

Afghan music in Australia

John Baily*

Abstract Based on research carried out in Melbourne and Sydney in 2009, this paper discusses Afghan migration to Australia, the emergence of the multicultural society, the civic promotion of the Afghan Bazaar Precinct in Dandenong (Melbourne), the genres of Afghan music performed in Australia, with brief biographies of some of the musicians, and a survey of CDs produced in Australia. The paper concludes that the Afghan-Australian community (less than 25,000 overall) is too small to support a fully-fledged Afghan music profession. The result is a vigorous amateur music scene catering for a community of music lovers. The work of three contemporary Australian composers influenced by Afghan music is also discussed, to show how the culture of this immigrant community has enriched Australian culture.

Keywords Afghanistan, Australia, multiculturalism, recordings, professionalism, keyboards.

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Introduction

My research on the music of Afghanistan began in the 1970s, with two years of ethnomusicological fieldwork, most of it in the provincial city of Herat, and to a lesser extent the capital, Kabul. My research in Herat was wide-ranging, looking into the performance of various genres: urban and rural; folk, popular and art; vocal and instrumental; traditional and modern; professional and amateur; female and male; and also at various forms of religious singing that did not fall clearly into the category of music, such as Sufi *zikr*, Shiah lamentations and Quranic recitation. The largely separate world of women's music making in Herat was researched by my wife Veronica (Doubleday, 1988), so that together we more or less covered the whole range of instrumental and vocal performance. When it came to writing the ethnographic monograph that was a major output from this research (Baily, 1988) I focused on male professional musicians operating in Herat city. Research into the wider musical context informed the ethnography but had little visible presence in my book.

After the *Saur* Revolution – the takeover of political power by the Communist Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan on 27.04.1978 - I made a number of short fieldwork visits (usually between two to eight weeks long) to Afghans in exile. The first was to Peshawar (Pakistan) in 1985, and over the years to Mashhad (Iran), Fremont (California), Hamburg (Germany) and Dublin (Ireland). I also worked and performed with several members of one of the outstanding hereditary musician families from Kabul's Kucheh Kharabat (musicians' quarter) who were now located in London. After a hiatus of 17 years I spent seven weeks back in Herat in 1994, during the Coalition period, and made five visits to Kabul after the defeat of the Taliban government forces in 2001. Most recently, in 2009, I spent nine weeks in Australia trying to get some idea of the state of Afghanistan's music in one of its most distant new homes. The present paper, which can be considered as no more than a preliminary report, is based on information gathered during that visit. A fuller account will be published in due course.¹

My 'academic journey' over the last 35 years has moved from a detailed ethnography of music making in a 'pre-industrial Muslim city' (English, 1973) to a focus on processes of globalization produced as a result of (generally) forced migratory movements. With no forward planning, my work has led me to a confrontation with the complex matter of music and migration (for a summary of earlier research by Adelaida Reyes and others see Baily and Collyer, 2006). In trying to understand what happens to music culture and its performance in any particular migration situation one has to take into account a number of variables, such as: geographical distance between countries of origin and settlement; cultural similarity in terms of language, religion and other attributes; the size of the immigrant communities, their ethnic constitution and demography; official attitudes towards migrants; and, prospects for the future in terms of security, employment, and eventual integration in the host society. In the

migration situation music may be static or progressive, in other words, value may be placed on trying to retain what is seen by those who have migrated as their 'traditional' music, something that connects them with their (often imagined) past, or on creating new genres that incorporate elements of the music culture of the host society and equip the music for its new social environment.² Migrant groups have recently been recognised as a source of cultural innovation rather than simply repeating what has gone before, which points to *"the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism"*, as Cohen (1997:26) puts it' (see also Baily and Collyer, 2006:171). And music can be inwardly or outwardly directed, in other words, it may be restricted within the migrant community, to reinforce an encapsulated sense of identity, or it can be used to announce and advertise one's culture to other communities occupying the same space, including, of course, the host community.

Exiles from Afghanistan are living in many parts of the world today. Two neighbouring countries, Pakistan and Iran, had until recently, very large refugee populations, while Uzbekistan and Tajikistan accepted much smaller numbers. Within Europe the main sites of Afghan settlement are Germany, the UK and France. And in North America there are very large Afghan communities in the US and Canada. The city of Toronto alone is estimated to have 100,000 Afghan residents. Australia and New Zealand have small but significant Afghan settlements. Some of my recent work has been to discover how 'music as information' flows between Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora and within the diaspora itself (Baily, 2007). The transmission of music has occurred through the migratory movements of people, including musicians, concert tours by musicians living in one country and performing in another, audio and video recordings, radio, television, and today, via the internet. In all this there has been a shift in the location of the centres of musical creativity, away from Afghanistan itself to certain sites in the periphery, notably in the US and Germany (Baily, 2007). My research in Australia was conducted to establish how the Afghan-Australians fit into the broader picture.

Afghan settlement in Australia

The first Afghans came to Australia in the 1860s. They had an important role in the opening up of the interior of much of the country, initially for purposes of exploration, and later for the movement of goods. It was realised that horses and bullock teams were not suitable for the sandy deserts of the Australian interior, and it was proposed that the camel would be the appropriate beast of burden for this harsh terrain. Camels needed camel drivers, people with expertise in the welfare of camels, and the knowledge of how to drive them. So, with the camels, imported by ship mainly from Karachi, came a number of cameleers. Some were Pashtuns from Afghanistan or the North-West Frontier Province of what was then British India, others were Baluchis and Punjabis. This diversity notwithstanding, they were generally known collectively as 'Afghans', a term often abbreviated to 'Ghan'. It is estimated that between 1860 and 1920 more than 2,000 cameleers went to Australia, along with something like 20,000 imported camels. Their settlements were known as Ghantowns, and the railway from

Adelaide (on the coast) to Alice Springs (in the interior), which followed a route pioneered by the cameleers, was known as the Ghan Railway. Many of the cameleers came on three-year contracts and returned home after fulfilling their contractual obligations. Others stayed on and in due course set up their own camel train businesses and imported animals themselves. This migrant community has been fully documented in two recent publications, by Stevens (1989), and Jones and Kenny (2007). The cameleers did not bring their families with them and there was a good deal of intermarriage with Aboriginal women. The descendants of these pioneers remain today, as do a few of the mosques they built. As far as we know, the interaction with Aboriginal culture did not have had any musical repercussions.

