



Music Making in the Village of Nimbin

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Abstract: The focus of this paper is on the function and value of music in a small community, the village of [Nimbin](#) in the North Eastern corner of New South Wales, Australia. The paper provides a brief historical and social background of the village as well as some historical information about musical life since the legendary Aquarius Festival (1973). Emphasis is placed on current musical practices and the spatial politics of musical production in the village. The use of music for political protest, community celebration and fund-raising for community projects is discussed. In addition some treatment of professional and semi-professional music making is provided within the context of the national music industry. Music is shown to have a vital and pervasive role in the life and identity of this community.

Key terms: Aquarius Festival, alternative lifestyle, community music, cultural identity

Introduction

The focus of this paper is on the function and value of music in a small community, the village of [Nimbin](#) in the North Eastern corner of New South Wales, Australia. The paper provides a brief historical and social background of the village as well as some historical information about musical life since the legendary Aquarius Festival (1973). Emphasis is placed on current musical practices and the spatial politics of musical production in the village. The use of music for political protest, community celebration and fund-raising for community projects is discussed. In addition some treatment of professional and semi-professional music making is provided within the context of the national music industry. Music is shown to have a vital and pervasive role in the life and identity of this community.

Theoretical framework and methods

Finnegan (1989) provides a useful framework for the discussion of the musical activities of a non-urban area. The extensive community and semi-professional musical activity in the English town of Milton Keynes is shown to be "hidden" in several senses. Firstly the activity is not part of the musical "mainstream" and thus is not accounted for in official cultural and economic surveys. Secondly the "participants ... are often unaware both of its extent and of the structured work they themselves are putting into sustaining it" (p. 4). Finnegan asserts that "local music ...

turns out to be neither formless nor just the product of individual endeavour, but to be structured according to a series of cultural conventions and organised practices, ... in which both social continuity and individual choices play a part". (p.10).

The complexity of musical activity in Australian regional centres is the focus of studies by Gibson (2000 and this issue) and Hayward (2001). In contrast to Finnegan, both these studies confirm the importance of tourism as a driving force for significant local music making activities outside the mainstream music industry. Gibson remarks that a "complex of restructuring processes including technological change; state intervention; appropriation of internet technologies; and interventions with the tourism industries, has meant that a region such as the North Coast is positioned to become increasingly intertwined through music with networks of commodity distribution and cultural flow beyond the region". (Gibson 2000, p. 8). Significantly, both of these studies focus on areas with strong alternative lifestyle traditions: the North Coast (which is centred on Byron Bay and includes Nimbin), and the Whitsunday Islands and adjacent coast, which incorporates the strongly counter-cultural enclave of Airlie Beach. Apart from the music production infrastructure offered to musicians through tourism, both regions have what Gibson refers to as "strong artistic (sub)cultures" and "high levels of grassroots music activities" (p. 133). The research methods employed for this paper on music in Nimbin include participant observation, interviews with performers and consumers, analysis of documentary texts such as newspapers, and, to a limited extent, the analysis of performances and recordings.

Interrogating my biases, I should say that I have been a resident of Nimbin since 1993, and have participated in many of the musical activities referred to in the text, particularly as a performer and/or audience member at many School of Arts activities. I also joined the Moonday Choir temporarily for the purposes of investigating its cultural and musical practices. As a full-time academic, however, I could not consider myself as an alternative lifestyle. I moved to the general area to take up an academic position and chose Nimbin as a place to build a house because the land was cheap and the views magnificent. My engagement with the community has been the normal one of moving to an area, making friends and becoming involved in community-based social activities. My project was inspired by a gradual realisation of the complex fabric of the musical subcultures of this small rural centre and by the work on local protest songs by an honours student, Andrew Parks (1999).

