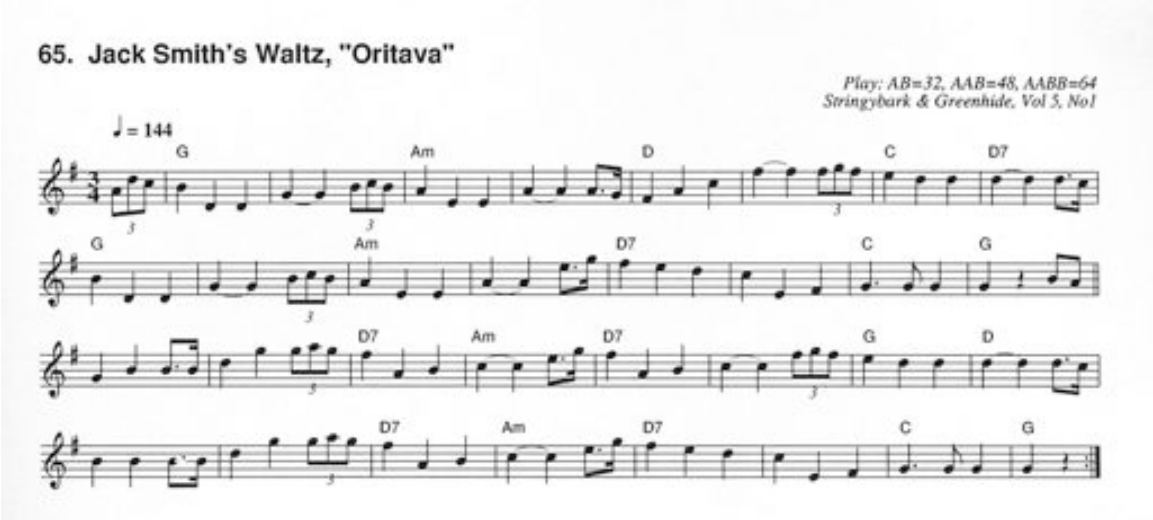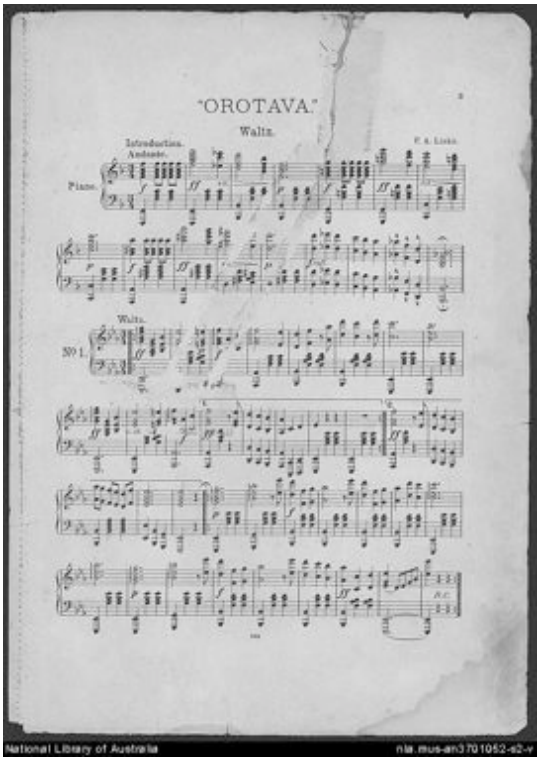

Fakelore to Folklore! Part 2, Printed Sources

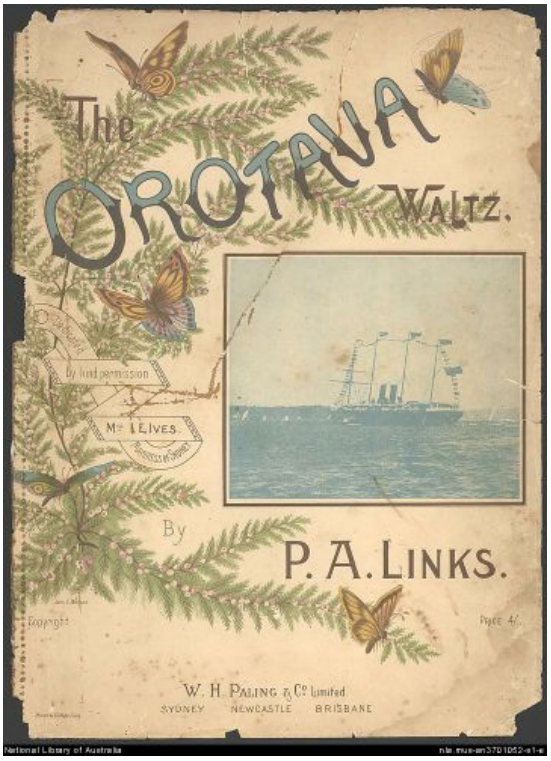
Peter Ellis

I am of the opinion that most of our tunes will have come from some published and composed or specially arranged source and that it doesn't really matter if known or anonymous. And yes, some will have been brought by our immigrants from the home country. What makes it Australian is the way in which it has evolved in the handing down through the generations and the individual's stamp and rendition of the tune with all its variations. The folk process certainly comes into play at this point and it is both the squeezebox and fiddle player in the bush to whom the main influence on development can be attributed. Fiddlers, often self-taught, played in a non-conventional manner with much short bowing and 'jigging' the tune with several notes, rather than playing the long bowed sustained notes that the trained player would have had considerable grounding in. The rendition of fiddle playing by Charlie Batchelor is a good example; he learnt most of his material sitting outside dance halls where both the sight reading dance bands and possibly the ear players were engaged. His Orotaba Waltz can be found in E flat as the Orotava Waltz in Paling's Music of the 1890s to the 1920s.



This popular tune is perhaps better known from Charlie is from Jack Smith courtesy Ray Mulligan. Compare it with the original score from Palings on page 2.





The diatonic squeezebox (button accordion and/or German style concertina) with its 'push pull' system and inability to play half notes or to modulate into key change phrases is another factor in the development of 'bush music'. Their particular action and limitations on the one hand, changed dance