

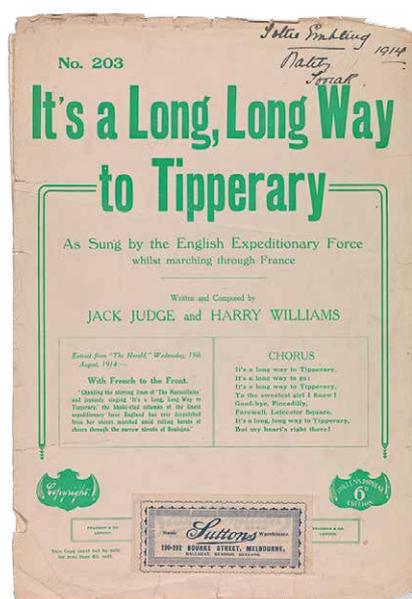
Singing the Great War

Australian song in World War I

Jennifer Hill

The Grainger Museum's contribution to the centenary of Anzac in 2015 is the exhibition *Pack up your troubles: Music in the Great War*. With a focus on the Australian experience, the exhibition explores the powerful and varied role of music and musicians during World War I and considers why music resonated so strongly across a broad spectrum of domestic, civic and military life. *Pack up your troubles* is the title of a British music hall song by Felix Powell and George Asaf,¹ which, like *It's a long, long way to Tipperary*, was one of the war's greatest song hits. As an exhibition title, 'Pack up your troubles' can also be read ironically, referencing popular music's customary disregard for—or ignorance of—the realities of war, and favouring, for the most part, jingoistic support of empire and pride in 'our boys' at the front.

The exhibition is enhanced by video footage from the war years,² and by sound recordings of songs, brass band numbers and excerpts from the musical theatre popular with troops during the period: visitors can choose from 20 tracks through loaned iPods, many recorded especially for the exhibition.³ The exhibition also features a break-out area illustrating Percy Grainger's experience of the war, when he was resident in America. While



the *Pack up your troubles* exhibition ranges widely across different sorts of musical activity, this article will confine itself to exploring singing, particularly of popular Australian song in World War I. The exhibition includes material from a number of public and private collections,⁴ although all the illustrations here are drawn from sheet music and concert programs found in the Rare Collections of the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library at the University of Melbourne.

Published popular song was an important mainstream means of

entertainment in Australia when war broke out, as elsewhere.⁵ These pieces of sheet music ('song sheets') were the predominant means of disseminating songs to the domestic market, though increasingly the gramophone and the player piano offered newer—but considerably more costly—ways of acquiring the latest hits for home use.⁶ Sheet music was relatively cheap to buy and publishers sold the most popular numbers at 6d per copy; 'sixpenny pops', from around 1900, used cheaper paper and fewer pages to print the song, squeezing in advertisements wherever possible. At the same time, sheet music that sold for 2 shillings (occasionally more) had a more generous layout, with sometimes an entire page devoted to the lyrics, and superior paper stock and printing. There was a proliferation of music publishing companies; each big music warehouse had its own: Allan & Co., W.H. Paling, J. Albert & Son and many others.

Sheet music was produced on a huge scale and sold in large numbers. We know from many sources, including contemporaneous fiction, that it was a 'treat yourself' purchase on a shopping trip, for example, or was bought as a modest gift. Sheet music was played at

Opposite: Jack Judge and Harry Williams, *It's a long, long way to Tipperary: As sung by the English Expeditionary Force whilst marching through France*, Melbourne: Stanley Mullen Company, 1914 (1912). Music RB ML J9275 ITS.1, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

Below: Robert H. McAnally, *Bravo! Boys of Australia: Stirring march song*, Melbourne: E.W. Cole, c. 1916. Music RB ML M1145 BRA.1, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

COLE'S Publication of 6^d Music Successes



BRAVO! BOYS OF AUSTRALIA

STIRRING MARCH SONG

Written and
Composed
by
**ROBT. H.
McANALLY**

SUNG
WITH UNBOUNDED
SUCCESS
throughout
AUSTRALIA &
NEW-ZEALAND
by
MISS VIOLET TREVENYON

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home on the parlour piano or when visiting friends, as a contribution to an afternoon's or evening's entertainment. Dancing, or learning to dance, around the piano was also commonplace. Songs could double as dances, though not during World War I; it was march songs (such as *Bravo! Boys of Australia*, left, and *Sons of dear Australia*) that proliferated at this time.