Location and History

The village of Nimbin is in North Eastern New South Wales, Australia. The closest city, Lismore, 30 kilometres to the south, has a population of approximately 45000 [42954 in ABS 1996 Census]. Around 400 people live in the village of Nimbin and a further 2500 or so live in surrounding areas, many of them on alternative lifestyle multiple occupancy communities. The Nightcap Range immediately north of the village is a World Heritage-listed National Park. Nimbin maintains a special symbolic significance within the alternative cultural history of Australia. It was the site of the first significant set of counter-cultural communities including Tuntable Falls Co-ordination Co-operative which Munro-Clarke (1986: 126) describes as 'uniquely large among Australian intentional communities having around 300 residents, order than most ... and more widely known than most (at least by reputation)'.

The history of Nimbin from the first white settlement in 1882 (but not covering the period of alternative lifestyle settlement) is documented in Ryan (1999). The village of Nimbin was established on a cattle run between Lismore and the Tweed Valley

that had been operating since 1843. From the 1840s large areas of rainforests were cleared for timber. The area was first subdivided in 1903 and gazetted in 1906. As the timber industry declined, the cleared land was used to create a dairy industry which became the mainstay of the Nimbin area up till 1950, when the regional dairy processing company, Norco, closed the Nimbin butter factory. Over the next decades around 300 dairy farms closed. By the early 1970s the village, once a thriving service centre, was like a ghost town. The village was saved by a group of student radicals who were looking for a site for a major counter-cultural lifestyle event called the Aquarius Festival in early 1973. The attraction of Nimbin to the festival organisers, Johnny Allen and Graeme Dunstan, was the fact that they would be able to recycle existing, unused buildings in the town. The event was funded by the Australian Union of Students but also by the federally funded Australia Council for the Arts' Community Arts Committee. As Hawkins (1993: 42-43) reports:

Soaking up a significant proportion of the budget, it signified some of the more startling impacts of Whitlam's first aid to the arts. In the 1973 Annual Report, Nimbin was justified as 'an experiment, an exercise in togetherness and the simple pleasures of arts and crafts activities'. Nimbin was the antithesis of the high culture binges at Perth and Adelaide; its hippie ethos equated the festival with the recovery of an organic, pre-industrial community.

"The May Manifesto" written by the festival organisers contains many of the ideals and organisational principles that are still arguably applicable to the Nimbin community. It spoke of a "concentration of arts and artists", "survival on earth", "self sufficiency" on a "tribal basis", "living in harmony with the natural environment", "participation rather than consumer entertainment", "no pre-arranged program of events" and "re-discovering the meaning that agricultural fairs once had for country people". (Dunstan, 1975: 20). The Aquarius Festival was attended by more than 5000 people, mostly students from the major university campuses in Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne. At the end of the festival, a meeting was held to discuss a more on-going commitment to the spirit of the festival, which eventually led to the formation of the Tuntable Falls community.

Apart from those who stayed on from the festival, other people attracted by the alternative lifestyle eventually moved to the area, either buying land to create their own approach to agricultural self-sustainability, joining existing communities or forming new communities. Other communities subsequently formed in the immediate vicinity and in adjacent valleys include Billen Cliffs, Moondani, Blue Springs, Bodhi Farm, and Siddha Farm. In the early 1990s the [Jarlanbah Permaculture Hamlet](#), a different type of community based on rural strata title rather than multiple occupancy, was established. Jarlanbah is typical of the influx of new residents in the 1990s. A significant number of people with life savings, or those able to make a living away from the city in home office fields such as information technology have settled in Nimbin looking for a more yuppified alternative lifestyle. It is also fair to say that the decision of many people to join multiple occupancy communities is now as much driven by lifestyle choice and economic imperatives as by the deep philosophical convictions about communal living outside mainstream culture that were the principal motivations in the 1960s and 1970s.

Nimbin in the 1990s has also experienced a significant hard drug dependency problem. Since the Aquarius Festival the village has been famous for its culture of marijuana cultivation and use. The tolerance of the community to the use of illegal drugs, in combination with the tactical problems of selling the marijuana crop, have spawned a street scene based around heroin and marijuana sale and use. Because it

is a small village, the drug related activity is very visible, particularly when fights break out over deals, or there is an overdose resulting in someone being stretchered off to the hospital. Typically drug addicts sell marijuana supplied to them by dealers in order to be able to use their commission to buy heroin. The marijuana sales are mostly to tourists who come to Nimbin by car or tourist bus, specifically to score. There is a vivid street scene in the main street, becoming more active as backpacker and general tourism increases. Apart from the tourists, the 'junkies' who congregate in Allsopp Park and the hippies who hang outside the Nimbin Museum, often playing music, there are street merchants, and the many local people who use the village for shopping and other services. The daytime [café scene](#) is very active.

