways, stories and imaginings to use as their 'fertile site(s) of meditation.'



My practice as a composer has been to work with sound and music within the psychological space of the Australian landscape, a landscape which the work attempts not to imitate but to *be*. By this I mean that the sound object is not just tied analogously to the landscape but forms its own landscape, in it's own context. I sought to effect a transformation of land into sound, music and text. This has led me to look at the nature of music, myth, representation and radio.

Over a number of years the work of Mihai Spariosu has become important to my compositional practice. Spariosu describes an earlier form of representation, a representation that comes from a time when music and

dance were privileged as spontaneous and free play – in a milieu where poetry and myth were the main sources of authority.<sup>7</sup>

Mimesis is defined by Spariosu as an 'imitation of nature'.<sup>8</sup> But he draws together two apparent opposites when he cites Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink in describing an almost shamanistic, *pre-Platonic* mimesis as 'the ecstatic play of the world'.<sup>9</sup> Here is the liminal, that almost *outside* sensation, brought together with the very physical body, the *breath*. It is at the point of friction between these two notions that I would like to place my work.

For Spariosu, this form of mimesis pre-dates and is quite opposite to Platonic, imitative mimesis, brought about through Plato's instigation of a split between Reason and Myth in Western thought. Spariosu's suggestive idea has offered me a way of working impressionistically with sounds recorded in the arid parts of Australia. This type of mimesis is related to 'ritual and myth...the "Dionysian" movement of Being, rather than the imitative, imperfect or pale image of a no longer accessible or accurately representable Being'.<sup>10</sup> It is striking to consider these words not written in the Australian context yet so applicable to its landscape.

By way of example in the radiophonic sphere, the Balkan sound artist, Arsenije Jovanovic, considers his work as a means to connect directly with 'being'. Certain uses of musical instruments provide a 'clarity', according to Jovanovic, which skips past imitation, and the 'shallow waters of realism' and instead connects directly to the 'thing' itself.<sup>11</sup> Jovanovic sees the musical instrument as a way to channel an intention, to *become* the thing it also represents. The instrument as an object 'disappears' and instead plays a role with other sounds to achieve a particular meaning. This is a destruction of

the semantics of the sounding object, and can occur through the use of particular instruments, and also the human voice. For example, because of its historical connection across multiple cultures with the outside environment, as a shepherd's instrument,

the flute as a representation of *itself* is missed, and you instead connect directly as a person/listener... to the open space (with which it is historically associated).<sup>12</sup>

Later I will discuss the presence of the performer's body as another way to connect the listener's body with this sonic space as a space of pre-Platonic 'play'.

## **A Means of Production**

*Inland* and *The Frenchman's Garden* vary markedly in the style of their production. *The Frenchman's Garden* follows the 'writing with sound' tradition, to be discussed later in the context of work by Jane Ulman and Kaye Mortley. On the other hand, *Inland* is a composed work for radio, more in keeping with the work of composers such as Ion Pearce.

In *The Frenchman's Garden* I go in search of an existing story and the sound world that surrounds it – although I seek to also explore the imaginary in its interpretation. In *Inland*, the sum of my outback experiences is drawn upon to create an abstracted landscape, a pre-Platonic play with that space: what it reveals and what it conceals.

While *The Frenchman's Garden* examines this play within the subject matter of the work – the hidden, female sexualities of the garden and the man's relationship to it/her – in *Inland* I imagined the play as a kind of 'music of horizons' and of landscapes, and of the disappearances and reappearances, on these horizons and in different forms, of certain mythic tropes.



With sub-titled sections – Immersion, Flight, Stone, Heat – *Inland* tells of a sleeping convict, a woman flying, an alcoholic cripple, and an atomic bomb site – each suspended in a landscape which is continually shifting and metamorphosing.

The narratives circle a series of suspended states, both physical and temporal – the cusp of death, the point of decay, the fragile permanence of bones. Meanings are revealed through the ritual listing of the shadows and shapes, which make up the physical, psychological and sonic landscapes. The work is also concerned with elemental breakdown and reconstitution. Matter disintegrates and reverts to basic forms – hydrogen, oxygen, the odd trace element – which reform under certain conditions into other compounds. There is a parallel structural, textual and compositional disintegration and recomposition across the work. Notions of death, decay, desiccation, weightlessness, sleep, heat, moisture, light and shadow sink below and then rise to the work's surface to be re-membered in different forms, yet remain essences of Australian landscape.

