

## The Victorian Tunes Project

The Victorian tunes project arose from a discussion between myself and Hugh McEwan about how best to disseminate the vast amount of folkloric material residing unexamined in our libraries. There are a small number of artists and musician doing good work in using this material to foster an ongoing awareness of what it was to be an Australian musician in the previous two centuries. They focus mainly on the dance music of rural communities as their relative isolation has preserved many traditions peculiar to our culture.

My interest originally was fostered by meeting and playing with older traditional musicians and discovering the world of tunes they used mainly for old-time dances played in community halls and woolsheds. These tunes form a unique body of music peculiar to our origins as a nation. This material was part of an even wider web encompassing the globe and still being added to today. The study of this phenomenon is easily the subject of a Ph.D. thesis in many nations around the world but sadly not here.

The musicians collected their material according to the avenues open to them. Some was acquired aurally as in the folk tradition, some off the written page. Later tunes came off the radio or early Edison recordings. One example came from the song of a magpie. Possibly the first European tune played in Australia was The Rogues March played at the drumming out of a Royal Marine on the First Fleet.

The various permutations of these pathways led to an amazing emergence of variants, many of them exhibiting original composition and ideas. Nearly all this material is derivative in the sense that it reflected the music of the various national and cultural groups that went to make up our population. This is exactly the story of popular dance music the world over and our experience of it is both typical and unique.

The Mp3 available for free download on this site are examples of this ongoing process. The musicians are all respected members in their communities, some professional and some not. They all have given their time and skills for free. All of the tunes have something new about them. It could be new instruments or a new combination of instruments or a shift in style but all are deeply connected to our heritage through their long ongoing use in the halls and parlours of Australia.

Funding for this project was provided by The R.V.H.S. originally for a C.D. and explanatory booklet. This is in the pipeline and will contain about 20 sets of tunes on completion. Anyone interested in getting a copy of the C.D when it is completed (sometime in 2006) can email me at [greganol@optushome.com.au](mailto:greganol@optushome.com.au) and I will let you know where to get it.

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