Music making in Nimbin: a short history

According to David Hallet, president of the Nimbin School of Arts, community music making for many years after the Aquarius Festival was folk-based, using instruments like bongos, mandolins, banjos and guitars, that were easily transported. There was a Latin influence in the folk style, but also, not surprisingly, an Eastern music influence, with people playing instruments such as tablas, sitars and veenas. Visiting Buddhist gurus also introduced traditional chanting practices. In 1978, a folk festival named the Country and Eastern Bush Music Convention was held. This festival, in Hallett's view, marked the beginning of another strong arts practice in Nimbin, performance poetry. There were two poets from New Zealand performing, plus Hallett himself. Since then it has become a feature of public performance in Nimbin. There were regular poetry readings at the Rainbow Café in the 1980s and the activity became more organised and professional in the 1990s (Hallet, 1999).

An early focus for the performance and composition of folk music was the strong involvement of people from Nimbin and neighbouring areas in the Terania Creek protests in 1979. In a successful month-long campaign, hundreds of people peacefully resisted the attempts of a sawmilling company to begin logging the pristine Terania Creek basin. The protest resulted in a government inquiry that eventually led to the creation of the Nightcap National Park. Andrew Parks (1999: 32) has argued that group performance of music played a vital part in defusing the potentially violent interaction of loggers and protesters. The focused commitment of the protesters to their singing and playing made it difficult for the loggers to draw them into fights. This protest, and others following, such as the 1982 Mt Nardi protest, also generated many protest songs, some created at the blockades itself. Many of these songs have become standards in the environmental activism movement. Protesters such as Lisa Yeates, Mook and Shanto, Soozah Clark, and Brenda Liddiard have carried on this performance tradition. Some of these songs have been collected by Parks (1999), and have been issued on *Lock On: Songs to Save Australia's Forests* (Raw Power, 1999). For example 'The Power of the Trees' (Track 4) was written by Soozah Clark and Brenda Liddiard and is performed by Clark, Mook and Shanto. It tells the story of the Nightcap campaign and subsequent court actions, leading to the creation of the Nightcap National Park.

Another aspect of the music making in the forest protests is the idea of involvement of the complete group in the music making. Parks (1999: 33) notes that participating in the music making was achieved by people with no background in performance. Learning to write and perform songs was possible through a kind of osmosis in the long periods of time spent in the protester camps. The use of drums and other basic percussion instruments was also a common easy way to participate. Hallet (1999) recalls that in Nimbin's community music making in the 1980s there was a move to a

fusion of acoustic instruments and electrification by using pickups and experimental devices made by local musical instrument makers like Danny Brouchli. This development was impeded by the shortage of amplification equipment in the village. Harry Freeman, one of the medical doctors at the 1973 Aquarius Festival, owned two amplifiers which were constantly on call. Another important development in the early 1980s was the establishment of [Bush Traks recording studios](#) by David Highet and Ruth Miller. This facility has enabled hundreds of local artists to make professional recordings, many of which have been released and sold locally.

The Nimbin School of Arts acquired a grand piano in 1982. This provided a boost for classical music performance in the village. The piano is a proud possession of the School of Arts, and a piano solo (usually played by Harry Freeman) is invariably featured as the first act in many of its fund-raising events, like the Blue Moon Cabaret.