Musical literacy—the ability to read notated music—was remarkably high in Australia and the middle classes sent their children, particularly the girls, to learn piano or, to a lesser extent, singing, from exponentially increasing numbers of teachers, not all of them good. The proliferation of vamping methods, in addition, is proof of an interest in quick ways for adults to learn pianistic skills they had not acquired in childhood. And while printed sheet music provided perfectly serviceable and not-too-hard piano marches, dances and song accompaniments, playing the music as notated was not mandatory. Demonstration pianists in publishers' warehouses (Allan's, for example) elaborated and improvised, making the store's printed wares irresistible to purchasers, who were often disappointed when they played the same music at home.

Edward H. Tyrrell and Sam Cowan, *They lie sleeping in Gallipoli to-night: Pathetic song*, Sydney: W.H. Paling & Co., 1916. Music RB M T993 THE.1, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

Bert Rache and Private Harley Cohen, *They were there! There!! There!!!*, Sydney: W.J. Deane & Son, 1916. Music RB M R11892 THE.1, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

Reginald A.A. Stoneham, *Back home*, Melbourne: Loebel & Co., 1918. Music RB M S8814 BAC.1, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

With the Publishers and Composers' Compl.
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Sung with immense success by Messrs. MARYON MARRAS, W. SCHUBERT, K. SCHUBERT, J. J. PUNTON, and Misses NELLIE BRADY and DOLLY KIRBY. (Others: IVY SMITH, BETTE BOSHE, ADDIE HANDCOCK, MAGGIE MAYCAR, NELLIE GALLAGHER, BELLA BARLOW, ELSIE HOLKINWORTH, BESSIE BRYANT, WINNIE TURNBULL, and Misses HAYMOND SMITH. Also played by Leading Bands and Orchestras.

They Lie Sleeping in Gallipoli To-night



PATHETIC SONG.

Words by
SAM COWAN
WRITER OF
"OO-EE OO-EE" &

Music by
Edward H. Tyrrell
F.V.C.M.
Composer of the celebrated songs:
"OO-EE OO-EE" &
"Heroes of Gallipoli," etc.

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Price 2/- net.

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DEDICATED TO OUR GALLANT ANZACS

BACK HOME



Chorus
Back Home, back home
Gee! 'tis great to be able back
Home!
While the birds sing a song of joy,
And the folk at home greet their
Gallant Boy,
Back Home, back home,
Never more far away do roam!
Never more far away do roam!
That a waterway like this, fills a
"Gallant" with tales,
Gee! 'tis great to be able
Back Home, back home.

Written and Composed by
REG. A. A. STONEHAM

Price, 2/- net

Published by
Loebel & Co.
12 ROYAL ARCADE, MELBOURNE

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Sung by PETER DAWSON, world famed baritone, with enormous success throughout AUSTRALIA.

DEDICATED TO
OUR ANZAC BOYS!

Who by their Gallantry at GALLIPOLI
Daringly and Unflinchingly
Success has created a world famous
song Unifying Home for AUSTRALIA.

