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22 February 1977

Mr Jacques Cloarec
International Institute for
Comparative Music Studies
20 Winklerstrasse
Berlin 38
WEST GERMANY

Dear Mr Cloarec

Thank you for your letter of 20 January. I am glad to know that you have found our photographs for the record cover acceptable and that the Phonogram technicians have passed the recordings themselves and in the order submitted on the master tape.

We have given careful thought to the name of the chapter, or category, in which our record is to be placed in the "Musical Sources" series, and I must now convey to you our objections to its inclusion in your chapter of 'primeval cultures'. In saying this we have not lost sight of the fact that the intention of "Musical Sources" is not to impose this classification on the music in this series, but merely, as you have explained, to announce it as a preliminary proposal, with a view to formulating more precise theories later on.

Despite what you say, I must confess to finding little or no difference between 'primeval' and 'primordial'. For the former, the meaning given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary is "of the first age of the world; ancient, primitive"; for the latter, "existing at or from the beginning, primeval, original, fundamental".

It seems to us that an audacious and unfounded assumption will be made if a disc of Australian Aboriginal music, recorded in the latter half of the twentieth century, is issued in a 'primeval' series. Listeners to this disc will be asked -- albeit tacitly -- to believe that the music they hear is no different from the music of the first singers who found their way to this continent, perhaps earlier than 50,000, or 100,000, years ago.

Recent archaeological findings in Australia do nothing to support a notion of cultural inertia over this long period of time. On the contrary, there is firm evidence of change, and in many different spheres of Aboriginal activity.

Few would wish to postulate the structure of unwritten music as it was performed by a specified tribal group 500 years ago. All we can attempt to do now is to find out how long some of the musical styles

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heard today in Australia have been practised. A playback of early recordings to older members of a given Aboriginal community will soon reveal that many musical styles have changed, and quite recently. Have we any reason to doubt that this has been the case for many generations?

We appreciate the difficulties in regard to your published 'primeval' category and realise that, once commenced, it is difficult to alter a serial format. However, because of our serious objections, may we ask you simply to retain your serial number without making any reference on the printed cover, or in related printed matter, to 'primeval cultures'? In granting us this request you will not only gain the confidence of ethnomusicologists in your UNESCO series but also the interest of the Australian Aboriginal people, many of whom are now literate and able to read about music from their own and other regions in Australia.

Enclosed are two signed copies of the Agreement as requested.

Yours sincerely

Alice M. Moyle
Research Officer, Ethnomusicology

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