Here I am thinking again about pre-Platonic play, which occurs not only in the production (rather than 'reproduction') but between states of 'being' explored within the work – to float and to sleep, to plummet to the earth, to

drink yourself to death, to walk into the sun – all become one and the same experience. Absence and presence in the landscape in *Inland* are equivalences.<sup>13</sup>

The musical 'being' of this work was also found through elemental disintegration. Pitches are broken down and their substructure revealed. The vibraphone, bowed, releases its composite harmonics. The bass clarinet fractures into multiphonics, and the double bass slips lightly up and down the harmonic spectrum, fragmenting at each pitch. Voices crack into laughter, or breath. Many of the environmental recordings were made with a contact microphone, which captured the hidden sounds of a fence wire, a canoe, a water tank, a gas pump – giving an ambiguous effect.

While the percussion functioned on the same level as the found sound objects in the environments I recorded, the use of the double bass and clarinet was a means to place the body *in* the landscape. They 'play' the place, but the place also plays them (the music was written partly in response to the sounds gathered). The voice-like sighs of bow on string, of breath drawn, of mouth sucking on reed, of key clicks and breath exhalations and the 'sung' quality of the instruments' utterances are a very present reminder of the human body which produces them. While the percussion is played at a distance from the performer's body, the double bass is embraced by the performer and translates every physical movement into sound. The bass clarinet is linked to the body by the breath which flows from within the performer through to the instrument, and the instrument is connected on a visceral level with the stomach. The result of placing these sounds within a sound landscape is that the body is suddenly there, floating within it, and the listener's body is placed

there too, through this process, and also through connections I will draw later in the context of the voice.

The music for *Inland* was written concurrently with the text and forms an intimate rhythmic relationship to the sound world. The text is embedded in the composition and this was essential to the writing of the work - there had to be an equivalence of legibility between music, text and sound. During this process I also formed a position on post-production – the work would be finely edited, but with an absolute minimum of sound treatments to be employed – including reverberation. Although I am not a Luddite when it comes to the usefulness of technology (including the technologies of highly trained performers and specialist recording equipment), it was essential to the aesthetic of the work that the sound I searched for came through with little tampering.



The process of producing *The Frenchman's Garden* was almost opposite to that of *Inland* – akin instead to the school of ‘writing with sound’. The story of Albert De Lestang – an eccentric French botanist, a wanderer and a free spirit who kept a botanic garden in the Gulf country from the 1920s to the early 1950s – had remained with me after I heard it for the first time in 1994, whilst camping at the site of the former garden. I had not paid much attention on first hearing the story, though I made a note of it in my diary. However, my thoughts kept returning to the tale and so, in 1998 I travelled there again, this time with a tape recorder to record the sound environment and some interviews with local people who knew something of De Lestang's life and history. In the ‘writing with sound’ tradition I had no pre-conceived ideas

about how the material would be shaped. I was going in search of the sonic remains of Albert De Lestang.

The three interviews I conducted and the recordings I collected formed the inspiration for, and dictated the structure of the piece, through which I also wove a series of poems which explored the garden and my imagining of De Lestang's relationship to it as a *sexualised*, panpsychic<sup>14</sup> place. I devised percussion music, but after the fact of the text and recordings, and as directed improvisation rather than note-by-note composition.

Like Paul Carter's explorers' journals, which were so often reshaped after the event,<sup>15</sup> the script was written after the trip and although there was a 'score' composed for the different materials (in a similar way to, though not as detailed as, Kaye Mortley's production process), the piece found its final form when it was constructed in the studio.

## **A Story Told**

Both *The Frenchman's Garden* and *Inland* are concerned with a form of story telling.