THEY WERE THERE! THERE!! THERE!!!



by
Private Harley Cohen
OF THE
Fighting 4th Batt

Music by
Bert Rache

**THE FAMOUS
GALLIPOLI SONG**

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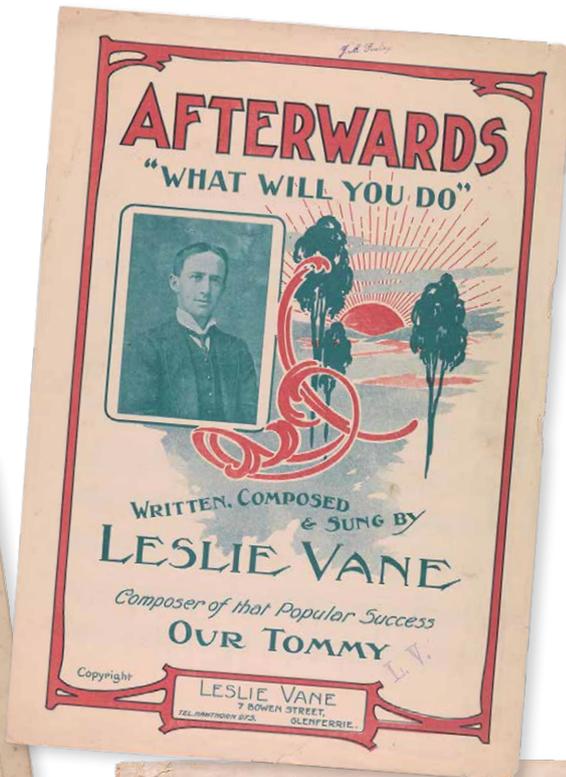
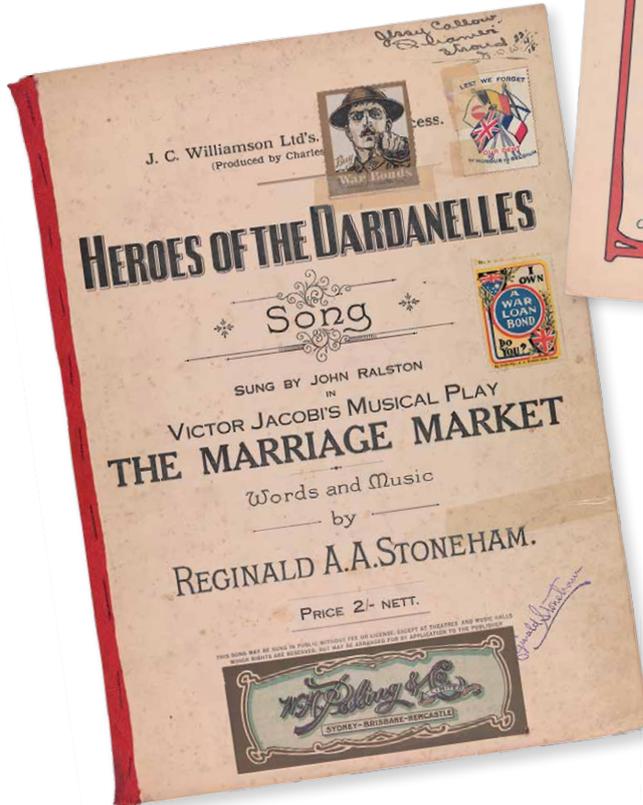
W. J. DEANE & SON

Handwritten signatures and notes are visible throughout the sheet, including names like 'Genny Collins', 'John J. Deane', and 'The Gallant Boy'.

Leslie Vane, *Afterwards 'What will you do'*,
 Glenferrie (Melbourne): Leslie Vane, 1918.
 Music RB M V250 AFT.1, Louise Hanson-Dyer
 Music Library Rare Collections, University of
 Melbourne Library.

Reginald A.A. Stoneham, *Heroes of the
 Dardanelles*, Sydney: W.H. Paling & Co., 1915.
 Music RB M S8814 HER.1, Louise Hanson-
 Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University
 of Melbourne Library.

Victor Champion and Reginald Franklin,
Fighting for the Motherland, Sydney: Albert &
 Son, 1914. Music RB M C4495 FIG.1, Louise
 Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections,
 University of Melbourne Library.