After the World War II a number of Afghans went to study in Australia under the Colombo Plan, an organization that was born out of a Commonwealth Conference of Foreign Ministers, held in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), in January 1950. At this meeting, a Consultative Committee was established to provide a framework within which international cooperation efforts could be promoted to raise the living standards of people in the region. Originally conceived as lasting for a period of six years, the Colombo Plan was extended several times until 1980, when it was extended indefinitely.³ Australia was one of the founding members of the Colombo Plan. Other Afghans went to study under different arrangements, such as Safar Sarmed, who worked for me as my research assistant in Herat in 1974. He studied at the University of New South Wales for a masters degree in engineering in 1977, and like a number of other Afghans in Australia at that time, stayed on after the *Saur* Revolution of 1978, which marks the beginning of a war that has raged in one form or another ever since. Once the conflict in Afghanistan became identified as another front of the Cold War between the USSR and the West (consolidated by the invasion by USSR troops in December 1979) it was relatively easy to be granted political asylum in Australia, as was also the case for a number of other western countries. Those already in Australia were able to sponsor family members and others. Over the years Safar Sarmed sponsored around one hundred people, relatives and a few friends. With the fall of the last Afghan leftist regime in 1992, when a coalition of Mujahideen parties came to power in Kabul, political asylum became more difficult to obtain, Afghanistan now being considered to be at peace. The situation became somewhat easier for immigrants once the Taliban took control. Meanwhile, criminal gangs of people smugglers had pioneered routes from Afghanistan to the southern islands of Indonesia then on to Australia, and we see the arrival of Afghan asylum seekers coming by boat. This process of immigration is described in some detail by Najaf Ali Mazari in *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* (Mazari and Hillman, 2008). During my visit to Australia in 2009 there was the much-publicised incident of the boatful of nearly 50 asylum seekers, most of them Afghans, that exploded three days after being apprehended by an Australian naval patrol off the Ashmore Reef, 200 miles north of the Kimberley Coast of Western Australia, with significant loss of life and terrible burn injuries to many. The cause of the explosion, probably in a fuel tank on the asylum-seekers' boat, has not been conclusively identified.⁴ Australia, particularly during the time of the Howard government, made things very difficult for apprehended illegal immigrants, incarcerating them for long periods in internment camps such as the infamous one at Woomera, in South Australia.

In 2009 the South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre published the following figures for the Afghan population in Australia, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of 2006. The total Afghan population was 17,865, of whom 5,848 were in Victoria, 6,699 in New South Wales, 2,339 in South Australia, 1,782 in Western Australia, and small numbers in Queensland, Northern Territory, Tasmania and Canberra Australia Capital Territory (2009: 23-4). Of course, as the survey itself admits, these figures cannot be entirely accurate, and they are now several years out of date, but nevertheless, it is clear that the Afghan population in Australia in 2009 was quite small, probably less than 25,000. This turns out to have some significance for the life of Afghan music in Australia. The same census for 2006 reported there to be about 330,000 Muslims in Australia. Afghanistan itself is ethnically diverse, with Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras forming the largest groups. Migrant Resource Centre report gives the following estimates for Afghanistan itself: Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Uzbek 9%, Hazara 9% (Migrant Resource Centre, 2009: 8). None of the other ethnicities made up more than 4% of the population. All four of the main ethnic groups are represented in Australia but the report does not give an analysis of their size one to another. Because of my and Veronica's extensive research on Herati music, and the fact that our access to the Afghan-Australians was largely mediated through Safar Sarmed, a native of Herat, my experience of Afghan music in Australia was biased towards this community.⁵

Australia as a new immigrant nation

The music making of any immigrant community is likely to be influenced in one way or another by the culture of the host community. One might ask what are the salient features of Australian culture that can help us understand the Afghan reaction to life in this particular part of the western world? Australia is, of course, a country of immigrants, who gradually disenfranchised the indigenous Aboriginal peoples who had lived there for at least 40,000 years, a process of immigration that began with the arrival of the 'First Fleet' in 1788 carrying 734 British convicts sentenced to transportation, and which has seen successive waves of immigrants since then. How do the new Afghan immigrants fit in? In trying to get a grasp on the relevant aspects of Australian life for the purposes of my study I received a helpful steer from Gary Bouma, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Monash University, and an expert on the sociology of religion, with special reference to Australia. When I met him in April 2009 he painted a rather rosy picture of Australia as a successful multicultural society, and graciously gave me several of his publications to peruse. His approach is very much orientated towards religion, with the variety of religious affiliations that immigration has produced in Australia, and with trying to explain why significant inter-religious conflict has been avoided so far by successful federal and state multicultural policies. In order to understand something of this we have to go back to Australian immigration from the beginnings of the 20th century.

When the several Australia colonial governments united in the creation of a federal state in 1901, which involved the previous separate colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, etc. becoming federalised, the so-called 'White Australia' policy was promul-

gated. As Attorney General and later Prime Minister Alfred Deakin stated somewhat disingenuously in 1901, with potential further Chinese and Japanese immigration in mind: *'It is not the bad qualities, but the good qualities of these alien races that make them so dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance and low standard of living that make them such competitors'* (La Nauze, 1965:279).