music from the classical style of the city bands, and developed tremendous simplicity and excellent dance rhythm with the 'bellows punch', on the other. The fiddler emphasised the 'punch' with the bowing. This would have been in play well before the advent of the squeezebox, but I've always maintained Greg O'Leary plays his fiddle like a button accordion; his rhythm in bowing is bellows style and Greg agrees with me.

The bush musicians found the playing of waltzes, schottisches, polkas, mazurkas and simpler single jigs and reels to suit the 'sets', right up their alley. The popularity of the squeezebox (comparable with the guitar today) from later in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was concurrent with that of the dances and they were of the same European blood. They did not easily handle the more complex British double reels and jigs and minor key tunes that might be favoured by the village band or groups of ceilidh fiddlers in the old country.

In rural Australia, the dance musician was often a sole player, with no support from other musicians to carry him over intricate passages. He had to adhere to the simpler tunes that would allow him to play with punch and emphasise the more important rhythm and dance beat, as well as maintaining strict tempo and to 'fill a hall with music'. The squeezebox player because of the action of his instrument and the bush fiddler did much to modify tunes in the first instance, by their style and the folk process did the rest.

The following extract and quotation (Concertina Magazine No. 1 winter, 1982, p8 of Clem O'Neal – Anglo player) aptly sums it up:

'*While an occasional record may have provided a new tune, normally, the tunes on the records were not suited to the slower jerky style of concertina/accordion playing that was found in the bush.*

