

Beyond The Bush Ballad: Authenticity in Australian Country Music

Amy Bauder

Bachelor of Arts (Hons), Sydney University

Macquarie University

Faculty of Arts

Department of Music, Media, Communication and Cultural Studies

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
List of Figures	3
Abstract	4
Statement of Authenticity	5
Acknowledgements	6
Part One: Contexts	9
Chapter One: Introduction	9
"Just Make Sure It Is Australian"	9
Defining Country Music: It Is About More Than the Sound	12
Ethnographic Fieldwork	13
"Distinctions" in the "Field": Theoretical Framework	15
<i>The Great Country Songbook: Contested Traditions and Mateship</i>	20
"True Blue Bust-Up"	25
Thesis Structure	30
Chapter Two: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methodology	33
Literature Review	33
Theoretical or Analytic Framework	59
Methodology	69
Fieldwork	78
Chapter Three: Roots and Heritage	89
"Honouring an Australian 'Legend'": Fieldwork Account	89
Slim Dusty as Touchstone for Australian Country Music	91
The Country Music Canon	92
Slim's Life Story	95
Sources of the Legend	96
What Are the elements?	97
Part Two: People and Relationships	101
Introduction	101
Family	103
Coming Home: Fieldwork Account	103
Public Private Lives	107
Travelling Family Band: The Slim Dusty Family as Pioneers	108
The Family Business	112
Professionals and Stars	118
The Family Business Redux	119
Mateship	127
Troy Cassar-Daley & Friends: Fieldwork Account	127
"It's Good to See You Mate": Friendship in the Country Music Community	129
Australian Legends: Bush, Pioneer and Mates	134
The Community of Mates	138
Who Is the Star? Fieldwork Account	145
Solo Artists, Bands, Stars	147
Session Musos	152
Fans and Artists	156
Family Friendly: No Sex, Drugs or Rock and Roll	156
No Strangers, Just Mates You Haven't Met Yet: Fieldwork Account	161
"The Front Row": Slim as Friend of the Fans	164
Accessibility of "Stars"	165

Part Three: Places and Spaces	169
Introduction	169
Places	170
Where I'm from, My Home: Fieldwork Account	170
"Boys (and Girls) from the Bush": Rurality and Country Music	172
"Just to Say That We Did It. Another Cultural Experience": Fieldwork Account	178
City Boy	179
Chronicler of the Bush: Slim Dusty, Heritage and Countrymindedness	181
"Give Me the Road": Touring, Authentication and Heritage	184
Spaces	190
The Rooms Themselves Become an Instrument for the Band: Fieldwork Account	190
The Lucky Country Hall Tour	195
Contemporary Touring Scale and Authenticity	197
"Old Time Country Halls": Slim Dusty	210
Do It Yourself Aesthetic	214
Connection with community	216
Part Four: Performance	223
Watching the Band Play: Fieldwork Account	223
Performing Country	226
Why Live Performance?	231
Travelling Showmen: Roots and Heritage	235
Woodford Folk Festival: Fieldwork Account	239
Playing to a Different Crowd: Changing Performances	241
Performance Styles	242
Jump Endings, Smoke Machines and Rising Stages: Fieldwork Account	245
Bringing Van Halen Theatrics into Acoustic Bluegrassy Country	248
Natural or Rehearsed? Performance as Skill	251
"The Story of My Life": The Autobiographical Mode in Australian Country Music	254
Playing Beccy Cole: Persona, Performance and Authenticity	256
Conclusion	272
Part Five: A Coda and Conclusions	273
Coda: America, Nashville and Americana	273
Conclusions	282
Reference List	287
Discography	304
Appendices	308
Appendix One – Sales, Charts and Accreditations	308
Appendix Two – Sites of Observation of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band	313
Appendix Three – Where Artists Live	318
Appendix Four – Lucky Country Hall Tour	320
Appendix Five – Festivals	322
Appendix Six – Beccy Cole 2013 Touring Schedule	324
Appendix Seven – Ethics Final Approval	328

List of Figures

Figure One: John Williamson performing on Main Stage at the Gympie Music Muster, 2012.	10
Figure Two: Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band performing at CMC Rocks the Hunter in 2013.	14
Figure Three: Interviews.	82
Figure Four: Bob Corbett performing at the Star Maker Finals, 20 January 2013.	150
Figure Five: Sue, Bob and Dave singing together.	154
Figure Six: Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band performing at Cessnock School of Arts Lounge.	191
Figure Seven: Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band playing to the Mud Bulls and Music Festival crowd.	204
Figure Eight: Poster for South Australian leg of the Lucky Country Hall Tour.	216
Figure Nine: Beccy Cole performing at the Woodford Folk Festival, 2013.	240
Figure Ten: Bob Corbett “rockin’ out”.	249
Figure Eleven: Beccy Cole and Lyn Bowtell performing “Girls Out Here”.	267
Figure Twelve: Beccy Cole performing at Club Singleton, 2013.	270
Figure Thirteen: Australian artists in the round at the Bluebird Café.	274

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnography of Australian country music. It explores the experiences of individuals active within Australian country music. It acknowledges that country music is a musical project, but takes as its object of study the cultural experience it offers artists, industry personnel and fans. It explores the practices of those involved with Australian country music, the everyday, on-the-ground activities associated with making music, such as performing, promotion, touring, recording, and how these are connected to, shaped by and shape attitudes, beliefs, discourses and stories that circulate within the community. This thesis steps away from a focus on the recorded sound of country music, instead finding that discourses relating to people, relationships, place, space and performance shape the experience and practices of country music culture.

The conceptual framework of this thesis is drawn from Pierre Bourdieu's work on "fields" as a way of understanding Australian country music as a discrete, relatively autonomous social microcosm. A series of distinctions shape the cultural logic of the field and it is through these distinctions that participants determine what is valued as authentic and legitimate. It is through these distinctions that artists work to position themselves and gain legitimacy. Throughout this thesis I will explore four interrelated distinctions: "country" versus "city", "tradition" versus "new", "independent" versus "commercial" and "real" versus "fake". Each of these sets of distinctions relates to aspects of performance and practice and is tied to different discourses that circulate within the field. These distinctions provide meaning and value within the field and are used to inscribe authenticity to certain expressions of country music over others.

Statement of Authenticity

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled 'Beyond the Bush Ballad: Authenticity in Australian Country Music' has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

The presented thesis is an original piece of research, and has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received during my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used is indicated and acknowledged fully. The Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee approved the research presented in this thesis on 13 September 2012; reference number 5201200632(D).

Amy Bauder

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Part One: Contexts

Chapter One: Introduction

“Just Make Sure It Is Australian”

In January 2014, I attended an after-party for the Golden Guitar Awards. The Country Music Awards of Australia, nicknamed the “Golden Guitars”, are the annual music awards of the Australian country music industry. The awards ceremony is held each year at the end of the Tamworth Country Music Festival in January. The after-party was full of the who’s who of country music, all socialising, drinking and winding down from Australian country music’s big awards night and the ten-day festival. John Williamson, who had just won a Golden Guitar for Vocal Collaboration of the Year, was sitting with his wife. They were strikingly alone.

I had loved Williamson since I was a kid. The fandom began at six years old; when during a car trip to the local Chinese restaurant for my Dad’s birthday celebration I first heard Williamson’s song “Rip Rip Woodchip” on the radio. I became obsessed and from that point on his music dominated the soundtrack of my childhood. My love of Williamson had waxed and waned. As a teenager and young adult, country music was daggy; a guilty pleasure best not mentioned in the company of peers. Plus, all the “true blue” Aussie patriotism John Williamson was known for was hard to reconcile with lefty politics, a university education in gender and cultural studies and living in the inner city. But in my late twenties the love was rekindled and strengthened as I travelled to the places he sang about – the albums of my childhood became the soundtrack to a solo road trip around Australia – his songs about his childhood home in the Mallee region playing as I travelled through the same area of western Victoria; “Ancient Mountains” as I drove around Uluru; and “Old Man Emu” popping up on random as emus ran alongside my car

in the Flinders Ranges. I had approached him early in my thesis research, hoping to get an interview with the veteran figure of the Australian country music industry, but had been told by his management that Williamson does not do interviews for free, even if the research is admirable. On this night I was wary of his “grumpy old man” image and fairly sure no fruitful discussion would be possible.



Figure One: John Williamson performing on Main Stage at the Gympie Music Muster, 2012.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

At the after-party I was introduced to John as both a fan and someone writing a PhD on Australian country music.

“That’s great,” said John. “As long as you argue it should be ‘Australian’ I’m sure it will be good”.

“Well it is not really my job to argue what it should or should not be”, I replied. “Instead I’m looking at how artists experience and understand what it is to be country, and how they perform that. I am interested in what you mean when you say ‘Australian’.”

“Just that it should be Australian,” responded John. “It should sound Australian. Authentic: true blue, Australian. Not the American rubbish.”

Over the next ten minutes I tried, in vain, to elicit a more nuanced answer to this question. But the answer never really moved beyond “Australian”, “Aussie” and “true blue”.

Six weeks before this awards night John Williamson had resigned as President of the Country Music Association of Australia (CMAA). Following problems with the administration of the nomination process for the 2014 Golden Guitar Awards Williamson cited disappointment with the trend toward American-style music – calling the Golden Guitars the “The American Country Awards of Australia” in a letter to the Chair of the Country Music Association of Australia, which was published in the Tamworth newspaper *The Northern Daily Leader*. In the same letter he argued that if the Country Music Association of Australia is “NOT respected as a legitimate organisation to promote original Australian country music, I cannot be associated with it any longer” (Williamson 2013). The main focus of these complaints was the six finalist nominations received by Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey for *The Great Country Songbook*, an album of covers, and American-based Keith Urban’s four nominations. Williamson’s resignation sparked mass debate and wide media interest in the controversy, and resulted in Troy and Adam withdrawing their nominations for the awards.

Defining Country Music: It Is About More Than the Sound

The foregoing account introduces a set of connected events that occurred during my research: the resignation of Williamson as the long-serving president of the peak industry body for country music in Australia because of the “Americanisation” of the awards and industry, and the subsequent withdrawal of the most commercially successful Australian country album of 2013 from contention in the Golden Guitar Awards by two “stars” within the industry, Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey. But it also provides an insight into the views of Williamson, one of the participants in the public debate about the definition of Australian country music sparked by these events. The release of *The Great Country Songbook* and debate in the industry about both the album and its suitability for nomination for Golden Guitars reflects macro-level themes in the Australian country music community and will be used to contextualise the more specific and detailed exploration of how artists negotiate the field that occurs within this thesis. I am primarily interested in this incident as an entry point for exploring what is valued in the field and how this shapes country music culture, rather than continuing debates about defining country music based only on musical sounds, an approach which I believe to be unproductive.

My original research question centred on investigating how Australian country music had developed and changed since the 1980s, with the aim of understanding what is currently included in the definition of Australian country music. The aim of this question was focused on finding and defining what country music was using recorded music, media texts, artist biography, historical evidence, interviews and some participant observation at festivals and other gigs. I was planning to apply a genealogical approach to the research and structure of the thesis. Over the course of my early research I began to realise that the gap in the literature on country music that interested me was the way those participating in the contemporary field experienced country music as a culture,

how they connected practice to discourse to explain and position themselves as country music artists or fans and exploring performance conventions. It was these things that were absent in the existing scholarly work on Australian country music.

This thesis is an ethnography of country music. It explores the experiences of individuals active within Australian country music. It acknowledges that country music is a musical project, but takes as its object of study the cultural experience it offers artists, industry personnel and fans. It explores the practices of those involved with Australian country music, the everyday, on-the-ground activities associated with making music, such as performing, promotion, touring, recording, and how these are connected to, shaped by and shape attitudes, beliefs, discourses and stories that circulate within the community.

This thesis steps away from a focus on the recorded sound of country music, instead questioning how discourses relating to people, relationships, place, space and performance shape the experience and practices of country music culture.

The opening account is also used to position me within the field: I am a fan of country music; I have engaged with the music and the scene as a consumer of the music for many years prior to this research, and this shaped my research and understanding throughout my fieldwork. My fandom shaped a desire to explore country music beyond jingoistic portrayals of a daggy, patriotic, populist music form that has no value as a culture.

Ethnographic Fieldwork

This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between March 2012 and January 2014. This fieldwork included participant observation at over one hundred and fifty country music events across New South Wales and Queensland and in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants. The broad focus of the initial fieldwork gave

way to a focused immersion with the central case study of this thesis, Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band.



Figure Two: Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band performing at CMC Rocks the Hunter in 2013.

Pictured left to right: Robbie Long, Sue Carson, Bob Corbett and Dave Carter.
Photo credit: Amy Bauder

Based in Newcastle, the second-biggest city in New South Wales, the Roo Grass Band includes: Bob Corbett the lead singer, who plays guitar and is the primary songwriter for the band; Sue Carson, who plays fiddle, mandolin and sings; Robbie Long, who plays guitars, mandolin, dobro, bass and has produced and engineered a number of the band's albums; Dave Carter, who plays banjo, bass and bagpipes; and Michael Carpenter, who occasionally plays drums and bass with the band and who mixed a number of their albums. Bob was recognised by the "mainstream" Australian country music scene in 2012 after winning the Star Maker competition (an annual competition run during the Tamworth Country Music Festival which has launched the careers of numerous contemporary "stars" such as Keith Urban, Lee Kernaghan and Beccy Cole). Since the

win Bob and the band's success within the field has increased – higher album sales, larger crowds, more airplay, recognition, sponsorships and nomination for Golden Guitar Awards (the main Australian country music industry awards). They play a mercurial mix of styles including bluegrass, Western swing, pop folk, and rock. At the core is a concern with storytelling, and live, acoustic-based performance is central. Bob and the band are primarily engaging with the field of Australian country music (through festivals, media, and self-identification), rather than the folk or bluegrass scenes, which, while related, are distinct fields with different logics, rules and relations.

This fieldwork provided a rich body of fieldwork observations upon which this thesis is based. The accounts running through this Chapter, about *The Great Country Songbook* controversy, differ from all others used in this thesis. To convey the complexity and nuances of the debate about the album and its nomination for Golden Guitar awards, it was necessary to construct an account from media sources and cover a long period of time. All other fieldwork accounts in this thesis are based on observations made by me at a specific event. They are generally an account of a short period of time and are detail-rich explorations of everyday practice or performance. However, *The Great Country Songbook* incident serves to provide broader context on the debates, structure and operation of the field, and is informed by the ethnographic knowledge amassed during this research.

“Distinctions” in the “Field”: Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of this thesis is drawn from Pierre Bourdieu's work on “fields” as a way of understanding Australian country music as a discrete, relatively autonomous social microcosm. It is located within the social space of Australian society, and the broader music industry, yet is ruled by logics that are “specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields” (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97).

Australian country music consists of systems of relations that define the occupants of the field – country musicians, industry, “stars”, fans (to name a few) – and shape the products and practices of the field. Participants in the field of Australian country music work to differentiate their position, and gain a monopoly over authority and influence within the field – to be recognised as successful, authentic country music artists (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 100). This framework allows analytic space for exploring and understanding a tension between so-called “authenticity”, as a form of cultural capital, and the commercial imperatives of country music as a popular music form. The field shapes and is shaped by the ways in which participants engage with Australian country music; the way they play the game.

Throughout this thesis I rely on an assumption that artists are the lead agents within the field. This is, in part, a result of the approach I took in this research – I was primarily interested in how artists understood their relationship to Australian country music. The central case study for this thesis is Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band. As the front man of the band, independent musician and manager Bob (I use first names throughout this thesis, because that is how those in the field refer to one another) engages with the field as lead agent – he runs his own business, books his own shows, writes his own music, records his own albums. While limited by the rules and logic established by others in the field, he has high levels of agency in the way he negotiates the field. He is not unusual in Australian country music, which includes a high number of independent, DIY musicians. This troubles the model of record company (or other corporate interest) control over all aspects of the music industry, in which artists are “managed” or regulated by corporate masters and it is a rare and remarkable artist who fights back, takes control and does it their way.

A series of distinctions shape the cultural logic of the field – it is through these distinctions that participants determine what is valued as authentic and legitimate (this is drawn from Sarah Thornton’s work [1996, 3] and will be explored in greater detail in “Chapter Two: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methodology”). It is through these distinctions that artists work to position themselves and gain legitimacy. Throughout this thesis I will explore four interrelated distinctions: “country” versus “city”, “tradition” versus “new”, “independent” versus “commercial” and “real” versus “fake”. Each of these sets of distinctions relates to aspects of performance and practice and is tied to different discourses that circulate within the field. It is these distinctions which provide meaning and value within the field and are used to inscribe authenticity to certain expressions of country music over others.

The imagined home of Australian country music is rural and regional Australia. Artists continually narrate their place geographically and lay claim to connections with particular places and spaces. “Country” and “city” form overarching distinctions within the field through which participants determine what is legitimate or authentic. Artists work to position themselves in the field through their relationship to place or space in terms of concepts such as “home”, and also through touring practices. “Country” places and spaces, and experiences of these places and spaces are more highly valued, whereas “city” places and spaces, or experiences require more work to legitimise as fitting in with country music culture.

Australian country music is marked through the value that history, heritage and nostalgia has for participants in the field. Artists must negotiate a path between respect for “tradition” and a desire for “new” musical expression or approaches to the business of making music. Contemporary practices and sounds are not merely understood to be the products of the historical development of the field, but are continually legitimised

through discourses of “tradition”. There is an authenticating value in the ability to explain current practice in relation to that of the pioneers. This is most frequently done with reference to Slim Dusty, who through his success, longevity and influence on the establishment of the field is a key touchstone for how to do “country” – showing key possibilities for action within the contemporary field. This thesis relies on stories about Slim to provide historical context for contemporary practice, mirroring the way in which participants in Australian country music continually refer their practice to Slim as a model of how country should be done.

Country music is a commercial popular music form and culture. Many agents in the scene have an uneasy symbolic relationship with the commercial aspects of country music, but it is a basic premise within the field: the music exists to make money. The “independent” versus “commercial” distinction is evident in the way artists work to position their practice within this popular music logic. All artists engage with the commercial, economic or material aspects of the field in some way—most obviously by producing or releasing records for sale or playing gigs—with varying degrees of success. Even those rare few who make the decision not to make any money from their music (by giving away their music, playing for free) are marked by their relationship to economic capital. This is not to say that financial and popular success (in their quantifiable forms: money made, units sold, crowd sizes, radio spins) is the only thing valued in country music. As a form of cultural capital, authenticity – being seen as authentic - is also valued. But within Australian country music a tension exists between parts of the field underpinned by commercial logic and the idea of the popular, and those underpinned by notions of creativity, independence and musical integrity.

The “real” versus “fake” distinction is most closely tied to the discourse of “authenticity”. Ideas about, and associated practices concerning, “authenticity” permeate the culture of

Australian country music. The discourse reaches across all aspects of the field, and all participants in the scene are compelled to at least turn their minds to questions of authenticity, and develop strategies for dealing with them. Value is conferred on artists seen to convey so-called “true” and “genuine” personas. Indeed the country music community demands something referred to as “honesty” from performers. This thesis primarily relies on an understanding of “authenticity” as a discourse, but it is also understood as a form of cultural capital attached to practices and discourses, which reinforce non-commercial values, and as a strategic device used by artists to position themselves within the field.

Authenticity is used to distinguish country music (both Australian and American) from other styles of music in a number of key ways. It can be understood as an essential quality of music which “honestly” reflects or expresses an identity or experience (such as Australian national identity, rural experience, heartbreak) (Sanjek 1998; Watson 1982; Watson 1983); as a proper way of relating music, artist and audience (Smith 2005); as an ideological watchword which tempers commerciality (Sanjek 1998); or as something “fabricated” or constructed in the codification of the genre (Akenson 2003; Carriage and Hayward 2003; Peterson 1997). I am not positing this as a feature unique to Australian country music. A number of authors have highlighted the role authenticity plays in popular music as an ideology or discourse used to navigate, understand or obfuscate the functions of the commercial music industry and shape its output (see, for example, the approaches of Barker and Taylor 2007; Frith 1988; Sanjek 1998).

The scholarship on country music and popular music in general often explores how authenticity is inscribed in the musical products, rather than the processes and practices behind those products: the everyday, extra-musical activities of participants in the scene. This thesis is concerned with how discourses of authenticity are sutured to

business, musical and promotional practices, and how such tropes function alongside discourses and practices about relationships and people, places and spaces and performance in the negotiation of commercial realities in Australian country music. Rather than looking at end products, my research takes a ground-up approach, exploring what people are doing and how they talk about their practices and decisions.

The Great Country Songbook: Contested Traditions and Mateship

Returning to the incident/s mentioned in the opening section of this Introduction I will explore what John Williamson's resignation as president of the Country Music Association of Australia, and the debate around the nomination of Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey's *The Great Country Songbook*, reveals about Australian country music.

In April 2013 Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey released the lead single, "Lights on the Hill", from their forthcoming album, *The Great Country Songbook*. The song had been penned by Joy McKean in 1971 and originally released by her husband, Slim Dusty. The film clip for Troy and Adam's version begins with Adam buying cold drinks in an old-fashioned country-style general store. Adam pauses at the counter to watch a video of Slim and Joy on stage at the Old Regent Theatre in Charters Towers (taken from *The Slim Dusty Movie*) performing "Lights on the Hill". After paying for the drinks Adam walks outside, past the racks of saddles and stacks of stockfeed, to join Troy at a table.

"Hey mate, can you hear that old Slim song?" asks Adam.

"Yeah mate, I love it."

"Hey, you and I ought to do that."

Troy nods, staring off into the distance. The Slim version fades out; the shot cuts to someone climbing into a truck and the guitar intro of Troy and Adam's version starts.

As the lead single for Troy and Adam's *The Great Country Songbook* album, "Lights on the Hill" worked to position the album, and the artists, as paying tribute to an Australian tradition of country music. Slim Dusty is held up as a pioneer of "real" Australian country music and provides a model for how country music should be played. Within Australian country music contemporary practices are constantly articulated to a "tradition", in which Slim Dusty dominates. Artists establish authenticity through their knowledge, relationship to and love of the "roots" of the genre. Troy and Adam's cover was not an isolated nod to Slim's recorded legacy; their single was released one week after Lee Kernaghan and the Wolfe Brothers also released a video clip of their version of the same song.

When Troy and Adam then released an entire album of traditional country music, *The Great Country Songbook*, two months later in June 2013 only two of the twenty tracks included on the album were Australian songs. Both were songs written by Joy McKean and made famous by Slim Dusty – "Lights on the Hill" and "Indian Pacific". The rest of the album was made up of American country music classics - songs made famous by Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard and Charley Pride. This album was presented as a representation of the musical influences of these two men:

Some of the best collaborations are born from ideas scrawled on a pub coaster, and that can certainly be said of the passion project from legendary multi award-winning Australian country music cohorts Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey. The result is a lovingly hand-picked bunch of songs, top-heavy with their biggest personal influences. Simply, all the songs they both could not live without (Cassar-Daley and Harvey 2013).

There is no sense that these musical influences and traditions are problematic. Troy and Adam regularly speak of their love of old, "traditional" country music, both Australian and American; they often include covers of these songs in their shows and have played

shows comprised entirely of these types of covers. The album itself came out of these shows.

We had so much fun jamming together that Troy suggested we put a band together and do a live show. We rounded up some of the best musicians we could find - Vaughan Jones, Michel Rose, Chris Haigh - and for the last couple of years have been fitting in performances wherever we got the chance (Harvey quoted in Jarvis 2013, 10).

Importantly, there is an inclination in this discussion and at these shows toward American country songs. Space is given to “traditional” Australian country music, particularly Slim’s music; however, there is a richer and more sustained engagement with a variety of traditional American country music. Troy, in particular, engages with “traditional” Australian country music through his original music which often includes story songs about the “bush”, Australian places, people, events and values, albeit with a more “modern” musical sound than the sparsely accompanied bush ballad. In “Chapter Two: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methodology” I explore the bush ballad, its history and definitions in more detail.

In addition to connecting the album to their musical history and inspiration, Troy and Adam clearly attempted to connect this album to a tradition of music making – highlighting the connection the session musicians who played on the album had to the music. In the promotional videos for the album each of the musicians who played on the album were introduced with reference to their love or experience of playing these “traditional” country songs, as well as their central positions in the contemporary Australian country music industry. For example, in one video Adam commented:

What about that Slim Dusty song we recorded, and then Col Watson, who played on the original version for Slim, played on our version too. That’s pretty cool you know.

Troy nods and adds:

And I said to him, do you need to write a chart? And he goes, "Mate, I played on the original!"

Later in the video, Troy comments:

...it's so nice to be able to pull this band of players together. But heading this band playing was one of the most beautiful, authentic country things I have heard for a long time in a studio ("Adam Harvey, Troy Cassar-Daley - Behind The Scenes of The Great Country Songbook" 2013).

The recording process itself was also positioned as old fashioned. Because of the talent and experience of the musicians involved they relied on first take tracking with no need to "fix" the recordings with technology or retakes.

Discourses of friendship and fun permeated the discussion of both the recording process and subsequent tour. In the promotional videos Troy and Adam highlighted their friendship:

Here's the thing, I wouldn't be able to do this with anyone else in our industry. That's just plain and simple. I think it is because Adam has the same sort of love of old country songs as I do, big on Johnny Cash, big on Willie Nelson, so it couldn't really happen with anyone else. And I'm not just saying that because you're here, I'm just saying it because it's the fair dinkum truth ("Adam Harvey, Troy Cassar-Daley - Behind The Scenes of The Great Country Songbook" 2013).

The men's friendship and enjoyment is also noted in the media coverage of the album and tour:

Troy and Adam clearly have enormous admiration and respect not only for the artists whose work they've recorded, but also for each other. And they have a wonderful on-stage rapport, with plenty of witty banter and the exchanges of stories about their own careers and those of their idols (Jarvis 2013, 12).

Through the promotional material, and media coverage, a sense that these are songs that the artists just sit around playing together in their spare time comes through; that through these videos, albums and shows we are getting a secret look into their

backstage life. The video clip for Lee Kernaghan and the Wolfe Brothers' version of "Lights on the Hill" uses backstage footage of a dressing room jam interspersed with on-stage footage and images of trucks, giving the impression that it provides an insight into their "real" offstage life. The glimpse shows that they are not just playing for the money, but enjoy the music and play it in their time off. This works to legitimise their choice to record an album of cover songs.

Three things emerge as important to both Troy and Adam in the promotional material for *The Great Country Song Book* – the importance of acknowledging and respecting musical tradition, the significance of friendship, and the enjoyment of playing music live. The stories told about releasing an album of covers work to legitimise a practice, which could potentially be censured for not being serious and legitimate country music product – that is original material or "new" music.

The album and tour were hugely successful. The album gained Gold status in five weeks, and is now platinum accredited (see "Appendix One – Sales, Charts and Accreditations" for information on ARIA Charts and Accreditation). It was the top Australian release on ARIA's end of year Top 50 Country Albums chart in 2013, coming in at number two behind Taylor Swift's *Red*¹. It was ahead of Keith Urban's *Fuse* (which was released three months later on 10 September). On the ARIA Top 50 Australian Albums of 2013 it came in at number seven, and was 35 on the ARIA Top 100 Albums of 2013. The success continued into 2013 - with the album coming in at number six on the 2014 ARIA Top 50 Country Albums chart. The tour, which included larger venues like the Crown Casino in Melbourne and Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre at 800-1000 seats, was regularly advertised and spoken about as being a "sold out" tour.

¹ Which is arguably a pop crossover album rather than country album.

Then in November 2013, Troy and Adam were announced as finalists for six awards in the Golden Guitar Awards: Album of the Year and Top Selling Album of the Year for *The Great Country Songbook* and Vocal Collaboration, Heritage Song of the Year, Single of the Year and Video Clip of the Year for the single “Lights on the Hill”. The announcement of the finalists was marred by a number of errors, with Male Artist of the Year nominee Pete Denahy being ruled ineligible and two of the finalists for Bush Ballad of the Year not complying with the nomination rules. This was not the first time errors had tarnished the Golden Guitars. Two years prior Lee Kernaghan was incorrectly announced as the winner of Album of the Year during the Awards ceremony. While it was reported that the error was picked up backstage instantly, it was not until the following day that a statement was issued clarifying that Graeme Connors was the rightful recipient of the guitar-shaped statue. The nomination mistakes in 2014 were rectified, new nominees were announced and no questions were raised about the eligibility of Troy and Adam’s releases.

“True Blue Bust-Up”

On Tuesday 10 December 2013, the Country Music Association of Australia held its Annual General Meeting. That morning the Tamworth newspaper *The Northern Daily Leader* ran a front-page story about John Williamson tendering his resignation as President of the Country Music Association of Australia. The headline was “True blue bust-up, Williamson walks: Golden Guitars ‘too American’”. The paper printed John Williamson’s letter to Country Music Association of Australia Chair, Jeff Walker:

I have decided to resign as President of the CMAA. This is not over the obvious mistakes this year. The current turmoil was bound to happen. Firstly, it is impossible to run serious Golden Guitar Awards using volunteers. But it is the lack of commitment by artists, radio and recording companies generally towards the Australian culture.

There is almost no encouragement to be original in style.

While artists pay homage to Australia, they are generally entrenched in the American country music culture.

It's as though the Golden Guitar Awards are The American Country Music Awards of Australia.

It seems the industry is hell-bent on producing more Keith Urbans. At least Keith went over there and 'sold coals to Newcastle'.

If we are NOT respected as a legitimate organisation to promote original Australian country music, I cannot be associated with it any longer.

Artists with Aussie accents aim their songs at the Heritage or Bush Ballad Golden Guitar Awards.

'Mainstream' is really now American style country rock. As Slim used to call it, 'rock'n'roll in a cowboy hat.'

I don't need any more Golden Guitars but I am saddened by the fact that young country artists will continue to feel they need to be 'American' in style to win one, which is the message underlined by many of the final nominations for this year's Golden Guitars (Williamson 2013, 4).

In the article published alongside this letter it is stated that John "said the most damning indictment on the awards was the fact 'an album with 90 per cent American covers can get in. We should be nurturing what Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson started'" (Johns 2013, 4). Keith Urban's eligibility for nomination was questioned because the album was recorded in America (that has long been a problem for Williamson); but more significantly because, although he is Australian, he is based in America and is primarily active within the American country music scene.

The mainstream media picked up the story and debate broke out across social media.

Two days after Williamson's resignation went public, the controversy deepened as Troy and Adam withdrew their nominations for all voted categories in the Golden Guitars

(this excluded the nomination for Top Selling Album of the Year which is awarded on sales figures, not voting). In a press release the duo stated:

The decision to nominate in various categories was due to the success of their near-platinum selling album *The Great Country Song Book* and it was at that time encouraged by the CMAA.

There was and still is no problem with the album's legitimate qualification in the categories for which it was nominated, however due to recent objection and the ensuing industry debate, both Troy and Adam have decided (with respect) to withdraw their nominations.

"The conversations and debates about the album over the past few days has fragmented an already fragile music community. We are very proud of the achievements of the project however wish to not have the album as part of the awards. We are just sad for Country Music that this has all happened. The last thing we wanted to do was cause any controversy. It was just two mates paying tribute to our musical heroes," said Troy and Adam.