Immigration to Australia was henceforth to be largely drawn from the UK and Ireland, although the 'White Australia' policy did not discriminate significantly against other Northern and Southern Europeans. After the World War II there was a gradual change in Government policy. The idea of 'whiteness' was extended to other European nations, notably Italians, and Greeks, and in due course to Lebanese and Egyptians, both countries having substantial Christian populations. By 1973 the 'White Australia' policy was seen to be dead. When the new immigrants were first admitted from outside the British Isles the cultural policy was that of assimilation: immigrants were expected to become true Australians by adopting all aspects of the pre-existing white Australian English-speaking Anglo-Celtic culture. This policy changed during the 1960s, and assimilation was replaced by integration as a policy. Under this, migrants were not discouraged from maintaining many aspects of their traditional cultures, including language, religion, the celebration of national festivals and cuisine. The policy of integration was gradually replaced by that of multiculturalism, with policies couched in terms of the rights of minorities to maintain their culture, and to have culturally appropriate government services delivered to them. There was now a more explicit emphasis on an openness to diversity, with a tolerance for ethnic minorities to retain and celebrate their culture, mother tongue, cuisine, religion, festivals, etc.

Using census data that reveal the sizes of various groups in 1981, 1986 and 1991, Gary Bouma is eager to explain why, as he puts it, there is little likelihood of religious inter-group conflict in Australia (Bouma, 1995). Here he compares Australia with two other multicultural British ex-colonies, Canada and New Zealand. He states: *"There has been no history of violent inter-group conflict, unlike in Canada or New Zealand and all of Europe"* (1995:296). He lists six factors that explain the success of Australia as a multicultural, plural society: 1) the relatively small size of the minority religious groups (such as Muslims) in comparison with the large number of Anglicans and Catholics; 2) the lack of overlap between ethnic and religious difference, in other words, members of different denominations come from many different ethnic backgrounds, while some ethnic communities are religiously diverse; 3) the low degree of residential ghettoisation; 4) The fact that religious difference is not politicized, so that there is equality of opportunity at the individual level regardless of the communities to which a person may belong, or personal characteristics, or of life-styles and identities a person may select; 5) A long history of resolving inter-group conflict through legislation and the courts; 6) the existence of effective organisations promoting positive inter-group relations. Bouma perhaps underplays the significance of inter-group conflicts in the past, for example between Catholics and Protestant/Anglicans in the first half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, I found his arguments helpful in understanding the current situation,

In this milieu Afghan immigrants have been able to make the most of Australia as 'a land of opportunity', a phrase frequently articulated (in English) by Afghan-Australians, and a major theme of Najaf Ali Mazari's autobiography (Mazari and Hillman, 2008), which brings him from a small village in northern Afghanistan to become the proprietor of a successful carpet business in Melbourne. The Afghans I met seemed a relatively affluent community, with well-established families living in often-luxurious houses in well-heeled suburbs. Within that population the four main ethnic groups in Afghanistan are present: Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks. The two main branches of Islam, Sunni and Shiah, are also represented. While Afghans are obviously aware of differences between these groups this has not become a major source of conflict, from which one might conclude that the tolerance supposedly characteristic of the multicultural society extends to these groups. The major conflicts that arise within the Afghan community are of two main kinds: inter-generation differences, with tensions between the traditionalism of the older generation and the modernism of the younger; and problems of marriage breakdown and divorce, where traditional Afghan ideas about gender roles in marriage are contrasted with those of mainstream Australian society.

Dandenong as a case study⁶

As in many other countries with ethnic diversity, there is in Australia a tendency for ethnic business enclaves to develop: Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Indian, etc., and now Afghan. The South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre's report lists four Local Government Areas with more than 1,000 Afghans in the 2006 census: Greater Dandenong (Victoria) 2,485; Auburn (New South Wales) 2,214; Casey (Victoria) 1,517; and Paramatta (New South Wales) 1,076. Since Dandenong is close to Monash University and seemed from the outset particularly interesting, I visited the area a number of times.

The City of Greater Dandenong (also known as 'The City of Opportunity') is in reality a suburb of the city of Melbourne, about 30 kilometres from the city centre. The day after my arrival in Australia I was taken by Safar Sarmed to Thomas Street, with its plethora of Afghan businesses, with many Afghan groceries, kebab shops, restaurants and carpet shops. Thomas Street had been until recently a rather dilapidated business area, with empty premises and problems with homelessness and alcohol/drug abuse. As part of the Melbourne 2030 policy an urban regeneration programme was inaugurated, under the banner of 'Revitalising Central Dandenong'. Thomas Street was designated The Afghan Bazaar Precinct, and an attractive logo was designed with the image of a camel, clearly harking back to the Afghan cameleers of the 19th century. In April 2009 this image suddenly appeared all over Thomas Street, in the form of business cards, posters in shop windows, and large billboards. It transpired this was connected with the making of a television documentary about the Afghan Bazaar Precinct.⁷ To promote Afghan business and culture, Dandenong has established its Afghan Bazaar Cultural Tours. The attractively designed flyer for these reads as follows:

AFGHAN BAZAAR CULTURAL TOURS

Experience the enchanting Afghan culture, fashion, food and music through the gracious hospitality of a wide variety of traders in Dandenong's Afghan Bazaar Precinct.

Your tour guide will lead you on a journey to a far flung corner of the world throwing light on the captivating Afghan culture where exotic music, unique fashions and tantalizing food will be experienced.

Tours occur once a month and include visits to specialty shops, an introduction to Afghanistan's long history with Australia, intriguing rugs and carpets, authentic Afghan music, including a variety of delicious food samples that will excite all your senses. Then share the fun of the tour over a meal in a local Afghan restaurant. Tours free, meals optional.

Your tour guide is Bashir Keshtiar, an Afghan community leader, manager of a local branch of the National Australia Bank, and also one of several presenters of Afghan programmes on SBS (Special Broadcasting Service, Australia's multicultural and multilingual community radio). The text of the flyer has several points of interest, such as alluding to the era of the Afghan cameleers and hence Afghanistan's long history with Australia, and two references to authentic Afghan music. Dandenong would seem to be an admirable example of Australian multiculturalism in action. There is an interesting comparison to be made with Fremont, in California, which also has a large Afghan community and is known locally as 'Little Kabul' (Baily, 2005:223). Some years ago Afghan traders in Fremont requested the city council to designate officially the area where there were many Afghan businesses as 'Little Kabul'. This request was refused.