In the 1990s music in Nimbin seems to have polarised into electric bands, on the one hand, and "tribal" style drumming ensembles, on the other. Drumming, typically but not exclusively employing single headed drums, such as Middle Eastern goblet-shaped drums, rather than paired Latin instruments such as bongos, congas and timbales, has become a feature of the various festivals, street marches, protests, special gatherings and public and private jamming in Nimbin. At important events like the Mardi Grass Festival, drumming sessions in the streets or parks of Nimbin can go well into the night, prompting organisers in 1999 to institute a midnight curfew after complaints from residents the year before. In these kinds of events, the drumming is often accompanied by fire-twirling and tribal-style dancing. A weekly workshop is held in the Nimbin School of Arts for "tribal" drummers and dancers. Hallet (1999) also noted a trend of didgeridu playing in the village (often as an addition to drumming ensembles). In his view this peaked in the mid-1990s, but has declined somewhat in recent years except for a few indigenous players who are often seen performing outside the Museum.

Another trend in music production in the 1990s has been the use of computer-based home studios to create recordings, often of ambient music for relaxation and chakra cleansing. The musicians creating music of this genre are often only presenting themselves publicly when they launch their CDs. These practices are in line with a global DIY movement in the music industry facilitated by the availability of cheap computer-based means of music production.

Performance outlets, festivals and events

The country markets in Nimbin, The Channon, and other Northern Rivers country centres have supported the performance of music by setting up stages and contracting performers as entertainers. They have also provided a viable platform for buskers. Many musicians from the alternative lifestyle community have relied on the country markets as performance outlets for their music, particularly since the pub and club scene was often not appealing to non-drinkers. Nimbin has always had a monthly country market. The current version is the Aquarius Fair, held on the third Sunday of each month on the grounds of the Community Centre. Entertainment, featuring local artists and bands such as George Scott, Coral Spawn, Peppa Rose, and Ragweed, is provided.

[Mardi Grass](#) is an annual event held on the May Day weekend (or following weekend) to celebrate the marijuana harvest, to raise awareness of hemp products, and to advocate the legalisation of marijuana for medicinal and personal use. Along with

environmental songs, songs related to legal issues concerning drugs, and songs celebrating marijuana use are the most prominent among the musicians of Nimbin. Many of the artists and bands involved in protest music and alternative lifestyles are scheduled to perform at Mardi Grass. In the three-day 1999 Mardi Grass there were a number of outdoor stages as well as three events in the Town Hall: the Psychedelic Circus, with a variety of musical groups and techno DJs; the Harvest Ball, with amplified bands and DJs; and the Pickers' Ball, featuring acoustic music performers. The economic basis of the Mardi Grass is tight and the musicians involved are paid very little. In the 1999 program, for example, 25 bands, solo artists and DJs were listed as being involved in the indoor events alone, but the musicians' fees amounted in the published budget to a mere \$900 (Balderstone, 1999)

"Visions of Nimbin" is an alternative lifestyle expo held every two years. It was established in 1996 as a fundraising event, with the objective of purchasing the old Nimbin Central School property (along with eight buildings), to create a Community Centre. Although its focus is on exhibits dealing with alternative energy technologies and sustainable agricultural methods, it also includes a significant performance and art exhibition component.

Sites of musical and other cultural production.

The most immediate artistic impression made by Nimbin is its muralscape. The top sections of many main street commercial and public buildings are elaborately illustrated, mostly using psychedelic or aboriginal themes. This project was begun in the lead-up to the Aquarius Festival, and received a boost in 1977 with the donation of paint from British Paints, arranged by Rolf Harris. The main artist is Benny Zable, also well-known as an organiser of protest campaigns. Zable is currently engaged in an ongoing project of repainting his murals. There are many sites of music performance in the village, from the street to the Bowling Club, which occasionally runs dinner dances with club bands such as the Jill, Ann and Bill Trio.

The Town Hall is owned and managed by the Nimbin School of Arts, which was established in 1904. The hall provides a venue for hire for concerts by local and touring acts, social events, community meetings and other activities, such as gymnastics and music tuition. There is also an art gallery run by a cooperative of local fine arts and crafts people. The School of Arts' main activities are fundraising events to enable the maintenance and expansion of the facility. The extremely popular Blue Moon Cabaret is a typical fundraising event, with music, dance, comedy, poetry and drama performances by local artists and some guests. The Town Hall provides a venue for some regular music events, such as a Christian Rock Music concert every second Saturday, promoted by the Church of Christ.

