

# Australia

With entertainment and manufacturing based on Western models, Australia adds a unique perspective and character to its music and filmmaking

**RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WORLD'S** first feature-length film in 1906. Australia has a long and proud history associated with professional audio and entertainment technology. Based on the notorious 'bushranger' Ned Kelly, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* was an unprecedented 70 minutes in length and, according to *Australia Screen* (an outreach programme operated by the National Film and Sound Archive), audiences had never seen anything so bold. The film stayed in distribution for 10 years in various forms after production and was presented with live sound effects and narration, so it was anything but silent. Several fortunes were made on the basis of its receipts. Visual effects were also used with scenes tinted for dramatic effect, as in the red colour used to enhance the effect of the burning of the hotel.

It should be no surprise that Australia's first foray into film production focused on an outlaw, and was more than likely filmed by decedents of lawbreakers. A



A still from *The Story of the Kelly Gang* – the world's first feature-length film

long-time haven for its indigenous population and traditional landowners, the Aborigine, with earliest recorded remains dating back 40,000 years, white settlement began in Sydney in 1788. Set up as a penal colony, convicts were transported from Great Britain along with a number of officials and military personnel. As the demand for labour increased, convicts were sent out more frequently, a total of 160,000 men, women and children convicts sent until transportation ceased by 1868.

According to the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade the scarcity of labour, the vastness of the land and new wealth based on farming, mining and trade made Australia a land of opportunity attracting more and more free settlers. However, this tremendous period of growth resulted in Indigenous Australians suffering enormously. Death, illness, displacement and dispossession disrupted traditional lifestyles and practices. Today,

Australia's population numbers just less than 22,000,000 with 95 per cent living in the coastal areas.

The world's sixth largest country in land mass became the Federation of Australia in 1901, uniting all six States (New South Wales, Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania) and two Territories (Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory coming on board in 1911) under the one federal government. Just 13 years later, on the battlefield during World War 1, Australia forged its national and international identity and created values cherished by the population today. 'In the end, ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] stood and still stands for reckless valour in a good cause, for enterprise, resourcefulness, fidelity, comradeship and endurance that will never admit defeat,' – Charles Bean, official historian of the First World War.

After the Second World War, Australia entered a boom period. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants (mostly from Europe) arrived to develop major nation-building projects such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme –100,000 people from more than 30 countries worked on this project alone. In terms of exports, it is said that during this period that Australia 'rode on the sheep's back' (a term sometimes still used in a derogatory manner by sporting rivals) so strong and in demand was wool production. These days Australia's major exports have shifted from rural (wool and beef) to mining (minerals and coal), education services and tourism.



The Easybeats in 1968

Major imports these days include cars, petroleum and plasma TV sets.

## Music and manufacture

The contemporary music industry in Australia owes much to this influx of migrants through the 1950s and 1960s, who not only bought their cultural artistic traits and culinary delights with them, but also the latest records from Europe. Housed in migrant hostels throughout the nation, these temporary new homes for the new Australians become a hub of the latest fashions, food and music from Europe – a far cry from what was developing in mainstream society. Bands such as AC/DC, The Bee Gees and The Easybeats can all be traced back to Australia's booming European immigration period at the time.

'The birthplace of The Easybeats was the Villawood Migrant Hostel, in Sydney's southwest suburbs. The hostel was a halfway house for hundreds of thousands of new arrivals from Europe and the UK.



Peter Vogel and Kim Rylie with Fairlight CMI Series III

The hostel hosted a thriving musical scene, and the band became part of the many regular jams and temporary bands that formed and played at the hostel dances. The hostel's kitchen and shower blocks were favoured venues, partly because of the acoustics and partly because they were well away from the living quarters,' Glenn A Baker, Australian music historian.

It wasn't just immigrant musicians who flourished in this environment but professional audio manufacturers as well.

# 1/4 Horizontal



**QPAC's Lyric Theatre**

Røde Microphones evolved from an audio business established in 1967 in Sydney by Henry and Astrid Freedman, after immigrating from Sweden. The company designed, manufactured, installed and serviced a diverse range of audio products, culminating in the first Røde microphone being built and marketed to the world in 1990. Today Røde is a global leader in microphones offering a range of well-made and well-priced products.

Australia was thrust into the spotlight of pro audio technology in 1979 when Kim Ryrie and Peter Vogel created the Fairlight Computer Music Instrument (CMI), the world's first digital sampler. Costing \$25,000 at the time, the CMI featured an 88-note keyboard, a light pen, menu-driven graphical user interface, dual 6800 processors, eight notes of polyphony and delivered 8-bit (10kHz) resolution at 20kb per sample – which was broken down as 16kbs for the sound and 4kbs for parameter information (poor by today's standard but revolutionary at the time). One of the CMI's most significant software features was the so-called 'Page R', which was the world's first real-time graphical music sequence editor, widely copied on other software synthesisers since. Adopted by

those who could afford the huge price ticket – Peter Gabriel, Stevie Wonder and Nick Rhodes from Duran Duran among them – before cheaper technology and the burgeoning home computer market started to spell the end for the CMI.