Against this background of a vast domestic market for popular song, war-themed songs started to appear in the published song repertoire—first imported, then local—from the very early months of World War I. The numbers of songs published accelerated into 1915 and 1916, tapering off somewhat in the latter years of the war.⁷ Lyrics reflected the mood and responded to the events of the war. Early on there were songs of empire (*Fighting for the Motherland*, December 1914, illustrated on p. 27) and songs of burgeoning pride in the bravery of the Australians who volunteered to serve (*Bravo! Boys of Australia*, 1915). The Gallipoli campaign featured heavily in numerous songs (*Heroes of the Dardanelles*, 1915; *They were there! There!! There!!!*, 1916) and, as more soldiers were needed to replace the injured and dead (*They lie sleeping in Gallipoli to-night*, 1916), recruiting songs started to emerge to persuade the hesitant or reluctant (*Coo-ee! Coo-ee! You're wanted at the Dardanelles*, 1915; *For auld lang syne! Australia will be there*, 1916). In later years songs about what the future might hold for returned servicemen began to emerge (*Afterwards 'What will you do'*, 1918; *Back home*, 1918).

The individuals who wrote these songs were mostly established

composers or relatively obscure amateurs. Of the latter, many turned to song composition in response to the war and had a message to impart;⁸ others (presumably the minority) had a more cynical motivation: to cash in.⁹ Most of the professionally written popular patriotic music was first heard in popular staged entertainments—vaudeville and pantomime. Vaudeville shows—popular staged variety given all year round—seem to have offered the best audiences and thus the greatest potential for publication and subsequent sales of the Australian songs.¹⁰ Songs, even the successful ones, range from those with the sophistication of the British drawing room tradition (Reginald A.A. Stoneham's *Heroes of the Dardanelles*) to well-crafted vaudeville numbers (Edward H. Tyrrell's *They lie sleeping; Coo-ee! Coo-ee!*), right through to the manifestly inept, the musically mediocre and those with clumsy lyrics.

Songs were also heard at patriotic concerts. These ranged from major events with star guests at city town halls to the suburban or country town equivalent. Common to all were kilometres of red, white and blue bunting and hand-held Allied flags, which the children waved.¹¹

There were often also larger flags to auction off at high prices: soprano Nellie Melba, queen of capital city patriotic fundraisers, was well known for exhorting the well-heeled to pay above the odds when auctioning large silk Allied flags that she herself signed and dated.¹² As the writer of one column for 'The Ladies' put it: 'Madame sang, we listened with reverent joy; she pleaded for war stricken families, and we gave willingly, gladly'.¹³ Souvenir programs, of often very attractive design, survive from these concerts and were also used to raise funds. At her patriotic concerts Melba sang songs and operatic excerpts from her usual repertoire, rather than anything of direct relevance to the war, though she and other singers who raised funds, like Antonia Dolores,¹⁴ would generally also sing one or more national anthems (or national songs).

An extended article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* only months after war began gently satirised the patriotic concert phenomenon, specifically the suburban variety, of which national songs were a particular feature. In this humorous account, the singers and a lone cornet player were kept together by a pianist, plodding on 'like a howitzer with caterpillar feet', through the national anthem,

Skipper Francis, *For auld lang syne! Australia will be there*, Melbourne: Dinsdales, 1916. Music RB M F819 FOR.3, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

the Marseillaise, the Belgian and Russian national anthems, then a Japanese hymn. In these songs the school children excelled while adults floundered with the lyrics; in Belgium's *La Brabançonne* the 'curly notes' proved very troublesome.¹⁵ This widespread singing of Allied patriotic songs—and the difficulties they could present—explains the proliferation of sheet music for sale reproducing these numbers. Judicious practice at home of words and melody would undoubtedly have been beneficial to those who attended these frequent and well-supported community events.