In her essay, *Circuits of the Voice: From Cosmology to Telephony*, Frances Dyson describes the Word as it forms the creation myths of the Dogon people of north-west Africa. The 'first word', or the first 'language' of the world, is 'breathed sounds, scarcely differentiated from one another, but nevertheless vehicles.'<sup>16</sup> A connection is made between sound as an 'aural phenomenon' and sound as 'water-bearing breath or vapour', which I am reading here as

the physical body. This is not a clearly articulated Word as in the Biblical myth, but a 'vapourous sounding', voice but not yet speech.<sup>17</sup>

Appropriately, to the Dogon, this word is also a *sound*, that of weaving with block and shuttle, 'the creaking of the word'.

It was the 'second word', which, in following the first, led to the primary Dogon metaphor of language as 'weaving'. This metaphor, as Dyson points out, is also shared by the west: 'spinning a yarn... losing the thread... creating a fabrication... weaving a web'<sup>18</sup>, and the word 'text' itself. These metaphors are also of interest when considering the way the early Australian explorers' recreated their journals on their return home.

So weaving was very much a guiding metaphor in *Inland*, musically, textually and sonically, and story weaving was the primary function of both *Inland* and of *The Frenchman's Garden*. All fragments of text, whether gathered from the real environment or created in response to it, contribute to the spinning of these fictional worlds.

In the Dogon philosophy, voice is also considered part of a triad – voice, ear, breath<sup>19</sup> – which I have read as speaker, listener, *body*. The voice of the 'first' word is analogous to Arsenije Jovanovic's flute/wordless voice; in eliciting an emotional or psychological response it also brings the performing and listening bodies together in a radiophonic space. And the story-telling voice too is a way 'in' to the listener's body. The listener reacts emotionally and directly to this voice and it invokes a sensory response to the work. This is one vibrating body activating another, as the artist and sound artist Joyce Hinterding has observed:



'My interest in sound began with a fascination in the phenomenon of sympathetic resonance: the ability for one vibrating body to activate another. It is an interest in "this that exists between things" ...'<sup>20</sup>

But the story-telling voice also glissandos into pitch, sliding between the Dogon 'first word' and the 'second word' – a humming, private, barely-voiced pitch, the sung voice of someone alone. This internal sound made external, again makes the connection between the spoken voice and the body (and the body here, as discussed earlier, is also the landscape – read through sound and music). The voice is slippery, particularly in *Inland* – it acts to connect sound, breath, body, instrument, performer, landscape and listener.

In these regards – a combination of weaving and a direct transforming of the materials – my work is similar to some other Australian radiophonic works I want to discuss.

## **A Composing for Radio – The Suspended Moment**

*Close miked conversations*

*Distantly positioned sounds*

*A telephone, ringing*

*An ocean, far away.*

Morning – *Intimacies* – Tony MacGregor<sup>21</sup>

'I am remote...you are pressed against my ear', says the male figure in a classic reflexive radio moment during Tony MacGregor's Morning – *Intimacies*.

As with *Inland*, these are composed words, a story-telling, sourced from the producer's imagination. The work is designed before entering the post-production studio. A fiction is constructed around this voice, and the telling of a single moment suspended in time; an anecdote, part of an on-going story. This is a fragment written in real-time but caught in a radiophonic score.

The speaker is talking to his lover of waking in the space of their small, dark, damp room, of an overcast sky and an angry ocean, of a journey away from home while she sleeps on, of entering the office, of her phone call, her expression of the pain she suffers and behind that, her isolation.

The speaker addresses her in the second person, as does the narrator in *Flight*, *Inland*, and so the listener is invited into the story.

The use of the natural, non-dramatic, and closely miked voice, as in *Inland*, and *The Frenchman's Garden*, compels a listening, a drawing in; a sensory and an emotional response. In listening as to a friend, someone well known, there is a sense of listening in, but without malice; a certain care, a reciprocity; an exchange of breath, enters the equation. This intimacy is very much pressed, telephone-like, against the listening ear.

A distant sound world in *Morning – Intimacies* functions to gently accentuate the intimacy of the voice. Soft rain, the ocean in the background, slowly transform into the hum of the office, then that of the telephone line... These are sounds that represent something unspoken, but contain their own anxieties. The digital clicks and hums reflect the rhythm of the heartbeat (a

sonic artifact, commonly used to represent the body and its mortality). The digital becomes the deeply personal.