Fairlight is still going strong today (albeit with different owners) in Sydney and manufactures and exports digital audio recording and mixing systems to the world's film, broadcast, postproduction and music industries.

Another Sydney-based manufacturer of audio products is Australian Monitor. For more than 25 years, this company has produced microphones, mixers, signal processors loudspeakers and power amplifiers for the Australian pro audio industry, as well as for export. The company also produces a range of audiovisual products for the A/V integration market as well as background music and paging systems as part of its monitor installation series. Then there is ARX – based in Highett, Victoria – which is behind a range of equipment that spans loudspeakers and amplifiers to essential 'problem solving' interface boxes.

Melbourne-based Maton, meanwhile, is Australia's longest-running and most successful guitar manufacturer. Established



**John Lancken – now at the Fairlight helm**

by Bill May in 1946, Maton guitars pioneered the use of many Australian wood species in guitar construction including Queensland maple, walnut and bunya, and Victorian blackwood. George Harrison, The Easybeats and Neil Diamond have used Maton guitars in the past, and it is the guitar of choice today for players including Neil and Tim Finn, Tommy Emmanuel, Queens of the Stone Age, Josh Pyke and Ben Harper. According to the Maton website 'Bill May's importance to the history of Australian music was recently recognised at the Australian Music Association Awards where he was posthumously awarded their highest honour and inducted into the hall of fame.'

### Facilities

Up until the mid 1990s the 'traditional' music production industry in Australia was very strong. All major record labels had offices and large expensive analogue recording facilities in most Capital Cities around the country. However, with the technological improvements in home computer-based digital recording, illegal music downloading and increase in popularity of loop-based dance music production, the demand for large recording facilities in Australia fell, while the number of smaller boutique digital studios increased correspondingly. Some of the last

the last remaining Capital City to defy gaming machines in pubs, these establishments continue to seek live entertainment to attract customers. Eskimo Joe, Little Birdy, Red Jezebel and The Sleepy Jackson all hail from Perth and it's close neighbour Fremantle, the scene being currently described as the 'Freo sound'. Former ACDC frontman Bon Scott is laid to rest at Fremantle Cemetery and would be happy with the current vibrant music scene around him.

Larger performance spaces are evident throughout Australia in the form of convention centres, entertainment centres, theatres, multipurpose outdoor and indoor sporting arenas, as well as iconic venues such as the Sydney Opera House. All of these spaces have significant audiovisual installations and there is a strong commitment from government in Australia to build new spaces and improve existing sites as evidenced recently in Brisbane. According to the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) website, the Queensland Government recently invested Aus\$34m to refurbish QPAC with new seating, lighting and acoustics as well as improved access for patrons with mobility difficulties. One of the improvements included acoustic panels added to the seats in the Concert Hall – these are designed to replicate someone sitting in the seat when it is empty, allowing for a truer sound check and audio quality and performance



**The Scoring Stage at Trackdown in Sydney**

# 1/4 Horizontal



to be unaffected by the size or movement of the audience.

In terms of postproduction, the Fox Studio lot located at Moore Park (10km southeast from the Sydney CBD) is the undisputed capital. Opened in May 1998 for filmmakers who 'want to work in one of the world's most beautiful cities, accessing facilities of the highest standard, nestled in parklands just 15 minutes from the city centre'. Built on a 13.2-hectare site, (the original heritage site of the Royal Agricultural Society's Sydney Showground) the studio features eight stages, production offices and workshops, alongside the creative community of more than 60 independent businesses. These businesses provide everything to fully service productions from casting, travel and freight, equipment rental, postproduction and special effects. The prestigious Australia Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) is also located here.

Baz Lurhmann's recent Aus\$160m film *Australia* had this whole lot buzzing, and spilled out into production houses scattered throughout other parts of Sydney to cope with the massive workload and busy schedule. These businesses included Trackdown Scoring Stage, Soundfirm sound editing and ADR, Big Bang Sound, The Sydney Opera House and the new Aus\$4.5m Deluxe Stage One Sound film mixing facility purpose built for the film.

There are postproduction facilities located in other parts of the country including Tracks Post Production in Adelaide, Soundfirm's Melbourne facility and Cutting Edge in Brisbane. Also Warner Roadshow Studios has a large film lot (adjacent to the Warner Brothers Movie World theme park) on the Gold Coast (45mins drive south of Brisbane) in Queensland. The facility consists of eight sound stages, three water tanks, 10 production offices and postproduction companies The Post Lounge and Digital Sound and Vision.

Australia is a modern technologically advanced country whose cities regularly score highly in the world's most liveable list.



**The Queensland Performing Arts Centre Concert Hall stage**

A small population density (ranked 258 in the world), temperate climate, golden surf beaches, tropical rainforests and reefs, desert, snowy mountains and beautiful unique flora and fauna makes it popular with tourists and locals alike. As innovators on the world stage in the fields of film production and digital audio technology, a proven successful track record in popular film and music production, and with a strong work ethic and reluctance to admit defeat forged on the battlefields of Europe, the Australian professional audio production market is vibrant with local and international business, as is the popularity of production crews overseas.



**The Sydney Opera House recording studio**

## 3/4 Island