Popular song was also a feature of suburban patriotic concerts, sometimes composed especially for the event. In the *Sydney Morning Herald's* satirical narrative:

... the tenor in the artists' room waits nervously for the proudest moment of his life when he shall sing the patriotic song composed for the occasion by local talent, 'Khaki Can Do Its Little Bit,' or 'Mother, Your Boy Will Do You Proud'.¹⁶

One Australian song surpassed all others in popularity, sheet music sales (even allowing for the customary exaggeration of sales figures) and

No. 298 85th THOUSAND

FOR AULD LANG SYNE! AUSTRALIA WILL BE THERE



**AUSTRALIA'S
BATTLE SONG.**
The Accepted March Song
of the
AUSTRALIAN EXPEDITIONARY
FORCES

Sung by the Troops on the
Troopship "SOUTHLAND"
when it was torpedoed and
sunk on September 2nd,
1915.



SKIPPER
FRANCIS



**SUNG BEFORE
HIS MAJESTY
KING GEORGE V
and ROYAL PARTY,**
at Buckingham Palace, March 22, 1916.

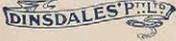
Played on the occasion of the Presentation
of the Freedom of the City of London to
the Prime Minister of Australia, the
Right Hon. W. M. Hughes.

WRITTEN, COMPOSED, AND SUNG WITH PHENOMENAL SUCCESS BY

SKIPPER FRANCIS

(The Bristol Channel Swimmer) to whom the Full Theatrical Performing Rights are Secured and Reserved.

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by Dinsdales' Pty. Ltd.
E. Osborne & Co. Ltd.,
London.



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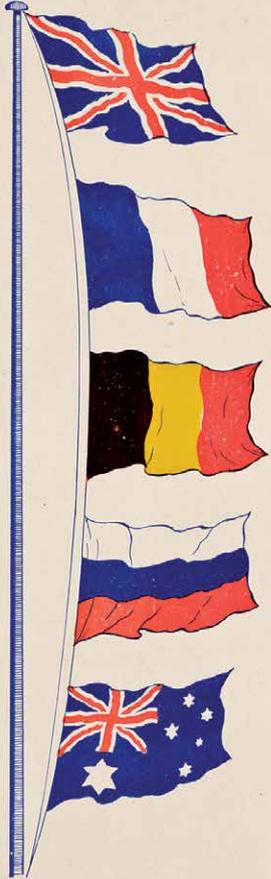
Columbia
"Regal"
Record
No. 6889

Also His Master's Voice,
Beka, Winner, Patha,
and other Records.



Program for *Melba patriotic concert* at The Auditorium, 10 September 1914. Concert Program Collection, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

The Auditorium. *Thursday, 10th September, 1914*



MELBA PATRIOTIC CONCERT



Artists (who have all generously given their services) :

MADAME MELBA.
MISS ELLEN TERRY
(By courtesy of Mr. Joseph Blascheck),
MADAME MAGGIE STIRLING,
MR. FREDERIC R. COLLIER,
MR. HAROLD WHITTLE,
MR. JOHN LEMMONE,
THE COMBINED PHILHARMONIC AND
FESTIVAL CHOIRS,
THE COMBINED SYMPHONY AND PHIL-
HARMONIC SOCIETY'S ORCHESTRAS.
Principal Violin :—MISS IMELDA CLANCY,
Conductors :—MR. ALBERTO ZELMAN and
MR. J. J. BAILEY.
Organist : MR. W. F. G. STEELE.
Accompanist :—MR. HAROLD WHITTLE.

Hon. Treasurer, MR. GEO. C. ALLAN.
Hon. Manager, MR. JOHN LEMMONE.

CONCERT GRAND PIANO from ALLAN'S.

adoption by the soldiers themselves: Skipper (W.W.) Francis's *For auld lang syne! Australia will be there*. Subsequent editions and reprints of the sheet music suggest that well in excess of 116,000 copies were sold; the copy pictured on p. 29, from 1916, is one of the '85th thousand'. It is hard to know exactly why this song was so popular and travelled so far. *Australia will be there*, in the standard two verse and chorus vaudeville form, quotes the music of *La Marseillaise*, *Rule Britannia*, *Advance Australia fair* and *Auld lang syne*, has an easily memorable chorus (an 'earworm') and its piano accompaniment is at the simpler end of the spectrum. These advantages pair with chorus lyrics that combine the essence of empire ('Rally round the banner of your country / take the field with brothers o'er the foam') with the Australian troops cast as Britain's saviours ('But England home [*sic*] and beauty have no cause to fear / Should Auld acquaintance be forgot / No! ... Australia will be there').