The [Hemp Embassy](#) organises the Mardi Grass Festival, promotes legalisation of drugs, particularly marijuana, and sells hemp products and other hemp merchandising. Is the home of the Big Joint, the symbol of Drug Reform, which is a feature of the Mardi Grass and other protest marches. The Nimbin Museum was a junk shop before the owner, Michael Balderstone, formalised the junk into an eight-room Museum. Its *Nimbin News* (April 1999) advertisement urges visitors "to follow the Rainbow Serpent's path through Aboriginal, Pioneer and Hippy Eras". Groups of people associated with the enterprise linger on the street, spruiking, selling hippie merchandise, and often playing guitars or didgeridus.

There are various live music venues in Nimbin but much of the activity is either sporadic or informal. The Oasis tea rooms are attached to a used and locally crafted

furniture shop. The owners encourage local artists and backpackers to hang out, providing a small PA and some guitars for impromptu music making. There is a Wednesday night jam session and a Thursday poetry night. The Espresso Café (also called 'e-bar') provides an excellent collection of recorded music and holds occasional trance dance parties with a DJ and fluoro decorations. The Cave (formally the Cage) is downstairs from a youth centre called Youth Worx, and is used as an entertainment venue principally by the young people of Nimbin. At one end of the room is a café with restaurant tables and chairs; and at the other are lots of lounges, coffee tables, a black dance floor decorated with a white spiral and other postmodern décor. The Cave stages "Random Events": small-scale dance parties, music performances and performance art. It is part of the Nimbin Community Centre, which also includes an Art Studio, Hall, Printers' Collective, Family Day Care facility, a Sacred Space (for activities like yoga), the Neighbourhood Centre and the Bush Fire Brigade.

The Nimbin Hotel and Backpackers (formally the Freemason Hotel) promotes regular Friday night pub rock gigs. It has traditionally been regarded by many local musicians as a good venue, because of its unpretentious furnishings and gritty ambience. According to Hallet (1999) the audiences are both laid back and hard to please. In 1999 the licence was bought by Tom Mooney (owner of two famous Byron Bay music venues, the Railway Friendly Bar and The Great Northern). Renovations carried out in 2000 provoked considerable protest from many locals, who preferred the pokey rooms and grungy atmosphere to the new spaciousness and fashionable décor. The upstairs area of the hotel was transformed to backpackers' accommodation to capitalise on the rapidly growing tourism of the area. Nimbin is regarded as one of the main backpacker destinations in Australia (along with Byron Bay, Cairns, and Uluru). It has two other facilities: Nimbin Backpackers (Granny's Farm) and Rainbow Retreat.

The Bush Theatre shows current movies on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. The Bush Theatre is also available for theatre productions on other nights (for example by The Nimbin Players). It is sometimes used as a large performance space for Bush Traks, the recording studio mentioned earlier, which is in the same Bush Factory complex. Bush Traks has had a major impact on the recording industry in the Northern Rivers area, and recordings produced there have won prizes in various music industry awards. For example the Spliffmasters' song "Spliffmasters" from their album, *Hemp Hop Bop* won the local music industry association's Dolphin Award for Engineering and Production in 1997. It is a typical Nimbin drug celebration song written in a satirical manner.

Another band associated with Bush Traks is [Pagan Love Cult](#) which promotes its blend of psychedelic rock and hippie philosophy on a colourful web site. According to its leader, Neil Pike (1999) the site has not generated a lot of CD sales but has resulted in Pagan Love Cult securing significant touring work, notably in India. One of Bush Traks' recent indirect achievements has been to help lay the groundwork for the career of Nimbin singer/songwriter, Diana Ah Naid. Ah Naid did work experience at the studio and produced her first recordings there, before achieving national success with an ARIA award nomination and significant airplay on the Triple J network. Her hit song, "I Go Off", is a typical product of the local acoustic folk music tradition.