The (live) performance of Afghan music in Melbourne and Sydney

As in other parts of the Afghan diaspora, there are two main categories of music to be found, which for want of a better terminology I shall characterise as popular music and art music. The 'new' Afghan popular music has developed over the last 50 years, and today is strongly rooted in modern electronic keyboard technology. The originator of this style can be identified as Ahmad Zahir, sometimes known as the 'Afghan Elvis Presley', a very significant figure from the past and an enduring model, in the sense that a large number of his songs are available on CD and internet, many of his songs are still being performed, and his style is copied by many.⁸ In addition to the standard Indian harmonium used extensively in Afghanistan, he also played electric organ and accordion, and he would often be accompanied by western instruments such as trumpet, saxophone, flute, trap set, etc. It is interesting to note that Ahmad Zahir's official website is run from Sydney, by IT expert Karim Yousufzai.⁹ I have heard Ahmad Zahir's songs described as 'classical' in Australia, so important has the canon become. Many other songs from pre-war days by other singers continue to be performed, and some of these originated as folk songs in various parts of Afghanistan which were taken up by radio artists (Baily, 1981). Within the category of popular music we find a distinction between 'slow music' and 'fast music', the former being largely romantic love songs, and the latter designed for dancing at festive occasions, especially wedding parties. There are many singers of this kind of music in Australia, mostly young men. A few are semi-professional, going out to play live gigs, while

others are amateurs, who play for their own enjoyment and to entertain their friends at private parties.

The second main category is art music, a style closely connected with the art music of North India (Hindustani music), and rooted in the same principles of Hindustani *rag* (melodic mode) and *tal* (metric cycle). The main genre of art music in Afghanistan is the *ghazal*, a song form used for the singing of classical Persian and Pashto poetry, often of a spiritual and mystical kind, performed in a style closely connected to the ghazal style of India. The great master of this music in Kabul from the 1950s to the 1980s was the classically-trained Ustad Mohammad Hussein Sarahang, who not only sang the Indian classical genres *khyal*, *thumri*, and *tarana*, but was also a master of ghazal, being especially noted for his interpretations of the poetry of the Indo-Afghan poet Bedil (Wikipedia).¹⁰ This kind of music is now of minority interest in the diaspora, and in Afghanistan itself. There are instrumental genres that go along with this singing, usually played on the *rubab*, lute and tabla drums. There are some amateur singers of the Kabuli ghazal style in Australia, and several professional Afghan musicians playing art music on sitar, rubab and tabla.

The one kind of music common in Afghanistan but little represented in the diaspora is regional folk music as played on indigenous instruments such as *dutar* and *tanbur* (two types of long-necked lute), *sarinda* and *ghaichak* (two types of bowed lute), and various kinds of flute. One reason is the difficulty in obtaining these instruments outside Afghanistan. An exception is the use of the *dambura* (long-necked lute) by Hazara migrants, which I have observed both in Canada and Australia. But while performances may lack traditional instruments and their distinctive sounds, folk songs are often performed, but sung in the popular music style to the accompaniment of the keyboard.

Music has an important role in Afghan culture. It is considered to be appropriate for the celebration of certain rites de passage (marriage, birth, circumcision) and other festive occasions, such as *Eids* (marking the end of the month of fast and the climax of the Haj pilgrimage), The Prophet's Birthday, and at the *Now Ruz* (New Year) celebrations on the occasion of the Spring equinox (usually March 21st). In particular, music is an essential part of the Afghan wedding celebration, regarded as a joyous occasion, to be accompanied with up-tempo 'fast' music for dancing, both individual solo and massed dancing, and, depending on the circumstances, danced by both males and females. At these events in Australia, music is usually provided by locally based professional and semi-professional musicians (see below). In addition to these organised events there are numerous private music sessions when groups of friends gather for dinner and then play and sing deep into the night the old songs from home and the new songs of the diaspora, accompanied by harmonium and tabla. There are benefits and charity concerts, and occasional visits by the big stars of Afghan music, such as Farhad Darya, Mahwash and Wahid Qasemi, which are attended by hundreds of young Afghans, who like to dance en masse in front of the stage. Afghan restaurants sometimes have live performance, as laid on for the Dandenong Afghan tours.

Another type of music making worthy of consideration is what may be called women's domestic music (Doubleday and Baily, 1995). In Afghanistan, this kind of music making went on in the privacy of the home, and consisted of singing, either solo or in a group, accompanied by the *daireh*, a large frame drum fitted with pellet bells and rings inside the frame, that was the most important instrument for women. This drum was also used to play the rhythms of a number of dances. Adult women performed this kind of music in connection with happy occasions, such as betrothal, engagement, or wedding parties, and after the birth of a baby. Women's music making tended to be inclusive, with a high degree of audience participation. Such occasions afforded ideal circumstances for girls to listen, learn and actively participate in music making with gifted and motivated adult performers. This home made music was the main enculturating experience for children, the kind of music to which they were exposed from the earliest age in the warmth of the domestic environment, and was also the style that constituted 'children's music'. It was the foundation on which Afghan musicality was based. A very good example is the 7/8 rhythm called *mogholi*, which westerners find so hard to master but for Afghan children seems to be learned without effort, exposed as they are to it from birth (or even earlier).

This kind of music making is not something we normally find in the Afghan diaspora, but in Australia it exists. My wife Veronica Doubleday is an expert performer of this kind of music. At a number of private parties where my wife was singing and playing the drum other women joined in, singing with gusto. In one case, at a mixed private party of Heratis in Melbourne, after eating together with the men, all the women, my wife included, left for another room, from where the sounds of singing, harmonium playing, and banging away on a pair of tables and much laughter emanated, leaving the men to watch television and engage in a desultory conversation about how many people in the UK own second homes to rent out. In Sydney I interviewed young Afghan women from a music-loving family who described parties where Afghan women get together to play the drums and sing together.

Afghan musicians in Australia

In the early days of recent Afghan immigration, in the late 1970s and 80s, there were very few people with performance skills. And in those early days there were very few Afghan wedding parties. Often when music was required for an 'Eid or Now Ruz celebration, cassette recordings were played. But gradually Afghans arrived who had musical skills and abilities. And then a new generation of Afghans grew up in Australia and experienced music in the school system and was encouraged to perform 'its own' music. Many of the musicians mentioned below can be located on the internet.