*Spoken texts – just a few lines*

*A disjointed rhythm, interrupting external fragments*

*Indonesian percussion influences Western composition*

*Cello*

*Predominantly 'live' instruments – little obvious treatment or sampling*

*A musical train.*

*Practice – Ion Pearce*<sup>22</sup>

*Practice*, like *Inland*, is a composed work, written and conceived before the composer, Ion Pearce, set foot in the studio, and this is again a work without a documentary component, springing from the imagination of the composer.

Like MacGregor, Pearce uses the spoken voice as a device to draw the listener into an intimate space<sup>23</sup>. In this he is unlike Arsenije Jovanovic. The *spoken* word is also able to carry the work to the listener's sensory response – the listener responds emotionally to the story told. The voice acts as a foil to the instrumental writing, which Pearce views as creating distance through its non-figurative abstraction.

In *Practice* the voice, hard edited up against the music, has another function. It is a sound object fitting into a particular structural process.

Pearce is concerned with the relationship of performer body to instrument to resultant sound – not only on a programmatic level but a structural one.

Exercises in technique generate form – from the use of algorithms to the rhythms of simple physical movement. In *Practice*, walking provides a way to generate rhythm and a larger structure. Similarly, breath informs the work through its effect on tempo and modulation, without actually citing the referent. As the rhythm of literally instrumental ‘practice’ is established, so the work finds its own rhythm, and the breath becomes the regular and infinite, soothing sound of train wheels on tracks.

The body of the player influences the work on a another level, as Pearce strives to play with the suspended performative moment – for a string player (Pearce plays violoncello) this may be between, say, throwing and catching the bow. This Zen-like moment identified by the composer is of being in the middle of the note – a *suspended* quality, of floating between beginning and arriving – without effort, without thought, and is akin to the qualities I sought to achieve in *Inland*. This concern with the carrying *by* the body of a body of sound through radiophonic practice is also a form of pre-Platonic mimesis: the body *is* the sound, an *embodied* sound – a notion that provides an alternative to the popular assertion of radio as disembodied.<sup>24</sup>

And again, this suspension has larger structural and programmatic implications for the journey undertaken in the work, including a reference to a childhood of travel and disruption. While Pearce’s compositions are for live ensemble, he sees the technology used in post-production as an extension of the ensemble, allowing him to further deconstruct the moment of suspension, to play with, as a texture, a now flexible duration and presence: the physical action of making a sound.

## Of Writing with Sound

It is from the outside environment that certain radiomakers have developed their practice of 'writing with sound', to which I referred when discussing the process of *The Frenchman's Garden*.

In Jane Ulman's *The Siren South*<sup>25</sup> and Kaye Mortley's *On Naxos*,<sup>26</sup> for example, a subject is chosen and the producer goes in search of recordings, documentary and otherwise, to be found around that subject. It is a 'starting with nothing'<sup>27</sup> and a returning from the field with a collection of sound material which only then informs the structure and context of the work. A deconstruction and reconstruction takes place, either as a complex score before entering the studio or in the studio itself.



*'You remember the myth?'*  
*footsteps*  
*a love song*  
*waves lapping at a shore*  
*'She's gone with the man in the long, black coat'*  
*A door closes*  
*chains rattle*  
*'You crept away'...*  
*A girl laughs in a room*  
*a voice, a violin...*  
*Hooves on cobblestones.*

*On Naxos – Kaye Mortley*<sup>28</sup>

In *On Naxos*, Kaye Mortley goes to the island where the Ancient Greeks of mythology; Ariadne, Theseus and the Minator, played out their tragedy. Mortley records the sounds of contemporary Greece. But she decides the recordings are not particularly interesting and she must find enriching material in other ways. So she asks friends to write postcards as if from the place, translates the love songs of the island and works these into a mixture of the stories which emanate from the island. By almost scavenging sounds and ideas from those which exist around the subject, the art of the production becomes the radiophonic collage – where an unexpected light is cast on material through its placement in relation to a variety of other materials from non-traditional sources. Once the material is gathered, these relationships are mapped out in an intricate script before entering the studio. But none the less, the most revealing moment of the work – reflective of the ambivalences of Mortley’s radiophonic practice as a whole – comes from those first recordings made on that holiday where a voice says:

Don’t you see she’s got a tape recorder...? She’s stealing our voices...she’s recording everything we say.