Spatial politics of Nimbin

Contestation of space is observable within the village amongst the different cultural groups and subgroups, including the arts sectors of the community. The alternative community (which includes most of the artists and musicians) and the farming/business community (which existed prior to the Aquarius Festival) have achieved a measure of peaceful co-existence in the ensuing years, but the growth of a visible hard drug culture in the main street has caused new tensions. There is a popular view that it would be desirable for the police to 'crack down' on hard drugs, but, from the alternative point of view, not at the expense of a crack-down on marijuana use. The most vocal opposition to the hard drugs scene is from the main street business community, which is the most exposed to its activities, and is also exasperated by its perceived negative effect on retail trading. The retail business community of Nimbin could also be seen to be challenging community-based activities, including arts and music. The Nimbin Chamber of Commerce, for example, opposed the purchase of the old school site by the community, ostensibly fearing that rental of some of the buildings by new businesses might significantly affect their members' retail market share. This was in spite of the fact that a significant use of the site was earmarked for non-profit community and arts activities. Another twist to this project was the involvement of the Nimbin Bowling Club in the school site purchase. The conservative members of this club saw fit to cooperate with the predominantly alternative-based Community Centre because part of the purchase involved land (Peace Park) which is adjacent to the Bowling Club. This represented the only land that could be utilised for possible future expansion of the Bowling Club's sporting facilities.

The spatial politics of the Mardi Grass are complex. This festival brings in substantial revenue for the retailers and support industries of Nimbin but it is potentially offensive for conservative community members. An instance of this was the 1997 festival, when a local church, as an act of community goodwill, opened its doors to festival goers for shelter during a period of torrential rain. Its officials were outraged to discover evidence that the people they had helped had had sex and taken drugs in the church overnight.

Some outdoor dance parties have been held in the region of Nimbin, but have resulted in complaints from the rural communities adjacent to the party sites. The Nimbin rural environs are relatively densely populated and unsuitable for all-night and all weekend party activities. More typically, raves take place in the forests some 50 km west of Nimbin. Community reaction to excessive noise levels was also the reason for the transformation of The Cage into The Cave. The building, originally the tuck shop of the Central School, possessed a typical open design with thick wire lattice down one entire side, and the open side needed to be walled in to contain the noise levels of the music nights.

There is some sense of exclusionary politics within the arts community itself. In 1999 the Nimbin School of Arts initiated a supper club for the purpose of fundraising for the establishment of a drama course. The membership recruitment process bypassed some prominent members of the arts community, causing considerable friction. In 2001, highly respected local musician, George Scott, who had been performing regularly in the "Music in the Park" project (in Allsopp Park), funded from a grant and with support from a select group of businesses, wrote a letter to the Nimbin Good Times (May edition) claiming:

It is the only 'space' in town that is commons. The many buildings in town that were once common are now all in the hands of factions. So let's work on the park ... let's create something in the park (p.2).

This outburst was presumably occasioned by negative experiences Scott had had in negotiating local outlets for his work. It may indeed be true that the arts community is factionalised within organisations such as the Nimbin School of Arts and the Nimbin Community Development Association. Scott's objections appear, however, to be more philosophical than practical, as all the venues in the village are available for hire at very cheap rates. His community space plan for Allsopp Park can also be viewed as particularly optimistic, since the space has been for several years constantly occupied by the intravenous drug-taking subculture, whose activities and attitudes disturb many local people.

The spatial politics of music in Nimbin should also be considered in the light of what kinds of music are not generally played and heard. In her analysis of music in Milton Keynes, Finnegan (1989) discussed a large number of genres of amateur and professional music making. Many of these, including classical ensembles, jazz ensembles, brass and concert bands and country music bands, are conspicuous by their absence in Nimbin, although they are typically represented in many regional towns throughout Australia. There are some vestiges of classical music performance in School of Arts concerts, although the repertoire is generally popular classical rather than 'high art' music. Even more surprising is the absence of country music. This genre is dominant in most rural centres in Australia (including elsewhere in the Rainbow Region; see Gibson in this issue), but is curiously absent in the verdant cultural landscapes of Nimbin. It appears that the ethos of the folk and various popular musics have acted to suppress the music that might otherwise be the predominant community music expression of the pre-Aquarius Festival population.