The Great Country Song Book is a lovingly hand-picked bunch of country music classics, recorded entirely in Australia, top-heavy with both Troy and Adam's favourite childhood songs. Songs that evoke memories of families that lived and loved country music; songs that have formed the fabric of their musical careers such as their faithful rendition of Slim Dusty's "Lights On The Hill" which was released as the first single from the album in direct response to pleas from their fans ("Adam Harvey & Troy Cassar-Daley Withdraw From Golden Guitars" 2015).

Troy announced the withdrawal on Facebook with a similar statement:

I love Country Music and always will, our reasons for withdrawing our nominations are clear and have been done with the utmost respect to our industry and our peers and the Golden Guitars are far too dear to me to have controversy surround them.

We must move forward now and continue to celebrate Country Music in Australia no matter what style you choose to play. To me the real judges are the fans and friends who choose to buy our music, I just want to say thanks to them for their unconditional support through thick and thin (Cassar-Daley 2013).

Both these statements worked to assert Troy and Adam's image as "nice guys" in the controversy, reaffirmed their love of traditional country music and the Australian industry and the centrality of friendship and loyalty in this album project and country music in general.

While some supported or had sympathy for Williamson's position, he was strongly criticised from within the country music community. Fan responses to Troy's post about the withdrawal of nominations were scathing toward Williamson. Within the 676 comments on the post people accused him of "sour grapes", being an "opinionated arsehole", "arrogant bastard", "too big for his britches", "pompous bigot", and a "bitter old prick" among other things, while Troy and Adam attracted glowing praise and support (Cassar-Daley 2013). During the Tamworth Country Music Festival in January 2014 rumours circulated within the industry that Williamson had received death threats during the "incident".

Some people, including prominent artists such as Felicity Urquhart, made public statements agreeing that Williamson raised valid questions, namely that an album of covers being nominated for Album of the Year, and a cover being nominated for Song of the Year did not reflect the values of these awards, particularly that they recognise new material. Others, such as Graeme Connors, agreed with his criticism of the Americanisation of Australian country music.

More broadly, Williamson's decision to speak out publicly was criticised for being narrow-minded, self-serving, a response to his fading stardom and a threat to Australian country music. This reflects a trend of censoring those who speak out or criticise the CMAA or "stars" because it is disloyal and undermines the scene. During my research another CMAA Board member, Allan Caswell, found himself at the centre of a controversy after making a post on Facebook asking his friends and followers to explain

the appeal of Lee Kernaghan's song "Ute Me", which at that point was topping the CMC Top 50 Countdown Chart. The album, *Beautiful Noise*, would later go on to reach number 1 on the ARIA Australian Artist Album Chart (see "Appendix One – Sales, Charts and Accreditations" for more detail on charts). While the comments thread reportedly descended into personal attacks on Lee and others, the original post did nothing more than ask why people liked a particular song which was not to Allan's taste. Yet he was criticised for abusing his position within the industry to unfairly undermine and attack another artist. The post was removed.

Both this incident and the Williamson controversy reveal something about unwritten rules that govern the field of Australian country music. Discourses of friendship, mateship and community are held up as defining the operation of the scene, and these discourses result in limits to appropriate actions. The idea that everyone gets along and likes everyone else in the industry powerfully limits public dissent, criticism, disagreement and even debate.

There is also a defensive element to this logic: an understandable belief exists that those outside the industry do not like, understand or support country music and that they will take any opportunity to laugh, dismiss or pillory the music, its fans and cultures. This image problem of country music works with the discourse of mateship to limit public critical discussion within the field. The popularity and commercial success of *The Great Country Song Book* and Keith Urban's *Fuse* were grounds for defending the merit of the albums being nominated for the Golden Guitars.

The debate was characterised by a series of either/or propositions: you cannot respect traditional country music and follow new musical styles; that the bush ballad and modern country music are two discrete and irreconcilable styles; that the scene can either reward commercial success or a creative musical culture; and that country music

is either Australian or Americanised. These either/or propositions are underpinned by a number of those distinctions which shape the cultural logic of the field outlined above: “tradition” versus “new”, “independent” versus “commercial” and “real” versus “fake”.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured in five parts. “Part One: Contexts” establishes the scholarly, methodological, theoretical and historical context for the thesis, through three chapters: “Chapter One: Introduction”, “Chapter Two: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methodology” and “Chapter Three: Roots and Heritage”. The chapter “Roots and Heritage” provides an outline of the historical narratives of Australian country music and of Slim Dusty’s country music career, and this background will inform each of the remaining three parts.

The next three parts form the body of analysis, exploring three different elements of country music culture. “Part Two: People and Relationships” explores how discourses of “family” and “mateship” shape how artists and others working in the field interact and relate to one and other. It explores how these discourses are used to position artists within the field in relation to big business and record companies, the negotiation of commercial aspects of country music, and the obfuscation of commercial relationships, competition and material gains through claims to friendship, family and community. Practices of involving kin in the work of being a country music artist, the description of colleagues as “mates” or “friends”, the negotiation of hierarchies associated with “stars” and the relationship between artist and fan will be explored here.

“Part Three: Places and Spaces” explores the ways in which artists continually narrate their geographic position and lay claim to a connection with place, particularly rural space. This section will explore how ideas of “home” are used to legitimise artists’ claims to connection with rural space, what artists who are not from the country do to

legitimise their relationship to place and how travel and touring are connected to discourses of rural experience to authenticate artists.

“Part Four: Performance” explores the live performance of country music and how certain ways of being on stage are understood, valued and practised within the field. It explores how particular ways of performing are marked as properly or improperly country – through distinctions such as “acoustic” and “electric”, “songwriter” and “entertainer”, and “natural” and “contrived”. It also explores the idea that artists adopt a persona or character in their performance of country music and how this challenges ideas of authenticity as an essential quality. This section highlights the work that goes into performing in a way that is recognisably country.

The final part, “Part Five: A Coda and Conclusions”, moves the focus to Nashville and a group of Australian country artists performing at the Americana Music Festival as a counterbalance to the “just make it Australian” attitude explored in this introduction by exploring the experiences of Australian artists in Nashville and the field of Americana music.

We now move into the next chapter, which establishes the scholarly, theoretical and methodological contexts of this thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Literature Review

While I have been a fan of country music for most of my life, I had never thought about researching it until I came across a book chapter on Felicity Urquhart's album *New Shadow*, an artist and album that I love. In the chapter, Eve Klein explores the vocal performance, the album's cover art and promotional material through the lens of gender performativity and feminine identity. She argues that Urquhart enacts a form of hyper-femininity which is complicit in heteronormativity and the reproduction of gender roles revealing that "the structural roots of patriarchy remain present in contemporary country music performance" (Klein 2005, 141). My reaction to this chapter spurred an interest in country music as an object of study. At the time I disagreed with Klein's reading of this album and the generalisation to the scene and believe that its condemnation of Urquhart and a particular "country" aesthetic and culture applies "outsider" values and politics in its reading. The chapter seemed lacking in any thick description of the scene and Urquhart's experience of it.

The literature on Australian country music can be broadly categorised into two approaches: this type of textual analysis of the mediated forms and products of Australian country music; and historical narrative based accounts of the scene or genre. In many cases there is a slippage between the two, and much of the historical narrative literature uses the analysis of recorded material, promotional material, media and other texts as the method for inquiry into the past. There is also a small body of literature from tourism studies, geography and business studies, which deals with country music as it relates to regional development, tourism strategy (particularly festivals and festival cultures) and business models (see for example Adsett 2011; Connell and Gibson 2003;

Gibson and Davidson 2004; Jensen 2008; Morrow 2004; Morrow 2005). This literature is based on a variety of methodologies, from qualitative methods such as ethnography, participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis to qualitative surveys and economic analysis. This literature is valuable in its focus on exploring business models or strategies within the music industry, economic and community development, and trends. However, it often refrains from exploration of broader musical cultures.

I am drawing a distinction between textual analysis and historical narrative based on the way these two categories function. This thesis addresses the limitations I see with these types of methodologies, reading meaning through textual analysis of static products of country music, such as lyrics, recorded music and media, or constructing historical narratives to explain and define country music in Australia. These approaches overlook the richness and complexity of the people involved and their lived experience of the culture, context and values.

The textual analysis approach is prominent in the academic literature on country music, where academics working from popular music studies and other disciplines often approach country music as an ad hoc research interest and explore individual albums, artists or archives interpreting values, trends, styles or meaning from these objects. These interpretations are often used to reach conclusions about Australian country music in general.

The historical narrative approach dominates the literature, matching an obsession in the Australian country music scene with its past. This approach explores Australian country music through its history, charting the development of the genre to try to understand, define and arbitrate on country music then and now.

In both these approaches the contemporary lived experience of country music is often missing. Country music is a musical project, and while there is some consistency of

sound, style and lyrical form, the boundaries of the musical form are porous, ill defined and constantly debated. I am interested in Australian country music as a cultural experience: a way of life for the artists, industry and fans. This includes the musical product but it also incorporates practices, beliefs, experiences, networks, economies and rules that shape and go beyond the musical sound. These extra-musical aspects are the focus of my thesis: it is concerned with how country music is experienced and lived as a musical culture. I will explore Australian country music from an ethnographic approach, with deep engagement with performance practices and the live touring and festival circuit: the lived experience of the country music scene. This approach runs counter to that presented in the literature presented below.

Section One: Textual Analysis

The textual analysis approach attempts to produce interpretation of meaning within Australian country music through readings of products of the scene: such as music, lyrics, promotional material, and media. This style of analysis produces accounts of the end products of country music rather than the processes, experiences and lived-ness of country music. This approach attributes values and discourses, often those of outsiders, to the scene and musical culture. It explores what they think the music and lyrics mean, rather than how it is embedded in practice and a broader culture.

There are two key scholars who write about Australian country music using this approach – Graeme Smith and Toby Martin. Both scholars have produced book length accounts of Australian country music: Graeme Smith's *Singing Australian* (2005) is one of the most comprehensive critical histories of Australian country music; while Toby Martin's book *Yodelling Boundary Riders: Country Music in Australia Since the 1920s* and PhD thesis, *Yodelling Boundary Riders: Country Music in Australia, 1936-2010*, provide a cultural history of Australian country music, contextualising country music in broader

Australian history. The historical narrative elements of these works will be addressed in Section Two of this chapter, but here I am interested in how these works rely on an analysis of texts and mediated products to explore Australian country music, and what this reveals. In the opening chapter of *Singing Australian* Graeme Smith (2005, xiii) highlights limitations of what he terms a cultural studies approach which he argues involves reading social attitudes in music, using the same techniques to read song lyrics as used when analysing other language texts, and exploring the economic and social conditions of musical production. He argues that these approaches are not sufficient for understanding how country music has developed and presented its claims for national representativeness and authenticity. He proposes a broader conceptual framework that:

considers the specifically musical elements of the musics, the performative contexts and modes of audience-performer interaction and the characteristic organisational styles (Smith 2005, xiii).

He further argues that the organisation aspect is significant:

for exploring the ways music represents the nation, for it is in the ideas and practices which shape notions of a musical community that we find idealised notions of the imagined national community (Smith 2005, xiii).

The concept of the “scene” is central to this approach in Smith’s work. He argues that “genre” generally refers to musical style, while as a concept “scene” includes:

the whole range of social relations through which the music produces its meanings. It includes performers, audiences, agents, specialist retailers, fans, critics and commentators, as well as formal institutions and organisations and informal networks (Smith 2005, xiii).

Smith argues that it is these social relations that shape meanings and form the scene, its limits and ability to change. He stresses that for adequate understanding of how the scene is shaped and defined, it must be contextualised in the broader social and cultural situation, including factors such as “technological developments, changes in leisure

habits, international musical models, new audience expectations, changing demographics" (Smith 2005, xiv). In his exploration of country music Smith notes the existence of fans, clubs, recording companies and facilities, venues and festivals, performers, managers, promoters and agents, media and institutions within the scene and argues that these groups, individuals and structures "not only act cooperatively to produce and promote the music but also create the ways in which the music is interpreted and understood" (Smith 2005, 98).

Despite its accomplishments and useful contribution to studies of country music, within Smith's work there is little sustained engagement with the ways any of these elements interact or are experienced by participants in the scene. The bulk of his analysis falls into the cultural studies approach he critiques. He notes that the research for *Singing Australian* drew on his personal music experience, but also that this experience was concentrated in the folk movement and multicultural scene, which are also explored in the book. He indicates that for country music "my role has been that of an outside observer, the doggedly professional nature of country music allowing little room for the intellectual dilettante" (Smith 2005, xiv–xv). Inevitably, Smith's observations about the country music scene lack the experiential understanding he brings to his readings of the folk and multicultural music scene (and to which he compares country). While I am wary of making any claims to insider status, and I have no personal experience as a musician, my ethnographic approach has enabled access to insider knowledges and observation of the ways in which the meanings are created and negotiated. So while Smith's model for the study of country music, as a situated and contextualised scene is useful, his contribution to understanding the country music scene is limited because his analysis often falls into the realm of textual analysis, divorced from the experience of those in the scene.

Toby Martin posits that his thesis is “an analysis of music and its message” (Martin 2011a, 8), and that it uses sound recordings, promotional material (photos, sheet music, comics), television and radio shows and magazines as its primary historical sources. As a historian, Martin’s methods are based on the reading of static texts rather than the documentation of practices and experiences. There are limited sources available to him to explore the “backstage” activities of artists, or the parts of practice and experience which are not caught up in the realms of publicity and media. Martin was unable to observe how (most of) his central examples, such as Tex Morton, engage with an audience after a show, what they said off the cuff night after night on tour, interview Morton or help set up and pack up for a gig. His sources could not answer back. This is not to say texts are any less “real” or valuable, but it only offers a partial picture of the musical culture (as do all methods).

Martin positions his work as differing from the existing scholarship on Australian country music in the way it “asks different questions of the source material” (Martin 2011a, 9). He argues that the histories of country music have:

tended to focus on the Australianness of Australian country music, though they frame this focus through different questions. Eric Watson and the Bells have asked ‘How Australian is Australian country music?’ and have sought to answer this question through an analysis of the subject matter of the songs and country music’s mode of address. Graeme Smith has asked a related, but more nuanced question, ‘How has country music made the claim to being an authentically Australian form?’ The question of this thesis is, ‘What does country music tell us about culture in Australia?’ (Martin 2011a, 9–10).

These questions were all shaped by what the sources could offer – and guided by the ethnographic research in this thesis, I am less concerned about country music’s Australianness (as an identifiable feature of texts) or what it can reveal about Australian culture. Rather, I am exploring how country music functions as a field, in which

“Australianness” is a discourse. This discourse explains or justifies certain practices, and is one of many points of distinction that shapes the culture of Australian country music. What has meaning for someone like Martin is songs and texts, and his work is about producing knowledge about music as a text. He explores non-musical texts about the field of Australian country music and by those active within it, but rarely addresses the lived experience of participants in the field. He argues that although his work is a history of Australian country music, that:

is not to say that [it] is a definitive, or even a comprehensive, or linear, history of country music in Australia. It takes some important themes in country music – authenticity, nationalism, respectability, gender, attitudes to land – and looks at key moments in which they seem to be at their most acute. It is partly a history of the development of country music and its imagery.... Overall, it is most concerned with finding out what country music can tell us about culture in Australia in general (Martin 2015, 9).

The objective of Martin’s work then is to determine how sounds, words and mediated performances are understood to shape genre, or at least the image of country music. It is also to see what country music, as a cultural product, reveals about national identity and culture.

Smith identifies the claim that country music is Australia’s “true national music” as a defining feature of the Australian country music scene. Using lyrics, promotional material, archival documents and limited interview material as evidence, Smith positions country music as a cross over scene from folk music, and as folk’s commercial cousin.

Smith suggests that folk and country music possess a common claim that they emerge from an Australian rural social experience, nineteenth century origins and draw on similar themes and material. He also argues that country has a distinct musical style, is performed for a different audience and has a different set of institutions. Drawing from

his lived experience of the folk scene, Smith argues that the folk movement is radically nationalist, diverse/heterogeneous, pliable and tied together with:

a seriousness of engagement with the political and social meanings of music-making, a reflexive intellectualisation which has made the folk movement a continuing source of ideas for performers in other scenes and genres which want to address questions of individual identity and the nation (Smith 2005, xi).

This reading of the folk movement draws on understandings of the process of music making. Yet, his reading of how country music's imagined past diverges from folk's seems to be based more on musical product:

In place of folk music's radical nationalist landscape of the social relations of the nineteenth century itinerant bush workers and their employers, country music evokes the world of the small farmer and the pioneering struggles of country people to tame the environment and make it productive (Smith 2005, xi).

Smith positions early country "as the voice of the farmers and small country towns" with contemporary country music having broadened its appeal "to many people whose experience is circumscribed by locality and a fatalistic stoicism" (Smith 2005, xii). This is based on his analysis of song lyrics, recordings, media texts, such as radio broadcasts, and printed media, and promotional texts (such as advertising and marketing material, CD and record artwork and liner notes, and media releases and biographies issued by record companies to promote records and tours). He claims that country music aims to speak to "ordinary Australians" and "although its claims to national representativeness are less theorised than those of the folk movement its democratic populism is easily recognisable" (Smith 2005, xii). This dichotomy is carried through Smith's work, and informs his analysis of both folk music and country music. There is little space in *Singing Australian* for country music to have a broad range of political opinions beyond a conservative populism. However, Smith does acknowledge that country music has adapted to the diversity of Australian experience, noting that artists from urban areas

who sing about urban experience and issues are successfully entering the scene, and the status of Indigenous country music (Smith 2005). I think lived experiences of the scene, at least in the present day, differ greatly from Smith's description, which displays a lack of complexity. The characterisation of country music, and its relationship to the idealised folk movement, is drawn from a thin description of the content of lyrics and media (and a narrow selection of these texts), rather than a thick description which explores and synthesises the ways in which these texts are understood and experienced by participants.

This textual analysis approach often produces attempts to define country music by identifying common themes or sounds contained within the canon of country music in general, or in particular artists' recorded material.

In a similar manner Smith and Brett make claims about country music in general, arguing that:

country's core musical style was also established in the 1930s: narrative lyrics, rural and working class imagery and references, distinctive tense vocal style, yodelling and instrumentation from stringed instruments, paradigmatically the guitar (Smith and Brett 1998, 12).

This collation of characteristics is drawn from an analysis of recorded material. The definition offered by industry pioneers John Minson and Max Ellis seems to rely on a similar approach:

1 A simple chord progression. Generally country depends on a limited number of chords. It is not musically complicated and this certainly contributes to its popularity and playability.

2 Country music should have a strong story line. "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda" or "Pub With No Beer", illustrate the point.

3 The song should have a simple and memorable chorus, which supports the storyline and is one reason so many people find it easy to recall and sing a good country song.

4 Identifiable instrumentation. Organs, orchestras, strings, wind instruments are NOT country. Guitars, banjos, fiddles, pedal steel guitars, harmonicas definitely are. There are exceptions of course but instruments must be played in a country manner.

Some say that geographic locations are a factor, insisting that a non urban setting is an essential ingredient. But there are plenty of examples of successful country songs that don't have country locations (Ellis and Minson 2006).

While this definition was developed from within country music, and specifically the Tamworth Country Music Festival² it ignores the lived aspects of how country music is experienced as a culture.

Another example of this approach is Rebecca Coyle's reading of John Williamson and Sara Storer's recorded work and live shows. In this work, Coyle identifies broad Australian accent and lyrics concerned with rural settings and people as characteristic stylistic approaches of a "new traditionalism" in Australian country music (Coyle 2004).

Occasionally the textual analysis approach is used to reveal how country music contributes to broader society, as in the case of Fitzgerald and Hayward's reading of Graeme Connor's recorded output on North Queensland as productive explorations of the history, culture and economics of that region (Fitzgerald and Hayward 2003). In this case country music is seen to offer insight into regional life.

The literature from this textual analysis approach to studying Australian country music offers valuable insight into Australian country music's image, how that image is constructed and what values, ideas and stories are part of that image. However, the

² Max Ellis was a key marketing and promotion figure in the establishment of the festival and John Minson was "Australia's first full-time country music broadcaster" on Tamworth's 2TM radio station.

absence of consideration of the lived experiences of those making or consuming the musical and other texts remains largely unaddressed.

Section Two: *Looking Forward, Looking Back*: Historical Narratives of Australian Country Music

Australian country music is obsessed with its own past and Australian history. Graeme Smith has described the scene as “unceasingly self-historicising” (Smith 2004, 1) and Australian country music’s concern (or obsession) with history has been well documented in academic literature (Baker and Huber 2013; Connell and Gibson 2003; Martin 2011a; Martin 2011b; Martin 2015; Smith 2004; Smith 2005; Whiteoak 2005). The historical narrative approach in the literature on country music comes from both academic and popular sources. Broadly, there are three themes that this style of literature addresses: a narrative that Australian country music is the continuation of a vernacular bush ballad tradition with roots in the eighteenth century; the emergence of a distinctly Australian form of country music; and artist biography which creates a canon of celebrated artists, albums and industry models. There are proponents and challengers for each of these themes, and most often what is at stake is the definition of country music and its “authenticity”. This literature provides a background from which my thesis explores how these narratives are drawn into and shape the experience of those currently participating in the scene.

(i) “Bible of the Bush”: The Bush Ballad as the Authentic Australian country music

In Australia, the story of country music is often told through a narrative that connects vernacular poetry and song from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the literary ballads of the late nineteenth century to the hillbilly and country music which emerges in the 1920s and 30s (Ellis and Minson 2005; Haynes 2009; Watson 1982). The status of the modern bush ballad is based, in part on this popular rendering of history.

In somewhat of a challenge to this narrative, Smith and Brett propose that the term “bush ballad” was not widely used by country performers to describe their music until the 1960s. They posit that the term was first used to describe Slim Dusty’s album *Songs of Australia* (1964) album, and Slim adopted the term when titling his 1965 release *Australian Bush Ballads and Old Time Songs*. Smith and Brett conclude that the use of the term :

made explicit country music’s claim of descent from Australian vernacular and song, as well as from the literary ballads of the 1890’s, which have such an important place in Australian mythology (Smith and Brett 1998, 12).

Slim Dusty did consciously draw upon the poems of figures such as A.B. Paterson and Henry Lawson for lyrics. Joy McKean highlights this with the story of an old red book of Lawson’s verse given to Slim by a neighbour in his youth and a copy of similar (titled *Bible of the Bush*) she gave him on his first birthday after they married. These stories informed one of Slim’s songs, “Bible of the Bush” (lyrics Joy McKean and music Slim Dusty). Stories such as this serve to emphasise and reinforce the role of Lawson’s verse as a touchstone in Slim’s musical and songwriting career (McKean 2011, 87–91).

Country music historian, Eric Watson defines country music with an underlying belief that it is “the indigenous music of any rural people” and that its starting point in Australia was some 100 years before both the first American commercial hillbilly recording became available, and the first Australian recording was made (Watson 1982, 3). According to Watson, Australian country music began when those in rural Australia “the selectors, teamsters etc” started making up songs about their situation in the early nineteenth century (Watson 1982, 3). He outlines the “major elements” of Australian country music in the pre-1950s era as follows:

- A concern with the country, either in setting, subject matter, theme, attitudes or viewpoint expressed. This concern will not be merely contained in it, but basic to it.
- The use musically, of a simple melody line, clearly defined and relatively unembellished; a simple chord harmony, mainly of the three principal chords in the key, played in the open first position; a variety of simple bass runs; and close vocal harmony.
- A reliance on stringed instruments, the Spanish guitar predominating, closely followed by the other members of the guitar family, and the fiddle and banjo. Bass, mouth organ, piano and forms of percussion are often used, but never predominate.
- Vocalists who sound like country people. This will be mainly a matter of accent, whether it be Southern American or Northern Australian, and must be essentially genuine, not exaggerated almost to the point of farce, as is often the case with so many of today's pseudo country performers.
- Warmth, sincerity and involvement in performance (Watson 1982, 1-2).

Watson's definitional framework is from a long-gone era of Australian country music, and its relevance to the music today is limited. However vestiges of this definition and other understandings of Australian country music based on the bush ballad narrative are held true by various elements of the Australian country music scene, as well as the way in which contemporary practice is constantly referred to historical narratives (which will be explored in "Chapter Three: Roots and Heritage"). Much of this classification is carried into the modern bush ballad which is held up as the true "Australian" form and which has been strongly defined against American and other outside influences. While the colonial bush ballad narrative is challenged by a number of contemporary scholars (Martin 2011b; Smith and Brett 1998; Smith 2005) the weight of this historical misnomer is still felt in the scene, and the scene retains the myth in its self-understanding.

The modern bush ballad is one of the few styles in contemporary Australian country music where a clear set of rules exists. This is formalised in the nomination rules for the “Bush Ballad Award” in the Country Music Awards of Australia (the Golden Guitars):

A Bush Ballad is a lyrical narrative in song concerned with places, people, events and or attitudes clearly identifiable with Australia.

It must be presented in a traditional manner which exhibits an understanding of the genre’s musical and cultural values in the style established by Australia’s pioneer performers (Country Music Association of Australia 2012, 10).

The musical values are a sparse accompaniment that foregrounds the lyrical content. This definition is both drawn from, and effects, the way the bush balladeer musical culture develops. There is a devotion to historical form, which is resistant and defensive about change and as such has remained fairly static over the past half century. Clinton Walker offers a critique of the bush ballad and its rigid resistance to change:

Australian country music changed with the onset of rock’n’roll. A lot about it, notably the bush ballad tradition, didn’t much change, and it’s remarkable still that a form as archaic and sexless survives at all, let alone flourishes. But Australian country did broaden in the sixties, the bush ballad was added to; a younger generation of musicians - many, like Laurie Allen, whose background was equal parts country and rock’n’roll - brought in more of a contemporary if not American influence (2000, 114).

The bush ballad is remarkable in the scene because it functions as paradoxically both an integrated section of the Australian country music scene, and a discrete sub-scene of its own, with distinct networks, performative practices, media, festivals, recording infrastructure. Bluegrass is one of the only other notable sub-scenes in the Australian country music scene. Bluegrass also has a solidly predictable form, and while some purists exist within the Australian bluegrass scene, the distance of this scene from its folk roots (although the truth of bluegrass’ roots in Appalachian folk songs is contested [see Peterson 1997, 213–216]) seems to allow for greater freedom and transformation

of form, sound and elements that make up bluegrass, with less backlash than occurs in relation to the bush ballad and traditional Australian country music.

In 1996, the Country Music Association of Australia separated the existing Heritage category into two awards: “Heritage Song of the Year” and “Bush Ballad of the Year”. This was a separation of musical style and subject matter in the more traditional styles of Australian country music (Smith 2005, 114). Subject matter is covered in heritage songs, which must be “about Australia, its people, history, geography, attitudes and ideals. The content and presentation must be recognisable as being an Australian song about Australia” (Country Music Association of Australia 2012, 11). The nominees for Heritage Song are sometimes drawn from those artists recording in the bush ballad style, but also include a strong representation of artists who have a more contemporary and diverse sound. It is a concern with the unique Australianness of style and song that underpins both the Bush Ballad and Heritage Song.

(ii) “True Blue”: National distinctiveness

Another theme within these narrative histories is the relationship between “Australian country music” and “American country music”. The colonial bush ballad narrative is a specific form of this debate with the focus on rural roots and tradition comprising a significant part of the bush ballad’s “Australianness”. This conflation of rural experience with Australian identity was explored by Aitken in relation to rural politics in 1920s to 1970s, with him naming it an ideology of “countrymindedness” (1985, 35). This same ideology of “countrymindedness” is central to the historical narratives of Australian country music.

The narratives also negotiate the influence and role of American hillbilly or country music in the early twentieth century. This literature explores the idea that Australian country music is a distinctive form of music, not just a copying of the early hillbilly

records that came from America. The narrative of the colonial bush ballad maintains that there is a distinctive “Australian” root of country music, while the national distinctiveness narrative draws together the bush ballad and the influence of American country music.

Eric Watson, while clinging to the colonial bush ballad narrative, acknowledges the significance of American country music on the Australian scene, arguing that there “can be no doubt that this influx of American recorded country music was the greatest single influence on the making of what we know today as Australian country music” (Watson 1982, 7).

In his narrative, Watson allows for this American influence to “sweep away” the bush ballad tradition, “for a time”. But he maintains that:

the strong local tradition was still firmly embedded in the make-up of those who had access to it, and its influence was to emerge, as any local environmental influence must, to modify and to shape the American models towards the formation of the amalgam which finally became recognisable as Australian country music (Watson 1982, 7).

An insistence that country music in Australia is, or should be, “recognisably” or distinctively Australian runs through the literature. This is also a characteristic of the contemporary scene, with the tension between American influence and Australian country music’s national distinctiveness acting as a guiding force within the scene, seen in the debates about the necessity of sung Australian accent, domestic production, or Australian themes (often meaning rural themes, because country-mindedness still dominates).

Toby Martin’s work is underpinned by an argument that hillbilly music and, later, country music in Australia was a response to and critique of modernity. Martin argues that while country music was in some ways modern, the “modernity of Australian

hillbilly music was complicated by a notably sentimental and nostalgic streak” (Martin 2011b, 158). He posits that in the 1960s and 70s when for many Australians modernity “became synonymous with Americanisation and commercialisation” country music’s response was to become “more self-consciously localised and nationalistic” (Martin 2011b, 158). Further, Martin argues, this localism and nationalism “was how country music sought to gain the respect of a broader audience – particularly a left-wing audience interested in ‘folk’ cultures” (Martin 2011b, 158; see also Martin 2011a and Martin 2015).

Significantly for the context of my research, and current debates within the Australian country music community, he argues that this nationalism became more overt from the 1970s, with bush balladeers eager to differentiate their music from other country music styles, especially American product (Martin 2011b, 158–159). The vestiges of this anti-American, Australian nationalist approach to Australian country music, and the venerated position of the bush ballad as the “true” or “authentic” Australian form continues in sections of the Australian country music community to this day. The incident outlined in “Chapter One: Introduction” where Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey’s nominations for *The Great Country Songbook*, particularly for “Album of the Year” is an example of this. Part of John Williamson’s issue was with the provenance of the songs. Of the twenty-two songs featured on the album, only two songs were written by an Australian: “Indian Pacific” and “Lights on the Hill” (both written by Joy McKean and recorded by Slim Dusty). Williamson also revised a criticism he had long made of Australian artists not recording in Australia, by taking issue with Keith Urban’s four nominations for an album recorded and produced in America for an American market. These debates highlight how questions of the Australianness of country music and its relationship to American country still circulate in the field.

(iii) “The Story of My Life”: Artist Biography

The historical narrative approach often relies on artist biography, which serves to create or reinforce a canon of Australian country music, and support the bush ballad and national distinctiveness tropes. These historical narratives attempt to explain how specific artists conform to ideals of country music.

Eric Watson’s work utilises artist biography to construct a narrative history of Australian country music. Artists are presented chronologically by their first recording and explored in relation to influence, engagement with the developing institutions of the scene, career achievements and musical output (Watson 1982; Watson 1983). Jim Haynes’ *The ABC Book of Australian Country Music: The Ultimate Guide to Country Music in Australia* provides a survey of those artists active in the Australian scene at the end of the first decade of the 2000s, providing biographical narratives based on their place of birth, “home” and any country roots or experience, as well as musical influences, output, career milestones and networks (Haynes 2009). This text is a significant source of the popular understandings of country music in the Australian context, as are works such as Max Ellis’ *Stars, Hurrahs and Golden Guitars: The Story of Tamworth, Country Music Capital* (2012) which is something akin to a biography of the Tamworth Country Music Festival and History of Country Music in Australia website which provides biographies of key figures, events and institutions (Ellis 2009). The fans, artists and industry celebrate and rely on these texts for knowledge about the scene and its history. Challenging the standard selection of artists, Clinton Walker’s *Buried Country* (2000) retells the historical narrative of Australian country music through the biographies of fifteen Aboriginal country music artists.