"The principle source of the new tunes was those which were learned when people were away on trips.
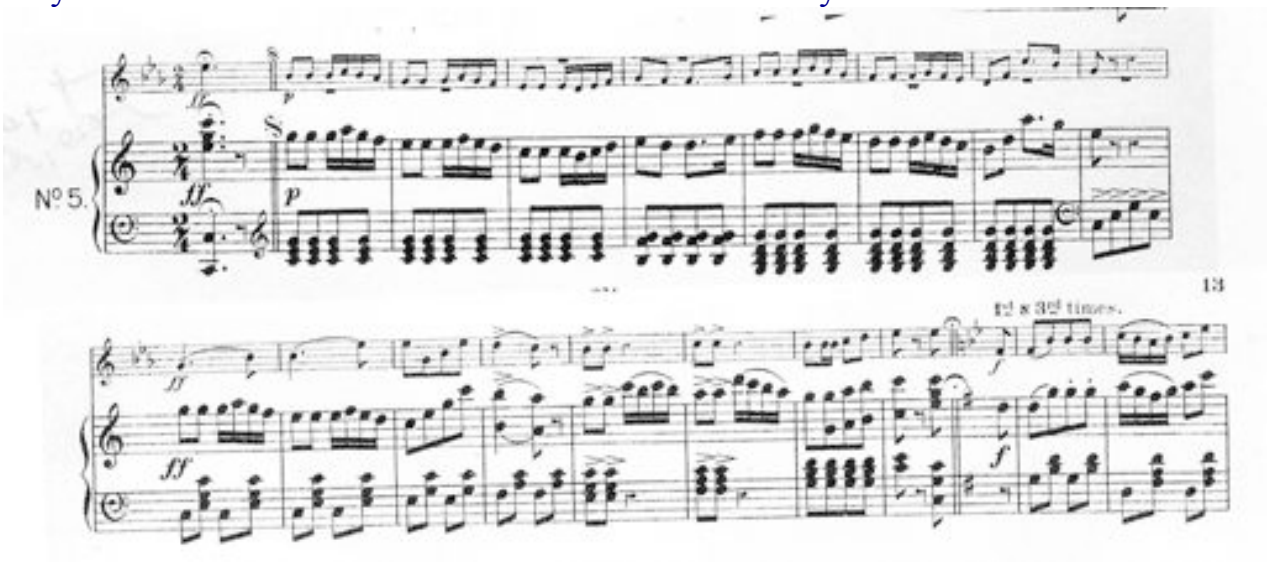
"In some cases they would remember the whole tune when they returned, but quite often they had forgotten part of it.

"In these cases they would either combine part of several tunes, or else they would make up a piece to fill in for the bit that had been forgotten.
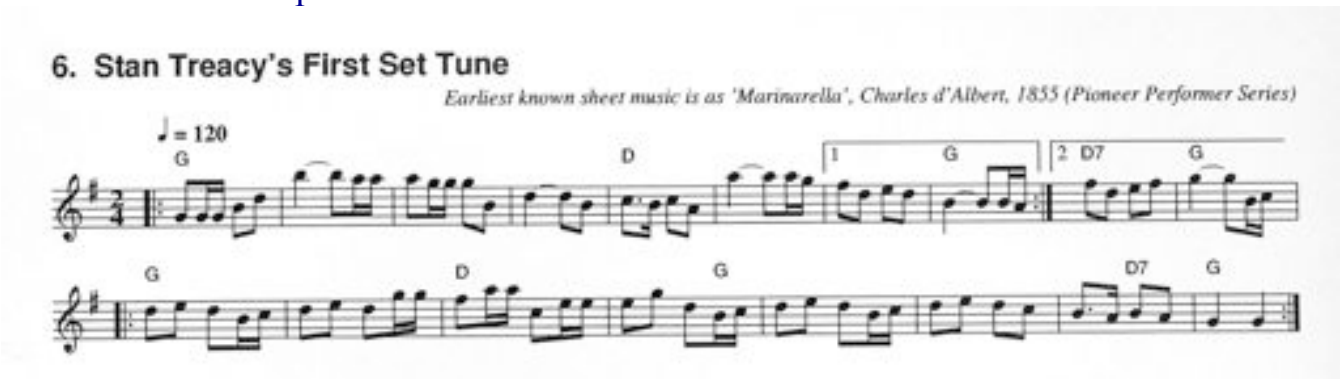
"The only way things were, was that someone would go away on a shearing trip and he'd remember part of the music, part of something.

"He'd have to keep it in his head; when he comes back perhaps he'd remember only parts of it.'

The Following tune is from the Merrie England Lancers 16 bar opening grand chain section from Wright & Rounds String Band Journal. It will be recognised as very close to a set tune collected from Bert Jamieson by Rob Willis.



Finally there are several set tunes that have been collected that can be recognised as the Northumbrian folk tune known as Geordie. Stan Treacy's Set Tune is one and Frank Thompson's 'Dad's Tune for the Lancers is another.