Francis, a Welsh entertainer, was in Sydney in 1914 with Fuller's vaudeville presenting a silent movie of his 1912 Bristol Channel Swim.¹⁷ When war broke out he was inspired to write *Australia will be there*. As a popular stage performer himself he was able to sing his own song



to great success. His backstory of physical disability and sporting accomplishment probably helped attract press coverage and initial interest in his song.¹⁸ *Australia will be there* was to acquire official status as ‘the accepted march song of the Australian expeditionary forces’ and was dubbed ‘Australia’s Battle Song’. On several occasions it was named in reports where Australian service personnel distinguished themselves; stories like these were widely syndicated. The sinking of the *Southland* by torpedo strike is the standout example of this. At the call to abandon ship, Australians were

reported to have sung *Australia will be there* ‘with no more hurry than a brisk march’ as they calmly followed orders, lowering the lifeboats and giving priority to the wounded.¹⁹

Australian folklorist Warren Fahey provides an account of how singing was a constant in military life:

They sang on the march to relieve boredom and as an aid to maintain uniform marching time, they sang in the barracks, they sang in the troop trucks as they criss-crossed [*sic*] foreign lands and, of course, they sang in the trenches. Above all, they sang on those rare opportunities when they were ‘temporarily free men’ on leave and on the rantan.²⁰

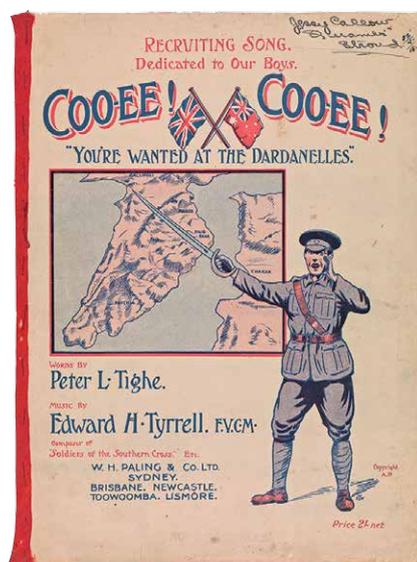
Fahey’s interest is in collecting lyrics where parody and liberal amounts of often ‘blue’ humour provide an unvarnished picture of military life—the appalling food and widespread disrespect for their superiors and the British, for example—as well as lyrics that were aggressively gung-ho and designed to be heard by the enemy in battle. The lyrics Fahey has collected were often sung to traditional tunes; others were bowdlerised or localised versions of international hits and

provide an interesting counterpoint to the songs that appeared in print.

Some returned soldiers, wounded in battle, forged careers as songwriters and variety performers; this could provide a living for those unable to return to their former occupations. Private Harley Cohen, who lost an eye at the Battle of Lone Pine, for example, formed the Anzac Concert Party with other wounded veterans, and later the Gallipoli Strollers.²¹ Cohen began writing lyrics in the trenches at Gallipoli. A small collection of well-thumbed Australian song sheets with lyrics by Cohen has survived (*They were there! There!! There!!!; The dawn of a perfect day*), autographed by the soldiers-turned-performers of the Anzac Concert Party; most of the men have added their battalion number or unit and some even note where they were wounded.

Songs and singing resonated throughout the war years for many Australians: creators and performers, publishers and music-sellers, civilians at home and soldiers at the front. One hundred years on, the popular songs and concert programs in the Rare Collections of the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library, University of Melbourne, bear witness to, and illuminate, the music that accompanied those troubled times.

Edward H. Tyrrell and Peter L. Tighe, *Coo-ee! Coo-ee! You're wanted at the Dardanelles*, Sydney: W.H. Paling, 1915. Music RB M T9933 COO.1, Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne Library.