Biographies and autobiographies provide insights into the touring life and songwriting practices of Australian country music artists. The body of biographies, autobiographies and memoirs of Australian country music artists includes Slim Dusty and Joy McKean

(Dusty and McKean 1996; McKean 2011; McKean 2014), Kasey Chambers and the Chambers Family (Chambers and Apter 2011; Lomax (III.) 2001), Beccy Cole (2015), Lee Kernaghan (Kernaghan and Buchanan 2015) and John Williamson (2003; 2014). The books on Dusty and McKean shed light on what is now a bygone era, the 1940s to the 1990s, providing insight into the history and development of idealised touring practices in Australian country music. These texts, and their stories of Australian country music history, will be explored in more detail in “Chapter Three: Roots and Heritage”. The autobiographies and memoirs of Kasey Chambers, Beccy Cole, Lee Kernaghan and John Williamson offer contemporary reflections on the Australian country music scene. It is notable that, until 2014, the only book-length biographies and autobiographies are of Slim Dusty and Joy McKean and the Chambers family, given their preeminent and dominant positions in the scene. While these biographies and autobiographies provide insider reflections on the experience of Australian country music, they often pay little attention to the networks of significance and meaning that comprise the culture of country music in Australia.

The creation of narratives which are retrospectively neatened to fit a particular ideology about what country music was, meant, looked or sounded like is central to the way in which country music is defined. Baker and Huber explore this process in relation to the historical narratives constructed and circulating in Tamworth, “Country Music Capital”, in what they call a “canonical rendering of history” (Baker and Huber 2013, 237). They argue that this canon:

characterised by its singular and coherent story which is experienced through practices of repetition, and supported by the broad recognition of its content and authority by audiences, performers and institutions alike, that transcends the complexity of country music as a lived experience. The canon is, in effect, the sound that rises above the cacophony (of Peel St during the Festival), the sound that makes itself heard over and over again, against the sonic backdrop of a

discordant, contradictory, complicated reality. It is the story that is told and retold, while others are forgotten by collective memory (Baker and Huber 2013, 237–238).

The historical narratives that dominate the literature on Australian country music act in the same way – creating neat stories that elide the complicated lived reality of the scene. The focus on the past and those in the present who maintain or conform to historical image of country music functions to constrain and limit the stories that are told and the voices that are heard. My thesis challenges this canonical rendering of history presented in the literature, while also acknowledging the power it still has over the discourses used in the field.

Section Three: Authenticity

Throughout this literature, across both the textual analysis and historical narrative approach, runs a concern with authenticity. Authenticity is often identified as a defining concept of country music. It is a common concept used to understand and explain what it is that distinguishes country music from other styles of music. The centrality of authenticity is reflected in the literature on country music, both Australian and American, in a number of key ways. Authenticity can be taken as an essential quality of music, which “honestly” reflects or expresses an identity or experience (such as Australian national identity, rural experience, heartbreak) (Sanjek 1998; Watson 1982; Watson 1983); as a proper way of relating music, artist and audience (Smith 2005); as an ideological watchword which tempers commerciality (Sanjek 1998); or as something “fabricated” or constructed in the codification of the genre (Akenson 2003; Carriage and Hayward 2003; Peterson 1997). I am not positing this as a feature unique to Australian country music; and note that discussion of authenticity as one of the ideologies or discourses used to navigate, understand or obfuscate the functions of the commercial music industry and shape its output exists in scholarship about many forms of popular

music. While the ways in which authenticity is discussed throughout this thesis are guided by the ways in which participants in the field of Australian country music understand, use and define the term and are specific to the field of country music, the work of scholars on authenticity in other popular music forms is valuable for framing the exploration. Barker and Taylor's work on authenticity in popular music provides a framework for thinking about what it is people are referring to when they say something is authentic (2007). There are three main types of authenticity according to Barker and Taylor: "representational authenticity", which is "music that is exactly what it says it is"; "cultural authenticity", which is "music that reflects a cultural tradition"; and "personal authenticity", which is "music that reflects the person or people who are making it" (Barker and Taylor 2007, x). These types of authenticity emerged throughout the fieldwork for this thesis and this typology helped isolate the distinctions of "country" versus "city", "tradition" versus "new", "independent" versus "commercial" and "real" versus "fake" which are underpinned by one or more of the types of authenticity outlined by Barker and Taylor.

Simon Frith highlights the constructed and conventional nature of authenticity in rock and pop music and rejects the idea that authenticity is a natural or essential element of music. His work explores the tensions between music as a product of mass markets and corporate interests, and ideologies of artistic creativity, where authenticity is one of a number of discourses used to justify cultural judgements about music (Frith 1996; 2007). These cultural judgements are distinctions made by consumers of music, and are shaped by the cultural context. Authenticity is something performed and constructed by artists within the limits present in the field. Frith argues that:

to be authentic and to sound authentic is in the rock context the same thing. Music can not be true or false, it can only refer to conventions of truth and falsity (Frith 1988, 100).

It is these conventions I explore throughout this thesis.

Within the field of Australian country music, and literature on it, the exploration of the static products of country music as well as an obsession with the past is used as grounds for making judgements about the “authenticity” of certain artists, songs or approaches to the industry. While my thesis explores participants in the scene’s understanding of their experience, rather than attempting to read or judge the “authenticity” of the scene, the concept is still central to how country music is understood and experienced.

Richard A. Peterson views authenticity as one of the distinguishing characteristics of country music in America, something which has been codified as an identifying marker of the style (Peterson 1997). He argues that authenticity is not a fixed quality inherent in the music, style, look or production, but rather something that is fabricated as part of the production of country music and the development of country music as a genre. Peterson argues that:

the ironic phrase ‘fabricating authenticity’ is used here to highlight the fact that authenticity is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but a socially agreed upon construction in which the past is to a degree misremembered (Peterson 1997, 3).

He argues that the process of commodification of authenticity is what marked the development of American country music as a music with recognised and coherent look, sound and lyrics (Peterson 1997, 3).

In Peterson’s figuring, this construction takes up existing, often traditional, musical forms, such as fiddle music, traditional ballads, and later hillbilly music, and combines them with other facets of constructed authenticity, such as look, the ten-gallon hat, silver studded leather wear, distinctive cut and decoration of clothes and boots, six-shooter, horse with western saddle, impassive look, and imperious, legs-spread-wide stance to

create an image of the authentic Western singing cowboy which could be marketed and replicated, but which was of dubious factual origin (Peterson 1997, 83).

Peterson's concept of authenticity requires further development. He is mainly concerned with drawing out an account of those qualities that are deemed authentic in the production of country music as a genre and how they are then perpetuated, altered and discarded. He does go some way to exploring the tension between an authentic real (which may or may not exist) and that mediated through the commercial world which calls for regular, recognisable product, and the element of artifice that always exists in this context.

I find Peterson's model of socially agreed upon authenticity useful in looking at Australian country music – the scene relies upon a number of markers of authenticity, which are to greater and lesser extents misrememberings of the past. For example, the contemporary bush ballad having strong and direct connections to songs sung in formative stages of the colony, with ideologies of mateship, cocky farmers, itinerant bushmen, and other ideals of country life remembered and misremembered to varying degrees in song and image.

Peterson concludes that “maintaining the sense of authenticity takes work” (Peterson 1997, 223). He is at pains to point out that the use of the word “work” is intentional, to “signal that authenticity is a contrivance that takes a conscious effort to achieve and to maintain” and that part of the work is to make the “act” seem “natural” (Peterson 1997, 267). This work is explored throughout this thesis, but is particularly significant in “Part Four: Performance” where performance practices are explored in relation to ideas of authenticity and honesty and the constructions of stage personas.

Martin makes a similar observation in relation to the insistence in country music that artists sound like they are either “authentic” or “country people”. Martin argues that in

the earliest era of Australian country music, particularly in relation to Tex Morton (and Eric Watson's positioning Morton as the first Australian country artist) "sounding like a country person" was evident not in their Australian accent, so much as in the "way in which [their vocals were] apparently unmediated by technique" (Martin 2011a, 33).

Martin reports that:

professionalism and musical training were advantages of the city. The country performer could not help but be untrained because he simply did not have the opportunity to be otherwise. To be 'country' implied a naturalism of sound as much as it did a geographic region (Martin 2011a, 33).

Martin acknowledges that there is a form of training in Tex Morton's attempt to emulate American hillbilly singers, such as Jimmie Rodgers, and also the technical skill and control yodelling demands. An apparent lack of technique is itself a technique in country music everywhere, and this has been explored in relation to Australian country artists, such as Kasey Chambers by Carriage and Hayward (Carriage and Hayward 2003, 114–116) and Graeme Smith (1994).

Martin does argue that "country music was the first modern popular musical form" (Martin 2011b, 31). Musicians specialised in a single genre and then marketed themselves as "hillbilly" performers, for the first time outside classical music. Martin cites this as evidence of atomisation of culture, a modern phenomenon. Martin concludes: "To a large extent, this is what country means: to be real to one thing, not to experiment and not to diversify, thus losing authenticity" (Martin 2011a, 31). He also argues that authenticity is imagined to be incompatible with commercialism and any demands the business of music place on an artist to change or adapt to trends (Martin 2015, 172).

Graeme Smith's approach to authenticity is concerned with authenticity as a way of relating the music, artist and audience. He argues that folk, country and multi-cultural

musics possess a “self-conscious engagement with the task of representing Australian³ in music” and that they also share a concern with representing social experience in music with “authenticity”. He proposes that:

In contrast to the mass music industry, each claims an authentic relationship to its audience and so embeds its music in imagined social relations which the mass music industry is regarded as unable to provide (Smith 2005, xii–xiii).

In Smith’s conceptualisation, authenticity in country music is about much more than the musical sound, it is about “proper relations between music, the individual and society” including styles and contexts of performance, audience-performer interaction and modes of creation and production (Smith 2005, xiii). Smith posits patriotic or nationalist politics, economic and cultural nationalism, country mindedness and nostalgia as central to defining country music as a genre. Smith also leaves the concept of authenticity relatively underdeveloped in *Singing Australian*, relying on it only to explore the importance in Australian country music of laying claim to an authentic relation to patriotism, Australianness and often a rural heritage.

These models of authenticity provide a starting point for the exploration of authenticity in Australian country music. Smith is much more focused on the relation between performer, listener, subject matter and attitude, Martin explores how an image of authenticity is performed and constructed, while Peterson’s model of authenticity is about identifying discursive constructions which mark country music as a genre. The reminder in Peterson’s work of the labour that goes into presenting as “authentic” prevents one from searching for the real, and rather looking toward discursive processes which underpin any identity or cultural form. Smith provides a way of understanding how concepts of authentic Australianness, country experience, and patriotism function to mark Australian country music. But both these conceptualisations

³ This is quoted correctly, Smith uses the term “Australian”.

will be further developed, throughout this thesis as I explore the importance participants in the scene place on honesty, directness and emotional resonance as defining features of country music, how this is structured and how this is balanced with the commercial realities of country music which calls for regular, mass mediated product.

It is possible to isolate musical, lyrical and thematic markers that can be used to identify country music, such as acoustic or steel guitars, fiddle, banjo or mandolin, structured story songs about love, relationships, rural places, experiences and people, songs about place, both urban and rural, nostalgia and drinking. It is also possible to construct historical narratives to explain the development of Australian country music. But neither of these approaches account fully for the ways in which the boundaries of the genre or scene are habitually drawn through other social, economic and cultural factors. As a start, artists' own self-identification as country, and professed links to the "heritage" or sound of country music are often enough to enable entry. But participation in the scene through festivals, country music media, the specific social, musical and business networks of country music, and the institutions and award processes are as much markers of an artist's or band's country-ness as how they sound.

This thesis looks at how artists and other participants in the scene experience country music, particularly in relation to live performance and festival cultures. It uses the insider view, where one of the key markers of an artist or band as "country" is participation in the Australian country music festival circuit. It is one of the ways to "get known" and integrate with other artists' and fans' experience of country music.

Participation in the festival circuit indicates a social and economic entanglement with the scene, and the artist's ability and willingness to inhabit the "difficulty" of some festivals, with their isolation, harsh conditions such as flooding rains, extreme heat or cold, dirt and dust, and general lack of creature comforts, often conveys an artist's

commitment to the scene and culture. While there are gatekeepers within the festival circuit, such as festival organisers, booking agents, venues and other artists, who make determinations about who may be popular, talented or fitting within the genre, the open and participatory nature of some country festivals, through busking, ad hoc booking arrangements for decentralised venues, competitions and other ways of being heard like campsite concerts, as well as the sheer number of country music festivals held around Australia each year does allow for participation of a broad range of artists, a diversity of crowds and for constant movement within the scene as a whole. By taking this lived experience of Australian country music as the basis for exploring the scene a more complex and nuanced reading of the scene is possible.

Theoretical or Analytic Framework

Throughout this thesis I rely on an analytic framework drawn from Pierre Bourdieu to explore the “field” (or fields) of Australian country music, the way it exists within broader social spaces of Australian society and the music industry and how social agents (mainly Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band) experience, are shaped by and also shape the field of Australian country music. I am using Bourdieu to acknowledge that country music, as a genre, scene, community, culture or industry (depending on which designation one uses), is a social space, with its own logic, rules and regularities, which shape its constitution, its form, limits and products (musical and performance output). The agents within this field are shaped by it, and the broader social space in which they exist, they have habitus which manage strategies and practices available and intelligible to the field. Various forms of capital are active within the field of Australian country music, and the relative value of these forms of capital controls the entry, movement and position of agents within the field.

Bourdieu's work on music was limited. In *Distinction* he argued that music has a powerful ability to act as a marker of class differentiation: "nothing more clearly affirms one's class, or nothing more infallibly classifies than tastes in music" (Bourdieu 2010, 10). This is, at least in part, because music is understood by Bourdieu to have a special quality because the enjoyment and playing of music is internalised, and:

the flaunting of 'musical culture' is not a cultural display like others: as regards to its social definition, 'musical culture' is something other than a quantity of knowledge and experiences combined with the capacity to talk about them (Bourdieu 2010, 10).

Part of music's unique position in Bourdieu's figuring is that it "says nothing and has nothing to say" and "represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art" (Bourdieu 2010, 11). The music Bourdieu refers to is largely classical music, not popular music in the form of rock and roll, jazz, pop or country music. These popular music forms are different to classical, and do have something to say, bear social messages and rely on some affinity with the values and expectations of audiences. Also, while Bourdieu does address the playing of music, he is generally concerned with what the consumption of music can reveal about society. Bourdieu finds that there is a correlation between liking and consuming particular kinds of music and social class. His concern with classical music means little attention is devoted to popular music, the commercial system of music production and distribution, or the relationship between music and subcultures or identity. His approach offers a way of understating how music as a cultural product contributes to establishing and maintaining social stratification. However, it is outside the scope of this thesis to explore the consumption of country music and the way in which a taste for country music may be shaped by and shape class distinctions in Australia. Future research into what the audience of Australian country music may reveal about the contemporary class system in Australia would be valuable

and fascinating. I note here the work of popular music scholars who take up Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, distinction and taste. Of particular note is Simon Frith's work which provides a model for analysing music as a socially embedded product and process (1988; 1996; 2007; 2011); Georgina Born's work on production and practice-based analysis of music and culture (1995; 2010); and Sarah Thornton's work on the way distinction shapes the culture, practice and discourses of musical scenes or fields (1996).

Bourdieu's work on cultural production as a "field" is much more useful in the way it "placed the aesthetic object in a network of social forces and determinants" (Prior 2011, 122). It also offers an analytic frame which can take account of more than just the musical products of country music, instead exploring the relationships and culture of the industry. Fields and subfields are spaces with their own logic, rules and regularities. The "field" is defined by Bourdieu as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" where:

the positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situations (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of the species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97).

The field of Australian country music is a discrete, relatively autonomous social microcosm. It is located within the social space of Australian society and the broader music industry, yet it is ruled by logics which are "specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields" (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97). There may be homologies (resemblances with difference) observable between fields, but "every one of

these characteristics takes a specific, irreducible form in each field” (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 106).

Bourdieu acknowledges that literary and artistic fields are autonomous, but are also influenced by the broader economic and political fields in which they exist, particularly in relation to the distribution of value:

the specificity of the literary and artistic field is defined by the fact that the more autonomous it is, i.e. the more completely it fulfils its own logic as a field, the more it tends to suspend or reverse the dominant principle of heirarchization; but also that, whatever its degree of independence, it continues to be affected by the laws of the field with encompasses it, those of economic and political profit (Bourdieu 1993, 39).

The commercial imperatives of the field of Australian country music reflect the laws of the broader fields such as the music industry and Australian society and the hierarchies of value that exist. This is played out in tension between “independent” and “commercial” within Australian country music which is explored in this thesis.

This framework allows for both the way in which a field has a sense of consistency, but also how it is shaped or transformed by the agents within it. Wacquant argues that:

each field prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles. These principles delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form (Wacquant 1992, 17).

Australian country music consists of systems of relations, which define the occupants of the field – such as country musicians, country music stars, industry, or country music fans – and shape the products and practices of the field. These positions or identities only exist as such, and can be named and understood as such, because the field of Australian country music exists. The field of country music is regulated, but the rules can also be broken, thus reshaping the field. According to Bourdieu the field:

presents itself as a structure of probabilities – of rewards, gains, profits, or sanctions – but always implies a measure of indeterminacy... Even in the universe par excellence of rules and regulations (the French bureaucracy), playing with the rule is part and parcel of the rule of the game (Bourdieu 1990b cited in Wacquant 1992, 18).

The analogy of the “game” is used throughout Bourdieu’s work on the field to explain the dynamic of those participating within the field: playing within the rules of the game, but also bending the rules of the game in order to win the game and gain legitimacy or control over part of the field. As Santoro has argued, there are some features that are common in all fields and these include:

antagonism between those who are already well established in the field and those who are newcomers. The former have an interest in conservation and orthodoxy, the latter in transformation and transgression (Santoro 2015, 135).

This antagonism is evident in the debates outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, which can in some ways be categorised in terms of a distinction between “tradition” and the “new”. Another common feature is that:

anyone in the field has an interest in playing the game of the field, which involves action in ways that build cultural capital and legitimation, and that effectively serve to preserve the existence of the field (Santoro 2015, 135).

This thesis will explore how artists play the game of Australian country music, how they negotiate the field. It will do that by exploring the way a series of discourses are used to explain practice and position artists in relation to distinctions which function to shape the cultural logic of the field. I will explore the regulative principles, values and logic, but also question what is at stake in maintaining or changing the boundaries and form of the field.

The field is defined by the distribution of forms of capital within it, and forces within the field define the specific species of capital:

A capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field. It confers a power over the field, over the materialized or embodied instruments of production or reproduction whose distribution constitutes the very structure of the field, and over the regularities and the rules which define the ordinary functioning of the field, and thereby over the profits engendered in it (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 101).

These forms of capital include social capital, cultural capital, economic capital and symbolic capital. Each of these types of capital is valued differently in the field and this helps to shape the logic of the field.

Participants in a field work to differentiate themselves from rivals to reduce competition and gain monopoly over a subsector of the field. Bourdieu uses novelists and fashion designers as examples of people who do this, yet the work of agents within the Australian country music scene follows this same logic (Bourdieu 1969; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 100; Bourdieu 1994:). This thesis explores how artists, as participants in the field of Australian country music, work to differentiate their position, and gain authority and influence within the field – to be recognised as successful or authentic country music artists (or both).

The agents within this field internalise the structures, rules and logic of the social space through what Bourdieu terms “habitus”. In Bourdieu’s framework, habitus is also part of the answer to what gives social life its pattern, particularly when external structures and order is not understood to mechanically constrain the action of individuals. Habitus “consists of a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Wacquant 1992, 16). These dispositions which are acquired through experience, are variable from place to place and time to time (Bourdieu 1994, 9). The acting agent has a “‘creative’, active, inventive capacity” but is not that of a transcendental subject (Bourdieu 1994,

13). For Bourdieu the constraint of socialisation is at the heart of the human subject (Bourdieu 1994, 15). Habitus allows for both innovative and intuitive action, by:

following the intuitions of a 'logic of practice' which is the product of a lasting exposure to conditions similar to those in which they are placed, they anticipate the necessity immanent in the way of the world (Bourdieu 1994, 11).

Habitus is not strictly individual, nor is it fully determinative of conduct.

Bourdieu's "social praxeology" underpins the mode of analysis used in this thesis - working through two stages of investigation: the mapping/sketching of the social space or field, the "objective structures (spaces of positions), the distribution of socially efficient resources that define the external constraints bearing on interactions and representations" (Wacquant 1992, 11) and habitus, "the immediate, lived experience of agents in order to explicate the categories of perception and appreciation (dispositions) that structure their action from inside" (Wacquant 1992, 11). Using this framework this thesis will "note potentialities inscribed in the body of agents and in the structure of the situations where they act or, more precisely, in the relations between them" (Bourdieu 1998, vii).

This conceptual framework for the study of practical life should be understood as "flexible and must be examined by the researcher in the empirical setting rather than being seen as a set of categorical boxes to which the data must conform" (Mahar, Cheleen, Harker, and Wilkes 1990, 3). This approach does not provide a set of "ready-made answers to all possible queries" or a theory with universal explanations, rather it provides a framework for thinking about social space, where:

the major virtue... is that it promotes a mode of construction that has to be rethought anew every time. It forces us to raise questions: about the limits of the universe under investigation, how it is 'articulated,' to what and to what degree, etc. It offers a coherent system of recurrent questions that saves us from the

theoretical vacuum of positivist empiricism and from the empirical void of theoretical discourse (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 110).

The suppleness of this approach is productive for my exploration of Australian country music as it opens up investigation beyond fixed definitions of genre, scene or industry that are often used in the study of popular music. Bourdieu's social praxeology, according to Wacquant, "explodes the vacuous notion of 'society' and replaces it with field and social space". He continues, arguing that this model of:

differentiated society is not a seamless totality integrated by systemic functions, a common culture, criss-crossing conflicts, or an overarching authority, but an ensemble of relatively autonomous spheres of 'play' that cannot be collapsed under an overall societal logic, be it that of capitalism, modernity, or postmodernity (Wacquant 1992, 16–17).

The existing literature on Australian country music largely uses fixed frameworks - proffering rigid definitions of the musical style, presenting singular historical narratives and sidelining debates and diversity within the culture. This does not reflect the complexity of the scene or give adequate attention to the struggles and play that occur within Australian country music, which are a significant and interesting aspect of the scene. Bourdieu's model recognises the durability of social structures and culture, but also allows for their alteration or evolution.

Bourdieu's framework is also underpinned by the "primacy of relations" with the concepts of habitus and field designating bundles of relations, and calls for the exploration of connections not things, and processes not states. Bourdieu's model allows for active but constrained agents who exist in non-determinative/flexible social structures. This thesis is underpinned by the basic ideas that individuals are structured by the world around them, and that they in turn utilise strategies and practices to shape the social spaces around them.

The use of Bourdieu is an intentional challenge to ideas circulating in relation to popular music. One such idea is that musicians produce out of an autonomous and inherent genius. Bourdieu acknowledges the contribution of Howard Becker because he “constructs artistic production as a collective action, breaking with the naïve vision of the individual creator” (Bourdieu 1993, 34). The use of habitus and the field builds on Becker’s idea that through a process he terms “editing” choices are made at all stages of the production of an art work which effects the end product, and that these choices are shaped by art world of which the artist is a part, along with buyers, critics, audiences and a range of other social agents. He concludes that:

Art worlds, through the activities of participants other than the artists, affect art works beyond the life of the work’s original maker. All these choices, made by all these participants over the work’s life, are what give meaning to the assertion that art worlds, rather than artists, make works of art (Becker 1982, 198).

This revises the mistaken conception that brilliant individuals are alone responsible for cultural production and that they are creating outside any expectations, limits and conditions. This thesis explores all artists in relation to how they work within the constraints and possibilities of the field and how they interact with others.

The framework above shapes a two step mode of analysis throughout this thesis. The day to day practices of individuals and groups involved in Australian country music are investigated, but I am also looking at how they talk about these practices and how they are explained through discursive frameworks. This relies on the understanding that humans as agents make the world meaningful, and their experience of meanings important in how they understand the world (Wacquant 1992, 7). This is shaped by the phenomenological ethnographic methodology used (outlined below).

In his performance ethnography of the South Indian martial art, kalaripayattu, Phillip Zarrilli uses the term “cultural praxis” to designate the way in which “bodies,

knowledges, powers, agency and selves/identities have been and are repositioned through practice" (2001, 5). For him practices are "those modes of embodied doing through which everyday as well as extra-daily experiences, realities and meanings are shaped and negotiated" (Zarrilli 2001, 5). Everyday practices are those "habitualized and routine activities" and extra-daily practices are those which require the practitioner to "undergo specialized body training in order to become accomplished in attaining a certain specialized state of consciousness, body, agency, power and so on" (Zarrilli 2001, 5). Within this thesis I argue that artists, in particular, have much time, energy and expertise invested in their position as "cultural specialists" as performers and musicians. But I am also interested in how they interact or exist with the social space of Australian country music. While Zarrilli draws a strong distinction between everyday and extra-daily practices, that distinction does not hold up as neatly when looking at Australian country music. Where *kalarippayattu* is an embodied practice that requires training and is bracketed from everyday life, the social space I have studied does not have such bracketing. Extra-daily practices and experiences could be seen as those in the space of performance. But in the space where artists engage with fans/audience through "public" practices (meet and greets, merchandise signings, being "on tour") practices often collapse the extra-daily and everyday. The discourse of "authenticity" shapes the way "everyday-ness" is understood, it calls for the public performance to be natural, unaffected and - you are performing your "true self" – but a major component of that performance is extra-daily. This is the illusion inherent in the discourses of authenticity. Performers don't perform or appear in tracksuit pants, with unkempt hair, or play unrehearsed; they make efforts. The focus on practice in this thesis is guided by Zarrilli's argument that:

because practices are not things, but an active, embodied doing, they are intersections where personal, social and cosmological experiences and realities are

negotiated. To examine a practice is to examine these multiple sets of relationships and experiences. A practice is not a history, but practices always exist within and simultaneously create histories. Likewise, a practice is not a discourse, but implicit in any practice are one or more discourses and perhaps paradigms through which the experience of practice might be reflected upon and possibly explained (Zarrilli 2001, 5).

What follows are three parts organised around themes, ideas or discourses which have emerged out of the lives of those I studied through my fieldwork research: People and Relationships (family, mateship, community), Places and Spaces (home, country, travel, touring) and Performance (honesty, acoustic, authentic, natural). These are categorisations applied by me, but the identification and naming of them draws on insider terminology, experience and significance. These themes, ideas and discourses are explored in relation to the practices of artists within the field – acknowledging that all practice is couched within discourse.

Methodology

As outlined in my literature review, the academic work on Australian country music has not turned to a sustained engagement with the experiences of those inside the scene.

My thesis will extend this existing work, building on approaches which take the mediated products of Australian country music – such as recorded music, lyrics, promotional material or media – and looking at how these sources are created, used, understood, and experienced by participants in the scene. It will focus on the live contexts in which Australian country music exists, recognising that performance and interpersonal interaction are central to people's experiences of the scene.

The ethnographic approach I have adapted has involved participant observation at over one hundred and fifty country music events across New South Wales and Queensland, hundreds of informal interviews and conversations at these events, as well as in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key informants. There were three aspects to the

participant observation research: a general immersion in a wide range of scene activities, not tied to any particular artists, and from the positioning of audience member or fan; a focused immersion with Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band (see “Appendix Two - Sites of Observation of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band” for a list of the sites of observation); and a period of time working within the industry as an intern for a marketing and management company at the Tamworth Country Music Festival in 2012 and 2013, assisting with events, merchandise and band management.

The methodology informing the research in this thesis can be situated within the body of literature on the role and value of ethnographic approaches for the study of popular music, while a number of ethnographies of popular music forms provide a model for this research. The methodological approach is couched within the theoretical orientation of phenomenological ethnography. Factors such as my positioning in the field, practical considerations, problems, ethical considerations and a certain happenstance have shaped how this ethnographic project unfolded.

Popular Music Studies and Ethnography

Students would rather sit in the library and study popular music (mainly punk) in terms of the appropriate cultural theory, than conduct ethnographic research which would treat popular music as social practice and process (Frith reported in Cohen 1993, 123)⁴.

As a discipline, popular music studies’⁵ adoption of ethnographic methods has been sporadic. Ethnographies of contemporary and popular music scenes or communities do exist (see for example Born 1995; Cohen 1991; Gibson 2002; Gibson and Davidson 2004; Gallan 2012; Hodkinson 2002; Kahn-Harris 2007; Kühn 2013; Maxwell 2003; McIntyre

⁴ In IASPM UK Working Paper No 1 published in 1982 Simon Frith called for ethnographic approaches to the study of popular music. I have not been able to access a copy of this article and thus rely on secondary descriptions of it.

⁵ It should be noted here that in talking about “popular music studies” as a discipline, I am referring to the groups of scholars who are connected under the International Association of Popular Music Studies banner, through publishing in the associated journals and presenting and attending their conferences. I acknowledge that there are scholars researching popular music outside these social and disciplinary boundaries, but they are often working within other disciplines.

2008; Morgan 2009; Shank 1994; Thornton 1996). But as Eliot Bates found when he undertook a content analysis of the three primary popular music studies journals (*Popular Music and Society*, *Popular Music* and *Journal of Popular Music Studies*) anthropology and ethnography have not been a significant part of the study of Anglophone popular musics in the UK, US and Canada (Bates 2013)⁶. While ethnographic work on popular music does exist, the lack of sustained attention within the discipline of popular music studies is a source of ongoing discussion, with scholars concerned that, by ignoring social and cultural context, popular music studies is neglecting or downplaying the role music plays in life and society (see for example Bates 2013; Johnson 2013; Bennett 1999; Tagg 2011).

Cohen argued that popular music studies was (and I believe continues to be) “more influenced by linguistic, semiotic and musicological traditions than by the social sciences” with its reliance on “textual sources and analysis” (Cohen 1993, 126). A focus on music as a social practice and process is required to balance the tendency to view music as commodity, media, capital and technology, as well as abstracted theoretical models which have been separated from empirical data and popular music studies’ reliance on statistical, textual and journalistic sources (Cohen 1993).

Ethnographic approaches enhance the analysis of commercially released recordings by allowing popular music studies scholars to:

demonstrate a familiarity with the environments in which these recordings were created (such as audio recording and film studios, or live concert stages), the sorts of professionals who help create these recordings (engineers, editors, studio musicians, arrangers, producers, foley artists, field recordists, FOH mixers), and the effect of the social networks and interaction of these individuals (for example,

⁶ Ethnomusicology does draw on anthropological approaches in its study of non-Western musical cultures.

artist managers, publicists, critics) on the resulting musical product (Bates 2013, 18).