*Metallic tinkling*  
*water lapping, rhythmically*  
*‘What is a map?’*  
*goods taken on a long sea voyage*  
*mermaids, merdevils, sea serpents and sirens*  
*bell tolling*

*the horn-like call of a shell*  
*the diary of a terrible journey*  
*a woman photographer of sea's edge*  
*A man in search of his father's history*  
*A song: 'Full Fathom Five, thy Father Lies'...*

*The Siren South – Jane Ulman*

Jane Ulman posits a similar philosophy to Ion Pearce about the role of voice in radio. The voice becomes an expression of the whole body and so carries the body with it through the airwaves to the listener. Voice in radio is *not* just a talking, disembodied head – the microphone picks up the faintest physical nuance and it is the whole body, which performs on radio.<sup>29</sup>

But *The Siren South*, Ulman's work about the Dutch discovery of the west coast of Australia, has a construction process more closely related to Kaye Mortley's approach. While using similar methods of gathering material, Ulman creates the structure of her work largely in the studio environment, patch working the elements together as she goes.

In *The Siren South* Ulman set out to find material on the 17<sup>th</sup> century ideas of navigation which brought explorers to the southern continent of Australia, and a series of fortuitous accidents led to the specific material found. When she interviewed Jo Mallard in order to talk about his knowledge of, and approach to, certain information about the Western Australian coast, she also found a narrative about his search for paternal identity resonated in the subtext of his knowledge – and this then took a stronger representation in the

work. Her visit to the Scheepvaartmuseum in Amsterdam in search of voyage histories led her to speak not to the resident expert but to a librarian and publicist, Mr. Wildman, who told her instead of maps and mapping equipment.

Ulman gathers her sound world along the same way. In *The Siren South*, it is the sounds of clocks and instruments in British museums, brass and wood, which transmogrify into the sounds of a wooden clapper on a brass bell, an anchor chain, a foot on the planks of a boat – the sounds of a boat, approaching the Australian coastline.

### **A Mapping of a Place**

Jane Ulman and Ion Pearce are indicative of a number of Australian radiophonic artists in their concern with a sense of the Australian landscape. Ion Pearce's *Practice* ends with a section which is a musical version of an Australian train – travelling for a long time, over great distances and Jane Ulman's subject in *The Siren South* and other works is a radiophonic mapping of the southern continent onto the psyche of its inhabitants.

The sound world of the Australia of *The Siren South* is metallic. It speaks of the Eden that was imagined for the place where Australia sits: the tinkling of

bells, shimmering pitches, set in a bed of Australian bush recordings. Metal is dry but its sound is fluid – to be both fluid, and dry, is to be very much of the Australian environment. The call of a shell always brings the listener back to water, and what it holds. This is a reverberant, watery space.



The work's structure also reflects place and the approach of the philosophers and explorers who imagined and circumnavigated the island, from this angle, from that. They come in for a close look here, stay back, avoid too much detail there. The radiomaker returns again and again, picking away at the edges of several stories, weaving them together to make the whole. There is never an all-encompassing aerial view. In *The Siren South*, Ulman arrives by sea, and stays near the coastline.

For Ulman, the muse of *The Siren South* was quintessence, the fifth element. This is the *idea*, the spirit of the place, rather than the place itself. And again, here is a connection to pre-Platonic mimesis. The radiomaker takes the essence of the thing, in this case, the mapped Australian landscape, and the radio work 'becomes' it, just as, in the case of the discovery of the southern continent by 17<sup>th</sup> century explorers, the landscape became what was culturally imagined before they even knew the land mass existed.

This place, like the image in the camera obscura Ulman saw at Greenwich Observatory during her research, is revealed as a world coming up out of the mists, out of the sea.

## A Return to My Place

*Inland* and *The Frenchman's Garden* had very particular Australian landscapes which I wished to communicate.