Dr Jennifer Hill is the music curator at the University of Melbourne and has worked for over a decade with the Grainger Museum's collections. She is also an honorary research fellow at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music; her research interests include music in late colonial and early 20th-century Australia.

The Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library is located on Levels 2 and 3, ERC Building, University of Melbourne, see <http://library.unimelb.edu.au/lhdml> or contact lhdmusic-library@unimelb.edu.au. The exhibition *Pack up your troubles: Music and the Great War* at the Grainger Museum closes on 23 December 2015.

1 The song *Pack up your troubles*, published in Australia in 1916, won the competition held by British publisher Francis, Day & Hunter to find the 'best marching song'.

- 2 A seven-minute silent movie was compiled from World War I footage from the collections of the National Film and Sound Archive.
- 3 Eleven songs were recorded in the university's Melba Hall, most for the first time, by baritone Kiran Rajasingam and pianist Andrea Katz.
- 4 Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare Collections, University of Melbourne; Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne; Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne; Art and Historical Collections, Federation University; National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra; Collection of the Crouch family, Melbourne; Collection of the Durance family, Victoria; Collection of Katherine Griffiths, Melbourne.
- 5 Information on domestic and professional music making during this period is based on the author's doctoral research: Jennifer Hill, 'Aspects of Australian published song, 1890–1914', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2002.
- 6 However, very few Australian popular songs were recorded during this period, presumably because the market was too small; *Australia will be there* and *Heroes of the Dardanelles* were notable exceptions.
- 7 Georgina Binns identifies 485 World War I songs for examination in 'Patriotic and nationalistic song in Australia to 1919: A study of the popular sheet music genre', MMus thesis, University of Melbourne, 1988 (vol. 1), p. 159 and *passim*; inevitably more songs have been located in the years since this fine study was completed.
- 8 See for example 'Vaudeville jottings', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 16 August 1914, p. 18, which opens: 'The patriotic wave has brought along on its crest a host of new song-writers. Spurred to action by dreams of daring feats of arms, people who never before thought of themselves as versifiers or composers, have been sending in to the Tivoli management songs by the score. Most of them are bad ...'
- 9 See for example 'Songs in time of war', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 27 February 1915, p. 16, which begins: 'War is a boon for song-writers. If a ditty is taken up by the soldiers the composer is almost sure to become a wealthy man'.
- 10 The Tivoli and Fuller circuits were the most prominent.
- 11 'The patriotic concert', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 December 2014, p. 5.
- 12 One of these signed flags is located in the Rare Collections of the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library, University of Melbourne (Music RB MELBA FLAG). It is an incomplete French flag (one panel missing) with wooden rod, restored but very fragile. For Melba as persuasive auctioneer, see for example 'The Ladies', *Observer* (Adelaide), 28 November 1914, p. 6.
- 13 'The Ladies'.
- 14 Antonia Dolores (also known as Antoinette Trebelli) was a French-born soprano touring Australia at the outbreak of war.
- 15 'The patriotic concert'.
- 16 'The patriotic concert'.
- 17 Francis claimed he swam 15 miles, from Penarth to Newport. For an account of this film, see the *Riverine Herald*, 14 June 1918, p. 2.
- 18 For an account of why Francis came to write this song, see *The Register* (Adelaide), 9 December 1919, p. 8. His physical disability is inconsistently identified in the press.
- 19 For one of many accounts see the *Southern Star* (Bega), 27 November 1915, p. 4.
- 20 Warren Fahey, 'The songs the Diggers really sang', parts 1 and 2 [*Speewah*, September 2000], republished on *Simply Australia*, www.simplyaustralia.net/article-wf-diggersang.html, accessed 13 August 2015. See also Robert Holden, *And the band played on: How music lifted the Anzac spirit in the battlefields of the First World War*, Richmond: Hardie Grant, 2014.
- 21 See the Australian Variety Theatre Archive (www.ozvta.com/tag/vaudeville/), especially <https://ozvta.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/cohen-harley-23122012.pdf>, accessed 13 August 2015.