This contextualised understanding is essential for the thick description distinctive of ethnography. Thick description is ethnographic writing, which renders the behaviour of those being analysed meaningful to an outsider. Clifford Geertz argued that:

man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz 1973, 5).

Ethnographic writing therefore needs to be analytical, rather than merely describing or recounting events or behaviours, but these events or behaviours must be contextualised and the ethnographer is responsible for “sorting the structures of signification” as well bringing the behaviour and the context of that behaviour together in their writing (Geertz 1973, 9).

Cohen argues that this approach should:

emphasise, among other things, the dynamic complexities of situations within which abstract concepts and models are embedded, and which they often simplify or obscure. The social, cultural and historical specificity of events, activities, relationships and discourses should also be highlighted (Cohen 1993, 123).

The focus on the “complexity of cultural production” (Straw 2010) differs from audience-centred analysis so common in popular music studies.

There are a number of popular music ethnographies that have informed the methodological approach taken in this thesis. Ruth Finnegan’s seminal work *The Hidden Musicians: Music Making in an English Town* (1989) explored the amateur music making practices of Milton Keynes in the 1980s, across classical music, brass bands, folk music, musical theatre, jazz, country music and rock and pop (Finnegan 1989). To develop an understanding of these practices, Finnegan undertook participant observation of events

and processes, conducted formal and informal interviews, questionnaires and surveys and accessed documentary sources such as newspapers, policy documents and records (Finnegan 1989, 342–347). The focus on the “practice” of music and “on what people actually do on the ground” (Finnegan 1989, 8) redressed the lack of knowledge about the extent of local music making at the time. Additionally, this focus refuted the “powerful definition of music in terms not of performance but of finalised musical works” (Finnegan 1989, 8). Finnegan argued that this definition fixes musical works in “some kind of asocial and continuing existence, almost as if independent of human performances or social processes” (Finnegan 1989, 8) which:

obscures the significance of its active realization by real human practitioners on the ground; and for many other musical traditions is altogether inappropriate for elucidating how music is created and transmitted (Finnegan, 1989, p. 8).

By exploring music making practices, or what people were actually doing on the ground, Finnegan revealed a richer, more complex picture of music making in Milton Keynes than would have been apparent if she had only looked at finalised musical works (such as recorded music, sheet music, public performance). While Cohen’s work on rock bands in Liverpool used immersive fieldwork to explore, and then describe, the lived, social experience of the musicians she studied (Cohen, 1991), this thesis explores practice, alongside experience, to reveal the ways in which participants in the scene create and negotiate meaning.

Sarah Thornton’s *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1996) is an exploration of the dance and club scene in Britain. The book is based on ethnographic fieldwork: Thornton undertook participant observation at over two hundred discos, clubs and raves and attended about thirty live gigs as a point of comparison (Thornton 1996, 106). She relied on participants in the culture, insiders, to act as informants and “guides” – to show her where parties and clubs were, get her into secret or VIP clubs and

parties, hang out, and share their clubbing experience. She also used interviews with participants in the dance culture. These interviews and interactions inform Thornton's approach and conceptual framework – the book is an account of their experiences of the culture:

except for some discussion of the taste war between disc-dancers and the Musicians' Union in the first chapter, I don't investigate in depth the values of people outside dance culture. Instead, I am concerned with the attitudes and ideals of the youthful insiders whose social lives revolve around clubs and raves (Thornton 1996, 2).

What this approach allows Thornton to explore is the way in which club cultures function as "taste cultures" – where the participants are generally drawn together by shared musical tastes, interests and preferences. These taste cultures are "riddled with hierarchies" argues Thornton (1996, 3). The book explores three distinctions she identifies as "principal" and "overarching": "authentic versus the phoney, the 'hip' versus the 'mainstream', and the 'underground' versus 'the media'" (Thornton 1996, 3–4).

Thornton argues that "each distinction opens up a world of meaning and values" and that her project:

excavates the sociological sources and pursues the cultural ramifications of the distinction in question ... [exploring] slightly different debates about youth, media and culture ... unified by an unbroken concern with the problem of cultural status (Thornton 1996, 4).

This approach and framework enables an exploration of the ways in which these debates and negotiations of cultural status and value by participants shape the club culture. It also allows for a detailed exploration of how participants in these club scenes negotiate their place, identity and belief through these distinctions. I have adapted this framework of distinctions to explore how artists within Australian country music work

to establish their position in the field, but also how they mark themselves as both part of the culture and unique.

Australian country music has had little ethnographic attention. Graeme Smith's work, outlined in the literature review above, is more ethnomusicological (or even musicological) than ethnographic in its analysis of the products of Australian country music, rather than the social agents and cultural practices of the Australian country music scene. Baker and Huber's work on historical narratives and cultural memory in Tamworth utilises participant observation at the Tamworth Country Music Festival to explore how "the processes associated with articulating country music's past work to create and maintain something that can be recognised (and experienced as) a dominant narrative, or an Australian country music 'canon'" (Baker and Huber 2013, 224). The processes include tourism marketing, museum curation and monuments, and live music performances, including the Roll of Renown concert. In doing so, Baker and Huber offer a challenge to existing discourses of nostalgia and conservatism with a more nuanced reading of how historical narratives are used by social agents in the active articulation of country music culture. This is part of a larger project exploring archives, popular music and memory, of which this is the only publication relating specifically to Australian country music.

Straddling popular music studies and performance studies, Ian Maxwell's ethnography of Hip Hop in Sydney in the early 1990s provides an account of processes through which participants in that scene negotiated their relationship to hip hop culture. He grounds this ethnography in thick description of performative events, paying great attention to the performances of Hip Hop culture (on stage, in the media and socially) and the experience of its participants. His focus on the performative contexts, embodied experience and liveness is a departure from popular music studies and its focus on

linguistic discourse. However, discursive analysis of the media products of the hip hop scene forms a significant part of the book (Maxwell 2003). Maxwell's work is also a rare combination of performance studies and popular music studies (see Auslander 2004 for a detailed discussion of the relationship between performance studies and academic writing on popular music). Drawing on the work of Maxwell, my thesis places live performance at the centre of its exploration of country music culture.

Phenomenological Ethnography

The focus on experience, lived practices and the embodied performance of country music in this thesis is framed within phenomenological ethnographic approaches. This challenges approaches that attempt to "fix", order or structure the "flux of experience with finite, all-encompassing, and bounded terms", a project phenomenology views as "absurd" (Jackson 1996, 3). The destabilisation of "taken-for-granted" assumptions which organise our unconscious engagement with the world is the central goal of phenomenological description (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 88).

Phenomenological ethnography, as a method, takes the position that:

life cannot be understood simply through the systematic study of its outward and given forms: symbolic images, conventional usages, habitual expressions, or the inherited past (Jackson 1996, 25).

Instead, it takes into account the social activities whereby "givenness" is produced and transformed. Symbolic systems are experienced by social agents, but are also constituted by social practices. By suspending inquiry into the divine and objective truth of customs, beliefs or world views, phenomenological ethnography explores them as "modalities or moments of experience, to trace their implications and uses" (Jackson 1996, 10). In this view the world is always in the process of being made, and thoughts and actions only have meaning in relation to practical and social life in which we are

engaged (Jackson 1996, 4). Also, ideas are seen as “approximate expressions rather than exact explanations of experience” (Jackson 1996, 10).

Setting aside the rational, ontological or objective status of beliefs, I attempt to “fully describe and do justice to the ways in which people actually live, experience and use them – the ways in which they appear to consciousness” (Jackson 1996, 10). The orientation of phenomenological ethnography is to “focus on ‘life as lived’” (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, 92). So, this thesis examines how Australian country music artists experience genre, rules, philosophies, beliefs and historical narratives of country music and how these experiences themselves actively create country music culture. This stands in contrast to some of the literature outlined above, which searches for truth, essence and fixity rather than exploring the lived complexity of the culture. As an ethnography, this thesis recognises that:

theoretical knowledge has its origins in practical, worldly activity, and... that in most human communities the measure of the worth of any knowledge is its social value (Jackson 1996, 36).

I will be exploring the social value of the ideas, how they are enacted through certain practices. This thesis attempts to explore the social value that the ideas presented in the literature review have within the field of Australian country music.

Bodies and Performance

Phenomenological ethnography involves a focus on bodies, through embodied experience and expression, and this fits well with the study of country music as a form of performance. Maxwell argues that the ethnographic approach of:

sustained temporal and em-placed engagement with a set of cultural practices and social agents.... (with) its attention to lived, embodied experience, and specifically, the lived, embodied experience of others – of those who are not like us – is its most powerful feature (Maxwell 2003, 110).

My focus on the performance of country music, both on stage and as a social identity, is in recognition of the phenomenological dictum that the knowledge of the body is as significant as the knowledge of the mind. Activity is viewed as meaningful even when it is not couched in words, explained in concepts, or subject to reflection. As Jackson says:

In other words, our gestures, acts and modes of comportment do not invariably depend on a priori cognitive understanding. Practical skills, know-how, a sense of what to do, are irreducible. The meaning of practical knowledge lies in what is accomplished through it, not in what conceptual order may be said to underlie or precede it (Jackson 1996, 34).

This thesis explores artists as active participants and creators of country music culture, investigating on and off stage performance as “micropractices of everyday life”. By looking at what people are doing, the moment to moment interaction, actions and expressions of humans, this type of ethnography hopes to discern and explore the disjuncture that exists between how people talk about, explain or express their understanding of the world and the way they live in the world (Born 1995; Jackson 1996, 2; Maxwell 2003; Rossmannith 2009).

Fieldwork

My position

The field research for this thesis has roots running back to January 2009. I had been a fan of country music since I was a kid, but a few pre-teen years of fandom gave way to (failed) adolescent attempts to follow cooler music, such as The Whitlams, Machine Gun Fellatio and Nick Cave. Over the years I drifted back to listening to Australian country music, but attending the 2009 Tamworth Country Music Festival for the first time got me hooked. I spent a few years being a fan: travelling to festivals, attending gigs following particular bands and artists, listening to country music albums, consuming country music media via radio, magazines and websites.

As an aside, I use the term “gigs” rather than “live music events”, “performance” or “concerts”, as this is the “insider” term most often used to talk about a raft of live performance styles in country music. A gig is a paid performance opportunity for an artist or band, often in a pub, club or small-scale venue, pre-planned and promoted and generally a solo show, rather than a showcase type event or a guest spot at someone else’s gig. Scale is significant, and large events with big crowds, celebratory significance (such as Opening Concerts or Grand Finals of talent programs such as Star Maker) and high production values are referred to as concerts. Programmed appearances at festivals are referred to as “spots” or “sets”. However, artists will still often use “gig” to refer to all live performances in informal, social settings.

Acknowledging this fandom is important in a project that seeks to work within Bourdieu’s “reflexive sociology” (Bourdieu 1994). The fieldwork has been guided somewhat by taste and the knowledge I had accrued as a fan and my experience of the scene, like all participants, had been guided by personal musical, aesthetic and social preferences. My “social origins and coordinates” (Wacquant 1992, 39) affect these judgements of taste: I have lived in urban and suburban areas for the vast majority of my life; I am university educated and have mainly worked white collar jobs (with the exception of a small period of time working as a fencer on farms and volunteer work in the Rural Fire Brigade); my politics are shaped by a youth spent in left wing political parties and activist groups; I am a queer woman; I often attended festivals and events alone.

Acknowledging my ways of participating in the scene (before and during the research) has epistemological implications for how I came to know and relate to the subject of research. Taylor terms this reflexive position that of the “critical insider” (J. Taylor 2012,

6). This reflexive critical insider-ness also calls for the researcher to affect a distancing from the knowledge of the area of research.

I prefer the term “semi-insider” (Lewis 1992, 1) to refer to my position within the field. I was an insider as a fan, although only within certain parts of the scene. There were limits to my participation, including the “rough country” scene of B&S Balls⁷ and Ute Musters. I feel unsafe attending these events as a woman travelling alone. The prominence of alcohol and groups of young men seeking sexual interaction creates an environment that felt too risky. As such I did not attend these types of festivals for research purposes or as a fan. I am not a musician, nor had I ever worked in the industry prior to this research. A few short stints working within the scene at the Tamworth Country Music Festival altered my position, and I now feel comfortable within the professional industry context. Interest in my research from individuals working within the scene has also meant I can interact as a valued participant in the scene. My understanding of country music was originally influenced by what I thought it was – who I thought of as country artists, how I understood the culture as a fan. This has shifted through my research, as I explored the way others saw and understood country music. However my experience and knowledge is still only partial. In no way do I claim that this is a complete picture of the Australian country music scene, or even Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band.

The Field

Ethnography is premised on “the field” as an easily defined and bracketed time and place (Wafer 1996, 260). Australian country music is not contained in a single geographic location (even the Australian boundaries are porous) or temporal dimension. As a massive, messy network of events, individuals and institutions, my

⁷ Bachelor and Spinster Balls, sometimes abbreviated to BnS. These events are held in rural areas, targeted at young people, involving music, heavy drinking, camping and dress-ups.

construction of the “field” has been based around particular individuals, groups, events or institutions affiliated with country music and an arbitrary timeframe dictated by the period of my PhD candidature.

I use the metaphor of “jumping around” or “jumping in” as a way of expressing the difference between immersive and non-immersive fieldwork (Wogan 2004, 132). The initial stages can be characterised as jumping around: my focus was broad. I attended nearly every country music festival and gig I could (although this was geographically limited, with all festivals occurring in New South Wales or Queensland). As outlined above, taste and my existing knowledge informed my picture of what was happening in the scene, but my experience was greatly expanded. I observed performances in a wide variety of styles, venues, and artists, and developed a broad picture of Australian country music culture. However, I lacked a sustained “emplaced” engagement with social agents, particularly artists.

I had planned to observe public performances, then approach artists for interviews and from there develop relationships that would facilitate further fieldwork. The fieldwork envisaged was akin to that which Cohen conducted with rock bands in Liverpool. She describes a process of getting to know the musicians, their social networks, participating in and observing their social activities – with the final text working as an “attempt to interpret and introduce a certain way of life, that of a particular type of rock band, to a readership that would be largely unfamiliar with such a culture” (Cohen 1993, 129). But, as Smith reports, country music is a hard scene to break into as a researcher (Smith 2005, xiv–xv).

Recruiting interview subjects proved difficult. An expectation exists in the industry that interviews provide publicity. I had no media affiliation, and was unknown to all but a very small number of artists. Asking artists to talk for free and with no publicity was a

hard sell. John Williamson's manager was direct in his assertion that Williamson does not even consider doing interviews for free, no matter how admirable the academic research was. Even when people agreed when approached in person at gigs, they would not respond to phone calls and emails. Also, requesting an artist share what are often deeply personal, commercially sensitive and behind the scenes experiences with a stranger is a big call. In the same way that Rossmanith finds that theatre rehearsals are "traditionally a carefully guarded and protected place of work" (Rossmanith 2009, 21) a strong public and private divide exists for Australian country music. This runs counter to the expressed openness and lack of barriers between artists and fans (an idea that is explored and interrogated in this thesis). But artists, as professional performers and musicians, are understandably protective of their image or performance persona. The spectre of the stalker or groupie hung over my research practice. I needed to position myself as a legitimate participant in the field, not just another obsessed fan wanting to get backstage and become friends with the band. In the later stages of this research a colleague, Dr Guy Morrow, provided assistance in recruiting individuals working in the business section of industry as interview subjects. Morrow's work within the industry, through management and video clip production, provided some legitimacy to these requests.

I conducted ten formal interviews in the course of this research; the details of these interviewees are presented in Figure Three below.

Figure Three: Interviews.

Name	Position in field	Interview date	Location
Bob Corbett	Australian country music artist. Star Maker Winner 2012. Lead singer of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band.	12 November 2012	Tuggerah, NSW
Sue Carson	Australian country, pop and classical musician. Member of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band.	17 July 2013	Lambton, NSW
Felicity Urquhart	Australian country music artist. Golden Guitar Winner.	19 July 2013	Tuggerah, NSW

	Host of ABC Local Radio's "Saturday Night Country".		
Michael Carpenter	Australian country, power pop and pop musician. Producer and part owner of Love Hz, one of the key studios producing Australian country music. Occasional member of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band.	19 September 2013	Leichhardt, NSW
Robbie Long	Australian country, folk, jazz and rock musician. Producer. Member of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band.	21 September 2013	Newcastle, NSW
Jim Lauderdale	Americana artist. Grammy Award Winner. Host of Music City Roots, a weekly radio variety show. Industry personality.	26 September 2014	Nashville, TN
Mark Moffatt	Musician and producer. Former President of the Americana Music Association Board. Expatriate Australian.	2 October 2014	Nashville, TN
Chris O'Hearn	Owner, Thrill Hill Entertainment (artist management, label, public relations, publicity and project management). Former Manager, Catherine Britt. 20 years industry experience, working across major labels.	9 June 2015	Sydney, NSW
Tim Holland	CEO, Bolder Music (management company). Former Artist and Repertoire and Label Manager, ABC Music.	17 June 2015	Sydney, NSW
Jeremy Dylan	Multimedia Marketing and Content Manager, Entertainment Edge. Member, Americana Music Association Australian Advisory Group. Film Director.	1 July 2015	Sydney, NSW

The aim of the interviews was to collect insights and in-depth and concrete empirical evidence to extend and strengthen the exploration and analysis of fieldwork observations. The inclusion of individuals working behind the scenes helped to gain a complex understanding of the operation of the Australian country music scene, which goes beyond a simple content analysis relying on promotional material, musical product and media coverage.

The interviews were semi-structured with the original questions reflecting my initial research questions about defining Australian country music and how it had changed

since the 1980s. The futility of this approach was revealed from the first interview and the discussion with participants became much more about how they experience Australian country music and the stories told to explain what they and others do within the industry.

These interviews lasted between half an hour and two and a quarter hours. Each interview was audio recorded, with the consent of participants, and transcribed verbatim.

The selection of my main case study, Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band, was somewhat accidental and instigated by a chance encounter prior to commencing the research. During the Tamworth Country Music Festival in January 2012, I was at one of the band's gigs. It was not the first time I had seen them during the festival, nor was it the first time I had seen the band play, having been a fan since mid-2010. But I had always sat back, never getting up to dance nor going out of my way to befriend the band or any of the other regular fans. Late in the gig, Jenny, a friend of the band, who had also been at a number of the gigs during the festival, came up and grabbed me.

"C'mon, get up and have a dance. I've been watching you and you can't just sit there all week and not dance!"

I have come to learn this kind of gregarious summons to participate is Jenny's gift. She has played a significant role in the touring life of the band during the period of my fieldwork. We stayed in touch and would talk at gigs and she knew I was researching country music. A friendly introduction from Jenny and invitation to join the band for a meal and some drinks at the Gympie Muster in August 2012 became my "jumping in" point for developing a relationship with the band.

As Jackson writes, "ethnographic fieldwork brings us into direct dialogue with others", and this provides:

opportunities to explore knowledge not as something that grasps inherent and hidden truths but as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground. In this process our social gumption and social skills, as much as our scientific methodology become measures of the limits and value of our understanding (Jackson 1996, 8).

To successfully conduct this dialogue requires time and a sustained engagement with others, what Wogan, by way of Geertz, calls “deep hanging out” (Wogan 2004, 130).

I spent eighteen months (August 2012-January 2014) “living with” Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band: on tour, at festivals, at side projects, via social media, observing and participating in their social and cultural world. This thesis will provide an expression or translation of their way of life, a reflection on the social networks in which they play, their affective investments and dynamics, and their relation to the broader country music scene.

Ridler acknowledges the importance of participating in practical activities, as a way of putting one’s self in the place of another, but also to help in developing relationships (1996, 248–250). He argues that:

the experience of shared embodied recreation or work ... permits a form of revelation of self which is precluded by the ulterior pursuit of instrumentalized relationship. Without revelation, ambiguous and nuanced as it may be, resonance and an empathic understanding is the ground of social knowledge, and the principal means we have available to understand the ‘natural standpoint’ of others (Ridler 1996, 255).

My fieldwork was conducted within professional musical scenes, and these practical activities included helping set up and pack up for gigs, hanging out at festivals, watching musical performance, sharing meals, drinking together. Some of the most productive moments of intersubjective dialogue have occurred during these activities.

Additional fieldwork was conducted at the Americana Music Festival in Nashville, Tennessee in September 2014. This fieldwork was focused on observing the activities of the Australian delegation of artists, media representatives and industry personnel attending the festival under the auspices of Sounds Australia⁸. I also worked as an unpaid intern for a small company called “Market the Music” during the 2013 and 2014 Tamworth Country Music Festival. I had known the business owner, Perrin Finlay-Brown since school and he offered the opportunity to observe how a number of major Tamworth Country Music Festival events were run, help manage a band during the festival and gain exposure to the “work” of the industry. While this did not form a major part of my ethnographic material, due to ethical and confidentiality concerns, it provided greater understanding of the industry and shaped the analysis of my fieldwork material.

Throughout this fieldwork I have been keenly aware of the way in which I am using social relationships for research gain. As such an element of reciprocity infects some of the practical activities – giving back by helping with necessary menial tasks at gigs - setting up chairs, packing up, washing up – but also by helping promote the shows through social media, my own local networks and poster runs, and always paying to get into gigs (I have only accepted complementary tickets as a recompense for helping).

Fieldnotes and Writing Up

During the fieldwork period I amassed a body of observations and fieldnotes, as well as recordings of performances, interviews, and documentation from tours and promotion.

⁸ Sounds Australia is an initiative of the Australia Council and Australian Performing Rights Association/Australian and the Australian Mechanical Copyright Owners Society (APRA/AMCOS). Sounds Australia is funded with government and industry support and was “established to provide a cohesive and strategic platform to assist the Australian music industry access international business opportunities” (Sounds Australia 2015).

This material was used alongside material artefacts such as social media⁹, media sources and recorded material such as music and video clips. “Field jottings” were taken in situ during fieldwork. These jottings included descriptions of spaces, people, dialogue, movement, sounds and interactions taking place at gigs, festivals, during set up and pack down for gigs, and at other events. These scribbles were recorded in notebooks or in my mobile phone.

I would also often take photos or videos, using a smartphone or personal camera, of artist performances and crowd response at music events. These recordings were used to supplement note taking where constraints of dim light, space or standing up meant taking notes was difficult, for the purposes of transcription of the onstage remarks by artists and to allow for repeated observation and examination of the performance and audience response. Amateur photography and filming is a normal part of Australian country music and is allowed, indeed often encouraged, at most events and gigs. I did not photograph or film where the artist, organisers or venue prohibited it. I also took full audio recordings of a number of Bob Corbett gigs, with permission.

As soon as possible after the event I wrote up fieldnotes based on these jottings and recordings. Fieldnotes were extended and filled-out accounts of what happened, often with transcriptions of the dialogue or stage banter and detailed descriptions of movement, action, interaction and responses. These fieldnotes totalled more than 300,000 words by the end of my fieldwork.

Using hard copies of my fieldnotes and interview I read through the body of research repeatedly and identified ideas, themes and discourses that emerged from the field. This often involved returning to the audio, video or photograph recordings of a moment to

⁹ Social media is something which fits between fieldwork and material artifact: I was a participant and observer online, but the ability to trawl through archives beyond that which I observed directly (or remembered), changes the nature of the source.

confirm detail, fill in missed nuances or correct a misreading of an expression or emotion.

Certain events, experiences or moments were written up in greater detail because they stood out, revealed something about the individuals, their beliefs, motivations or the stories they were telling about what they were doing, or because I had witnessed something which may ordinarily have occurred in private, off stage and thus been left out of the official story of Australian country music. There were many more of these key incidents than appear in this thesis. However, the details and revelations which emerged through this writing guided the shape, structure and content of the thesis. My aim was to produce fieldwork-based writing which:

brings home to us the ontological priority of social existence, and ... affirms that truth must not be seen as an unmasking which eclipses the appearance of the thing unmasked, but a form of disclosure which does it justice (Jackson 1996, 4).

The style of this thesis is literary; it attempts to convey the messy complexity of lived experience with all its richness and thickness. My hope is to avoid the style of ethnographers such as McIntyre, whose writing eliminates the voices and bodies of the songwriters and musicians he studies, leaving in their place abstracted models and explanations (McIntyre 2008; McIntyre and Sheather 2013). To do justice to a performance based culture I aim to give my research subjects voice and “body” (Lewis 1992, xxii).

Chapter Three: Roots and Heritage

“Honouring an Australian ‘Legend’”: Fieldwork Account

The Slim Dusty Centre was officially opened in Kempsey on the mid-north coast of New South Wales on Thursday 19 November 2015. The “Gala Opening” was held in an open field out the front of the building. It attracted a crowd of hundreds who braved sitting in direct sun in 30 degree heat to see a ceremony hosted by talkback radio personality, Ray Hadley and which included speeches from Thunghutti¹⁰ elder, Aunty Esther Quinlin, local, state and federal politicians, Slim Dusty’s family, and Alan Jones with performances by Slim’s daughter, Anne Kirkpatrick, Graeme Connors, Lee Kernaghan, Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey, all backed by members of Slim’s road band, The Travelling Country Band.

The day was a celebration of Slim, as an “icon”, “Australian legend” or one of “Australia’s greatest treasures”, but also of a community project to sanctify his position in Australian and country music culture in the most legitimate and institutionalised form – the museum. The local community of Kempsey and the “fraternity of Australian country music” were consistently thanked, situating both the building of the museum and Slim’s legacy within a communal project to remember Slim and country music’s history.

The local member in State Parliament, Melinda Pavey, skipped the final sitting day of the year to attend the event and pronounced, “This is the start of something very special for Kempsey, the Macleay and the Mid North Coast. It is an incredible day, because Slim Dusty, he communicated what it is like to think and what it is like to be an Australian from the bush... This centre is the essence and a sanctum to Slim Dusty and Kempsey.”

Alan Jones, as trustee of the Slim Dusty Foundation, the organisation which raised funds to build the centre and now runs it, argued that he did not want anyone to leave the

¹⁰ Also spelled Dunghutti.

ceremony with the idea that a piece of infrastructure could be the symbolic centre of a man. He stated:

We are honouring a person, and we use these words loosely: an iconic figure. We celebrate Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson in schools, and the kids read the poetry. The purpose of bush balladeering was that the poet was able to tell a story in language which was understandable to those who were reading it. This man is equivalent, the musical equivalent for over seven decades, of Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson. This is the musical balladeer of Australia. This is the man who was friends to truck drivers, to people in the bush, who could identify with them and could incorporate in that music the sentiments, expressions, the feelings, the disappointments, the doubts, the hope and the happiness that they were sharing every day of their lives. Now on top of that what needs to be understood is that this man, in the musical sense set records that will never be equalled. In 1957 he was the first Australian, now you've got to think of '57, this was when as a nation we were somewhat intimidated about being Australian, so the ABC news was read by a person with a Pommie accent, and the hit parade was dominated by voices from America and from Britain. We weren't quite up to all of that. And along came the boy from Kempsey in 1957, the first Australian ever to have a number one song on the hit parade.¹¹ Quite extraordinary. That was '57, how big was the hit for tiny little Australia? So big that in 1959 and 1960 it was translated into foreign languages and became the number one hit in Germany, Belgium and Australia. Slim Dusty from Kempsey. These stories need to be told. This man is the only musician in the world to record one hundred consecutive albums with the same music company. And the people from EMI are here today.

The crowd clapped and cheered, Jones stopped momentarily, nodded in the direction of the EMI representatives and then continued his exaltation of Slim. He moved on to the industry accolades Slim collected:

¹¹ I am unable to verify if this is true. The online resource *australianscreen*, run by the National Film and Sound Archive, provides the following details "[The Pub With No Beer] became the only 78 rpm gold record in Australia, and the first gold record by an Australian artist. It reached number 3 in Britain in January 1959, number one in Ireland and was popular in Canada, the US and Europe. From 1957 to 1979, according to music historian Glenn A Baker, it reigned as the most successful Australian-produced single – not just in country, but all genres... It spent more than half of 1958 in the Australian Top 40 chart, including one week at number one on 7 September 1958." (Byrnes 2015)

Thirty-seven Golden Guitar Awards. I mean people in this industry give their eye teeth to win one, or two, or three. Thirty-seven Golden Guitars. Unprecedented; will never, ever be equalled¹². And so, when we understand why we are here and why we are perpetuating this memory, it is very, very legitimate that people should honour the record and understand the record. This man made a contribution to the lives of people when others were ignoring them. And of course Joy knows, everyone knows, that he travelled thousands and thousands of miles to give a sense of pride and a sense of hope and I know Lee Kernaghan is here today and he's inherited that mantle and done it brilliantly. People in the bush, people west of the Great Dividing Range are forgotten people and they are certainly forgotten by most politicians in Canberra because the bulk of the people live in metropolitan Australia. And when this gap appears in people's lives and a hole appears in their lives, and when drought is there, and hope is denied, along come people like Slim Dusty to reinvigorate that sense and that spirit. And so this is about more than the building.

Jones ended by quoting from a video endorsement recorded by the then Prime Minister, John Howard, in support of the project to construct the centre:

He said 'Not only will this museum ensure that Slim's memorabilia be preserved for future generations to enjoy, but it will also be a place to assist young musicians in their studies and their careers. This will be a fitting tribute to a proud and lovable Australian character.'

Slim Dusty as Touchstone for Australian Country Music

I attended the opening of the Slim Dusty Centre in the final stages of writing this thesis. I was interested to observe how Slim was memorialised in this ceremony. Slim and stories about him had emerged throughout my research as an unavoidable behemoth in the contemporary field of Australian country music. He is held up as the "king of

¹² This is both incorrect and hyperbole. Slim's wife, Joy McKean, and daughter, Anne Kirkpatrick, discovered a thirty-eighth golden guitar when they were going through his memorabilia for display in the Slim Dusty Centre. This Golden Guitar was awarded to Slim as performer of "Lights on the Hill" which was awarded the first Golden Guitar in 1973, "APRA Song of the Year". Previously it was believed that only Joy McKean, as songwriter of "Lights on the Hill", had been awarded a Golden Guitar. Additionally, as of the 2016 Golden Guitar Awards, Lee Kernaghan has won thirty-six and Troy Cassar-Daley has won thirty-three. Both could feasibly surpass Slim's record in the next few years.

Australian country music” and the pioneer of a uniquely Australian form of country music. Contemporary artists constantly refer to Slim, telling stories about playing or touring with him, of seeing him play, or recounting parts of his life. He is held up as a model for how to be a country musician. In the media coverage of the opening of the centre Slim’s wife, Joy McKean, was cited as saying, “This isn’t just a museum about Slim; it’s about all the people who have built country music” (Lowrey and Poole 2015). Alan Jones’ speech provided the clearest articulation of the key elements of the tradition Slim represents: the bush ballad tradition; a concern with rural Australia; relationships with people in the country; commercial success; knowledge, experience and advocacy for the bush, which is thought to be forgotten in Australian society; and Slim as the model for how country music should be.

The Country Music Canon

As acknowledged in the literature review (in “Chapter Two: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework and Methodology”), country music is obsessed with history, particularly its own. Slim’s story stands in for the genre’s history, and acts as a short cut to knowledge and authority within the field. I will argue throughout this thesis that he functions as a “touchstone” within the field: he is spoken about as a guide but is also referenced to validate contemporary practice. That this role is played by a historical figure (and his position in a historical narrative) is significant. In their exploration of how country music’s past is remembered in Tamworth, Sarah Baker and Alison Huber claim that:

country music itself is heavily invested in heritage, storytelling and honouring the work of its songwriters through a strong tribute and covers tradition within its musical practice, and it seems that the cultural formation of country music is, perhaps, best thought of as a ready-made memory culture, even in its most contemporary incarnations (Baker and Huber 2013, 224).