Ghulam Sakhi Hasib Delnawaz arrived in Sydney in the late 1970s, an amateur singer who had a number of songs broadcast on Radio Afghanistan in the 1960s under the name of Delnawaz ('Player of the Heart'), including his much admired *Qolin Baf*, about making carpets in the town of Aqcha in northern Afghanistan. He was often accompanied by Nesruddin Sarshar, the tabla player (see below). For many years he was well known as a semi-professional singer in Sydney, but later became more

committed to religious singing, and at a festivity would only take the stage to sing a song or two.

Bareq and **Mirwais Naseer** were members of the famous 'new music' group Baran ('Rain') in Kabul in the 1980s. A third brother and Baran member, Asad Badie, lives in Austria. Bareq and Mirwais are semi-professional performers of the new popular music, with keyboards, drum machines, chord sequences, vocal chorus. They work extensively with their younger brother Tamim Naseer, keyboardist and arranger, whose main work is as an aerospace engineer in Melbourne.

Zahir Yusuf is a semi-professional singer brought up in Australia. His main work is as a taxi driver in the Dandenong area. As a singer he is regularly hired to sing at Afghan weddings and other events. He performs quite often with Yama and Ali Sarshar, but when engaged for lower paying gigs he performs alone, as a one-man band, singing and accompanying himself on the keyboard, using the drum machine built into the keyboard to provide the rhythm. He prefers to perform what he sometimes refers to as classical music, meaning singing classical Persian poetry, but his paid work as a musician requires him to perform mainly Afghan popular music, in both 'slow music' and 'fast music' styles.

Turning to some of the musicians who perform Afghan art music, we may mention the following:

Ustad Khalil Gudaz is arguably the best sitar player in Australia today. He was born in Kabul in 1963 into a family with a keen interest in amateur music making. As a boy he learned to play rubab and tanbur from Ustad Mohammad Omar, one of Kabul's master musicians. He was employed as a musician at Radio Afghanistan in the 1980s. He started learning sitar with a teacher at the Indian Embassy in Kabul at a time when the Embassy organised music courses for several instruments. In 1988 he received a scholarship to study sitar in India at the Shri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, New Delhi, and later at Prayag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad. Perhaps most importantly, he became the student of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, one of the great *sarod* masters. From all this he received a thorough training in the theory and practice of Hindustani (North Indian classical) music. He emigrated to Australia in 1998, sponsored by his brother, and settled in Melbourne. In his musical work Khalil Gudaz performs both Hindustani and Afghan music. In 2009 he had adopted a new model of sitar designed for Ravi Shankar, being a little smaller than the standard model, with a flat back, machine heads rather than tuning pegs for the melody strings, and a built-in pickup. What distinguishes him is his performance of Afghan folk and popular song melodies on the sitar, which is done tastefully and sensitively, with a strong input of Hindustani music, especially with ornaments and short improvised passages. In this he is following the example of several key Afghan vocalists such as Ustad Qassem (a 1920s court singer) and the aforementioned Ustad Sarahang, both of whom were trained in Indian vocal music, and who performed Afghan folk songs with a strong input of classical music. In recent years Gudaz has presented himself as a singer, using mainly the poetry of Rumi, sung to his own rag-based compositions, and accompanying his singing with the sitar. In this respect he is the unique performer of a new kind of Afghan

classical music. A short example of this new singing style can be heard on his latest CD *Bamyan* (see below). In Australia he is a full-time professional musician, making his living from performances. He runs a private music school, where he teaches sitar, rubab, tabla, harmonium, and vocal, and has a number of non-Afghan students. He is one of very few Afghan-Australian musicians with an international profile, having been on concert tours in Asia, Europe and North America. He plays sitar on the Mahwash CD *Ghazals afghans*, recorded in France and released in 2007, and on the Afghan singer *Yunus's Yadgar* album, produced by the CD company Bakhtar Music in Hamburg.

Nesruddin Sarshar, usually addressed as Ustad Sarshar, came to Australia in the late 1970s and stayed on after the Saur Revolution of 1978. He came from a family of amateur musicians in Kabul, and has received a thorough training in tabla playing from musicians in the Kucheh Kharabat. He also plays sitar, dholak, rubab, tanbur, harmonium, flute and vocal. He was one of the first Afghan musicians in Australia and these days is known principally as a sitar player, having been the student of Ustad Shamim Ahmad Khan, a disciple of Ravi Shankar. He also works for the Australian government as an interpreter, especially in the processing of new illegal arrivals who arrive from Indonesia by boat. He has two highly talented musician sons, Yama and Ali.

Yama Sarshar, born in Sydney in 1982, is an excellent tabla and dholak player, starting at a very young age, under the tutelage of his father. In 1997 he went to Mumbai to study at the Ustad Alla Rakha Institute of Music, and has been the student of Ustad Alla Rakha, and his sons Fazal Qureshi and Zakir Hussein. When I met him in 2009 he had just returned from another visit to India supported by a scholarship from the Australian Arts Council to continue his study with Zakir Hussein. Yama plays at Afghan weddings and other concerts, and often accompanies visiting Indian artists. He has also played at many concerts in India.

Ali Sarshar, Yama Sarshar's younger brother, also has a background in Indian music, learned from his father. He completed a diploma course with the Roland Company that covered training in sound engineering, keyboard performance, western music theory and practice, including fluency in western notation. He combines skills in sound engineering, arranging, and composition and is the key family member for another aspect of the Sarshar family enterprise, the music recording business called Sash Studios. Here he has a very creative role, not just on the recording technology side, but composing and arranging the backing tracks for singers. But this is not all that Sash Studios provide. Their business card gives a good idea of the range of services available, including organising events, providing live music, catering and musical training.

Sash Studio

Your Total Event Management

We provide our clients with all there is necessary to plan and manage their special event from Weddings, Private Shows, Corporate Functions, Religious Functions, Concerts and many more.