*Inland* listens to an abstracted island territory, moving in for a close look at four individual tales. *Inland* is Australia, but approached by air, with the clarity of location blurred in the summer haze. In it we are floating a thousand feet above the earth, but we cannot see the edges because we are inside the land, far from the coast. We are not looking out to sea, but at our feet observe the tiny lizard tracks crossing our view. This 'place' is constructed partly from recordings, partly from my sonic imagination. The recordings, from a variety of inland locations, are superimposed to create an in-between space, through which instruments move and function transformationally.

However, for *The Frenchman's Garden* I went in search of a particular place and time, which I found through the fragments that remained. There were few human-constructed spaces – a part of a house which had since been altered and added to, a few ditches dug. The work has a specific locale. The exotic flora of the garden had more or less gone and perhaps this altered the way birds and insects I recorded moved through the space. But the surrounding environment remained as it had been – a deep, fast flowing creek, tropical vegetation on its banks and dry grassland elsewhere. Nearby, the red rock gorges also remained and the birds no doubt passed and called through these as they always have.

The Australia of *Inland* and *The Frenchman's Garden* is primarily created through the specific sound and compositional techniques described above. But the works and the country with which they are concerned lie within a body of radiophonic practice that is peculiarly Australian, if broad-ranging in its style and philosophical approach – from Ion Pearce's highly abstracted work about the development of an artistic practice within an Australian lifestyle defined by long journeys, to Jane Ulman's audio map which is to be approached from various angles, just as the place mapped has been. This rich body of work, which includes many more pieces than I have had space to examine here, has had a profound effect on my development and has encouraged me to think in the long term about the place I inhabit as a traveller and a radio maker.

Equally important to my practice was the stylistic and creative guidance of Paul Carter's observations through this landscape, which allowed me to contextualise my work in terms of a tradition of Western explorers of Australia (including radiomakers) – the tradition of the journal.

For Kaye Mortley in *On Naxos* the tape recorder is a sound journal carried in the bottom of a beach bag which she carries around and pulls out, like a camera or a notebook to take sound snapshots, sound meditations. Jane Ulman's *The Siren South* is a journal-like collection of clippings; sound images and reflections which are connected sonically and conceptually, and as for a journal are gathered over a period of time, skipping from one subject to the next and back again. For Ion Pearce *Practice* is an explorer-like summary taken from a journal of a lifetime's work while Tony MacGregor's *Morning from Intimacies* is a narrative excerpt where a day's entry is a place to tell part of an ongoing story of love and fragility.

In an essay entitled 'Towards a Sound Photography', Carter keeps a journal of a trip around Birdsville country, and writes of his listening to a landscape. A place is 'a hearing zone, that, like the bell of a trumpet, has its own timbre', he writes. It 'is not a geographical object, it is a hearing place, where certain sounds resound and begin to discover a latent harmonics'.<sup>30</sup> It is for some of these harmonics I have listened.

In *The Frenchman's Garden* the 'fragmentary asides' of the art of the journal created the structure, the writing with sound. And in *Inland* the 'fertile site of meditation' the journal offers gave me a space for a channeling of stories, of latent harmonics, into a space for the composing of radio.

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan, Simon, *The Cartographic Eye: How explorers saw Australia*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Carter, Paul, *Living in a New Country; History, Travelling and Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p.11.

<sup>3</sup> Written, composed and produced through an Australia Council for the Arts New Media Arts Fund residency at The Listening Room, ABC Classic FM. Broadcast October 11, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Commissioned by The Listening Room in May 1998. Broadcast March 6, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> See Ryan, Simon, *The Cartographic Eye: How explorers saw Australia*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1996), for a discussion of the possessive, objectifying power and significance of the gaze in the Australian explorers' journals. The cultural obsession with the visual has also been discussed at length by Douglas Kahn, in *Wireless Imagination: sound, radio and the avant-garde*, (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), and Rick Altman in *Sound Theory Sound Practice*, (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Carter, Paul, *Living in a New Country; History, Travelling and Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p.27.

<sup>7</sup> Spariosu, Mihai, ed. *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory*, volume 1 (Philadelphia/Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984), p.iii.

<sup>8</sup> Spariosu, Mihai, *ibid.* p.i.

<sup>9</sup> Spariosu, Mihai, *ibid.* p.iii.