Baker and Huber explore how an account of country music is “materialised” in spaces, like museums and memorials, and “performed” in annual celebrations, in Tamworth, and how these accounts create and maintain what they term the “dominant” or “mainstream” narrative, which is recognised and experienced as a “canon” of Australian country music (Baker and Huber 2013, 223–4). The materialisations and performances they observe in Tamworth and during the Tamworth Country Music Festival have a more formalised and institutionalised basis than the practices this thesis explores. Their project explores the material markers of country music history such as the Walk A Country Mile Museum (run by Destination Tamworth/Tamworth Regional Council in the Tamworth Visitors Centre), the Australian Country Music Hall of Fame, the Gallery of Stars Wax Museum, Wall of Fame at the Lindsay Butler Studios, the Roll of Renown monument, and the Big Golden Guitar. From this Baker and Huber find that there is a “repetition of stars and songs, to whom homage is perpetually paid” (Baker and Huber 2013, 228). It is in this repetition that they identify a “canon” of Australian country music. This canon involves many more artists than just Slim Dusty, and I want to note that, although I rely heavily on the figure of Slim throughout this thesis to talk about tradition and heritage, the history of Australian country music is more complex and involves a broader cast of characters. However, I am guided by the way in which participants in the contemporary scene consistently use Slim as shorthand for all history and heritage, and to authenticate and legitimise current practice in the field. The Tamworth Country Music Festival is one point in the year at which a more complex articulation of the history of Australian country music does occur. This, in part, guides my use of the metaphor of the “touchstone”.

Ian Maxwell outlines a concept of “standard narratives” in relation to Sydney Hip Hop, which is also helpful in understanding the way in which participants in the field articulate history. I am not attempting to communicate or construct a “verifiable,

documentary history” of Slim Dusty, or the development of Australian country music.

And, as Maxwell argues:

this is not to deny the ‘truth’ or otherwise of events, moments or biographies constituting that history. Rather, I simply want to argue that what is most significant, for my purposes... is the manner in which a historical narrative is adduced in the ethnographic present, in order to locate particular agents in positions of authority and within a discourse of authenticity (Maxwell 2003, 56–57)

Maxwell further argues that:

‘Authority’ within the scene to a large degree derived from this kind of historical subcultural capital: either a claim to ‘have been there’ or a double claim: for to have knowledge, albeit secondhand, of what happened, and second, to argue that one’s current practice ad-equates to, or is consistent with, that history (Maxwell 2003, 57).

This “standard narrative” works to construct an idea of “tradition”. Maxwell argues:

Practice, or ‘performance’, is not simply generated by ‘tradition’ (pedagogy), but, in all its difference, in all its potential inequality and specificity, it is articulated to a body of discourse. ‘Tradition’ becomes an explanation for practice: what one does in synchronic time is accounted for in terms of the body of discourse that precedes, diachronically, that embodied performance (Maxwell 2003, 13–14).

This model of referring and explaining practice through tradition is used throughout this thesis to explore the “roots” of discourses which circulate in the contemporary field.

This thesis is structured around the ways in which contemporary artists establish “authority” within the field by experience or knowledge of the history, roots and heritage of Australian country music and attempting to associate their contemporary practice to that of the pioneers, particularly Slim Dusty. Where Baker and Huber (2013) explore how the past is memorialised and legitimised through formalised and institutional contexts this thesis explores the way discourses, performance and other practices function in a similar way, but in a much more informal and ad hoc manner.

At times artists draw on different histories, heritages or traditions (i.e. indigenous country music, American country music, rock and roll, folk) to position themselves differently in the field. While I do explore a number of examples where this happens, Slim is the central figure around which this thesis is structured. The way he is used in the field is as something combining the idea of a canon, a standard narrative or a tradition. I am calling him a “touchstone”. His history and stories provide models for how to be and the ideal form.

Slim’s Life Story

But who was Slim Dusty and what was his role in Australian country music? Born Gordon Kirkpatrick in 1927 in Kempsey, Slim changed his name in his youth and worked at becoming a country singer. In between periods of working on and running the family dairy farm, Slim played in travelling tent shows and rodeos. In 1946 he was signed to Regal Zonophone Records and began a recording career that would see him record one hundred and five albums (he was working on the one hundred and sixth when he died). Throughout his career he sold more than seven million records and accumulated over 70 gold and platinum album certifications.

He toured extensively around Australia with his wife, musician and songwriter Joy McKean and at various points their daughter, singer Anne Kirkpatrick. Son David Kirkpatrick sings, but has spent his working life as a doctor. The story of Slim and Joy is that they travelled everywhere and constantly: throughout remote parts of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland, regional areas around Australia, as well as the bigger cities.

Slim and Joy were also instrumental in the establishment of the Country Music Association of Australia. Slim was the first Chairman and Joy the first Treasurer when the Country Music Association of Australia was set up in 1992.

Slim died in September 2003, and a State Funeral was authorised by the NSW State Government. This funeral at St Andrews Cathedral in the Sydney CBD was attended by the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Dick Smith, Peter Garrett and many from the Australian country music community – such as John Williamson, Lee Kernaghan, Troy Cassar-Daley and Kasey Chambers. The cathedral was full and thousands of fans watched and listened to the service on the street outside. The funeral was also broadcast on ABC television, Channel Nine, Sky News and into remote indigenous communities via Imparja.

This brief biographical sketch will be built upon throughout this thesis, as I examine how the legacy of Slim Dusty functions to explain and legitimise practice within the field.

Sources of the Legend

There are a number of sources from which the Slim Dusty tradition is established. The autobiographies written by Slim Dusty and Joy McKean are significant records which people draw from. The release of Joy McKean's autobiographical *I've Been There ... and Back Again* (2011) and *Riding this Road* (2014) marked a renewed interest in the stories of Slim and Joy's life, particularly their touring and travelling lives, within the field. Joy regularly appeared in the media and at festivals to talk about the book and many artists and fans would share stories learnt from the books. Joy constantly works, through public statements and appearances, and her work with the Slim Dusty Centre, to "keep the memory of Slim alive".

The 1984 *Slim Dusty Movie* was also re-released in 2006 and was screened during the 2013 Tamworth Country Music Festival. The film saw another resurgence in interest and discussion about the way Slim and Joy toured.

The memories of artists currently active within the field of country music contribute to the "standard narrative". Artists regularly refer to their experiences touring, playing,

recording with or just meeting Slim. These stories, told on stage, in interviews, in song and in their autobiographies contribute to the image of Slim, his performance style, his personality and his approach to the industry which circulates and is used to legitimise contemporary practice. This constant retelling of his story helps to keep it alive in the minds of artists and fans.

What Are the elements?

Within the contemporary field of Australian country music the narratives that circulate about Slim, his career and the country music industry of the “early years” (which can be defined as anytime from the 1930s through to the 1980s depending on what is valued in the historical narrative) represent an imagined golden era of Australian country music. This golden era and Slim’s legacy is characterised by a number of key elements. These include: Australian distinctiveness; the centrality of the “bush” in Australian society and identity; family and mateship; success; and “realness”.

In the historical framework put forward by Martin (2011a; 2015) the early years of the Australian country music industry (from the 1930s to the 1960s) are presented as a process where artists are attempting to Australian-ise the iconography of the “cowboy”; synthesising Australian historical icons (the Bush, drovers, bush poets, larrikins) with the American popular music form. Dusty symbolises success in doing this. Participants in the contemporary field articulate a narrative in which Slim is the pioneer: the person who solidified the genre and made it “our own”. Others do feature in this narrative, Tex Morton, Buddy Williams, Shirley Thoms, Gordon Parsons, Smoky Dawson, but they are often presented as experimenters, and not as successful as Slim at being true to Australia. His immense success and longevity undoubtedly contributes to the construction of this narrative. He is positioned as the creator and therefore the one who knows how it should be.

The “bush”, knowledge of rural Australia, farming experience and a love of the country and its people are central to Slim’s image. The golden era is also seen to be a time when the “bush” was still a highly valued and fundamental part of Australian society and identity. Rural places, experiences and people are sources of significant value within contemporary Australian country music. This is often said to go against a trend in Australian society which ignores or neglects the country – the “forgotten people”¹³ west of the Great Dividing Range that Alan Jones talked about in the opening fieldwork account. This tension between city and country is central to the logic of the field, and Slim provides an anchor for the centrality of the rural in country music.

The Slim Dusty narrative is also focused on the way in which relationships – family, friends, community – were the foundation of his career, touring life and success. The constant reiteration of how relationships were more important than business by Slim, Joy and others when the story of Slim is told provides a model for industry relationships and the relationship between fan and artist to which contemporary practice is referred.

The stories of Slim’s commercial success, and the enduring nature of that success, are envied by contemporary artists. The golden era represents the peak of country music’s popularity – when country music was valued and consumed by a wide range of Australians. It also thought of a time when country music was not seen as shameful, embarrassing or “daggy” to those outside the field. This is contrasted to the experience of contemporary artists who claim to struggle for recognition, success, sustainability and legitimacy outside country music.

¹³ While the term “forgotten people” is used mainly to refer to the belief that city people ignore and neglect farmers and others living in rural and remote areas, reinforcing the significance of a “country” versus “city” divide, it also has a loaded conservative political history in Australia. This began with Menzies’ 1942 speech titled “The Forgotten People”, in which the forgotten people were the middle class rather than those west of the Great Dividing Range (see Brett 2007 for a more detailed exploration of the history of the trope of “the forgotten people” in Australian politics).

Finally, Slim is presented as being “real”. As a songwriter he is said to have written from experience, as a singer he made the songs of others his own, he never bought into the showiness of American country music or pop, he is always associated with a low key, acoustic musical style where the story trumps the accompaniment. But most of all he is said to have been the same man on stage as off. These elements of “realness” provide a tradition of authentic performance to which contemporary artists still articulate practice.

Part Two: People and Relationships

Introduction

In this part I will explore two sets of discourses that social agents used to reflect on and explain the relationships and structure of the field of Australian country music: “family” and the interconnected discourses of “mateship” and “friendship”.

There are two main groupings within the field that I explore here. Firstly, I turn to those within the “industry”, those people understood to be working inside the country music industry. My analysis mainly focuses on artists, but this grouping also includes people like managers, booking agents, support staff, media, venue staff and others providing labour in the industry. The second grouping is “fans”, and my analysis explores how artists and fans interact within the field. A significant part of this relationship between artist and fan is an insider/outsider dichotomy. There is a clear distinction between those who are part of the country music industry, and those who are fans, and various practices and discourses shape the way positions are defined within the field.

In exploring the relationships within the country music industry I am looking at how work is organised and explained, and how artists position themselves in relation to “big business”, record companies and other aspects of the “music industry” in the way they organise the work they do, who does it, and how they talk about it. I am also looking at how the relationships between artists are talked about. The discourses of “family”, “mateship” and “friendship” are all used by participants in the field of Australian country music to support claims to authenticity within country music culture – as a way of negotiating an artist’s relationship to the commercial elements of country music. They shape the way artists and others working in the industry relate and interact with each other, but they also work to obfuscate commercial relationships, competition between artists, and material gains and are part of the ways the field of Australian country music

distributes capital within the field. Rather than value being vested wholly within the material and economic, discourses of both family and mateship/friendship highlight the value derived from relationships: social capital.

These discourses are used by participants in the scene, in conjunction with the discourses of “stardom”, to explain relationships and the positions in the field of solo artists, bands and session musicians. I will explore the practices of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band as a “band”, but also the tension that exists between the proclaimed discourse of “band-ness” and the position of Bob as the lead singer or “star” whose profile eclipses that of the other band members. Bob and the band’s practices will be compared to those of solo artists and the ways in which they negotiate the relationship with musicians who play with them on records and live using discourses of “family”, “mateship” and “friendship” to discuss employment relationships. This reflects some of the systems of relations that define a field dominated by solo “stars”.

I will also investigate the relationship between artists and their audience. The practices artists used to engage the audience, to build a “fan base” and manage these relationships, are explained and reflected upon with discourses of family, mateship and friendship. The discourse of “family friendliness” shapes performance practices and shapes how artists engage with young fans. This, in turn, effects the composition of the audience for country music. The ideals of egalitarianism, equality and accessibility that are implicit in the discourse of mateship, and model how artists and fans interact, yet this comes into conflict with conventions of pop “star” and fan relationships which denote distance and inequality.

Family

Coming Home: Fieldwork Account¹⁴

The last gig of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band's 2013 Lucky Country Hall Tour is a hometown show, on the afternoon of Sunday 17 November. I run into the foyer, close my umbrella, shake the rain off my clothes and find Bob, Dave and Paul mid discussion in the building's foyer. Paul is a long-term, dedicated fan and friend of the band, and is in a wheelchair. The Savoy Room in the converted 1920s picture theatre has no lift for disabled access, and Bob, Dave and Paul are discussing how Paul is going to get upstairs. Bob and Dave refuse to admit defeat, and Bob's brother in law is coaxed into helping carry Paul up the flight of stairs in his wheelchair.

At the top of the stairs a tall, slim woman with a shock of red hair rushes to greet me with a hug, "It is so good to see you!" I am one of many interruptions to Veronica's work of setting up the merchandise desk and taking tickets. She greets almost every member of the audience by name (many with an effusive hug). Those she does not know are looked up on the guest list (compiled from online and phone ticket orders and some complementary tickets given away by Bob) or asked their name as they hand over the \$25 for a ticket. Veronica is Bob's mum, and has functioned as de facto tour manager throughout the Lucky Country Hall Tour. In addition to running the merch desk and ticketing, she has occasionally acted as roadie, or just supervising the packing of cars and trailers. These day-to-day jobs on the tour have been done with help from either her sister Roberta or, for most of the tour, a friend of the band, Jenny. Another of Bob's friends, who is also called Bob, also helped out as roadie for a leg of the tour.

¹⁴ I acknowledge that material and arguments included in this Part have been previously published as Bauder, Amy. 2015. "Keeping It Real? Authenticity, Commercialisation and Family in Australian Country Music." *M/C Journal* 18 (1). February.
<<http://journal.mediaculture.org.au/index.php/mcjjournal/article/view/939>>.

I drop off some chocolate brownies and biscuits in the kitchen, setting them up alongside fruit brownies made by Veronica. Bob's wife comes and says hello, followed by their son, who heads straight for the chocolate. Their daughter is running around with her best friend and next-door neighbour. Dave's wife arrives with their kids. Sue is pacing around, looking fractious. I approach, say hello, and ask if she's okay, "Yeah, it is just that my family is meant to be here already and they're running late. They're useless, and are going to miss it. They just make me so angry sometimes."

Jenny interrupts Sue's outburst, excitedly introducing me to her parents. They greet Sue, who is an old acquaintance, with warm cuddles.

Not long after, Sue's partner, who is also Veronica's brother, Bob's uncle does arrive with their two sons in time for the show.

Bob's sister Gillian arrives, also cranky. She's annoyed that her husband, who had been here earlier to help load in, decided at the last minute that his two sons needed to stay home to finish homework. Gillian is riled: "This was meant to be family time. This is my family, which is now their family, and that is never taken seriously. They've been playing x-box and iPads all day, when I left they still were. They just don't take my family seriously."

In the way of family get-togethers a heady mix of tension and excitement fills the room. But once the band starts playing things calm down, a group of kids occupy the dance floor, twirling, swaying, skipping and running along with the music. They move forward, leaning on the stage, entranced by the band during the slower songs. Bob plays up to the youthfulness of his mosh pit, throwing in impromptu versions of The Wiggles "Rock-a-Bye Your Bear" and "Can You Point Your Fingers and Do the Twist?", during which Dave rocks out on the banjo, Robbie adopts a "do I have to" expression but the band end with their best Wiggles dance impression – hips swivelling and fingers pointed. Bob also

responds to requests for Taylor Swift songs with a verse of “Love Story”, eliciting this response from Dave: “That was more of a Daihatsu Swift, I thought”. Later in the gig the band is renamed “Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Crèche”.

Near the end of the first set Bob introduces a song, “What should we do? I’ve got a song, we’ll do the next one. I’m going to come down and sing this one, to a very special girl in the audience. You know she’s such a big girl, but she might be embarrassed... We might sit up here [points to the edge of the stage]. You want to both come up... [lifts Matilda and Sophie up onto the edge of the stage]... Settle down here. Okay, now this is my daughter, Matilda Corbett, and this is our neighbour Sophie. And I once wrote a song for Matilda, and now I am going to play it for you”. The rest of the band leaves the stage ensuring Bob with his acoustic guitar and the two girls flanking him are centre of attention. Bob begins picking out the brightly high pitched melody on the guitar. The backing is sparse and simple. He then begins to sing the contrarily cheerful yet pensive lyrics. The quiet and subdued vocals are a shift from his normal enthusiastic and forceful singing. The holding back brings out a certain roughness in the grain of his voice.

Oh my Matilda won’t you be my only girl,
You’re the sweetest thing in this godforsaken world,
Pull me back out of the blue,
All I got to do is look at you,
Oh my Matilda won’t you be my only girl,
Cause even when the world is upside down,
Giving you and me the run around,
You always seem to chase the clouds away,
Every bit of my heart’s your home
You never have to be alone,
Sweet little honeycomb, yee-aah.

Oh my Matilda when you take me by the hand
Teaching me things I never thought I'd understand
With a smile that's oh so true
Yeah, I never stop loving you
Oh my Matilda when you take me by the hand
[Whistle solo, the whole room chimes in]
Cause even when the world is upside down
Giving you and me the run around
You always seem to chase the clouds away
Every bit of my heart's your home
Never have to be alone
Sweet little honeycomb, yee-aah
Oh my Matilda won't you be my only girl
You're the sweetest thing in my godforsaken world.
Pull me back out of the blue
All I got to do is look at you
Oh my Matilda won't you be my only girl
Oh my Matilda won't you be my only girl
Oh my Matilda won't you be my only girl.

Throughout the song, Matilda leans in, hugging Bob's left arm, both shy and touched. Although he is performing to a room of people, it feels like witnessing a sweet and private moment between a dad and daughter. The chirpy sweetness of the song evokes sunshine, play and fatherly adoration.

At the end of the song Bob's son walks onto the dancefloor, and also gets introduced to the crowd, "Oh and this is Marley Corbett now... Marley and I, when ah, when he gets a little bit older we're going to get a band together, it's gonna be called Bob Marley."

Public Private Lives

This account illuminates how the presence and involvement of family, through parents, spouses, siblings, aunts, uncles, children and even close friends are central to the experience of being the Roo Grass Band. The band make choices to involve family in the activity of “being” a band, touring, performing, engaging with fans, and these choices have emotional value for them, but are also yoked to broader discourses of family which circulate in the field of Australian country music. I open with this story to reveal that family is not a separate, private, entity in this scene; it is not something carved off from the band’s public engagement with the field of Australian country music. I will return to this account throughout the chapter, as I explore various ways in which discourses of and around “family” are implicit in the practices of Australian country music artists, as well as how those discourses are used as strategies by artists in the game to define what country music is and what is valued in the field. It is also one of a number of discourses used to support claims to authenticity within the field.

In his exploration of family as a “realized category”, Bourdieu outlines a set of premises on which the discursive definitions of “family” are often based (both in social scientific and everyday parlance), including the assumption that:

family exists as a separate social universe, engaged in an effort to perpetuate its frontiers and oriented toward idealization of the interior as sacred, sanctum (as opposed to the exterior). This sacred, secret universe, with its doors closed to protect its intimacy, separated from the external world by the symbolic barrier of the threshold, perpetuates itself and perpetuates its own separateness, its privacy, as an obstacle to knowledge, a private secret, ‘backstage’ (Bourdieu 1998, 65).

For Bob Corbett and the band, as for others in Australian country music, family is not always a separate social universe, and is definitely not kept “backstage”. Rather, practices involving kin have been tied to celebrated and central discourses of the field. The presence of family is allowed for and regulated by the logic, rules and regularities of

the field of country music. The historical narratives that are constantly circulated within the field – in this case those of the pioneer families breaking into and creating the industry - shape the logic and rules of the field of country music. I am not arguing that the collapsing of public and private, family bands, and family business models, are unique to country music, but rather that within country music they are tied to discourses which are imbued with social, cultural and economic capital and which render the private world of family quite public. This is part of the broader “private” versus “public”, “real” versus “fake”, and the “independent” versus “commercial” tensions which shape the field of Australian country music (which are essentially what this thesis explores). By bringing the private into the public, artists are seen as honest and authentic. The value of honesty and authenticity is read and articulated in distinct ways within different parts of the field and in relation to different practices, but here it is about an artist providing an insight into their life off stage. Additionally, by (either explicitly or implicitly) positioning their practices within a tradition of family involvement in country music, artists connect practice with a historical narrative, which in and of itself is a source of cultural capital within the field.

The argument that country music is a conservative social field is a well-trodden one; the weight of tradition, celebration of history and nostalgic imaginary, and most significantly for this chapter, the centrality of family within country music practices and discourse, can be most easily categorised as socially conservative. However, it should be noted that my research reveals an accepting and diverse culture with a range of cultural, social and political views.

Travelling Family Band: The Slim Dusty Family as Pioneers

The significance and foregrounded presence of “family” within Australian country music is a result of the history of the field in which family bands have been prominent. The practice of touring with your spouse, children or other kin has been connected to a

discourse of the “Family Band” in Australian country music. This is not unique to country music (other music scenes invoke this discourse also). It is interesting, however, to examine how this practice is a significant source of meaning within Australian country music.

As highlighted in the preceding chapter, Slim Dusty and his family, as pioneers in the Australian country music industry and arguably the most commercially and culturally successful artists in the scene’s history are held up as example par excellence of the country music canon, and provide the model for how country music should or could be done as a family. Slim, his wife Joy, daughter Anne Kirkpatrick and other extended family worked as a “family band” touring, performing, songwriting, recording, and being country music artists. The “Slim Dusty Family” hold a position somewhat like the royal family in the Australian country music community. Music journalist and historian Glen A Baker regularly refers to them as “the revered First Family of country” (Baker 2010). The Slim Dusty Foundation, which was set up in 2003 to raise funds to build the Slim Dusty Centre, a museum that opened in October 2015 in Kempsey, plays on Slim’s prominence in Australian country music. For example, a small flag emblazoned with “Australia’s King of Country” and the image of Slim, from the cover of his 100th album *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, hands on hips, staring off into the great unknown of Australia is regularly distributed at festivals and Slim-related events. Max Ellis, one of the “founders” of the Tamworth Country Music Festival also consistently highlights the position of Dusty and his family, with statements like “Slim Dusty was many things to many people. To the Australian country music industry he was our leader and our inspiration” (Ellis 2006). He has also written:

Family has always been a powerful influence in the wonderfully diverse scene that makes up Australian country music. In fact second and even third generation singers and musicians abound.

But one family stands out and that's because, when we look at the Kirkpatrick family, we see much more than just music.

For what better tribute could any man wish than to have his family follow in his footsteps... "Pick It Up And Pass It On" rings absolutely true in the Kirkpatrick family (Ellis 2008).

As the "first family" of Australian country music they dominate the social and cultural imaginary of Australian country music (C. Taylor 2004) and are held up as the idealised model of practice for families within the industry. They represent a tradition of family involvement in the business of country music, as a way of dealing with practical realities of touring, as a source of emotional support and enjoyment, and as a part of a relatively conservative set of values drawn from country life – all of which worked to discursively distance the "family band" from the commercial music industry and imbues integrity and naturalness in those artists' engagement with the music business.

Their family history has also become a significant part of the genre's history, tied to the purported foundation and development of country music and what it looks and acts like. The stories of Slim and Joy's early lives, romance, marriage, life on the road, children and grandchildren are told and retold by the family itself through significant and popular products and artefacts, like albums, books, films and concerts, within Australian country music. Artists regularly cite Slim, Joy and their family as providing the model for country music in Australia. Felicity Urquhart has said that the Dusty family "shows the way country music should be done" in relation to touring, performance and the business of making music.

The Slim Dusty Family, and a selection of other family bands dominate the "tradition" to which contemporary practices of Australian country music are articulated and explained, and which provides some of the possibilities for action within the field. But

the Dusty Family, as example par excellence of the country music canon, provide the model for how country music should or could be done as a family.

Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band are a family band: fiddle player Sue is Bob's aunty; her partner Michael Stove, Bob's uncle, was an original member of the Roo Grass Band, but left because he did not enjoy the country music scene. But more than that, the band understands themselves as a "family". Sometime drummer in the band, Michael Carpenter, talked at length about the "Roo Grass Family" when I interviewed him, including the affective value he places on those relationships:

I love it when Bob says 'Michael's been a part of the Roo Grass family for a long time' . . . it's a very country music thing to say . . . you go and see somebody play and it's like 'oh he's been in the family for a long time. Haven't used him for five records but he's been playing with us.' But when Bob says it, it actually means something, there's a certain level of weight to it, because I know the way he treats his bands, I know the way he treats the people who are involved. I mean you've seen it, the people who are even tangentially involved, with Bob's organisation, . . . it does make them feel like they are a part of something special and so, and that's beyond just doing a gig. . . . I don't ever want to just be a hired gun . . . I like doing that, but it's not a place that I want to be all the time. I could stay here in the studio and earn more money . . . But I'll do pretty much anything to be, to stay part of Bob's family. Because it's an important family to be a part of, in terms of my musical history, I know that what is happening now, with Bob, and the music that he's making, the music that the Roo Grass Band is making, that I'm attached to, in my little way, is important in the story of our lives, and I think that that is an important thing to recognise when we're in the middle of it. So, it kind of . . . creates this sense of loyalty that is important to me.

The other members of the band also understand and value their involvement with the band in a similar way, and it permeates the chemistry the band has on stage, and the enjoyment they derive from playing together. The idea of the family band opens out beyond the actual band as well: the "Roo Grass Family" includes friends, fans and others

with strong ties and involvement with the band. As argued above, the connection of ideas of loyalty, enjoyment, love and family, the practices of being in a band are again distancing the “family band” from the commercial music industry – with individuals such as Michael focusing on the relationships and their emotional value over any commercial gain. The deliberate distancing he effects by referring to his experience of playing with the Roo Grass Band as “I don’t ever want to just be a hired gun” and “I’ll do pretty much anything to be, to stay part of Bob’s family” places the focus and value on familial relationships which are understood as being outside the commercial logic of popular music.

Bob also refers to his mother’s musical practice, with a local choir, and regularly threw to her for a verse of songs during the Lucky Country Hall Tour. He also habitually positions himself in Newcastle’s rock music history with reference to his uncle Michael Stove who is a well-respected part of Newcastle’s music history. Other artists, such as Anne Kirkpatrick (Slim and Joy’s daughter), Beccy Cole, Kasey Chambers, Ashleigh Dallas and Melody Pool, cite their musician parents and families as their biggest influences, educators in the ways of country music, showing them the ropes and they also position themselves as continuing a family tradition. Inviting parents, or grandparents, on stage works within a discursive regime that strongly values tradition and heritage, and demands its recognition. The family band is an icon of tradition and heritage in country music.

The Family Business

Practical, on-the-ground support (both on tour and also at home) offered by family to artists in Australian country music is a significant source of capital for those artists. However, participants also talk about this family help as a chance to spend time together, and couch it within discourses of loyalty, love, fun and commitment. Practices and discourses of small, DIY business are also sutured to discourse of family, as a way of

reinforcing the fierce independence from big business and record companies. The fieldwork account at the beginning of this Part reveals some of the work done by family on tour for Bob and the band, mainly through the presence of Bob's mum, Veronica, as defacto tour manager. During the gig Bob offered a series of acknowledgments for the tour. After thanking the audiences and tour sponsors, Bob moved on to thanking family, "I'd like to thank Roberta, my aunty Roberta, she came along and helped us on a tour leg, ah, to Lithgow and Gulgong. Ah, I'm going to forget people, I'm going to leave the special ones to last. . . ."

Sue interrupts, "Spouses and families, yes. No, can I just say, yeah, thank you guys, thank you to our husbands and wives for putting up with us going away every weekend, leaving you with the children. Um, and just, you know, taking on what we can't do when we're not there, and you know, we appreciate you so much for that, thank you very much."

Bob offers an apology, "I will have forgotten somebody, sorry. I would like to thank Kirrily personally, but as Sue said, all partners and stuff, so I love you Kiz. But the most special one of all: Mrs Veronica Corbett [loud applause and cheers]. She's the backbone! Of the tour, so thanks Mum, thanks for everything."

Veronica acknowledges the appreciation, "Absolute pleasure Bobby".

"It's been, it's been a pleasure. You love doing it," replies Bob.

Veronica smiles, offering a rejoinder, "I love it".

"Yeah, you do love doing it, it's been great, you know. I don't want to get too, too sentimental, but, um just before Dad died, he turned to me and said 'look after Mum', and I don't, I don't look after Mum, but in a way, just sharing all these experiences, like, we're looking after each other, so, thank you for doing that. And thank you to everybody under this height [places hand at mid torso] for showing up today," Bob concludes.

In this account, I am interested in the ways in which Bob, Veronica and Sue talk about the labour provided by family. There are a number of ways that participants talk about the practice of getting family to help do the work of touring and performing country music, which emerge here, and are consistently used by Bob and the band. It is spoken of in terms of “spending time” with each other, and of loving that time. Discourses of enjoyment and sociality permeate Bob, Veronica, Jenny and others’ discussions of the practical reality of people giving up their time to help. This is part of the cultural capital of authenticity: being a professional country music band out on the road is about more than hard slog, making money and cold business; it is an enjoyable experience, underpinned with love. To be authentic, it should be about more than the dollars.

While the involvement of family in the activities of the band is discussed and understood as a chance to spend time together, an enjoyable experience, there are also discourses of support and help tied to the practice by those in and around the band. It is often acknowledged as a practical reality that family members are involved in the activities of the band (or in maintaining the home front) as a source of free or cheap labour which makes touring and performing possible. Sue acknowledged the importance of family support to the band, particularly as an independent band, in the interview:

Main sources of support? Fans, of course . . . and the management from Toyota and everything . . . after winning Star Maker, that was really great, so they’ve really helped . . . and also family. Our families are so patient, you know . . . there’s issues for all of us with that, but we all do the best we can and . . . you certainly need that support, because you can’t, you’ve got to get out there and do it, that’s the only way to do it. That’s why we’re touring, we’ve got to do that, otherwise it’s not going to go anywhere . . . people just don’t see you . . . it’s very personal support in a lot of ways . . . we’re not at that stage where, we’re not at a bigger level where there’s plenty of money being thrown around by record companies, that sort of support.

In acknowledging the role of family at home while the band tours, as well as the “personal support” given to the band, Sue binds the practices of individuals staying at

home, minding kids and maintaining home life, to the discourse of family. She is also linking the practices to the band's "independent" status and the lack of "money being thrown around by record companies" as the reason this support and other on the road, tour based work, is essential. Within Sue's account here, and at other times during my fieldwork, there was a sense that the need for family support is a sign of inadequacy, a sign that the band had not yet "made it" to the level where the support comes from record companies, and there will be money thrown around to support the activities of the band. This touches on a broader set of discourses that circulate in the country music community about professionalism and amateurism and which are also linked to ideas about family.

