

THE MAKING OF AUSTRALIA



Top: David Hirschfelder at his beloved composing rig. Right: Location recorder Wayne Pashley somewhere in Kununurra.

It's been an inescapable part of the landscape all Summer and a good way to avoid a suntan. AT caught up with three of the men involved in the composition, recording and mixing of *Australia's* sound.

Text: Stephen Bruel

▶ Having already lined up telephone interviews the next morning with *Australia's* Executive Music Supervisor, Anton Monsted; Composer, David Hirschfelder; and Scoring Mixer, Shawn Murphy, I thought it might be wise to see the film first. Rushing down to the local cinema with pen and paper in hand, I felt like a real 'Nigel no mates' sitting on my own in the dark. I didn't know what to expect. Trying to capture a subject so diverse and eclectic as *Australia*; dealing with such hot issues as the stolen generation, racism and our own inherent cultural cringe is a big ask. As the screen curtains widened I sank a little lower in my seat, anticipating a possible meltdown. I needn't have worried. By the time the house lights came up again I was on the edge of my seat, proud of what our local film and post-production industries can produce.

The first phone conversation the following day was with Anton Monsted who has worked with Baz Luhrmann since 1995, first as a research assistant on *Romeo+Juliet* and later as a music supervisor on *Moulin Rouge*. I began our chat by asking him to define his role on *Australia*.

SONIC CONDUIT

Anton Monsted: As Executive Music Supervisor, it was my job to help Director, Baz Luhrmann, achieve his vision musically; to be the conduit between himself and the people who helped him realise his musical aspirations for the film. That meant everything from putting him in touch with songwriters, musicians and music producers, to getting the right music onto his iPod so that his next

meeting with the composer was a useful one.

What's unusual about working on a Baz Luhrmann film is the involvement he has in every aspect of the film. Where some directors may just show up and ask you to get on with it, Baz really gets involved on every level. He even hums out tunes from time to time... anything he thinks will help tell the story.

Stephen Bruel: Can you fill us in on the nitty gritty behind the title of Executive Music Supervisor?

AM: In simple terms, I oversee the production of the music for the film. That involves everything from music selection during the film scripting process, music licensing, writing and managing the music budget and identifying, and hiring key musical collaborators. I also oversee and produce other tracks: Big band, set pieces, specialty tracks – like John Butler playing guitar on the 'stampede sequence' or Rolf Harris providing wobble board on the opening. I also ensure the interests of the music department are met in the final film mix, and supervise the production of the soundtrack album. For *Australia*, we worked from a pretty well developed temporary score to help determine what flavours and textures would best suit the pictures, even before we started working with the composers.

AN OLD-FASHIONED SCORE

SB: In a nutshell, what were you trying to achieve musically on *Australia*?

AM: Very simply, we wanted the music to help tell

the story. The music needed to be fun when the story was fun, and dramatic when the story was dramatic. That might sound straightforward, but it actually required a great deal of discipline, particularly on a film this long. We wanted the music to be heavily textured, not sound like it all came from the one source. We wanted a lush, orchestral score full of memorable tunes and themes – a slightly old-fashioned approach in this day and age.

Ideally, we wanted a small number of musical themes repeated, twisted, made triumphant or melancholy as and when the storytelling dictated. David Hirschfelder brought a deft touch to this through the superb use of orchestration and endless invention within the themes. We also wanted the film score to sound like the music of the period without slavishly reproducing or mimicking it.

Musically speaking the film involved a lot of research. We studied the music of the top end of *Australia*, particularly the music of itinerant workers, and quickly discovered their vast array of influences. Certain instruments kept coming up – the ukulele, the harmonica, guitar, violin – and these were played from a variety of musical traditions. There was early country music from America, islander music, Indonesian music, indigenous music, and Australian bush music, as well as the influences of big band and swing jazz all coming together in a melting pot. We wanted this kind of music to have a life in the film.

SB: How did you choose between so many styles and instruments then?

AM: Our musical choices came out of exhaustive research, and this is how Baz works on all his films. He creates a virtual world for the story to inhabit. The next step was to choose all the music that would appear on screen while we were shooting. Anything with a harmonica on screen or a band playing in the background required choices to be made and music to be written or licensed in advance.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH

Once shooting wrapped, Supervising Music Editor [and AT writer] Simon Leadley and Anton Monsted spent about two months working on the temporary score for the film.