Sash Studios specializes in Live Indian music from Background music to a full band, Live Afghani music band with the choice of any local or overseas artist, Australia's top Bollywood Dancers and many more.... Equipped with state of the art music and recording equipment to give our client all the up to date technology... can also manage all your catering needs from Indian, Afghani and a huge range of other Menus to choose from using some of Australia's number one chefs [...Nesruddin Sarshar] is one of Australia's leading music tutors [...] teaching Vocals, Sitar, Harmonium, Rubab and Dhol....

The Sarshar family constitute a viable ensemble, with Nesruddin on sitar, or harmonium if he is going to sing, Yama on tabla or dholak, and Ali on keyboards. In this format they are ready to accompany any Afghan singer who needs a band for a wedding party or other performance. In 2007 the Sarshar family recorded much of the music for the film *Son of a Lion* (see below). It can be seen that the family derives income from a variety of activities, and in this they seem typical of many other Afghan-Australians, who are ready to work on several fronts simultaneously.

Finally, we should mention two semi-professional rubab players, **Hosein Shirzad** and **Sultan Miazoi**. Both are former students of Ustad Mohammad Omar and maintain some of the repertory of Kabuli instrumental art music. Hosein Shirzad, from Herat, formerly a shoemaker, is also a highly skilled rubab maker, with a workshop in his house in Melbourne. He has made certain structural improvements to the rubab, and has created a number of new rubab-like instruments.

The Afghan recording industry in Australia

An important part of the Afghan music scene in Australia is the CD/DVD business. CDs and DVDs are sold mainly in the type of store known in the US as an 'Afghan market', and in Australia as an 'Afghan grocery', which typically stocks all the necessary ingredients for Afghan cuisine, the herbs and spices, the dried fruits and nuts, pulses, dried milk products, *halal* meat and freshly baked Afghan bread. Such groceries usually also stock a selection of music CDs and DVDs, including many of Indian film music, which remains very popular with Afghan audiences. There are a number of Afghan groceries in the Auburn area of Sydney and the Dandenong area of Melbourne. It is surely significant that music should be sold in food shops, and there is an interesting connection here between diet and identity, 'you are what you eat'. Likewise, music and dance CDs and DVDs also confer identity; 'you are what you listen to'. Indeed, in Afghanistan music is often described as *qaza-ye ruh*, meaning 'spiritual food or nourishment', an idea derived from Sufism. This connection between groceries and music can be found in other immigrant communities.

Most of the Afghan music CDs and DVDs to be found in the groceries of Dandenong are imported from the US and Germany, with a much smaller selection of locally produced Afghan-Australian CDs. During my visit to Australia I acquired a number of these, all of male artists. Six of them were recorded in the Sash Studio in Sydney. The studio is located in the garage of the luxurious large new house occupied by the Sarshar family in the Blacktown area of Sydney. The recording booth itself is minute,

little more than a square metre in area, and the control booth is the same size. Here it is that Ali Sarshar weaves his magic.

Unlike Afghan CD production companies in Germany and the US, Sash Studio does not offer the artists it records an advance. It caters for those who want to make their own CDs. Normally a singer approaches the studio to suggest making a recording. In that tiny studio the singer records the songs he wants on his CD, accompanied by his own harmonium, to a click track. Then over the next few weeks Ali Sarshar creates 'the music' in other words, the accompaniment, using as many tracks as he needs, getting his brother Yama to lay down some percussion tracks with tabla and/or *dohol*. Once the accompaniment has been finalized the singer returns to the studio and re-records his vocals, now without harmonium, over the 'music'. This itself can take quite some time. We see that in technical terms this is quite an advanced process.

The cost is 300 Australian dollars per track; typically the singer wants ten tracks. In theory, according to the deal, the singer can go back as often as he likes to make any changes he wants in the accompaniment or his own performance. When the work is finished he pays \$3000 for the master plus artwork for the CD's cover, also designed by the multi-talented Ali Sarshar. The artist pays a CD replication company \$2000 to get 1,000 copies made, and it is up to the artist to arrange about distribution. CDs sell for \$7-8 in the shops, and by the time the shopkeeper has taken his cut there is little if any profit to be made by the artist. Thus the CD in itself is not a commercial proposition. It is used to promote the artist and get bookings for live gigs. In global terms, the Australian-produced CDs have a limited distribution. Afghan-Australian artists find it difficult to get their products distributed elsewhere in the West, and as a consequence there is not much flow out of Australia. Exceptions are the Bareq and Mirwais and Khalil Qudaz *Souvenir* CDs, which are distributed in Europe and the US by Chorasani Musik (based in Hamburg).

In order to learn a little more about the recording industry, it is worth considering some of the CDs of Afghan-Australians produced in Australia. While there I tried to collect as many such recordings as possible from Afghan groceries in Sydney and Melbourne. None of these CDs has a label number. This small collection in fact covers nearly the whole range of Afghan musical genres found in the diaspora. There are no women singers, and no recordings of women's domestic music.

Yama Sarshar, Jugalbandi, Sash Studios – An album of four instrumental tracks, featuring Yama as percussionist, with his father Nesruddin playing sitar, Turkish saz by Deniz Sensis, and electric guitar and 'effects' by Steve Vizesi. *Jugalbandi* is the term for a duet. Inside the inlay is printed *'I would firstly like to thank God Almighty. Thanks also to the Australian Arts Council for giving me the opportunity to make this project possible. I would also like to thank my musicians for their hard work and efforts, my Father, Brother, Steve and Deniz, and all my friends and music lovers. I hope you enjoy this CD'* – YAMA. Such dedications are to be found in a number of these CDs.

Spirit of Music, Sash Studios – Another instrumental album, with Ustad Sarshar, sitar, Shri Sangeet Mishra, sarangi, Yama Sarshar, tabla, and Ali Sarshar, background

synths and harmonium. The sarangi player was visiting from India. The pieces include *alap* and *gat* in rag Jaijai Vanti, a *dhun* in rag Pilu, an Indian folksong and an Afghan folk song.