While the foregrounding of family has value within the field of country music, there is something else going on here. A division is often drawn between "commercial" and "creative" endeavours in Australian country music. By linking practices involving kin and discourses of family, Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band position themselves as authentic, or real, grass roots, and with creative freedom, in contrast to being creatively constrained or selling out. Within this division a reliance on one's family can be understood in some ways as a rejection of the commercial, business networks of country music. In the case of Sue's account above there is a sense that it is also a way of negotiating success when you do not have access to record label or other big business support, which may seem the easier route. Sue's view differs somewhat from Bob's in this respect. Bob often expressed pride in the fact that they are "doing it on their own" and boasting an independent DIY model of music business (for example through ticketing, tour organisation and production); a business model that relies on the support of their family, but which is respected and valued within Australian country music.

As a brief example of the on-the-ground practices of Bob and the band in relation to family, in May 2013, Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band put on a hometown gig at the Gallipoli Legion Club, which they named the “Newey to Nashville” show. To buy tickets you rang or emailed Bob’s mum, Veronica, deposited money into Bob’s bank account and then Veronica emailed a pdf ticket for presentation on entry. At the door on the night Veronica and Bob’s wife, Kirrily, took tickets, marked names off the list of ticket holders and sold merchandise. The whole system was smooth, but unsophisticated and personal. The DIY, family approach to the mechanics of the music business has been a constant through Bob’s career, and this continued during the year after he won Star Maker and had access to significant “professional” support. Bob has spoken about how this DIY approach (which relies on his family’s help) gives him greater freedom (see “Part Three: Places and Spaces” for discussion about the development of his own online ticketing system for the Lucky Country Hall Tour). In my interview with Bob he also talked about music that has integrity or authenticity versus manufactured music within Australian country music:

...it’s the integrity thing, if it is done with integrity, it’s, it’s solid as a rock, it’s authentic to me. Um, I reckon, um, you can sniff out stuff that’s been kinda manufactured and stuff that’s come from the right places.

There is a sense with Bob, and other artists in Australian country music that the point at which you have significant external financial support (management, recording contracts, investors) you lose creative or artistic freedom. I would argue that the inclusion of family within the day to day practices of a band, through touring and live performance support, record production or management is often understood as a part of a rejection of record labels and big business. However, even when artists maintain or profess a distance from record labels and big business, sponsorship is a common area of support for artists in Australian country music.

Strategies are used to validate the involvement of sponsors, with the discourse of family being tied to the practice of accepting sponsorship in order to clarify the relationship between sponsors and creativity. Bob receives support from sponsors; for the Lucky Country Hall Tour, sponsors such as Toyota, Rural Press Events, CMC, Fender and the Melanoma Institute supported the band (see “Part Three: Places and Spaces” for more detail on the role of sponsors in supporting the tour). In his end of tour thank-yous, Bob explained the involvement of Fender, Toyota and the Melanoma Institute:

And, um, earlier in the tour, the first half of the year Fender was a major part of the tour. Fender guitars, because they gave us a guitar and I went and got it signed by everybody, did you all see that guitar? Do you know which guitar I’m talking about? I went and got it signed by all the country music stars in Tamworth last January, and a few of the other festivals we were playing at, just hanging out backstage getting autographs, and we raffled that off, and um, and we were doing that to raise money for the Melanoma Institute Australia, because, I’m sure a lot of you know, I lost my dad to melanoma back in 2003, and last year with the Toyota Star Maker, and Toyota being a big sponsor, their charity partner is the Melanoma Institute Australia, so it was a match made in heaven for me. And we raised a lot of money, so five dollars for instance from every ticket here today, and every ticket that’s been sold on the tour has been donated to Melanoma Institute Australia, and when we raffled the guitar off we raised stacks of money, thousands of dollars, um, so I’m looking forward to handing all that money over. We should get one of those really big cheques. [laughter] Where do you get them done? We might put the kids to task, has anyone got a big piece of paper? Colouring in contest! So we’d like to thank all of them, I don’t think I’ve missed any sponsors.

Bob works to authenticate the involvement of sponsors by suturing it to discourses of family. The discourse of family often covers a practical reality: that the artist does not have a record deal, support of a manager, or lots of money to spend paying people to do the things that their family is helping with. But here Bob can be seen to connect the involvement of sponsors with something beyond the source of material support for his career. It becomes the chance to engage in charitable pursuits inspired by his family. I

wish to note here that I am not arguing that this is a cynical “using” of his family for financial gain and success. Rather, it is an option available to him within the game of Australian country music, and that from my fieldwork observation the family chooses to work together and does so with respect and seemingly genuine love, enjoyment and emotion. Within the field this is recognised as one of the correct ways of doing things – his motives “fit” with the values of the field.

Professionals and Stars

The (near) absence of family in the public discourse of and around an artist who wishes to establish themselves as a sleek and professional “star” is common. The experience and practices of Bob and the band contrasts to a band like Georgia Fall who have contracted a manager, Perrin Finlay-Brown through Market the Music. Perrin does much of the work Bob does himself, but which is also done by Veronica as defacto tour manager. At the Tamworth Country Music Festival in 2013 and 2014, Perrin, as their paid manager, coordinated and provided the “on-the-ground” support needed for a gig at a festival (roadies, sound, merch sales, ticketing). The band did some of the logistical planning, but Perrin provided the leadership, strategic planning and coordination support. The band’s families were at the festival, but provided emotional support, rent-a-crowd and applause, rather than practical task-based support. The band talked about this, and other aspects of having a manager, in terms of “professionalisation”, with a strong implication that those doing themselves or using family were more “amateur”. This was a part of the band’s stated goal of “breaking into the market of Australian country music looking sleek, professional and like they were already stars” on debut. There is a significant (ongoing) cost associated with this arrangement for the band. In their case families had provided intense and significant financial support – a large investment of money for record production, video clips, living costs, and to get the band going, as well as contributing to the coffers at the festival by buying every piece of

merchandise there was available and multiple copies of the new CD to give to absent friends, neighbours and family.

Another example is an artist like Morgan Evans, who is at a more established, and successful, point in his professional career than Georgia Fall. Morgan rarely mentions family support (if they provide any) or family at all. Family events, like his sister's birthday, brother's wedding, Father's Day or stories are occasionally told on stage, and in public interaction and on social media, but they are distanced from his professional music career, instead attached in a limited way to the bringing of family into the public as a "real" and honest strategy within country music. Interestingly, his significant "professional" support – he is represented in Australia by Rob Potts Entertainment Edge, one of Australia's biggest country music talent, promotions and booking agencies and internationally by William Morris Endeavour, reportedly the "world's largest talent agency" (Evans 2014) and has a recording deal with Warner Music – is rarely mentioned either. While these people were thanked during award acceptance speeches, such as at the CMC Awards in 2013 and 2014, on CD liner notes, and their logos appear on his promotional posters and the like, they are rarely mentioned on stage or media appearances. So, the day to day "work" they do, such as booking gigs, promoting his music and touring, selling merchandise, getting his music played in the media, remains relatively invisible. He is the "star", isolated from any sense of work off the stage, but also from any sense of group or communal existence that supports his success. Family would be too hokey a discourse to attach to the sleek and professional practice.

The Family Business Redux

Kasey Chambers does something else entirely in this game. She started out in the Australian country music scene in the early 1990s as a member of the Dead Ringer Band with dad Bill, mum Diane, and brother Nash: a family band. The band and others have

linked the Dead Ringers' touring style and experiences and those of the Dusty family. The story of how the band first came to Tamworth because Bill was nominated for a Golden Guitar Award for a song of his that Slim recorded, is still dragged out regularly and acts to validate the Chambers family's entry to country music. However, the Chambers' family also refer their musical practices (often more strongly) to the traditions, heritage and present of American country music. As such, the Dead Ringers were articulated to American traditions of the family band, the Carter family, the Cash family, and the Hank Williams family.

But where Kasey and the Chambers family differ strikingly is the way the discourse of family is tied to their experiences living on the Nullarbor Plain. For the first ten years of Kasey's life (from three weeks old) the family lived for eight months of the year in a Land Cruiser in the desert. They moved each night, travelling across the plain while Bill hunted foxes. While this lifestyle and family history is used at some points to legitimise their claim to being "country" in the rural sense (Smith 2005, 135), it is significant in my argument here because of how they refer to the experience of isolation to shape a story of family strength, closeness, self-sufficiency and music to explain their position in the field. The connection of these discourses with the practices of a band, and later Kasey as a solo artist, was used to explain their difference, their confidence in their ability to withstand the pressures of the music industry to conform, but also their "unaffected", "natural" and at times chaotic performance styles.

Kasey Chambers is one of the most successful Australian country music artists of the last twenty years. Her debut solo album, *The Captain*, went double platinum in 1999, while the next album, *Barricades & Brickwalls*, was certified seven times platinum in 2003, selling more than 490,000 albums in year of release (ARIA 2014b; ARIA 2014a). These sales are matched with the accumulation of other forms of capital within the field of country music and beyond – Golden Guitar Awards, ARIA awards (in both country and

general categories), mass airplay, including on mainstream commercial radio, Triple J, advertising and major events, and coveted gigs opening for artists like Lucinda Williams on American tours and Emmylou Harris on her Australian tour. Kasey's songs are also some of the most covered songs by buskers on Peel St during the Tamworth Country Music Festival, particularly by young girls who "want to be just like Kasey when they grow up". Other successful artists such as Catherine Britt and Emma Swift, cite Kasey as a key influence in their interest in country music, style or career trajectory.

Kasey's career is marked by the significant support from the "professional" music industry, through multi-album record deals with major record label EMI, single album deals with Liberation Records and Warner Music Australia, as well as employing professional management at various points in her career (to supplement that provided by her brother Nash). Yet, this is often minimised in discussions about her career being a family business, and the continued presence and involvement of Kasey's family in all parts of that career. Family is expressed as a point of safety, strength and security for Kasey's musical creativity, set against the big business music "machine". When talking about the experience of travelling to Nashville for the first time, with the Dead Ringer Band, Kasey says:

It was strange – people constantly told us on that trip, and on others, that they loved how we were doing things our own way – and then they'd turn around and try and make us do things the way they wanted. I think having four of us to talk decisions through really helped us hold our ground; it's a lot harder to remember what you believe when there's only one of you being talked at by persuasive industry people (Chambers and Apter 2011, 116).

The presence of family acts as a break on the ever-present threat that commercialism may swamp creativity. When Kasey talks about the move from being a member of the family band to being a solo artist, the ability to continue working closely with her family is central to her sense of wellbeing and confidence. She felt secure not having to do it all

alone, not being slung out into the industry without the security of her family working around her: Bill on stage with her, Nash in the studio and as manager, and Diane running the merchandise and money side of things. She talks about knowing and liking the people she works with being the most important thing making her feel secure and safe in her music.

Kasey's financial success in the industry is consistently spoken about as accidental, unexpected and a pleasant by-product of her real goal: musical creativity. Family is a big part of this narrative. There is constant reiteration that record companies have only ever been involved in the business side of her career, and that the creative control is held in the family. *The Captain*, Kasey's first solo album, was recorded after she signed to EMI on Norfolk Island, out of the sight of the company. Kasey explains the significance of this in her autobiography:

Our faith in Tony Harlow¹⁵ was borne out during this time. Normally during the making of an album someone from the record company 'drops in' to see how things are going but Nash (brother, manager and producer) dug his heels in and said, no, this is our part, making the album, and they agreed – I'd say largely because of Tony's influence. We pretty much gave them the finished product. In fact, hardly anyone from a label has heard a record of mine before it's finished. We've always had full creative control. And that's a beautiful thing from an artist's perspective (Chambers and Apter 2011, 136–7).

For Kasey, and the Chambers family, the self-sufficiency and isolation of their creative (family) unit is one of the strengths of their interaction with the music industry. It allows them confidence and grounded-ness in the difference of their music from the "mainstream" of both country and the broader popular music scene in both Australia and America. The use of "we've" when talking about the musical production process

¹⁵ Managing Director of EMI and the person who wooed Kasey and her brother Nash into signing with the company with the line "What I want you to do is go away, make the best album you possibly can, then bring it back to me... Then I'll find a market to sell it in. I don't care if it takes five years or 20, I'll find an audience for your music. I will make it fit" (Chambers and Apter 2011, 125).

reiterates the centrality of the family unit to Kasey's experience of music production. There is the sense in Kasey's account that within the music industry there are two camps – the creative, musical artists and the commercial "industry". It should be noted that it is not just musically creative, but also about performing, touring and recording in a different, less commercial way – often called the DIY approach by artists; and the business people. Within this ideology these two camps are understood to have conflicting aims and values. The artists, particularly those who are "different" or "original", are at risk of being pressured by the "industry" to change themselves into something more marketable, which fits within the mould of what is successful at that point in time. This dialectic is nothing new in the music industry, and as argued in the Literature Review for this thesis has been explored in great detail by scholars such as Peterson (1997), Frith (1988; 2007), and Barker and Taylor (2007). However, the significant thing here is that in the accounts of Kasey and the Chambers family it is "family" which provides a safe haven. The strength of family allows Kasey to navigate between these two camps without losing her "difference" or creative control, while also benefiting from the support a record label can provide for the "business" side, releasing, distributing, promoting and administering the creative product.

The tying of family and creativity together in Kasey's narrative softens the blow of her commercial success, in a field where discourses of "authenticity" and "creativity" are dominant discourses. This is significant for Kasey and her orientation to the field of Americana music, which explicitly sets itself apart from the commercial country music industry in America. She uses the involvement of her family as part of a purposeful distancing of her career approach, performance style and musical output from a music industry which is like "a machine that tells you what the market wants and then tries to make you fit it" (Chambers and Apter 2011, 117).

In the field of Australian country music the inclusion of family within the day-to-day practices of a band, through touring and live performance support, record production or management is often understood as a part of a rejection of record labels and big business, and is often tied to “authenticity” within the field. Because the field of country music values family this discourse is sometimes used to gain credibility in the scene, but can also cover a practical reality: that the artist does not have a record deal, support of a manager, or lots of money to spend paying people to do the things that their family is helping with.

Returning to Bourdieu, the artists all occupy “positions” in the field of Australian country music (in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97), and the discourses of “professional”, “commercial”, “amateur”, “creative”, and “authentic” all work to categorise artists, and their position in the field. In each example used in this section there were economic and material circumstances which limited, enabled or influenced the decisions to involve families or not: for Bob, the need to maximise income to feed his family taking his mum and friends on the road and DIY ticketing good choices; while for Georgia Fall the hope that the investment in “professional” management will see them make it big; Morgan has people investing in his career; and Kasey works to authenticate her creativity through a discourse of family business by distancing her creative process from the commercial music industry, but this would have been a much easier task after the immense financial success of her first two albums. But these material factors work with symbolic and cultural factors, in the game of cultural legitimisation about what it is to be a country music artist. The way in which these artists invoked particular discourses to talk about the on-the-ground practices of having family involved (or not) in their working lives as musicians is part of the work these bands and artists are doing to represent themselves to the country music community; they are attempting to establish themselves as adequately, legitimately “country”. In the process they are also

shaping what it is to be a country music artist. The constant struggles over what country music is, what is “authentic” country and what represents success, are struggles over the “schemata of classification... essentially, the words, and names which construct social reality” (Bourdieu 1989, 20). Each of the artists discussed above, are using strategies in this struggle, in these cases the strategies link practices involving kin, to discourses of honesty and openness through collapsing of public and private, heritage and tradition through the family band, and authenticity, professionalism, and success through the relationship artists have to big business.

For a band like Georgia Fall, the strategy is to connect the practice of employing professional management to discourses of “professionalism”, “mainstream” or “star”. They are working to position themselves as serious professionals who are on their way to being stars. As a result, intentionally or unintentionally, they position someone like Bob as “amateur”. However, Bob’s understanding of his position in the field is not as an “amateur” (and by material distribution of capital within the field, he is in fact a professional musician, in that he derives his entire income from music, while Georgia Fall need to work outside the industry to support themselves). Bob’s strategy is to express his practice as a rejection of big business, a DIY ethic, and linking this to discourses of “authenticity” or “integrity”. While Kasey needs to reconcile the relationship she has to big business with a desire to be understood as an “authentic” and “creative” performer. She connects practices of family, the involvement of her dad, brother and mother in her music career, to a discourse of creative strength and comfort, against the might of the big business machine. These strategies are ways in which the artists negotiate the values and regulative principles of the field of country music, but they are also part of the struggle of artists to “change or to preserve its boundaries and form” (Wacquant 1992, 17). At stake in this, and all other struggles, is what is valued in the field. These strategies are working to define the forms and distribution of capital

within country music: is the symbolic value of discourses like creativity, authenticity and independence of greater value than the potential economic rewards of “commercialisation” and mainstream success?

Mateship

Troy Cassar-Daley & Friends: Fieldwork Account

Troy Cassar-Daley stands in the centre of the vast stage at the Tamworth Regional Entertainment and Conference Centre (TRECC). He's flanked by a group of men who, at various points throughout the show, he refers to as his good mates: Vaughan Jones on keyboard, Michel Rose on pedal steel, Simon Johnson on bass guitar and Mik McCartin on drums. He has just opened his Troy Cassar-Daley & Friends festival show with a handful of his well-known songs, warming up the sold-out room (which holds approximately 3000). After changing guitar, he turns back to the mic and prepares to introduce the first "friend" to appear: "I love this show, it's always a surprise, I never quite know who is going to pop out and join me up here. But it is always so much fun to play with a bunch of mates"

He then goes on to introduce Adam Harvey, regular recording, touring and songwriting partner with whom he is to release an album of country covers, *The Great Country Songbook*, later in the year.

Later in the show Troy finishes a song, looks to the side of stage, smiles and after switching guitars starts, "We're gonna change it up a little bit and invite a friend of mine all the way from Nashville, Tennessee. He's been in town for most of the week, taking in much of the Tamworth spirit. Please welcome a good friend of mine, Craig Campbell, folks."

The American artist, here as one of the "headline" acts for the festival, walks out on stage, beer in hand.

"He has a beer too, and it's an Aussie beer too, we love it."

They shake hands and exchange banter about the duet single they released to radio during the festival, “The Sunshine Club”.

After playing the single, Craig explains how he “met” Troy, “This is my second trip to Australia. I was here back in March at the CMC Rocks The Hunter and while I was there, I was just walking around and I heard this song, over the big PA system. It was huge and it was just, and it came out and it sounded like heaven to me. And I said who is that and so I listened to the next three songs and I wrote these songs down, the titles in my phone. And I went back to my room and I googled it, I typed those titles in and Australia. And Troy’s name came up, I bought his album and I’ve been a fan ever since. And this is one of the songs right here that just reached out and slapped me in the face and said ‘listen to me’. I love it.”

Troy deferentially laughs off the story, “Well as you know I love Merle Haggard, have done for a long time. I will dedicate this song to my Aunty Caroline, who’s here all the way from Grafton. Any of you folks here from Grafton too?”

A portion of the crowd cheers, and Troy nods and continues, “It’s called ‘Thinkin’ About Drinkin’ Again’, exactly what Craig’s doing right here.”

At the end of the song Troy thanks Craig: “Mr Craig Campbell there, a good mate. Thank you for coming out,” the men hug and Craig leaves the stage, Troy quips, “Oh, this is too much fun to be a job!”

Toward the conclusion of the show Troy begins to introduce another “friend”. “I’m just gonna change guitars and then introduce you to someone very special. I know she is here because I can hear her laugh [a loud cackle emanates from side stage where Troy just looked]. Years and years ago there was a beautiful girl who won Star Maker, and one of the most memorable things was her coming to my little old caravan that I had here in Tamworth and coming over to sit and sing. And it was amazing to hear a voice that

natural and that warm and I thought I should share it with you. Here's a lovely young lady called Lyn Bowtell, ladies and gentlemen".

Lyn walks on stage, pulls the mic from the stand, continues toward Troy and the two warmly hug.

"Well we kept texting each other over the holidays, and between a surf or a fish I'd go say 'I'd better see what Lyn wants to sing. She chose one of my favourite, favourite Merle Haggard songs. I think she knows her way to my heart, and it's called "That's the Way Love Goes".

When the song finishes they hug and Troy asks Lyn where she's playing during the festival. This ritual is repeated after almost every guest (Craig and Adam are the exceptions).

By the show's close Troy has been joined on stage by Adam Harvey, Craig Campbell, Lyn Bowtell, Beccy Cole, Jim Lauderdale, Camille and Stuie French, Busby Marou, Warren H Williams, and his wife Laurel and kids Clay and Jem. Before playing the last song Troy comments, "To be able to do a show like this is something I never dream of doing. I get here and all these friends show up and we sing all these amazing old songs. What a thrill. Thank you all folks for coming and letting me get away with it!"

"It's Good to See You Mate": Friendship in the Country Music Community

This account about Troy and his "friends" shows how artists within the field understand and explain their relationships with other artists. The idea that the country music industry in Australia is a big group of friends and that everyone gets along is a powerful paradigm within the field. I do not doubt that the artists Troy brought on stage in Tamworth are friends in the common sense understanding of the word – that is, people who he knows, likes to spend time with, has affections for, and who is engaged in a relationship of mutual support and collaboration. However, I am interested in ways in

which these friendships are tied to powerful discourses of mateship, Australian national identity and the way they are used to not only explain, but also to regulate, the structure, texture and activities of the “community of country music”.

Troy’s frequent statements about how playing music with his friends is so much fun it does not feel like work, serve to position his music making practices as being ideally about fun and enjoyment, not “work”. As one of the most commercially successful artists at the time of this incident, this is a powerful ideological move. Sarah Thornton, in her ethnographic exploration of dance club culture, argues that the discourses used by clubbers are not “innocent accounts of the way things really are, but [are] ideologies which fulfil the specific cultural agendas of their beholders” (Thornton 1996, 11). She continues arguing that these subcultural ideologies are the way a group (in her case youth) “imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass” (Thornton 1996, 11). To call country music a “subculture” goes against the self-understanding participants have of the scene - while they do not believe country music culture is dominant, their understanding is that it is not underground, subversive or resistance, but rather “popular” and “normal”. However, the discourses and ideologies that circulate in country music fulfil certain agendas and are used to paint an image of how country music should look.

In his stage banter Troy affirms that the value for him is enjoyment, love, connection and friendship. This negates the fact that Troy is not playing this gig just for fun, he is not donating the takings, he is not doing it for free, it is a commercial enterprise. The sold-out crowd have paid to be there (adult tickets started at \$41.90 for an early bird ticket booked prior to November the preceding year). It should also be noted that Troy appears throughout the week at other people’s gigs –such as Adam Harvey, Felicity Urquhart, Leslie Avril, Kevin Bennett and Catherine Britt – and presents verbally and

affectively like he is having the time of his life. I do not doubt the legitimacy of his enjoyment, and the value placed in these relationships, but the use of the mateship and friendship discourse and its connection to the emotional quality of fun works to smooth over the economic arrangements in a field which has an uneasy symbolic relationship with the commercial aspects of its organisation. Authenticity, as a form of cultural capital, is contained in practices and discourses which reinforce non-commercial values – in this case the fun, friendship and love Troy delights in – and position artists as doing things for the “right” reasons. Friendship works here to authenticate Troy’s motivation for playing these Tamworth Country Music Festival gigs year after year. He is not alone in this - many other artists express enjoyment or appeal in these social networks and their value. Artists speak of the value friendliness brings to country music. Felicity Urquhart emphasised how friendship and getting along has value when I interviewed her:

I think we function well, and I think that others are amazed at how we all know each other and we’re all friendly and we work together and you know that’s something that’s really lovely about our scene.

The way in which friendship is spoken about within the field shapes the distribution of social capital within the field, but it also works to limit dissent within the country music community. The narrative that everyone is friends and friendly works to shut down public criticism and disagreement within the scene and creates an expectation that everyone is supportive and nice. To return to the incident involving John Williamson criticising Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey’s nominations for Golden Guitars, which was explored in the Introduction, participants in the field constructed it as dramatic and controversial because it was a rare instance of public criticism of someone in the industry by someone else in the industry. It jarred because it went against the unwritten

rules of friendliness, harmony and support which are connected to the ideas of mateship and friendship.

The discourses of mateship and friendship have further ideological effects within Australian country music – they link contemporary practices with Australian cultural history through mateship and the bush legend. The decision to focus this section on the connected discourse/s of “mateship” and “friendship” rather than focus on the much less irksome “friendship” is, in part guided, by the insider use of the term “mate” by Troy in the above incident (and many others). Mateship, as a core value or symbol of Australian national identity, is also used within Australian country music as a central discourse to explain, reflect and order the practices, experiences and activities of participants in the industry. Mateship figures prominently in accounts of Australian country music, in descriptions of the industry as a “community of mates”, the belief that fans are treated as mates by artists, and the use of “mateship” as a trope in festival advertising, lyrics, video clips and industry marketing. Ideas about the Australian country music industry being friendly, egalitarian, nice, generous and open are used to explain a range of practices within the field, but they are in turn implicated in the broader discourses or ideologies of community and mateship as Australian values. The centrality of mateship as a discourse is a part of the constant articulation of Australianness and the connection of country music to “the bush” within these articulations of national identity. Mateship has value in the scene, because it is so strongly tied to certain articulations of national identity and a particular conception of country-ness.

There is an idealism to this discourse, which overlooks and obfuscates inequality within the scene – in the relationship between artists and fans (which will be explored later) and the existence of a “star system” in which those artists who have established a certain level of authority and influence over the field, by accruing a requisite volume of economic capital (through album or ticket sales), or cultural and symbolic capital

(longevity, recognition, awards), are considered “stars”. This star system and the commercial nature of country music as a popular music form is, at least in part, premised on inequality, competition and self interest. The discourses of mateship and friendship are strategies used by artists, intentionally or unintentionally, to conceal this inequality and its effects. It also obscures the way certain articulations of difference, like queerness, femininity, cultural difference or urbanity, are absent, excluded or ignored by some parts of the scene. Like any social grouping, country music is not completely open. I say all this as a disclaimer; I wish to signpost the problems inherent in discourses of mateship, but also to bracket them, to allow space to explore how the discourse is sutured to practices within country music. I am not going to couch mateship within questions of tolerance, multiculturalism and racism. I acknowledge that country music in Australia is a music played by and listened to by a predominantly white community, and that problems of racism and intolerance do exist. The problems with mateship are well documented¹⁶, and I am interested in how it functions as an ethic of interpersonal interaction within country music communities, and as a scene-wide logic. So, for the purposes of this Part, I am using mateship in the way it is used within the field of Australian country music with the value conferred on it – as a relatively unproblematic, all-embracing, positive description of social interactions and Australian values.

I am not arguing that mateship is an essential truth within country music, or within Australian culture and identity. I am cognisant of its mythic qualities, but it is a myth which artists, fans and other agents within the field of country music in Australia reify and reproduce through practice and discourse. The ideals and values implicit in this

¹⁶ For example: that it is a masculine ideal which excludes women and non normative men (Altman 1987); that it eliminates women’s experience from Australian stories, or limits the range of characters available to women in those stories (Summers 2016, 130–33); and that is underpinned by patriarchal power dynamics and excuses male violence, particularly against women (Pease 2001, 191–202). See also later in this Part where I discuss the historical roots of “mateship”.

myth of mateship guide proper ways of being in country music - personal, collegial, friendly, supportive, ego-less, humble, and charitable.

Australian Legends: Bush, Pioneer and Mates

Many of those who are active within Australian country music understand the culture to be an expression of true or authentic Australian national identity. As Martin notes, country music in Australia “asserts a position as a quintessentially authentic Australian cultural expression” (Martin 2011a, 7). Smith argues that the Australian country music scene is characterised by a belief that it is the “true continuation of the Australian folk heritage and an authentic representation of Australian experience and national identity” (Smith 2005, xi). The contexts for making and listening to music, and the associated practices – such as attending festivals in country towns, State Forests, farms and other remote locations, where camping is almost mandatory, drinking is compulsory, socialising is central and raising money for charities is built into the festival – are all couched within ideas about what it is to be Australian and what Australian national identity looks, sounds and feels like. The ideas that circulate to explain these practices reflect myths and legends of Australian history after European settlement. Key among these are the bushman as the representative of the bush or pioneer legend – with “his egalitarian temper, and the value he placed on mateship” (Carroll 1992, 1). The historiographical, political and cultural debates about the “truth”, origins, function and significance of the bush legend, mateship and Australian identity are extensive (see for example Carroll 1992; Docker 1991; Horne 1964; Ward 1958) and this rough sketching of the debates is intended to give a background on some of the historical antecedents of “mateship” and its link to Australian identity, and by extension country music.

In the 1940s to 1960s, when Australian country music was being established as an industry, through artists like Slim Dusty, Buddy Williams, and Tex Morton, these debates about the role the bush played in Australian national identity and Australian history

were running hot. I am not suggesting that Slim and other pioneers of country music were consciously drawing on these radical nationalist historians, but rather that the ideas within these debates have similarities with and reflect the concerns of agents in country music.

The key premise of both the bush and pioneer legends is that there is a distinctive Australian “character”, “spirit” or ethos that exists and that it was strongly tied to, if not entirely forged in, the bush. The untamed, harsh and isolated bush provides a backdrop for the development of this spirit, which was tested and solidified during the goldrush, and cemented during the Gallipoli campaign of the First World War.

Russel Ward, in his work tracing the sources of the “Australian legend”, argues that:

the ‘typical Australian’ is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing ‘to have a go’ at anything, but willing too to be content with a task done in a way that is ‘near enough’. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. Though he is ‘the world’s best confidence man’, he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endures stoically rather than one who acts busily. He is a ‘hard case’, sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great ‘knocker’ of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority, especially when those qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen. Yet he is very hospitable and above all, will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong.” (Ward 1958, 1–2)

This bush legend is tied to a radical nationalist political movement, which valued the anti-authoritarian, egalitarian idealism of the approach. Later, John Hirst (1978) put

forward the pioneer legend as a corresponding myth, which shared a similar source of Australia's national identity, the land, but which was more conservative in the way it 'celebrates courage, enterprise, hard work, and perseverance' and individual enterprise over collective or state enterprise. In each of these readings of history the role of *The Bulletin Magazine*, and particularly bush poets such as Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson or Henry Lawson, during the 1890s and onwards, is acknowledged as central to shaping the image of the bush and pioneer legends is acknowledged (Carroll 1992; Docker 1991; Hirst 1978; Ward 1958).

Mateship emerges, in the context of the isolated frontier, where by necessity men worked together. Literary scholar, Tom Inglis Moore argued that while mateship may have started out as a working partnership, guided by self-interest and as a defence mechanism against the hazards of bush life (or the battlefield), "the necessity was made a virtue..." (Moore 1965, 50). Moore defends mateship from claims it is nationalist myth, and also extends mateship's origins from the bush to the battlefield and the working classes, arguing:

Most of such critics, one notes, fail to grasp the significance of mateship because they are also inexperienced in bush life and the fighting services, the two sources of mateship's strongest manifestations, just as academics misunderstand mateship because they cannot appreciate the bond of loyalty between working mates. (Moore 1965, 46)

Within this argument that mateship is a virtue and a discourse, mateship has an emotional significance. Moore argues that the reciprocity, openness and lack of self-interest which mateship demands is the source of its egalitarianism. He posits that:

we have the Australian people in general accepting a form of mateship which is not a formulated creed but a philosophy implicit in the popular usage of the term mate ... The ideal implicit is, of course, democratic equality, the freemasonry of

independent men. For mateship is necessarily democratic: men can only be genuine mates when they are equals. (Moore 1965, 54)

These ideals of equality and egalitarianism are central to discourses of mateship and friendship in contemporary Australian country music. These ideologies powerfully shape the way in which agents in the field of Australian country music explain practice and experience.