AM: This involved sourcing existing music – classical music and other film scores mostly – and editing it to the scenes as they evolved through the editorial department. It was an intuitive process, and perhaps for me the most creative period in the life of the film. It was a little like trying to solve a giant jigsaw puzzle with musical pieces that aren't actually written to fit the film you're working on. This process is important because it acquaints you with the unique problems of the scenes you're trying to improve through musical choices.

SB: *Over the Rainbow* from *The Wizard of Oz* was an interesting choice of music that seemed to take on many forms throughout the score. How did you hit on that particular piece?

AM: I made Baz a big iTunes playlist featuring popular music from the period, and put it all on

an iPod for him to take on one of his early location scouts in the Kimberley, and one of those tunes was *Over the Rainbow*. Interestingly, the song was released in 1939, the same year our story begins. One day we talked on the phone and Baz said; 'I'm out in the desert listening to *Rainbow* and it's just magical! Additionally, the 'Rainbow' theme tied in nicely with the role of the rainbow serpent in indigenous mythology.

SB: I'd imagine securing the rights for such an iconic song as *Over the Rainbow* wouldn't have been easy. How did that process evolve?

AM: I went to the Head of Licensing at EMI in Los Angeles and had to ask for one of their most precious songs, their gem, and tell them how we planned to use it – sung in the indigenous Yolngu language and played on harmonica! (Laughs). It took a lot of trust on their part but we were lucky that a relationship had already been established through working with them on *Moulin Rouge*.

THE WAISTCOAT ORCHESTRA

SB: It's interesting that you mention the harmonica. I noticed there's a strong and recurring representation of the harmonica throughout the film. What influenced that decision?

AM: Jack Thompson, who's a great harmonica player – as well as an iconic Australian actor – played a significant role in this choice. During the research phase we discovered that the harmonica was all the rage in Northern Australia in the 1930s and '40s.



“Anton Monsted: “We used a minimal amount of compression, choosing instead to ride the faders to balance the sounds. The result is a dynamic and detailed music score that supports the dialogue rather than compete with it.”



Left to right: Richard Birrinbirrin, Wayne Pashley and acting legend, David Gulpilil, at Trackdown Scoring Stage in Sydney for a recording session.



Recording the orchestral music component at Trackdown Scoring Stage.

Described as ‘the orchestra in the waistcoat pocket,’ the harmonica was very popular with stockmen during this period, given its portability. Not many people know this but Jack worked as a jackeroo in his younger years and that’s when some of the other stockmen taught him to play.

SB: Ukulele was another instrument that featured strongly...

AM: Again, research told us that ‘hula house’ parties – featuring the ukulele – were common in the area at the time. These involved Japanese pearl divers, Philippino fisherman, Indonesian traders and the local indigenous population getting together and having jam sessions. To help us realise this sound, we worked with The Piggrim Brothers, direct descendents of the Philippine bands we researched – they still play a lot of ukulele.

OTHER MUSICAL CHALLENGES

SB: What other musical challenges did you face during the making of *Australia*?

AM: Getting the indigenous music right was a really big deal. We were incredibly thorough about how the indigenous characters were represented in the film, and that included portraying the music accurately.

We started by recording David Gulpilil’s traditional songs, taught to him by his father and grandfather. We also worked with Richard Birrinbirrin, the song man in David’s tribe, and to whom the songs are entrusted. We would show David and Richard a piece of film and ask what type of song they would sing, and they would say, for example, ‘We would sing a sunset song... for these reasons...’ The whole process was a close collaboration and a joyful experience.

SB: Did the recording process of these songs involve studio sessions or location recording?

AM: Supervising Sound Editor/Sound Designer, Wayne Pashley, recorded David’s vocals – or vocals and clap stick – in the outback on a SoundField four-capsule B-Format 5.1 surround field microphone and Sound Devices 744T four-track recorder. I must also acknowledge the input and guidance of sound recordist, Guntis Sics, and his sound team in pioneering the location sound recording process used with David Gulpilil. We also recorded some songs in a small studio in Bowen, and invited David and Richard down to Sydney for further recordings at Trackdown Scoring Stage. These recordings turned out well, although sometimes we reverted

back to those earlier ‘rougher’ field recordings – they just had something magical about them.