Some examples of community music in Nimbin

The Moonday Choir meets to rehearse every Monday evening in the Community Centre hall. There are about 40 members, of which typically 20 may appear at any one rehearsal. There is a wide age range, and the national, cultural, educational and economic backgrounds of the members are very diverse. The reasons for participating are both musical and social: the chance to be involved in an organised musical activity, to increase music performance skills, to share musical experiences with other members of the community and to take part in community events. The Moonday choir has performed its repertoire of popular song arrangements at important events like the opening of the Community Centre, at Visions of Nimbin 1998, in parades like the Mardi Grass, at School of Arts functions, and even at the unplugged (acoustic) Pickers' Ball.

Sue Edmonds, a resident of the Jarlanbah Permaculture Hamlet, invented the Hubaphone about eight years ago while living in Wollongong. This percussion instrument consists of 15 tuned hubcaps suspended on a horizontal frame. Tuning is a C major scale with an additional F sharp to allow for G major. The hubcaps are from different model cars. Late 70s Valiants cover the range from E below middle C to Middle C; the 71 Holden Torana is ideal for B below middle C to E above middle C; and beyond that the H series Holden Kingswoods from the early 70s give the best result. The sound is very similar to Trinidad steel drums (Edmonds, 1999).

As a Hubaphone soloist, Edmonds came third in a busking competition at the Sydney Opera House and embarked on a national tour (The Iron Woman Tour). A community

arts grant to do an international tour followed. Having moved to Nimbin about five years ago, Edmonds has formed a Hubaphone ensemble, [Hubaphonia Philharmonia](#). The group consists of six local women, only one of whom has received formal musical training. Their repertoire is made up of popular, folk and even popular classical music standards, with an international coverage. In festivals and busking situations they play tunes calculated to appeal to individual audience members from different nationalities. Some of the tunes in their repertoire are: "Jamaica Farewell", "Rock Around the Clock", "Mexican Hat Dance", "Ode to Joy", "Spanish Harlem", "Irish Washerwoman", "La Cucaracha", "Blue Moon", and "Heart and Soul". Sue Edmonds and members of her group have performed locally at the Blue Moon Cabaret, and at a number of events such as International Women's Day. Recognising that there is little chance of getting much paid work locally, they have marketed their novel act to folk festivals, city malls and other popular spaces, such as Sydney's Darling Harbour (Edmonds, 1999). The highlight of Hubaphonia's career was a stint of busking at Circular Quay (Sydney) during the 2000 Olympic Games.

Conclusion

Considering its size, Nimbin has an extraordinary concentration of musical activities. Much of this music making has emerged from the tribal community ethos established at the 1973 Aquarius Festival and continued through the subsequent alternative community culture of the village. Protest is a major theme in the music, and is focused on environmental issues such as logging and mining, and on social issues such as the drug laws and their impact. Although there is a high level of musical and other arts activity in Nimbin, there is little opportunity for paid work in the village itself, or even in the wider North Coast area. However, many of the musicians who have come to live in Nimbin or have emerged from the Nimbin scene, are highly skilled performers and composers, with professional aspirations. Gibson (2000), illuminates this contradiction for the North Coast music scene generally:

On the one hand many people had moved to the area for its natural and cultural environment, yet found it necessary to move away in order to advance career opportunities (forming a 'creative drain' from the region). Meanwhile a sense of frustration about the scene pervaded musicians' comments, for while the region had large numbers of musicians and professional bands, there was very little recognition of this strength beyond the region (p. 214).

This view is supported by the analysis of 'creative cities' advanced by Hall (2000). Although the cultural ingredients of high levels of grassroots arts activities and technological access exist to promote an explosion of creative energy, the business infrastructure and consumer population of a large city is needed for economically viable music production. Thus only a few music artists originating in Nimbin (such as Diana Ah Naid) have established a national profile in the music industry. Most musicians and bands are reduced to performing for little or no fee in benefit concerts, community events, open mic nights and informal community gatherings. However, many people involved in community music see their activities as having an important socially cohesive and politically proactive value, despite instances of territorialism amongst the various musical organisations and individuals involved in the music and arts scene in the village.

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