<sup>10</sup> Spariosu, Mihai, *ibid.* p.iii.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, Gretchen, *The wordless voice, the beginning of drama*, RealTime 35, February/March (Sydney: Open City, 2000), p.27.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, Gretchen, *ibid.* p.27.

<sup>13</sup> Spariosu, Mihai, *op cit.* p xii.

<sup>14</sup> According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, volume 7, (Chicago, London, Toronto: University of Chicago, 1961) panpsychism is 'a philosophical term applied to any theory of nature which recognises the existence of a psychical element throughout the objective world. In such theories not only animals and plants but even the smallest particles of matter are regarded as having some rudimentary kind of sensation or 'soul' which plays the same part in relation to their objective activities ... as the soul does in the case of human beings. Such theories are the modern scientific or semi-scientific counterparts of the primitive animism...'

<sup>15</sup> Carter, Paul, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1988), p.66-98.

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- <sup>16</sup> Dyson, Frances in *Essays in Sound*, eds. Davies, Shaun, Jonson, Annemarie, Jokovich, Eddy, (Sydney: Contemporary Sound Arts, 1992), p. 25.
- <sup>17</sup> Dyson, Frances, *ibid.* p.25.
- <sup>18</sup> Dyson, Frances, *ibid.* p.25.
- <sup>19</sup> Dyson, Frances, *ibid.* p.24
- <sup>20</sup> Hinterding, Joyce, interviewed by Josephine Bosma, on Soundsite internet magazine. (<http://autonomous.org/soundsite/texts/02/hinterding.htm>: Soundsite, 1988)
- <sup>21</sup> MacGregor, Tony, *Morning*, first broadcast on The Listening Room, June 5, 1997.
- <sup>22</sup> Pearce, Ion, *Practice*, first broadcast on The Listening Room, ABC Classic FM, June 17, 1996.
- <sup>23</sup> Ion Pearce, in taped interview recorded on October 14, 1999.
- <sup>24</sup> This notion has been discussed at length by contributors to *Wireless Imagination – Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde*, eds. Kahn, Douglas and Whitehead, Gregory, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992). See also Weiss, Allen S. *Phantasmic Radio* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1995). p.79. 'In radiophony, not only is the voice separated from the body, and not only does it return to the speaker as a disembodied presence – it is, furthermore, thrust into the public arena to mix its sonic destiny with that of other voices.'
- <sup>25</sup> Ulman, Jane, *The Siren South*, first broadcast on The Listening Room, ABC Classic FM, September 14, 1998.
- <sup>26</sup> Mortley, Kaye, *On Naxos*, first broadcast on The Listening Room, ABC Classic FM, November 7, 1994.
- <sup>27</sup> Miller, Gretchen, *Old, new, borrowed, blue*, RealTime 31, June/July (Sydney: Open City, 1999), p.42.
- <sup>28</sup> Mortley, Kaye, *ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> Jane Ulman, in taped interview recorded on October 13, 1999.
- <sup>30</sup> Carter, Paul, *op cit.* p.95-96.

# Production Credits

# Inland

Documentary voices	Nancy Bird, Sally McCosker, Greg Sherman, Yami Lester
Readers	Gretchen Miller, Yves Stening, Virginia Baxter, Sherre DeLys
Musicians	Dave Ellis – double bass Peter Jenkin – bass clarinet Daryl Pratt – percussion Gretchen Miller – voice
Sound engineer	Russell Stapleton
Location recordings	Gretchen Miller
Writer, composer and producer	Gretchen Miller

Recordings were made with the assistance of The Southern Cross Gliding Club, The Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Authority, The Lightning Ridge Tourist Information Centre and Betty and John Bevan, Gwen and Athol Jenkins.

The story of the cripple at Lightning Ridge was inspired by a story by Ion Idriess from his book, *Lightning Ridge*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1944).



# The Frenchman's Garden

Documentary voices	Maude Foreshaw, Barry Kubala
	Joyce Wright
Albert De Lestang	Christian Manon
Narrator	Rachel Szalay
The Garden	Gretchen Miller
Percussion improvisation	David Hewitt, directed by Gretchen Miller
Sound engineers	David Bates, Phillip Ulman
Location recordings	Gretchen Miller
Writer and producer	Gretchen Miller