‘HEAD CHEF’ HIRSCHFELDER

Born and raised in Ballarat, Victoria, David Hirschfelder has composed film scores for such notables as *Strictly Ballroom*, *Shine*, and *Elizabeth* (for which he won BAFTA and APRA awards as well as an Oscar nomination for Best Original Score). He also composed for the Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Sydney. On *Australia*, he was also the film’s Composer...

David Hirschfelder: ...or as Baz regularly put it; “the ‘head chef’ of the music kitchen.” There are 120 minutes of music in the film of which I’ve personally created 90 minutes and collaborated with others on the remaining 30. Apart from composing music for various scenes to drive the narrative, other jobs included adapting other melodies and integrating the western-style score with the indigenous musical elements such as didgeridoo and chanting.

SB: Is it possible to describe the music score of *Australia* in words?

DH: The musical pallet of *Australia* is made up of a wide range of styles, from symphonic 100-piece

AUSTRALIA
DAVID HIRSCHFELDER
TRACKDOWN STUDIO
JUNE 8-11, 2008

| | Microphone | Preamp |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| STRINGS/WINDS/HARPS/KEYBOARDS | | |
| 1 | WINDS LEFT | Sanken CU415M M |
| 2 | WINDS CENTRE | Sanken CU415M M |
| 3 | WINDS RIGHT | Sanken CU415M M |
| 4 | WINDS SOLOS | Sennheiser MKH80 M |
| 5 | HARP LEFT | Neumann KM184 M |
| 6 | HARP RIGHT | Neumann KM184 M |
| 7 | BASS SECTION | RØDE Classic II M |
| 8 | CELESTE | Sennheiser MKH80 M |
| 9 | WIDE LEFT | Schoeps MK2H M |
| 10 | TREE LEFT | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 11 | TREE CENTRE | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 12 | TREE RIGHT | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 13 | WIDE RIGHT | Schoeps MK2H M |
| 14 | BASS-1 | Neumann U89 M |
| 15 | SURROUND LEFT | Schoeps MK2S M |
| 16 | SURROUND RIGHT | Schoeps MK2S M |
| 17 | PIANO LEFT/HI | RØDE NT2 DAV1 |
| 18 | PIANO LOW/RIGHT | RØDE NT2 DAV2 |
| 19 | KEYBOARD LEFT | DI DAV3 |
| 20 | KEYBOARD RIGHT | DI DAV4 |
| 21 | VN1 FRONT | Sony C485M AV5 |
| 22 | VN2 FRONT | Sony C485M DAV6 |
| 23 | VA FRONT | Sony C485M DAV7 |
| 24 | VC FRONT | Sony C485M DAV8 |
| 25 | VN1 REAR | RØDE NT1000 R |
| 26 | VN2 REAR | RØDE NT1000 R |
| 27 | VA REAR/LEFT | RØDE NT5 R |
| 28 | VA REAR/RIGHT | RØDE NT5 R |
| 29 | VC REAR/LEFT | RØDE NT5 R |
| 30 | VC REAR/RIGHT | RØDE NT5 R |
| 31 | BASS 2 | RØDE NT2 R |
| 32 | BASS 3 | RØDE NT2 R |
| 33 | A/FLUTE | RØDE NT5 R |
| 34 | COR ANGLAIS | RØDE NT5 R |
| 35 | BS CLARINET | RØDE NT5 R |
| 36 | CONTRA BASSOON | RØDE NT5 R |

| | | |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| BRASS | | |
| 37 | HORNS LEFT | Royer SF125M M |
| 38 | HORNS RIGHT | Royer SF125M M |
| 39 | TRUMPETS LEFT | Neumann TLM170 M |
| 40 | TRUMPETS RIGHT | Neumann TLM170 M |
| 41 | TROMBONES 1 | Sony C485M M |
| 42 | TROMBONES 2 | Sony C485M M |
| 43 | TROMBONES 3 | Sony C485M M |
| 44 | TROMBONES 4 | Sony C485M M |
| 45 | WIDE LEFT | Schoeps MK2H M |
| 46 | TREE LEFT | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 47 | TREE CENTRE | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 48 | TREE RIGHT | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 49 | WIDE RIGHT | Schoeps MK2H M |
| 50 | TUBA | Neumann TLM170 M |
| 51 | SURROUND LEFT | Schoeps MK2S M |
| 52 | SURROUND RIGHT | Schoeps MK2S M |
| 53 | HORNS REAR LEFT | RØDE NT5 DAV1 |
| 54 | HORNS REAR RIGHT | RØDE NT5 DAV2 |

| | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| PERCUSSION | | |
| 55 | PERC 1 LEFT | RØDE NT5 M |
| 56 | PERC 2 LEFT | RØDE NT5 M |
| 57 | PERC 3 CENTRE | RØDE NT5 M |
| 58 | PERC 4 CENTRE | RØDE NT5 M |
| 59 | PERC 5 RIGHT | RØDE NT5 M |
| 60 | PERC 6 RIGHT | RØDE NT5 M |
| 61 | PERC – TYMPANI LEFT | CMC6/MK4 M |
| 62 | PERC – TYMPANI RIGHT | CMC6/MK4 M |
| 63 | WIDE LEFT | Schoeps MK2H M |
| 64 | TREE LEFT | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 65 | TREE CENTRE | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 66 | TREE RIGHT | Neumann TLM50 M |
| 67 | WIDE RIGHT | Schoeps MK2H M |
| 68 | PERC GC | Schoeps MK2H M |
| 69 | SURROUND LEFT | Schoeps MK2S M |
| 70 | SURROUND RIGHT | Schoeps MK2S M |
| 71 | OVERHEAD LEFT | Sennheiser MKH805M DAV1 |
| 72 | OVERHEAD RIGHT | Sennheiser MKH805M DAV2 |

orchestra, occasional choir (40 voices), bluegrass guitar, jazz bands, ukuleles, harmonica, Irish percussion (bodhran), wobble board, percussive breathing (effing and eiffing) and indigenous music (didgeridoo, chanting, clap sticks etc.) This variety is a reflection of the eclecticism of the Australian culture in 1930s far north Australia.

SB: What was the main challenge musically for such an epic film?

DH: The idea – and challenge – for the score was to somehow combine all the abovementioned disparate elements into an ‘Australian sound’ that would give an identity and context to the film, while also driving the narrative and supporting the drama.

In the beginning of the film we introduced musical themes and instrumentation, and later brought different elements of those themes forward in the mix at appropriate times.

One of the aims of the music team was also to ensure that the signal paths were of the cleanest, purest form possible. Then, once the sounds were on the faders, we used a minimal amount of compression, choosing instead to ride the faders to balance the sounds. The result is a dynamic and detailed music score that supports the dialogue rather than compete with it.

A TOUCH OF THE WOBBLES

SB: The wobble board is such an iconic Australian sound... what inspired you to get Rolf Harris involved for that?

DH: We introduced the wobble board at the start of the film to give the audience a feeling that they were on a journey, as well as to support the narrative. That’s how we came up with the idea to use Rolf Harris. It’s unique and immediately identifiable to the Australian audience, and yet it doesn’t distract the listener from the dialogue.

I sent Rolf a whole bunch of music scores and he overdubbed his wobble board parts and percussive breathing in a London studio. Before the recording session, I remember speaking to him on the phone, where he told me that the tempo of the music was too fast for his wobble board. The length of the board determines the speed at which they wobble, apparently, and Rolf said he might have to chop one down! Of course I didn’t want Rolf to damage his boards so I suggested he get his engineer to vary the tempo of the recording to accommodate the instrument, so that’s what they did.

AN AUSTRALIAN COMPOSITION

SB: To go back to the beginning for a moment if I may, where does one start to compose the music for a film like *Australia*?

DH: After much discussion with the Director Baz Luhrmann and other members of the music team, I absorbed the essence of the story and character of the film into my sub-conscious, and allowed it to ‘stream’. I then carefully evaluated the results and edited and crafted the raw ideas into music that underscores the story. Composing is different from songwriting; it’s generally more about combining elements, orchestration and arranging than writing melodies. If I hear an idea in my head, I need to get it into the computer as quickly as possible. Later, everything I write for the orchestra is fully represented in my computer via MIDI, every single

note. I use MIDI as an interface between what I hear in my head and the director, using virtual instruments to bring my musical ideas to the table before I start replacing them with audio.

SB: Can you describe your studio setup?