Zahir Yusuf, Sahil, Sash Studios – Zahir Yusuf, taxi-driver and semi-professional singer made some recordings with musicians from Kucheh Kharabat during a visit to Kabul several years before. This is his first CD recorded in Australia, with Sash Studio, according to the procedure outlined above, accompanied by Yama and Ali Sarshar. Sahil is the name of Yusuf's baby son. The album is a mixture of fast dance music, slow music, and ghazals.

Kamal Nasir Dost, Nawhy Del (Melody of the Heart), Sash Studios – Vocal accompanied by sitar, tabla/dholak and keyboards. A collection of mostly romantic slow songs, very much in the Indian film music style, some with relatively sophisticated chord sequences.

Hussain Damoon, Voice of the Heart, Sash Studios – Vocal accompanied by sitar, sarangi, keyboards and a strong tabla presence. Very much the Sash Sound, with lots of keyboard effects and clear use of chord sequences. The album displays a wide range of moods and 'feels'.

Naim Shams, Qarsak Panjshir, Dance Evolution, Sash Studios – As the title suggests, this is an album of fast dance music suitable for wedding parties, with Naim Shams singing, accompanied by keyboard and percussion.

Khalil Gudaz, Souvenir, CD 2, no details given about the recording studio – This is an instrumental CD of sitar music, with Ustad Arif on tabla. It was recorded in Peshawar in about 2000, and produced by the Aryan Supermarket in Oakleigh, Victoria. This business became the Aryan Restaurant in Dandenong, the proprietor Yergash Rahimi provides catering for Afghan weddings and other festivities, and also imports CDs from Germany and the US for distribution in Australia. This is one of the few Australian-produced CDs distributed in Germany and the US, through Chorasani Musik based in Hamburg.

Khalil Gudaz, Bamyani, Aryan Music Centre, Dandenong – Another album of instrumental sitar music, including an original composition in rag Bamyani, based on a four-note scale used in Hazara music. Other tracks are Gudaz's interpretations of Afghan folk and popular song melodies. The last track gives a brief sample of his new 'singing with sitar' style as a taster for his forthcoming album. Produced by Yergash Rahimi of the Aryan Music Centre in Dandenong.

Mirwais & Bareq, Aryan Music Centre, Dandenong – An album of fast music for dancing and several slow songs derived from Indian films. The singing brothers Mirwais and Bareq Naseer, with their keyboard playing brother Tamim. Also distributed in Europe and US by Chorasani Musik.

Sultan Miazoi, *Rohnawaz*, no details about recording or production – A selection of popular song melodies from the 1960s-70s. Sultan Miazoi (his stage name is Rohnawaz) is a fine rubab player, formerly the student of Ustad Mohammad Omar in Kabul, accompanied here on tabla by Pandit Ram Chander Saman.

Mir Wais Yousufzai, *Jahan-e Man (My World)*, recorded at JMF Studios and Arcadia Solutions Studios, Sydney – This album consists of (his own) original song compositions, very much influenced by the style of Ahmad Zahir. Mir Wais is an amateur singer and harmonium and accordion player. His brother Karim curates the official Ahmad Zahir website.

Mir Wais Yousufzai, *Ehsas (Feelings)*, recorded in Bloom Studios, Sydney – More of Mir Wais in the Ahmad Zahir style, mostly with harmonium and tabla accompaniment.

G. Nayel, *Live, A Collector's Edition of Ghazals, Ba Yadat Shab-o-Rooz ('Day and Night in Your Memories')*, recorded at a live concert in Sydney, 2006, produced by Dr NA Khalidi – Ghaus Nayel, vocal and harmonium, with Rahin Damoon on tabla. Nayal is an amateur ghazal singer in the Kabuli style who had some ghazals broadcast on radio and television in Kabul.

Wafi Jamal, *Afghanistan*, produced by K.C. Music – A mixture of new popular music styles with rap.

Australian composers and Afghan music

With perhaps the exception of rap, there is not much evidence of Afghan-Australian musicians incorporating ideas drawn from contemporary art of popular western music into their work. The westernisation and modernisation of Afghan popular music began in Afghanistan itself, in the 1960s-1980s, and developed further in the West, especially in the US. On the other hand, interestingly enough, there are examples of contemporary Australian composers inspired by music from Afghanistan, amongst whom we may mention Peter Sculthorpe, Amanda Brown and Sadie Harrison.

Peter Sculthorpe, is first and foremost Australia's most distinguished modern composer. In his dedicated pursuit during the 1950s and 1960s of an identifiably Australian idiom for his music, he turned his back decisively on traditional classical European models and influences, famously telling an interviewer from London's *The Times* in 1966: "*Europe is the past: Australia, Indonesia and the South Pacific are the future*" (Skinner, 2009). Sculthorpe's work embodies these ideas, as well as a strong belief in the need for justice with respect to minority groups in Australia. His *String Quartet Nr 16* (2005) was inspired by a collection of letters written by asylum seekers in Australian detention centres (Austin, 2003). The first, third and fifth movements of the quartet are freely based on a traditional love song from Central Afghanistan, almost certainly a Hazara folk song, while the second and fourth movements use a similar Afghan scale. "*Not only did the use of this material allow Sculthorpe to*

address a crisis of the present, it also allowed him for the first time to gesture to the long presence of Afghani cameleers in the Australian outback with which his music is so closely linked” (Skinner, 2009). The movements are entitled Loneliness, Anger, Yearning, Trauma, and Freedom, reflecting the emotions of the internees.

Amanda Brown, a second composer created the music for the film *Son of a Lion*, shot in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan in 2004-5 by Benjamin Gilmour (Gilmour, 2008). In the liner notes accompanying the CD of the soundtrack Brown writes, “Having never heard music of the Afghanistan/Pakistan region previously, before embarking on composing I had a lot of research to do in terms of a general understanding of the musical history and styles, instruments and their keys and ranges, and most importantly, tracking down local musicians who could actually play these instruments” (Brown, 2008). The Afghan musicians she found were Ustad Sarshar and his two sons, who performed much of the soundtrack for the film. She was the winner of an Inside Film Award for the best soundtrack of 2008 and the CD of the soundtrack has been nominated for the Australian Recording Industry Association Music Award for 2009.