In the chapter “Roots and Heritage”, I outlined the argument that the histories of Australian and American country music, and the figure of Slim Dusty and his family, are sources of tradition to which contemporary practice is articulated. This draws on the framework enunciated by Maxwell in his reframing of Bhabha (Maxwell 2003). In this section I wish to broaden this to argue that the mateship discourses are part of an Australian national tradition, intrinsically tied to Australian national identity, and it is at this juncture that country music makes its claim to an intrinsic, undeniable, almost essential Australianness because of the way mateship discourses and the Australian Legend are used as explanation for the practices today.

Mateship is also part of a range of Australian idioms and linguistic signifiers which mark an artist as properly “country”. By using language like “mateship”, “mates”, “Aussies”, “bush”, and other Australian idioms, artists establish themselves as “fitting” in the field – they are talking the talk. The adoption of Australian idioms by artists is a source of cultural capital and has become a performance convention within the field. The contemporary prevalence of the terms “mate” and “mateship” does vary within Australian country music. However, the legacy of Slim Dusty and other country music pioneers’ focus on the “the bush” as the source of Australian identity renders “mateship” central to the social and cultural imaginary and tradition of Australian country music.

Touchstones of the Australian Legend – Ned Kelly, bushmen, the ANZACS and the Larrikin – are also a significant part of country music’s cultural imaginary. They provide fodder for songs and stage banter, but more than that these touchstones and their actions shape “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions that underlie these expectations” (C. Taylor 2004, 24). As I argued in the “Roots and Heritage” section, Slim Dusty functions as a touchstone within the social and cultural imaginary. His (and many others’) championing of the “bush legend” (or arguably the “pioneer legend” although it is never referred to as such within the discourse), values such as loyalty, communality, egalitarianism and charity, and also an openness to meeting people, which are tied to mateship, form part of the symbolic framework and image of collectivity, which is shared by those who consider themselves part of the community of Australian country music. The practices associated with all aspects of country music, such as touring, recording, performing, promotion, and writing, are a result of that history, but are also continually referred back to a discourse of “tradition” built on that history.

The Community of Mates

Returning to the fieldwork account that opened this section, the “& Friends” format is common in Tamworth. Artists such as Kevin Bennett, Colin Buchanan, Kirsty Lee Akers, Ted Egan, Sara Storer and many others have been running shows explicitly named as such for years, with the advertising (print, posters and billboards, television and radio, and venue advertising) and promotion work (media appearances, social media interaction and banter at other guest appearances) reflecting that. There are also events such as Stuie French’s XXXX Gold Pickers Night (held 9pm on the Tuesday night of the festival), the Bill Chamber’s Sessions, Catherine Britt’s Hillbilly Sessions and the Bushwhackers Chardonnay Show and Beach Party which are premised and advertised

as involving a collection of special guests and friends, rather than being a solo headline show.

However, even when not explicitly named or advertised as such, many other artists open their gigs to numerous “special guests” or “friends” during the festival. During the research period I attended gigs by Felicity Urquhart, Beccy Cole, Shane Nicholson, Kasey Chambers, Catherine Britt, and Mustered Courage among others where a significant portion of the performance was given over to duets or performances by special guests. This practice of involving “friends” in performances is not unique to country music, but is central to how the field of Australian country music functions, and reveals some of how the complex discourse of mateship functions within the scene.

Toby Martin noted this practice in relation to the structure of a Slim Dusty concert in 2002, arguing that Slim had eschewed the “support act/s” and then main act structure, which has become “standard” for rock, pop and country concerts. Martin noted that Slim’s show had other performers play during the body of the show, with daughter Anne, wife Joy, sister-in-law Heather, and band members all taking the lead on a few songs between Slim’s songs (Martin 2015, 4–5). Martin argues that:

[t]his structure was inherited from variety and vaudeville styles and was the performative norm in the travelling tent shows in the mid twentieth century. It was a performance style that was, in its own way, as developed and ritualistic as the support/headline structure, yet it functioned to de-emphasise Dusty's positioning as ‘star’ of the show. Dusty was merely part of the entertainment. He was part of the Slim Dusty show, part of the family. Or, more specifically, he was the elder of the family and was both passing something on and literally making way for the next generation of performers. (Martin 2015, 5)

Martin ties this historic structure to the discourse of “family” rather than that of friendship or mateship, however I contend that while the discourse of family does, in some cases shape this performance structure, in contemporary country music the

structuring discourses of friendship and mateship, and the ideals of equality, openness and sociality contained within them, work to shape how artists organise their shows. While the “support act” followed by “main act” model is common in country music, it is not the only form, particularly at the Tamworth Country Music Festival. The variety model is common, both in this “& Friends” format and those with “special guests” who either do one or a number of songs alone or with the headline artist, but also in charity concerts, showcases and the like. Unless it is a member of one’s family being introduced then the “guest” is almost invariably invited on stage as a “friend” or “mate”.

While these practices carry throughout the year, at other festivals and in regular touring, they are grounded in the Tamworth Country Music Festival. This is, in part, because it is one of the few times a year that all of the Australian country music industry, or community, is together. The Gympie Music Muster is the other event at which a bulk of the community gathers, however it is a more strictly organised festival – with artists being booked for 45 minute sets and not having the same freedom Tamworth’s longer shows and freer structure allows.

There are a number of key descriptions used to talk about the practice of gathering in Tamworth for ten or more days each January, including that it is the industry’s biggest party, the best chance to network and the opportunity for young artists to be found. However, and most significantly here, artists consistently describe the Tamworth festival as a chance to catch up with friends in the industry, as a reunion of sorts. As a part of their special coverage of the festival Tamworth newspaper, *The Northern Daily Leader*, runs a column “My Festival” where an artist writes a short account of what the festival means to them, what their favourite part of the festival is, their first Tamworth and the like. The artists writing “My Festival” regularly reinforce the centrality of friendship to their festival experience. In 2013 Adam Harvey recounted a story of his first Tamworth Country Music Festival which could have been a disaster when the 16

year old and his family arrived at the festival only to find out that the promoter who booked Adam had skipped town. But, Adam and his family stayed and people gave him spots in their shows, giving young Adam the chance to play at the festival. This story is told to reinforce this point:

This was when I learnt the true spirit of the Tamworth Country Music Festival, and the friendly community that really exists in the country music industry. . . . After a disappointing first day in Tamworth, we left here feeling pretty good about the place, and we had made some friends for life. I have not missed a Tamworth Country Music Festival since. (Harvey 2013, 44)

The Tamworth Country Music Festival holds an important place in the field of country music. It is a temporal and geographic location where forces within the field of Australian country music coalesce to shape and define the scene and who or what is valued within it. The rituals of the festival, such as the awarding of the Country Music Awards (Golden Guitars), Australian Bush Laureate Awards, or the Tamworth Songwriters Association Awards, titles such as Star Maker, inclusion in the “canon” through the Roll of Renown, Galaxy of Stars, Hands of Fame Country Music Capital, and the gathering of the industry in one place for a period of time, help to create a sense of Australian country music’s “realness” – it is not just a media form, existing on the radio airwaves, on the Country Music Channel, and the internet. It is a real, experienced social network, with rituals and traditions. The festival is a source of much meaning and value for those within the scene. And by focusing on friendships and the ideal of mateship, participants in the scene reinforce an ideology that relationships are valued over commercial concerns or success. The “& Friends” format serves to highlight friendship between artists as a valued and important marker of what country music is, and how the industry functions, not just at Tamworth, but all year round.

Those within the field talk about an outside and inside of the field of Australian country music. What this means varies, and is not a simple dichotomy, however one of the key ways in which “insiderness” is judged is through the level of integration one has with the social networks of country music. In being present at festivals (both those that artists have high control over being included in, such as Tamworth and those where artists have to apply and be selected, such as Gympie) artists are in some senses understood as being insiders – they are present at the sites where the realness of the community of country music is experienced. However, attendance at festivals is not sufficient to guarantee entry into the social network. There is a need for artists to seek access – by getting to know others in the industry and becoming enmeshed with the “right” people.

There is a value for artists in these relationships beyond warm fuzzies and the fun artists have hanging out and playing music together. They are rich with social capital. As Bourdieu argues social capital is “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 119). Some people and networks possess greater social capital than others within the field – particularly stars, those with knowledge about how the industry functions and those working within the industry who have decision making powers or money to spend. While the overt discourse about “friendship” disavows the economic and material benefits of these social networks, they are implicated in the inequalities and hierarchies in the field – particularly the “star system”.

Social capital opens up opportunities within the field. The fieldwork account of Troy Cassar-Daley bringing his friends on stage provides opportunities for artists to appear in front of Troy’s sold-out audience. For Craig Campbell and Adam Harvey this may not be a big deal, their fan base and audiences are of comparable size (and material value), but for younger artists, such as Busby Marou, or those with smaller audiences like Lyn

Bowtell, this exposure and publicity is of value. Troy's stamp of approval also has value for these artists – fans follow networks out from their favourite artists, and may make the effort to see or hear the artists featured in Troy's show because of their link to Troy. Troy is also working to establish the shape of the field – who is and is not included in these types of shows (and other "shout outs" via media, social media etc) – has some bearing on the positioning of people within country music. These social networks also open up touring, songwriting, production and other creative opportunities.

Sue spoke of how Bob winning Star Maker meant that the band began being included in the community, being invited to functions where they got to meet artists, managers, media and other industry people gave them greater access to the scene. This had material rewards for her - she gained session work with artists such as Beccy Cole at festivals, as well as a booking as member of the house band for the 2015 "Cruising Country" cruise.

Michael Carpenter also spoke of how social networks help him gain work as a producer:

People having heard other things that I've done, um, or people who are asking people where they would have done something that they've done and ah referring to that, um, I've got this thing where I reckon if I did a family tree for all my clients you could probably bring it down to about three people I've worked with in about 1991. (laughs) And, and that seems ludicrous but it's probably true in the fact that I've had people who have been really, really loyal to me and it has spread, um, and um, and it's been good, it's been very good. And so, there's projects that just keep referred because they would go this 'guy can do anything'.

These networks guide who employs who, who is recognised within the scene and their position in the field.

There are various tickets that provide easier access to this social network. Bob winning Star Maker endowed him with symbolic capital that was (after a time) recognised within

the field and provided access to people and events that he would not have had in the previous year.

Talent, while not necessarily enough on its own, is also cited as the ticket to entry. Karrie Hayward, a 17-year-old singer songwriter from Mackay was drawn into the network at a young age. She has regularly performed with high profile artists such as Melinda Schneider, Adam Harvey, Adam Brand and Amber Lawrence, and each of these artists has provided some form of mentoring and assistance in navigating the field. The discourse that surrounded her integration within the scene is that of “discovering a talent”. The common trope of being discovered busking on Peel Street during the Tamworth Festival is used when talking about Karrie. Those who have taken her under their wing and offered opportunities talk about having seen her play as a twelve year old on Peel St and being blown away by her talent. But they also speak about thinking she was a great kid who has grown into a friend through performing with them. These guest spots, mentoring and recommendation have fed into the development of Karrie’s career – which has included countless competition wins (including the Queensland Champion of Champions and New Talent Award at the Gympie Music Muster), festival bookings (including CMC Rocks North Queensland 2014 and CMC Rocks Queensland 2015) and recording and management deals. Significantly it is personal testimonials from Adam Brand and Adam Harvey that, along with a large photo, feature on Karrie’s homepage:

Every now and then someone comes along that has that special something.... well, what ever it is, Karrie's got it! I can't wait to see the trail this talented young girl is gonna blaze!

- Adam Brand

I really think Karrie is going to be a shining star in the music industry. She has a great voice, she's really keen and dedicated, but most importantly Karrie has that charismatic "wow" factor that only a few artists have.

- Adam Harvey (“Karrie Hayward :: Singer/Songwriter” 2015)

The connection Karrie has with other artists, particularly “stars” is used to legitimise her position in the field. Social capital is central to establishing insiderness and access to the networks that distribute work.

“Mateship”, or “friendship”, is a powerful discourse used by artists, and others within the field, to explain what they do and how they interact within Australian country music. The distinctions between “tradition” and “new” and “real” versus “fake” are evident within the discourse of “mateship”. The discourse of “mateship” draws on the heritage of the “Australian legend” and an idea of a bush or pioneer tradition in which it was necessary for people, or more specifically men, to work together against the elements and hazards of bush life. An egalitarian ethos underpins this ideal and permeates the way the structure, organisation and interaction of the Australian country music scene is spoken about. This is buttressed by the “tradition” of Slim Dusty, in which friendships and relationships took centre stage.

The value placed on personal relationships and the emotional and social connections between artists works to reinforce the idea that enjoyment, support and affection are the motivating forces for artists, not commercial gain. “Mateship” and “friendships” are “real”, as are the motivations of those wanting to play with friends and enjoy themselves.

Furthermore, the discourse of “mateship” works to obfuscate inequality within the field. I shall now move on to explore how the ideas of egalitarianism implicit in the discourse of “mateship” can be in tension with the positions of “star”, “solo artist” and “band”.

Who Is the Star? Fieldwork Account

The stage at the Cessnock School of Arts is fairly small. It is just big enough for Bob, Sue, Dave and Robbie to fit across in a line. Bob is standing centre left, with Dave on his left and Robbie and Sue to his right. The band share two microphones for vocals (their

instruments are amplified). But the microphones are only necessary to enhance the volume of vocals, which can be heard clearly in the small room without amplification.

Midway through the second half of the show Bob starts to introduce the next song, Bob Dylan's "You Ain't Going Nowhere": one of the more recent additions to the band's repertoire, and a song where the lead vocals are shared by Bob, Sue and Dave for a verse each.

Bob starts, "Now, we haven't quite worked this out, now is it, it is a trio isn't it? Now, when there's two people singing it's a duet. But the trio, a trio doesn't sound right."

Dave tries to interject, "A trio is like..."

Bob interrupts, "A trio is like a band, but like a three way vocal collaboration, I would call that a threesome."

The crowd chuckles and Sue intervenes, "Trio".

"It's a trio, you say a trio, I say a threesome!" Bob concludes, and then starts picking the opening bars of the song. As he does he steps forward and to the left, so he is standing in front of Dave. He stays there for a few bars, then turns around and looks at Dave, who plays at being annoyed.

"I'm just hanging out here".

Bob backs back into his "spot", apologising, "Oh sorry, I shouldn't hog the stage like that!"

"It's alright, it is your stage Bob", says Dave.

Bob then starts to move in front of Sue, jesting, "I shouldn't get Aunty Sue upset, I might get in trouble."

"You'll get a smack Bob", utters Dave.

Solo Artists, Bands, Stars

While the observation that Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band are a band could be taken as a given, there is a tension about what that means, what practices are connected to the discourse of “band” and what value this has within Australian country music. Throughout his career Bob has made transitions from (and between) band member, lead singer in a band and solo artist. This began with high school band, The Paisley Brothers and then graduated to his first professional band playing originals, Mercy Dash, from 1990, in which he played rhythm guitar, backing vocals and provided most of the original songs played by the band. Bob then played in a series of bands through the 1990s, including originals bands Bliss, the Cooch Potatoes, and Mother Popcorn (with Roo Grass Band member Dave Carter) and covers bands such as The Loonatic Fringe and the acoustic guitar quartet, 24 Strings. This was in addition to being a “session muso” in many bands and for many solo artists, including Mark Well’s road band.

Bob began his professional recording career as a solo artist with an EP *Dockyard Workers* (2000), his debut album, *The Hurricane Inside* (2007) and then *Storyboard* (2008)¹⁷. The Roo Grass Band was put together by Bob to undertake a regional tour for the *Storyboard* album in 2009 for which he was awarded a \$10,000 Contemporary Music Touring Grant. The group went on to record *Silver Lining* (2010) and *Lucky Country* (2011).

Bob won Star Maker in 2012. Billed as “Australia’s premier country music talent search”, Star Maker has been instrumental in launching key country music artists such as Lee Kernaghan, Keith Urban, and Beccy Cole. This win is significant because the competition is aimed at supporting the careers of solo artists. The competition entry condition states that:

¹⁷ I say “professional recording career” here because Bob recorded albums with the early bands, but this recorded output is no longer available and not included in the discography used in his publicity material.

Toyota Star Maker 2015 is open to solo performers, eighteen years and over, already professionally involved in country music and a resident of Australia (Rural Press Events 2014).

And the prize pack is designed to support a solo artist - it includes a trip to Nashville for one person, guaranteed festival performance opportunities for the “star”, a recording deal, a hair, make up and photography session for one person, and a guitar. As part of the Star Maker prize Bob recorded *Every Day Is A Festival* (2012) which was released as a solo album but had the Roo Grass Band playing on it (with other musicians).

So, while Bob had spent three years from 2009 developing the career and profile of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band, the decision to enter Star Maker was also potentially a decision to break away from the band. The narrative Bob put forward publicly about his decision to enter Star Maker was that his career had reached the limit of what he could achieve as an independent, DIY musician. This limit was of skills, contacts and money.

This public narrative is typified in statements like:

I've exploited everything that I can do as a DIY business person and exhausted all of the funds that I have in the bank account to press on, especially to get to festivals around Australia or to travel around Australia, to co-write with great Australian songwriters. (Gregory 2012)

In this narrative Bob positions his career as separate from the band. This reflected the time and financial investment he had made (and continues to make) in the band. Bob has taken the lead on investment and workload in relation to the Roo Grass Band – it is his business, he provides the financial backing, he does the work associated with promotion, touring and recording as a nearly full time job. He is also the public face of the band. While all members contribute to and give time to the band, they have other projects and points of engagement with the music industry or work. This is not to cast scepticism on his relationship with the band, and his commitment to their existence as a unit. Almost immediately after winning Bob began paying tribute to and connecting his

“star” with the band. In the media coverage the day after his win Bob was reported to have paid tribute to the band who had played a big part in getting him to the point where he won – and then is quoted as saying, “They're the most loving, giving people and they're just over the moon for me” (“Bob Corbett Wins Tamworth’s Star Maker” 2012). He maintained the rest of his performance schedule with the band at Tamworth, but also continued to play with the band and take them on the road during his Star Maker year, rather than become a lone figure. He transformed the process and played with the rules and expectations of the field.

And it was successful, Bob subtly transformed what was possible for Star Maker winners, opening space for collectivity over the lone star. This was reinforced when at the next year’s Star Maker finals Bob and the Roo Grass Band played together. This valedictory performance of the previous year’s winner is tradition at the Star Maker finals. However, usually the previous winner would perform with the same house band that had backed up the finalists. I think the whole year had been a subtle negotiation between Star Maker and Bob about the role of the “star” and the band. The support the Star Maker machine has given to the band was evident through the week at Tamworth.



Figure Four: Bob Corbett performing at the Star Maker Finals, 20 January 2013.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

At the band's gig at the Longyard the day before I had noticed that the band had a new pull up promotional banner with "Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band" printed above a photo of Bob. This was in addition to the one with "Bob Corbett" and the same photo of Bob which had been provided by Rural Press Events/Star Maker earlier in the year. As I helped pack up after that gig I asked Veronica if Star Maker provided the banner, and she said yes. Asking why I wanted to know, I pointed out that it is branded with the band's name, not just Bob's. She had not noticed, and was also surprised.

So why did he do this? The reasons given include that the band grounded him, provided familiarity in a time of change in his career and experience, a point where commercial factors could begin to override creativity; and the band's creative and emotional investment in the musical product were also significant. In the days following his win, Bob commented:

You need an accompanist or a band behind you for certain songs and this is the Roo Grass Band. This isn't a bunch of session musicians that are just on the back line reading charts, they're the best musicians that I know and my best friends as well (cited in Gregory 2012).

The tension between Bob as “star” and Bob as a member of a band is discursively managed through the discourses of friendship and enjoyment.

Being a solo “star” can entail buying into a discourse of stardom and fame, which are often understood as being a “fit” within the commercial imperatives of the field. The discourses of “family” and “friendship” are often used by participants in the field of Australian country music to support claims to authenticity within country music culture – as a way of negotiating an artists’ relationship to the commercial elements of country music. They shape the way artists and others working in the industry relate and interact with each other, but they also work to obfuscate commercial relationships, competition between artists and material gains and are part of the ways the field of Australian country music distributes capital within the field. Rather than value being vested wholly within the material and economic, discourses of both family and mateship/friendship highlight the value derived from relationships.

But the “star” discourse is not the only one implicit in the practices of Bob and the band. Discourses of friendship and family expressed as collectivity, commitment to relationships, and enjoyment and love within the unit are tied to the practice of being a band. The oft repeated sentiments of artists not wanting to play with people they hate, or, in particular not wanting to tour with people they do not like, because it is a long way in a bus between tour stops, shape how the value of bands is understood.

This involved a challenge to the operation of the field. For example, during pre-production for the album Bob reported having to battle to convince Nash Chambers to get the Roo Grass Band in for the sessions, rather than the “usual suspects” who, while

possessing much social and musical capital within the field, were too ingrained in the old ways for Bob. He brought the “outsiders” in and bucked convention within country music record production for “stars” who use the “best” available musicians – the stars of the session muso world. There was also a musical element in this bucking – he challenged the sound of country music, but Nash fought back and challenged Bob’s sound by including a different bass and drum section – there was issue of “fit” with the musical field here. While Bob and the band experienced some resistance to his commitment to the Roo Grass Band it was not universal, and Bob was able to negotiate a position for himself and the band within the field.

Session Musos

Within Australian country music a distinction is drawn between “stars” who are usually solo artists, and musicians or “session musicians” who are the instrumentalists and singers who play in the stars’ backing bands. There is slippage between these two categories (as well as between star and solo artist), but they shape much of the way performance, business, employment and promotional practice is arranged, understood and explained within the scene. The solo artist is the most common form of performer in Australian country music. Bands do exist, and have prominence in the field. But there are many more solo artists. These artists play with bands, drawn from the pool of session musicians that circulate in the scene. Some artists choose to play with whoever is available – changing bands depending on location and availability. While others do use a stable group of musicians as a backing band – “their band” who they like working with. Often these touring bands include many of the same people – session musos will play with many artists.

When asked about the composition of the Australian country music industry, Bob outlined certain positions in the field, which he coupled with the concept of a “star system”:

There's a thing that I think we've definitely borrowed from the American scene. There's definitely a star system... I've always been intrigued as to why it is always one person... like Troy [Cassar-Daley] ...there's a few [bands], like there's Jetty Road who's a band, Bushwhackers as a band, and there's lots of bands out there, but not ones that are sort of you know, big in the... or the popular consciousness ... there's [also] a massive community of session musos ... and that's where it really is, because, the star system, that one star is, unless they're just going out there and play one acoustic guitar... So there's the musicians that make it up, and that's always interchangeable and that type of stuff. And you know there's, there's a whole heap, you can count them on maybe one or two hands, like just the popular producers for the albums and stuff like that. Sometimes I think that people choose producers for the credits, not for the product, you know what I mean? Ah, 'cause that's another star system really. And even the session musos: "Oh such and such has got such and such playing for them" you know. "And I thought such and such was playing for such and such" "Ah no, such and such is now playing for such and such." And so that's kind of a thing that keeps people talking.

There are certain behaviours expected of solo artists, or in particular stars, which are shaped by how those in the field understand and recognise "stars". These include:

- Being a public figure, this involves participating in promotional activities for your own music – media appearances, music videos, promotional photographs, social media. In a band all members are often involved in these promotional processes. Although some bands do have a distinct front person or people who do most of this publicity. This is not expected of session musos, who often attempt to go completely under the radar.
- Being front and centre on stage, commanding the audience attention and controlling the performance, talking to the audience between songs. This is shared in a band. Session musos are not expected to do this, and are at times asked not to.
- Engaging with fans – being open to being approached at festivals and via social media. Also the practice of signings following shows works to reinforce the position of artist

as star or famous person. It is almost universally expected that an Australian country artist who performs a gig or at a festival will, in some way, be available to fans after the show. This is usually through a “signing” where merch and other material is signed by the artist, photos are taken and fans get the opportunity to speak to the artist. Bands are expected to all be available for signings and the like. Again, session musos are not expected to participate in this kind of activity. They are not reliant on fans to get paid, they are employed by the artist to play, and that is often all.



Figure Five: Sue, Bob and Dave singing together.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

At the heart of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band’s experience of Australian country music is the tension between Bob as the “star” who has been recognised as such within parts of the field and the “band”. The band engage in the field as a fixed and consistent unit. The members are constant, they are publicly known. They record, tour, perform and speak about themselves as a group. But there is also a tension, Bob is clearly the

front man, and is positioned within the field as an individual distinct from the band. I deliberately do not use the term solo artist here – because it is a distinct position which Bob works to differentiate himself from because of the band. Bob does most of the publicity, media interviews and such. He is the public face of the band. But the band stand on stage as equals, in a line (most of the time), all speak to the audience during shows (although Bob takes the lead role as MC), all appear in videos, photos and such and engage with fans.

Fans and Artists

Family Friendly: No Sex, Drugs or Rock and Roll

Getting children and young people interested and involved in country music as fans is one way in which participants in the scene attempt to continue the tradition of country music. There is also significant encouragement of young people's involvement as artists. This is often part of a panic about the audience for country music dying out, because a majority of the crowd for most festivals and gigs are "grey nomads"¹⁸, or retirees. The involvement of children is seen as an important indicator that the future of country music is safe. But this is also part of a broader discourse about the safety of country music, often counterpoised to rock n roll or pop music which is seen as dangerous, highly sexualised and adult.

To return to Bob's final gig of the Lucky Country Hall Tour in New Lambton discussed above, the gig was timed to facilitate kids' attendance: Sunday at 3pm. This was not an unusual occurrence – throughout the tour the standard run was an eight o'clock Friday and Saturday night show and Sunday afternoon, with the show at two or three o'clock (and the occasional Thursday night show). This allowed the band to travel home after the gig, to see family and prepare for school and working weeks, but also established the tour's practice of including one very child friendly gig on each leg (the design of the tour will be discussed in greater detail in "Part Three: Places and Spaces"). The fact that shows on this tour were not in pubs and licensed venues also meant that kids were often present at the night time shows, but the later start did deter mass attendance (or just meant kids slept through the show).

¹⁸ Grey nomads is a name given to retirees who travel around Australia in caravans and motorhomes, particularly through coastal and rural areas and Central Australia, often having sold their family home to fund the travelling lifestyle.

The family friendly nature of the tour built on the approach Bob and the band had developed over a number of years at the Tamworth Country Music Festival, where the band had attracted and courted an increasing audience of children during the festival. The combination of daytime gigs in beer gardens or other child-friendly outdoor venues, the happy, upbeat sound of the band, and their active engagement with the younger audience (both on and off stage) had meant that not only were children often taken along to gigs by their parents, but they wanted to stay or return. They became fans. Bob's kids often came to the Tamworth gigs, and other members of the band would often bring their kids to the festival for a day or two, along with local cousins and friends. But kids from outside the immediate Roo Grass family were also fans.

By the 2014 Tamworth Country Music Festival the involvement of kids was well established, and on the Friday, at the band's first gig of the festival, a group of up to twenty kids aged between one and ten years old, spent the whole three hours of the gig dancing on the deck of the Longyard Hotel. They gathered at the front of the stage, taking up most of the dance floor, singing along to songs, dancing, and attempting to get the band's attention, squealing when they did. At one point Bob referred to them as the "Joey Grass Band", a new moniker for this group of dedicated fans. The set breaks for this show were really long, at half an hour or more: because Bob spends them signing posters he has been giving out to the kids and getting photos with them. During sets he got them involved in the many call and response style songs, including "New Orleans", which has an audience echo of "Hey-ey" on each line of the chorus. At this Tamworth gig Bob sets it up with the whole crowd at the start of the song – humming the melody of the chorus and then pointing to the crowd to elicit the "hey-ey". But at the end of a chorus mid way through the song he signalled to Michael, Dave and Robbie to slow it down and hold the groove.

“Okay, we’re gonna do a bit of a sing along down here”, he said as he took the microphone from the stand, climbed over the fold-back speaker and onto the edge of the stage, a truck trailer, leaning on the veranda railing the stage is parked against.

“Okay kids, here’s your job...” he turned back to the band and counted back into the chorus, “1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4” and then yelled “Hey-ey” throwing his hands in the air, index fingers pointed at the group of kids gathered on the other side of the railing. Picking the girl who yelled the loudest along with him, he threw to her with the mic for the next “hey-ey”, and then to the growing group of children leaning in to sing into the mic as well. He sang a chorus, perched on the edge of the truck stage, throwing the mic over to the kids at the end of each line for an increasingly enthusiastic “hey-ey”. At the end of the chorus he asked Sue and Robbie for fiddle and guitar solos, staying at the front of stage, saying to the kids, “We’ll do the last chorus together, okay?” which is met with big smiles, giggles and excited shuffles.

This was the norm in Tamworth, but was maintained on the Lucky Country Hall Tour, where kids were treated as a special part of the crowd. Part of Jenny’s self-appointed, but valued, duties during the shows was to dance with the kids (a job I was, at times, also roped into), and make them feel welcome, valued and have fun. This engagement with the kids is largely guided by enjoyment – the band, but particularly Bob, relish the excited and enthusiastic response of the children (or any crowd!). But there are a few other things going on here. It is part of attracting and maintaining a fan base – these kids have parents who are coming to the show and who can safely assume that it will not only be appropriate for children, but that the kids will, most likely, enjoy it. The active engagement with the children is also part of an approach to the relationship between artist and audience, or fan engagement, which I will be exploring below. But significantly, in relation to the discourses of family friendliness, these practices of engaging with the kids mark Bob as fitting within the field of country music.

Fostering a young fan base is not a new or unusual thing in Australian country music – a tradition of family or kids albums exists (for example John Williamson's *JW's Family Album No 1* (1990), and *JW's Family Album No 2* (1996), *Kasey Chambers, Poppa Bill and The Little Hillbillies* (2009)) and gigs arranged and marketed as kids shows are common at festivals like Tamworth. Notably, these family albums and specific kids shows are just an extension, or supplement to country music in general, which in most contexts abides by a "family friendly" ethos.

There is an unwritten set of rules in Australian country music about not swearing on stage, being nice to people, it being okay to talk about heavy drinking and sex but within limits and in specific contexts (such as night time shows, or over 18s venues). Practices are limited by the discourse of family friendliness. This allows parents to take their children to see bands and to festivals, with the expectation that it will be appropriate for children. There are notable points where this discourse is ignored or abandoned, such as late nights at festivals such as the Gympie Muster (the Crow Bar in particular) where it is assumed that children have gone to bed, and where the music and crowd are rowdier, alcohol flows more freely, and the rules of decency cease to govern stage banter. A festival like Mud, Bulls and Music (Muddies), which is held in November each year in Jimna, QLD, is part of country music's heavier drinking, rough country culture associated with the B&S Ball scene. B&S is short for Bachelor and Spinster Balls which are events held in rural areas which involve bands, cheap or all you can drink alcohol and a series of traditions such as Ute stunts, "formal" or fancy dress, throwing containers of food dye at members of the crowd and games. The crowd is young and the focus is on partying, drinking and engaging in casual sexual activity. Most people camp out in swags, utes or tents. At Mud, Bulls and Music there are fewer children than the Gympie Muster, Tamworth Country Music Festival or other festivals, but the organisers of Muddies promote their family friendly credentials in their promotional material and social media

presence, and include kids entertainment during the day with “The Farmer Rob Show”.