DH: My composing rig is comprised of a Yamaha Motif 8 keyboard for capturing the musical ideas, and Logic Pro running on a dual-processor Apple Mac G5. My Logic template consists of 90 virtual instruments replicating various standard orchestral instruments (such as woodwinds, brass, and percussion), which use samples, as well as non-orchestral instruments (guitar, keyboards, ethnic instruments etc.). Additionally, Logic provides a virtual console and virtual plug-ins (including reverbs, Gigastudio and other bits and pieces) and the entire virtual orchestra mock-up is mixed within the digital domain. My monitoring speakers are a pair of Meyer HD-1s.

SB: So why Logic?

DH: I’ve used Logic since the mid ’90s and in my opinion it offers far more sophisticated MIDI implementation and options than, say, ProTools. I can also notate in Logic, which is handy. I’m aware of Sibelius and Finalé offering more complex notation, but that’s more specifically for orchestrators who prepare the notated version of the score for musicians. Additionally, most classically trained composers are keyboard players not audio engineers, and they generally need a program focussed on MIDI first and audio second. ProTools, for instance, has a more ‘audio first and MIDI as an afterthought’ approach. Having said that, ProTools’ MIDI functionality is improving all the time, and we use it when we go into the studio to record audio.

SB: I imagine it would be basically impossible to live without such a setup in your line of work these days?

DH: Absolutely. My composing rig is of immeasurable value to my process as a film composer, as it enables my collaborators to hear the design and texture of the compositions prior to recording it with actual instruments. It facilitates enormous artistic expression for me, as well as peace-of-mind, particularly in the case of compositions requiring a 100-piece orchestra and 40-piece choir, because these large-scale musical ideas are able to be evaluated and approved *prior* to the expensive recording sessions.

SCORING MIXER - SHAWN MURPHY

Renowned American sound engineer, Shawn Murphy, was brought in to record and mix the music elements of *Australia*, including the original orchestral score, various solo elements and a variety of source elements. Shawn has a wealth of experience in film, having worked on a truly massive number of movies over several decades, including work on the recording of *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* (with John Williams), *War of the Worlds*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *The Bourne Ultimatum* and *Happy Feet* to name but a few. So what did his job entail on this project?

Shawn Murphy: My job on *Australia* involved recording, editing and mixing multiple stem mixes for the final dub. I was responsible for organising and implementing all of the music recording elements for the project. In conjunction with Anton

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Shawn Murphy: It’s not really the specific equipment but the application of the various types of gear that matters most.
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This is as close as anyone ever gets to taking a photo of Shawn Murphy (that’s him on the left). Here he is at work on the Sydney Opera House Recording Studios’ Euphonix System 5 console, with recording engineer, Tod Deeley.

Monsted and Rebecca Morellato (Fox Music), and under the artistic direction of David Hirschfelder, I specified the recording equipment to be used, managed the equipment and crew during the sessions, scheduled all of the recording and mixing, all editorial procedures and delivery requirements for the music. I also acted as a recording engineer on the sessions and a mix engineer for the post-production mix. I was ultimately responsible for the final mix of all materials, assignment of stems, processing, balances and levels.

SB: Can you describe a typical studio setup you used for the orchestral recordings?

SM: The orchestra recording was accomplished in separate sectional groups consisting of strings, winds, brass, and percussion. Additional passes included harps and keyboards. We used a standard concert setup, which consists of violins left, viola, cello and basses right. Winds were placed in the centre in two rows. Horns were placed left and we positioned the trumpets, trombones and tuba to the right. Timpani were dead centre with various percussion arrayed around the rear of the stage.

The recording equipment was a Digidesign ProTools HD rig recording at 24-bit/96k with 192 and Genex converters. We used one microphone per track using Millennia, Broadhurst Gardens and Raindirk preamps. I used Trackdown’s Yamaha DM2000 console to monitor the sessions on ATC SCM-20 speakers and Sennheiser HD-650 headphones. Strings and winds consisted of 36 tracks, brass 18 tracks, percussion 18 tracks, harps nine tracks and keyboards eight tracks. I didn’t use any equalisation or dynamic modification in the initial recording, apart from some minor low-cut filtering on some of the spot microphones.

SB: How does all this equipment help you achieve such great results?