A third Australian composer involved with Afghan music is Sadie Harrison. Born in Adelaide, Harrison has lived in the UK since 1970. Her work *The Light Garden Trilogy* was initially inspired by the book *The Light Garden of the Angel King*. Travels in Afghanistan with Bruce Chatwin by Peter Levi. From reading this she became fascinated with the idea of the Bagh-e Babur, the garden in Kabul where Emperor Babur, first of the Mughal dynasty, lies buried. The piece incorporates structural elements of Afghan instrumental art music as delineated by Baily (1997). The three parts of the trilogy are *The Light Garden* (2001), *The Fourteenth Terrace* (2002) and *Bavad Khair Baqi* (May this goodness last forever!) (2002). In the CD of *The Light Garden* the three parts of the trilogy are interleaved between four pieces of traditional Afghan music performed by London-based Ensemble Bakhtar, of which I am the director.

Conclusions

We can usefully begin to look at how Afghans have adapted to life in Australia by returning to the variables highlighted in the introduction to this paper. Obviously, Australia is a long way geographically from Afghanistan, though no more so than California. But being on the other side of the world, ‘down under’ as they say, introduces a kind of psychological distancing. In Australia you are somehow ‘out of contact’, ‘off the radar’. Australia is also far away from Afghanistan in socio-cultural terms. Imposed upon indigenous Aboriginal culture is a layer of Anglo-Celtic culture little more than 200 years old, and enshrined in the ‘white Australia’ immigration policy introduced in 1901. Australia is overwhelmingly Christian (Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox), the dominant language is English, there is the passion for sport, casual - even revealing - clothing, a tendency towards nuclear families, no great respect for older generations, little concern for family honour, sexual freedom, political democracy, working-class solidarity (‘mateship’), positive attitudes towards multiculturalism, opportunities for self-improvement and economic success. Afghans have adapted well to this cultural

environment and have embraced the liberal and tolerant ethos of their new home. Islamist tendencies are muted, shown by the relative scarcity of veiling, the general absence of strong anti-music ideology, and an absence of inter-sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiahhs. Tolerance is also evident in the absence of strong inter-ethnic tension between different sections of the Afghan population (Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and others).

Turning now to the matter of Afghan music in Australia, we see that Melbourne and Sydney conform to the same pattern that I have found in California (Baily, 2005), London and Hamburg (Baily, 2008). This supports the idea that there are in fact two parts to the Afghan diaspora, the near and the far, the 'eastern' and the 'western', the countries that are geographically and culturally close to Afghanistan, and those that are remote. Looking at Australia as part of the 'western Afghan diaspora' we see that Afghan musical life in Australia, in comparison with the US or Germany, is to a large extent conditioned by the relatively small size of the community, between 20 and 25 thousand people. This is not enough to support a vigorous Afghan music profession. There are no big stars and very few fulltime professional musicians. Such as there are, supplement their income by teaching in their own small privately run music schools. There are only two, very small, media companies, Aryan Music and Sash Studios. There is some state sponsorship for making commercial recordings and going abroad for musical training. And there are state sponsored multicultural radio and television channels that have some Afghan music programming. The result seems, unexpectedly, to be a vigorous amateur music scene catering for a community of music lovers.

Within the Afghan-Australian community there are several innovative musicians, specifically Ustad Khalil Gudaz, and members of the Sarshar family. They are successful both as purveyors of Indian (Hindustani) and Afghan music, indirectly pointing to the historical links between the music culture of the two regions. They are able to address a range of audiences, Afghan, Indian, and 'white-Australians' who patronise the world music scene. They perform both within the Afghan community - at weddings and other festive occasions - and to the greater Australian community, for example, at world and international music festivals, such as Mid West Music Festival, Aurora Music Festival, Womadelaide, and the Sydney Jazz Festival. However, not much of this creativity flows from Australia to Afghanistan or to other parts of the Afghan diaspora. It is a one way traffic, which shows that the model of music flow within the periphery proposed by Baily (2007) is an over-simplification that requires further refinement; the case of Australia shows how local conditions create irregularities in the flow of music information.

The work of the above-mentioned composers of western art music is particularly interesting because it shows how, for varying reasons, the culture of recent immigrants enriches mainstream Australian culture. It provides a fine example of the way in which migrant groups are a source of cultural innovation, supporting Robin Cohen's belief in "*the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism*" (Cohen, 1997: 26).

Notes

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² Note from editor: This emphasis on the value to retain images of what is seen by those who migrated as their 'traditional' music was identified as 'retention of musical models' in relation to the performing practice of fado among Portuguese migrants in the region of New York (Carvalho, 1991) and as expression of utter nationalism, relative to the practice of folklore groups in the same migrant context (Carvalho, 1990).

³ <http://www.colombo-plan.org>

⁴ This is currently the subject on further enquiry. There are indications that the explosion was deliberately started, see <http://news.theage.com.au/breaking-news-national/asylum-seeker-boat-fire-was-deliberate-20091001-gdzw.html>, accessed on 13.01.2010.

⁵ Heratis are today classified as Tajiks, though they probably never thought of themselves as such in the past. Locally, they called themselves Herati, or perhaps *farsiwan*, Persian-speakers.

⁶ The name is thought to be a corruption of the Aboriginal word *Tanjenong*, meaning 'lofty mountains', and referred to the ranges which overlook the area (Wikipedia)

⁷ 'The Ghan cameleer theme is stamped all over the Central Australia brand with bronze statues, logos etc.' (Gavin Gatenby, p.c. 16.11.2009)

⁸ Ahmad Zahir, born in 1946, came from a wealthy elite background. His father was Prime Minister for a short period. He was killed in 1979, seemingly because of his political views (Wikipedia).

⁹ See <http://www.ahmadzahir.com>

¹⁰ *Ghazalkhani*, ghazal singing, was very much an art cultivated by the hereditary musician families of the Kucheh Kharabat, the musicians' quarter in Kabul. The ancestors of many of these musicians were migrants from India who were employed at the royal court from the 1860s onward.

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