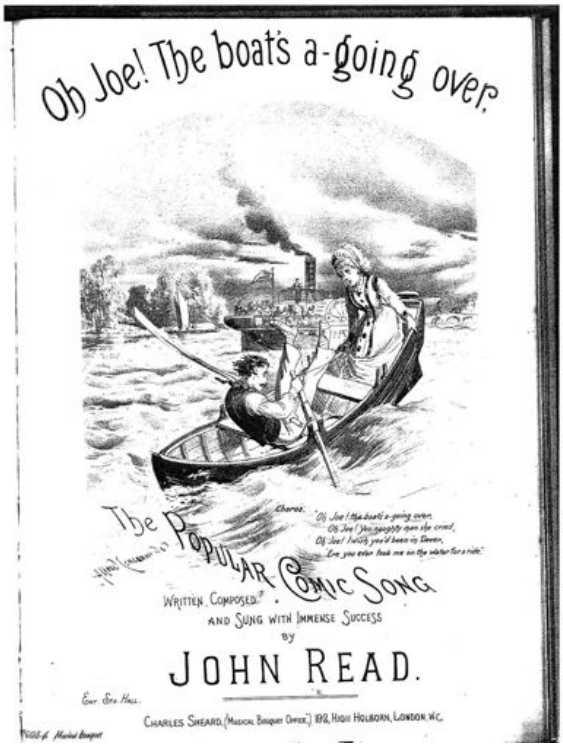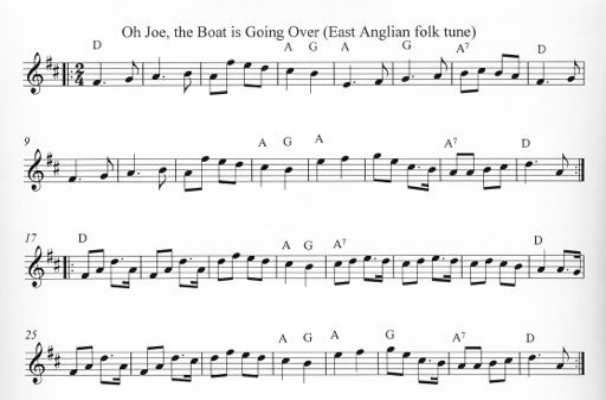


Although different from each other these tunes can be recognised as having a common ancestor. Those that know Geordie can compare it to that, however Dave de Hugard's discovered the earliest known as Marinarella by Charles d'Albert in 1855. D'Albert was one of the most popular dance music composers whose manuscripts were used all over Britain, Ireland and the Colonies and illustrates perhaps a common ancestral link between the folk tune Geordie as well as several Australian Lancers and First Set tunes.

But there is also a song to the same tune that was popular particularly in East Anglia and possibly also linked to Geordie.

The same song was popular in Australia in the 1880s, sung at a Benalla concert in 1883. Here is a reference from 'The Border Watch' Mount Gambier Sat. 1st November 1884 p3 "Tantanoola"

At the close of the Chairman's remarks the concert was proceeded with. Mr. Bray sang, "Oh, Joe, the boat's going over," which was encored.





(Lyrics on page 6)

Oh, Joe! the Boat's Going Over

I loved a charming creature, such a very timid maid,
She can stand almost anything but of water she's afraid,
She'll have a tidy fortune when her uncle dies some day,
While on a voyage to Dover once, that girl to me did say.

CHORUS

Oh! Joe the boat's going over,
Oh! Joe you naughty man she cried,
Oh! Joe I wish you'd been in Dover,
Before you ever took me on the water for a ride.

The wind was blowing rather rough she clung so tight to me,
The boat began to pitch and toss, all on the briny sea,
She looked so wild she cried aloud in a frantic sort of way,
Her arms she flung around my neck and then to me did say –

I said Matilda don't be afraid now there's a dear,
With a smile she looked into my face, and gave me such a leer,
A kiss then from her cheek I stole, oh, she seemed rather shy,
And while I was kissing her, that girl to me did cry -

We landed safe in Dover, her uncle there we found,
He died two days after that, and left her eight hundred pounds,
I made Matilda my dear wife we're so happy night and day,
While sitting by her fireside sometimes she'll say –