SM: In fact, it’s not really the specific equipment but the application of the various types of gear that matters most. There are many great microphones and yes, I have my favourites. However, it may not matter as much whether I utilise a Neumann M50, M150, or TLM50 as a main (tree) microphone as opposed to the spacing, height and orientation of the microphones. Microphones that are omnidirectional, and have a controlled high frequency rise with a smoothly narrowing pattern are especially useful. This can be accomplished with a rising omni (Schoeps MK2S, MK2H) and the application of diffraction spheres. So, many omnis are potentially useful.

SB: What microphones did you use in the end?

SM: For the nitty gritty, you’ll have to look at the list – it’s long! As for my choices, certain microphones were available through Trackdown Studios while others were hired in. I brought a few microphones with me that aren’t readily available in Australia, like the Sanken CU41, Sony C48, Sennheiser MKH80/800, Royer SF1 and SF12 and the AEA R88.

We were looking for the best balances acoustically in the room, so only the main microphones were monitored during the sessions – most of the spots were checked and then muted until mix. The seating arrangement played an important role in achieving the best balance, with the selection and placement of spot microphones only there to slightly adjust balances and perspectives in the mix if necessary.

MIXING THE SCORE

SB: Can you describe the studio setup you used for mixing the film?

SM: The mix was done at the Sydney Opera House where the in-house engineers Tony David Cray and Tod Deeley assisted on the setup and operation of the mix. The Opera House console is a Euphonix System 5 running at 96k, featuring 94 inputs, 12 mix buses, 48 group buses and 16 auxiliary sends. Only the orchestra resided on this desk, virtually filling the faders. We also used two Lexicon 960 reverbs, which allowed us to place a longer, lush reverb around solo instruments recorded during the string/ bass sections. The three orchestra stems derived from the Euphonix were then routed to a ProTools system running at 24-bit/96k. The additional six stems of material were patched directly from the ProTools HD production playback system to the mix rig, and mixed via a Pro Control. The output of the mix recorder was then sent back to the Euphonix to monitor in 5.1. The only additional outboard gear we used was a dbx 120A (modified) subharmonic synthesizer. We also used a variety of plug-ins including Altiverb, Revibe, MDW, Sony Oxford, Izotope and various Waves and Digidesign plug-ins. We monitored through ATC SCM-50s (Custom) for L/C/R, SCM-20s for the surround and an ATC sub. The level was fixed at 85dBc for LCR, 79dBc for each surround and 91dBc for the sub. The clocks I used on these sessions were Lucid and Apogee Big Ben.

SB: Were there any special methods or techniques you used to try and recreate the sound of northern Australia in the time period in which the film is based?

SM: I recorded the big band cues with everyone in the studio at the same time, configured in a circle around a single stereo (Royer SF12) ribbon

microphone as this would have been similar to the recording method used at the time. The ukulele band also performed with all four players in the room along with the big band, albeit recorded in isolation. I also close-miked individual instruments for a bit of extra bass and to enhance the solo clarinet.

SB: The film’s music certainly appeared to have a large dynamic range. How much did you use compression during the mixing phase?

SM: I used no compression on the orchestra and only a minimal amount on the synthesizer, solos and overdubs. I did, however, use a fair level of compression on the guitars.

SB: You’ve mixed a staggering number of films over the years, what were some of the challenges you faced on this project and how did you overcome them?

SM: The largest challenge was the ever-changing picture edit and associated music changes, resulting in additional music, re-writes and adjustment in already-recorded cues. The schedule changed on a daily basis and there was a tremendous amount of extra material to record and mix. This additional material occupied recording and mix time and came from composers Felix Meagher, Angela Little, guitarist John Butler and a song track from Elton John. But we got there in the end, thanks to the help of everyone at both Trackdown and the Sydney Opera house, all of whom were very professional without exception.

FINAL NOTE

As a musical score and recording, *Australia* is a detailed representation of Northern Australia in the late 1930s and early ’40s. I learnt a lot about the history of the ukulele, hula house parties, harmonica and indigenous chanting as part of our musical landscape and heritage through the exhaustive research undertaken by the production team. I also learnt about the tempo challenges faced with wobble board playing and recording. But perhaps most importantly, I learnt that in the hands of a true mixing and recording professional, the dialogue in movies produced today does not need to be lost in a soundscape slammed by compression. ■