There are different logics at each of these festivals (as sub-fields within the field of Australian country music) which in some ways can be explained through this discourse of family friendliness. The festivals with a greater focus on “community” over drinking or commerciality tend to be more family friendly.

It needs to be noted that the “family” is tacitly heterosexual, and the social conservatism of country music acts as a (moveable, but real) limit to what can be made public by an artist. Beccy Cole presented much of her family life to the public, her divorce was a source for songs, stage banter and jokes, her son featured in video clips - a narrative of her marriage, divorce and motherhood were central to her public persona. Her mother, also a country artist, regularly appeared on stage with her and was a big part of her story as an artist. Beccy professed openness and honesty in her performance, songwriting and engagement with the field of country music for 20 odd years. But there was a limit to this openness and in 2012 she came out as a lesbian. In the Australian Story episode in which she made this revelation Beccy disclosed:

I was extremely worried about people finding out from an audience point of view. I thought people wouldn't want to come and see me. My career was just starting to take off at the time that I realised I was gay, so I was just so scared that I was going to lose that, and I thought, I can't, I can't take that risk. It was automatically, 'How do I hide it from everybody?' (quoted in Cheshire 2012)

There was a sense throughout Beccy's career that the worry was because heterosexuality, and in the context of this argument, heterosexual families, were what were valued, assumed and allowed in the field. To be family friendly was also to be straight. She would make oblique jokes about her sexuality on stage for years prior to coming out (it was not a closely guarded secret in the last few years) and most people would look blank, few would laugh. The risk in coming out was that she would disrupt a narrative of country music families being straight families, and that some honesty was

just too dangerous. Beccy coming out worked to open space in the discourse of family for things other than heterosexuality, with little backlash, but is it still a limited space.

No Strangers, Just Mates You Haven't Met Yet: Fieldwork Account

Late Saturday night at the 2012 Gympie Music Muster Bob Corbett leads me to a campfire concert deep within the campgrounds that surround the festival site. Beside a stranger's camper trailer, by the light of a roaring fire, Bob's normal, exuberant and energetic stage persona gives way to a subdued, quiet and pensive performer. Jokes are made and songs are improvised to the sound of an airbed being inflated by a foot pump just outside the light of the campfire, but his mood, and that of the small crowd, is calm and hushed. This is at least the second night the campfire has been host to musicians, and the night before had involved a larger collection of musicians playing and singing. While a group of artists performing at the festival are present, Busby Marou, Lou Bradley, and a bunch of session musos, tonight alcohol and other substances have reduced the numbers willing and able to participate, so it is mainly Bob providing the music.

He plays *Western Star*, a slow country waltz off the album he was at the Muster to launch. On the album the song has a banjo, acoustic guitar and bass accompaniment with fiddle and Dobro solos. Tonight, the barely audible guitar and nearly whispered vocals, along with the slow, swaying rhythmic movement of the song captivates the circle.

This is a different side to the Bob I have come to know after two years of following him and the band. His love of story and song, belief in the power of lyric to move and music to soothe or excite, and care in performing become more evident than I have ever appreciated. Yes, he is just adjusting his performance for the current crowd: a bunch of friends, strangers and musical peers gathered closely around a campfire; but he seems to know he already has us, there is not the show-off's need to win over that one guy in

the back of the raucous bar. Bob comments at one point that this is what he loves about festivals like this, “sharing what you love with a bunch of friends, old and new”.

The party disperses at about 3am, Bob realises that he has to drive the 958km home that day with the rest of the band.

A few hours later, at about 7am, as the campgrounds begin to show signs of life, I run into the owner of the campsite we had crashed earlier that morning. She recognises me as a friend of Bob’s and asks if I know where he is staying because she would love to buy an album and get a photo with him. Having just parted with the band who were packing the last of their gear into the car and trailer a bit further into the campgrounds, I told her they were likely to drive past any moment. We started chatting and I asked how her and her husband came to host the campfire sessions. She replied, “We just liked having people around, and wanted to give the musos somewhere to come and relax, so we just asked some of them, and then word spread. This festival is all about the people you meet and get to spend time with.”

Bob pulls up beside us, recognising me, and not the host of the late night, early morning events. Both husband and wife had sat back quietly at the campfire, so it had been difficult to tell who owned the camper we had all been leaning on. I introduce Bob to her saying she would love to buy an album and get a photo. He jumps out of the car, grabs some albums and a permanent marker, and starts to sign the band’s entire back catalogue, “What’s your husband’s name?” he asks, as she says she’ll need to go grab some more cash from the campsite. “Nah, don’t worry, my gift to you. Thanks for providing us with such an awesome experience. Real Muster style.”

She acquiesces to this compliment, pulls out her camera and asks for a photo with Bob who, dressed in a worn, faded black singlet and black Adidas three stripe trackies, agrees. Photos taken and CDs handed over, Bob gets back into the car, once again

thanking Mary for the campfire and saying it was great to meet her, and she replies, “as they say: there are no strangers at the Muster, just good mates you haven't met yet”.

“Mates Around the Fire”: Friendship, Equality and Fandom in Australian Country Music

The above fieldwork account begins to reveal some of the ways in which the values of equality, accessibility, hospitality and easygoing sociality underpin the everyday practices within the field of country music in Australia. The explicit reference to “mates” in the account above provides a starting point for exploring how mateship, as a marker of Australian cultural identity incorporates the discourses of friendship to categorise, explain and shape relations between individuals within the scene - particularly between artists and fans.

This fieldwork account also throws light on a tension within the field. The overt discourse of equality and egalitarianism has limits, and the difference between this somewhat exceptional incident and the programmed performances on which the rest of the festival is based, is that a hierarchisation of artists and fans pervades the field. The aura of fame and stardom is reinforced by artists and festival organisers through a suite of practices such as performing in front of gathered crowds, on stage and under lights; seeking recognition or fame in the process of recording, promoting and selling music; signing merchandise after the show; and other moves within the field to gain social, cultural and symbolic capital. The discourses of equality, egalitarianism and “mateship” work to distance artists from certain parts of the aura of fame and stardom, and thus commerciality. The discussion of relationships between artist and fan in terms of friendship or mateship obfuscates the commercial nature of this relationship – an artist needs fans to buy their records.

“The Front Row”: Slim as Friend of the Fans

Slim Dusty and Joy McKean regularly spoke of their relationship with fans as one of friendship. In the acknowledgments in his “autobiography” (written with Joy McKean) Slim ends with this thank-you:

To all the people of Australia from all walks of life who have listened to my songs, come to my shows, written to me, and let me know that they consider me a personal friend – your friendship is my most treasured memento (Dusty and McKean 1996, x).

Toby Martin notes the way in which Slim and Joy spent time on stage paying tribute to the relationship with their audience:

The sense of family also extended to the audience. Unlike many rock shows, where part of their power derives from the rigid line between audience and performer, the line at a Slim Dusty concert seemed almost invisible. Predominantly over the age of sixty, the audience seemed to be mostly veterans of Slim Dusty Shows and there was a consequent sense of intimacy between those in the seats and those on stage. Joy McKean called out to some ‘old friends’ during the concert, wished several people happy birthday and congratulated others on a recent wedding anniversary. The idea of fans as family was memorialised in McKean’s song ‘The Front Row’, which celebrated the loyalty of their audience. Dusty often spoke of the intimate relationship he had with his audience and the way in which this, in turn, fed back into his music. Many of his songs were written by fans who approached him after the shows, songs in hand. (Martin 2015, 4).

Elsewhere, Martin argues that “this intimacy has been a defining feature of Dusty’s attitude” and that Slim’s practice of recording songs written by fans and handed to him after the show meant that “in the world of Slim Dusty, the roles of ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ became blurred into one universal, continuing culture” (Martin 2011a, 4).

Again the Dusty family can be seen to provide a template for how country musicians should act – as friends and equals with their audience. The expectation that artists be accessible to fans is historically conditioned.

Accessibility of “Stars”

Jon Fitzgerald highlights the relationship Troy Cassar-Daley has with his fan base as significant within his career in Australian country music, noting that “he acknowledges fans at every opportunity and endeavours to develop a sense of personal connection with them” (Fitzgerald 2005, 108–109). Fitzgerald notes the personal style of communication Troy engaged in on the “chatroom” section of his website - posting first person comments about everyday things in casual, informal language. This has migrated to social media in recent years, with Troy being an active user of Facebook and Twitter in the manner described by Fitzgerald. He also notes the “relaxed, friendly intimacy” of the interaction Troy engages in with fans at live performance:

During a live performance in 2003 at the Lismore Workers Club (attended by the author), Cassar-Daley chatted with the audience as a whole, directed specific comments to family and friends, and responded to comments and requests from the floor. Cassar-Daley spends considerable time chatting with fans and signing autographs after gigs. (Fitzgerald 2005, 110)

The characteristics of personal connection, humility, gratitude and respect (along with sensitivity) are central to Troy Cassar-Daley’s engagement with and success in Australian country music. This is not an aberration in country music, and while some artists do it better than others (taking into account shyness and other factors), artists are expected to interact with their audience not only after shows, but also online, on the street and at festivals.

When I asked Bob to describe the nature of the interaction between him and his audience, or fans, he said:

Ah, hopefully friendship. I never really want there to be a divide. A friend of mine that I used to play with, we’d finish gigs and a drunk person would come up and say something and I’d talk to them. And then they’d say exactly the same somewhere else, but I’d give them the time of day. But this person would walk

away, and he said to me 'I just don't know how you can fucking handle these people'. And it stretched across to the, it was always just 'us' and 'them', and not just with the drunk people. I don't like to see it that way, I like to see it as us, I just happen to be playing music today. Yes, I want that person's \$20 to buy a CD, I'd be a liar if I didn't say that, but it doesn't matter if they don't buy it as well. So my relationship, hopefully there is a friend thing. I'm not going to remember everyone's names and stuff, but friendship. And equality, not an us and them thing. Just because you are up on stage doesn't make you [any better than them]...

This extends to the on-stage performance practices with Bob also noting when asked what is excluded from the banner of country music:

particular attitudes, like... a disdain for the audience and things like that. Which goes really well with the Sex Pistols... I think that's definitely excluded. I think that people maybe do not consciously expect it but there is that mateship relationship...

The ideals of equality and egalitarianism implicit in the discourse of "mateship" shape and explain the ways artists and fans relate in the field of Australian country music. The small size of the field enables a culture of one-to-one interaction between artist and fan that would not be possible in a field where arena shows and crowds in the tens of thousands was the norm.

Conventions of pop star and fan relations imply distance and inequality, with the "star" being separate, distanced and above the undifferentiated mass of fans (or consumers). While this has changed in recent years, particularly with the increased prominence of social media which enables greater opportunities for direct communication between "stars" and "fans". However in mainstream pop and mainstream country music in America this "one-to-oneness" is limited by the size of the audience. An artist selling millions of albums is likely receiving thousands of tweets, comments and messages from fans a day. Additionally, signing autographs for audiences numbering in the tens of thousands is not viable. VIP packages and "meets and greets" are offered when overseas "superstars" visit Australia but they often cost significantly more than the concert ticket,

are limited in number or are prizes in competitions. The CMA Music Festival (also known as the CMAFest) is the world's biggest country music festival and is held in Nashville each June. A significant part of this festival is FanFair where fans can get autographs or photos with the artists performing at the festival. Four-day ticket holders get free entry or fans can pay a daily or four-day pass to enter. Additional tickets distributed via a sweepstake are required for some artist signings or up-close performances, generally the biggest names on the festival lineup.

This type of distancing is very unusual within Australian country music. A standard of "one-to-one" relationships and connection between fan and artists is idealised and valued within the field. This is also discussed as being one of the unique and special things about the field. The smaller scale of the Australian country music industry, the size of audiences at most gigs and festivals and the accessibility of artists through social media work with the discourses of openness, accessibility and egalitarianism to shape what an "authentic" relationship between an artist and fan looks like. Yet this ignores or covers a complicated inequality inherent in these relationships. The centrality of a practice like signings simultaneously reinforces the accessibility and egalitarianism of the scene, while also establishing an unequal affective power relationship – the fan lines up to meet their idol, buy their wares and express adoration. There is a heightened sense of awe and excitement when a fan meets a "star" or their favourite artist. But, the discourse of "mateship" or "friendship" works to conceal some of the inequality and establish relationships based on enjoyment, gratitude and fondness rather than money.

Fans are customers and discourses of "friendship" serve to smooth over the economic arrangement. The aura of the "star" distances the artist from the "fan" and is actively built and enhanced through practices like placing the artist on stage and under spotlights; ritualised merchandise signings where fans line up for autographs and

photos with objects of obsession or worship; and arrangement of performing spaces into public and private realms – backstage does exist and is closed to most fans, yet getting in there is the holy grail for many fans.

Part Three: Places and Spaces

Introduction

This part deals with two key aspects of how discourses about spaces and places, particularly rural spaces and places, are used within the field of Australian country music to legitimise participation in the field, and to explain practices. The reference to places and spaces as “country” works to shape the logic of the field and the way activities such as festival and touring are understood. In the first section, this Part examines how Australian country music artists constantly work to legitimise their position through geographic place. Underpinned by the distinction between “country” and “city” artists narrate an identity and experience that “fits” within a field in which the “country”, be it rural place, communities, agricultural activities and experience or landscapes, has high symbolic value. Through an exploration of “home” and “travel” as tropes used by agents to connect to “country” this section deliberately focuses on rhetorical and speech based practices, as this narration of place is a speech act used by artists to legitimise their position.

The second section, on spaces, examines Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band’s Lucky Country Hall Tour and the ways in which the tour was discursively positioned as different from contemporary country music touring styles. Central to this difference was the idea that the halls, or spaces, themselves shaped an experience of “country-ness”, particularly in relation to tradition, old fashioned DIY approaches and aesthetics, and connection to community. To fully explore how this tour was positioned as different a survey of contemporary touring “places” is included. The exploration of spaces and touring also reveals the tension between authenticity and commerciality in Australian country music.

Places

Where I'm from, My Home: Fieldwork Account

Gympie Music Muster (QLD), Thursday 23 August 2012

Sitting on bar stools positioned evenly across the Grove stage are the three artists featured in this APRA Songwriter Speaks session: Felicity Urquhart, Dan Hannaford and Jasmine Rae. Perched at the end of the row is Karl Brodie, a Scottish-born artist who now lives in Australia, who is moderating the “songwriters in the round” session. The songwriters each take a turn, introducing a song, speaking about the inspiration behind it, answering questions put by Karl, and then performing the song, backed only with an acoustic guitar. At the end of one of the songs Karl asks the group of artists, “How does ‘home’ figure in your songwriting?”

He pauses, looks up and down the row and settles his attention on Jasmine, who lives in Melbourne, Victoria, the second biggest city in Australia. She winces, laughs and then responds, “I’m not from the country, and that has always made writing songs about ‘home’ harder in this genre. It is assumed that home is a farm or small town. But on this next album I have embraced that I am from the city. But I have also always tried to sing abstract songs about where I am from or at, rather than songs about the exact place. That way everyone can relate.”

Tamworth (NSW), January 2013

Kevin Bennett, flanked by his band, is on the small stage which stands in the back corner of the large beer garden behind the Tamworth Hotel. He brushes his long hair off his face and begins introducing his autobiographical song, “The Ballad of K.B. (for Blondie)”. “We grew up in a little town called Kenebri, well, that is the big town, the little town that we actually grew up in was called Wolleybah. Wolleybah, isn’t that a great name? And it

was built around a sawmill. There was no town, there was no petrol bowser, no pub, or general store. There was a sawmill. It had a few workers on it and the workers had kids and there we were in the middle of nowhere. Cutting up wood and stuff. And my dad, my mum and dad, once a week would go up to the local town, Baradine, where I was born, and get paralytic. Me and my brother, Blondie, would go to the pictures and get back in the car and drink Fanta and eat chips, and wake up the next morning safe and sound in our bedrooms. Not even aware of the hideous drive that must have happened on the way home.”

He then launches into the song:

I grew up in a timber town, a one horse race

Left my younger brother living in his older brother's place. We both got lumbered with my father's face

My mother said son, its no disgrace. Oh no. That's just the way it goes.

I used to be a worker but I never broke my back

I always knew that there was something better down the track...

Franklin, Tennessee (USA), Wednesday 24 September

Kevin Bennett stands alone on the stage at Liberty Hall in The Factory about thirty-five kilometres out of Nashville. He is one of four Australian acts chosen to play in the Australian special of live radio show *Music City Roots* in the week after the Americana Music Festival. Having launched straight into playing his first song, Kevin begins his second song with a story, “Thank you for having us here, in your beautiful country. This is a song of mine about a river that flowed near where I come from. It's a place called the Pilliga Scrub and it's in Northern New South Wales in Australia. Aboriginal people frequent the place. It's kind of like the Okefenokee Swamps, I would think; it's kinda mysterious, there's voodoo down there, don't go down there alone. It's that kinda place.

My dad used to take us down to the river every weekend, and that's what this song is all about. It's called 'Paul Kelly's Blues'."

Pour out your painted days, and all your wondrous ways

And take me down to the river

Hold my hand so tight, don't let me go tonight Just lead me down to the river

Cause it's my home, away from home. It's my house, it's made out of stone

And I know, I'm not alone, on the banks, of the river

Kevin begins to introduce his next song, "Australian for a Broken Heart", "Here's a song that popped out when I was thinking about American music. Because we're recycling it and basically giving it back to you, with a bit of Australian stuff stuck to it. And I know that, and you know that and that's cool."

"Boys (and Girls) from the Bush": Rurality and Country Music

Country music artists continually narrate their place geographically and lay claim to a connection with place. "Home" is one of the powerful ways in which artists can demonstrate and explain their relationship to place, and is strongly tied to the discourses of family, friendship and community (explored in "Part Two: People and Relationships"). However, it also draws on a broader set of distinctions about country versus city. "Home" is imagined as the place you grew up, where you now live, where your family is or somewhere you feel a great connection to¹⁹; it is also thought of at various scales – individual (a house, a piece of land, a spot), local (a town, region), or national (Australia). These fieldwork accounts reveal ways in which artists narrate their geographic position as a context for understanding who they are and the music they make – Jasmine as a city girl and Kevin's through his childhood in the remote Pilliga Scrub. These stories, and countless others told by artists on stage, through lyrics and in

¹⁹ See "Appendix Three - Where Artists Live" for a list of artists referred to in this thesis, their "homes" and a location map.

promotional and media appearances, reveal how “home” or “origin”, and particularly if that is in the country, are significant tropes within Australian country music. The fixation on home is also tied to the nostalgic frame of country music – a longing for how things used to be, a celebration of the past and championing of history.

The meaning of “country” varies – it can be used to denote Australia, rural space and community, farming and farmland, isolated and remote areas or land and nature in general – but is essentially that which is not the city or urban areas. And any definition used in Australian country music draws on a combination of place, people and ways of life. More broadly, it is acknowledged that definitions of the rural or country are complex:

In the Australian case, a cluster of overlapping terms – rural, remote, regional, country, pastoral, bush, outback – has emerged in both official and vernacular languages to account for the diversity of ‘non-urban’ experiences, economic, political and cultural (Carter, Darian-Smith and Gorman-Murray 2008, 28).

In a later special issue of *Cultural Studies Review* this complexity was again noted: “This diversity includes a broad range of places, landscapes, people, practices and relationships between these” (Evers, Gorman-Murray and Potter 2010, 4).

This same diversity marks country music, however as an object of study it differs somewhat to those included in these special issues. Country music is not clearly geographically located. Certain festivals do take place in rural, remote or “country” areas, but others take place in cities or clearly urban areas. It is a virtual culture in many ways, with no clear home, geographic location or infrastructure. There are concentrations of recording studios and artists in places like the Central Coast of NSW, Sydney, Melbourne or Newcastle, but no single base for Australian country music (unlike say American country music with its Nashville home). However, the discursive framework of Australian country music clearly locates the field within a rural heartland.

The way in which people, artists in particular, speak about their identity, musical performance and touring practices connects ideas of Australian rural life and spaces to authentic country music. The discourses relating to places and spaces work to position country music artists and fans as emerging from and belonging to the country – be it rural farmland, small communities or landscapes.

In many ways the approach to ideas of the rural in this thesis draws on Gorman-Murray, Darian-Smith and Gibson's argument that:

Cultural approaches challenged the definition of the rural as an objectively measurable material or physical space demarcated through quantifiable demographic or social differences, such as population density or distinct economic activities such as agriculture, mining or forestry (2008, 38).

In this figuring, the rural is conceived as a "subjective and socially constructed phenomena, located in people's minds" and becomes a "symbolic lens for certain moral and cultural values which vary across time and space" (Gorman-Murray, Darian-Smith and Gibson 2008, 38). It is the idea of country that this Part explores. The work of Gibson and Davidson (2004) and Martin (2011b) exploring the practices and discourses used to market "rurality" as a quality of the Tamworth Country Music Festival also frames the arguments below.

"Country" versus "city" is one of the overarching distinctions within the field, through which participants determine what is legitimate, or "authentic". The negotiation of these distinctions by artists shapes the structure, logic and practices within the field. The practice of locating yourself in place is more distinct when "home" is in the country. This "home" could be a childhood home, a home that you had to move away from or a current home. Jasmine Rae's response to a question about home, reveals the way in which "home" is presumed to be located in the "country", and that this is a source of inspiration for an artist and connection with their audience.

Urban and city experiences are represented in the field. But those artists not from the country or with no strong connection to rural areas, such as Jasmine Rae, have to work harder to legitimise their position in the field, or just do it in a different way. They do this through other discourses such as “family” or “mateship” (see “Part Two: People and Relationships”), “honesty” and autobiographical songs (see “Part Four: Performance”), or “travelling” (to be explored later in this part). I am not positing that this “country”/“city” distinction is always a binary or continuum, often they are just points in the field. Later in this section I will explore how artists position themselves in relation to rural place or “country” in relation to touring practices and discourses of “touring”, “on the road” and “travel”.

Within the field there have been more and less correct ways to be country. Historically, authenticity was attached to those who were “truly” country, that is, that they were from the country, they had spent time there or could convincingly talk the talk or walk the walk. As Smith puts it, “people choose a music not merely because it talks about their life, but because it talks like their life” (2005, 83). The pressure on artists to function in an autobiographical mode – that is telling stories from personal experience – and the expectation of “truth” and “honesty” that underpins Australian country music is also in play here (see “Part Four: Performance” for a discussion of personas and honesty). The “country” as “home” narrative confirms that you are speaking from a place of experience.

To return to the fieldwork note that opened this Part, Kevin’s stories of his childhood growing up in the timber mill “town” of Wolleybah, his relationship to the landscape and river, and experiences of country life are central to the persona he presents, and the way in which that persona is recognised within the field. In recent years this has been added to as he revealed the discovery of his Aboriginal heritage. The narrative now explores

finding out he is Aboriginal and how this explained the relationship he had with land and those places. This is not to suggest that these stories are falsified, exaggerated or cynical attempts to legitimise a position – but rather that they are intelligible and possible within Australian country music. These origin stories provide useful context for understanding how Kevin “fits” within the field. The stories artists choose to tell on stage and the way they position themselves, their music and other practices, reveal what is valued within Australian country music.

Other artists articulate their life stories and narrative of involvement in country music to certain places and imagined worlds. For John Williamson place is central, particularly rural space. Songs such as “Mallee Boy”, “Cootamundra Wattle” and “Galleries of Pink Galahs” are said to tell the stories of his childhood home and experience on farms in the Mallee region of Victoria. Most of his other songs explore, describe or celebrate other Australian landscapes, communities, characters or rural experiences. What is significant in Williamson’s work is the Australian landscape – the bush, iconic landmarks and landscapes, animals – and his relationship to that, either instrumental relationship working as a farmer, or “respect” and awe as a “bush lover” (Williamson 2014, 59–60). Williamson explains his position:

I was a hard worker but far too lazy mentally to keep up with the technical side of it all. You can’t make a living on the land by just loving it but thankfully, with songs, I have made a living out of that love. My vagueness has made me a songwriter, otherwise I think I might have struggled on the land. I’m far too romantic about the bush! And I’ll go on trying to help people appreciate the beauty of it until I die (Williamson 2014, 67).

In his autobiography and stage banter, even relationships with prominent people, such as John Laws, Charles Wooley, Steve Irwin, Bob Brown, Rolf Harris, Ted Egan and Warren H Williams are described through their relationship to or with the land, a shared

love or experience of the landscape, rural communities, and its animals – not in terms of the musical, creative, or business relationship they share.

Part of Williamson's persona is an obstinate belief that country music should rely on a particular rendering of Australian national identity, unsullied by American country music (or culture in general or commercial interests). He consistently posits that Australian country music should have the quality of being "distinctly Australian", which while an amorphous concept, is invariably linked to rural Australia. He consistently expresses disdain about Nashville and American country music and the influence and relationship they have to Australian country music (as explored in the Introduction to this thesis). He sets himself up in opposition to any Americanisms:

It was also around this time that I fully rejected the country and western image... I accepted my first Golden Guitar in 1985 in white jeans, T-Shirt and sandals. As I've mellowed I've dressed more like I did on the land... It's really the outfits resembling the American country music culture that I still reject (Williamson 2014, 121–123).

This love of land, experience in the bush, and rejection of outside influences, particularly American, is the source of his "country-ness" and way in which he works to position himself in the field and try to shape the field.

Beccy Cole focuses less on rural locations, land or agricultural experience – except where she pokes fun at her lack of such experience. Rather, she focuses on people. Place does figure in her songs, stories and image – her childhood home of Blackwood, beaches, experiences of touring the outback – but this focus is secondary to relationships. In her stage banter, media appearances and autobiography her "country-ness" is expressed through reference to friendships, musical partnerships, influences and experiences in communities.

Lee Kernaghan goes to great lengths on stage, in the media and in his memoir to position his songwriting in the “country” – telling stories of Garth Porter (his main songwriting collaborator and producer) and his songwriting trips to the desert, the bush, Longreach, and a range of other rural places. In these places they search for inspiration and to collect stories so they can try to capture the essence of places, people and community in their songs. Each album and song featured in his memoir is articulated to the place, or places, it was written, workshopped and developed, be it his shack in south east Queensland (which is, oddly, in the same range as the shack Williamson now lives in), the cabin in the Blue Mountains, the Birdsville Track or a small town in Victoria affected by drought.

One of the main logics of the field of country music is that you always turn your mind to the relationship you have with the land, country or rural areas. Distinctions between and within “country” and “city” provide a frame through which participants within the field determine what is legitimate and valued, explain practice, experience and history, and through which “authenticity” is recognised.

“Just to Say That We Did It. Another Cultural Experience”: Fieldwork Account

Bob and the band have just played the opening gig on main stage of the Mud Bulls and Music festival. The festival is an annual event, which runs for four days on the first weekend in November on a property called Landcruiser Mountain Park, a 10,000 acre “wilderness, camping and 4WD park” near Jimna, a small town on the Sunshine Coast hinterland in Queensland, about one hundred and fifty kilometres from Brisbane. The venue is, by city standards, isolated. To enter the festival most people drove the road from Kilcoy of which the last thirty to forty kilometres is unsealed roads. The Tarago campervan I have rented for the weekend bounces around or vibrates its way down the road, slowly filling with the fine dust thrown up by the four-wheel drives that keep

passing my slow moving house on wheels. While the promotional material claims that the festival site is 2WD accessible – it is not 2WD comfortable!

Eating dinner one night Bob asks what everyone wants to see that evening, and the band scrabbles for their copies of the program.

“I think I want to go see the rodeo. I have never done that before!” says Dave.

Bob assents to this plan and the boys head over to the Events Area where the “Bundaberg Rum Bucking Thunder Rodeo” is taking place. Watching a guy be thrashed around by an 800kg bull and then, having been thrown from its back, run and jump the side rails to escape the post-ride pursuit by the thundering bull, Bob expresses disbelief.

“I don’t understand. What is going on here? Why are these people doing this? It looks painful.” He trails off as the rodeo clown dodges a bullhorn by centimetres.

“Really painful, and potentially lethal.”

Later in the same week I interview Bob and he mentions that the band had been approached to play at a Bachelor and Spinster (B&S) Ball.

“And I’m tempted to just do one. Just like we were tempted to go and watch the rodeo the other night. Just to say that we did it. Another cultural experience.”

City Boy

Bob Corbett, like Jasmine Rae, is not from the country. He has lived his whole life in Newcastle, the second most populated area of New South Wales. Newcastle is an industrial city, rather than a rural or agricultural centre. Bob’s father, Paul, was a dockyard worker, and later a loans officer for Newcastle Permanent; his mother, Veronica, worked in white-collar jobs. The “country as home” trope does not work for Bob. The fieldwork account above reveals the unfamiliarity with which Bob approaches certain elements of “rural” culture, which while peripheral to country music

performance, are significant cultural experiences or events in rural areas, and which are often co-located with country music events. Both rodeos and B&S have historically been regular events across rural Australia, and have strong connections to country music, with it being the music style played at these events. Both events are also depicted in many country music lyrics. Bob's description of the B&S and rodeo as "a cultural experience" serves to highlight the distance he has from this element of the field. His "fit" with these aspects of the scene is not great.

When asked about how important patriotism was in country music Bob highlighted a connection between Australian national identity, country music and place:

It's huge....when it's done the right way, it's so awesome, but it's so easy to make it naff as well... I would rather write a song like 'Aborigine' than write a song about me being proud to be an Australian. You know? Not that I'm not, but I would rather write songs that, with stories that probably need to be told, or the way I feel need to be told, than just singing a song, what's an example – like 'I'm an Australian boy'²⁰ –I couldn't write a song like that, but fair dinkum I find myself singing that song... But I reckon it's really, really important, because that's where all the stories are, like from Slim... I guess I won't approach it by going 'wow, I really like that sunset in Mildura'²¹, I'm going to write a verse song called the Mildura Sunset'. I've got to actually have a real reason for it, or a protest or um, yeah, like I don't know whether I am a landscape writer, like some people can do it really, really well, like John Williamson... like [Bob's song] 'Lucky Country' ... I would rather write those types of songs about Australia, that sound like I'm complaining, but it's, it's just offering what I believe is the real picture, it's like just take a step back and have look at the big picture and it's pretty good, ah [sings] 'it's as good as the Mildura sunseeet', I just can't do that for some reason...

²⁰ Referring to the Lee Kernaghan song "Australian Boy" (off his 2009 album *Planet Country*), with lyrics such as

"I got roots where the saltbush grow,
I'm an Australian Boy
In the land of boredom and brigalow
I'm an Australian Boy"

²¹ A regional city in northwestern Victoria, located on the Murray River. Mildura hosts an annual country music festival.

Sue Carson also picked up on the tension between city and country, when asked about what she thought distinguished country music from other styles:

Country music is for the country, yet it still appeals to people in the city, yet it is still the country thing.... And because it's rooted in stories, of farmers, you and the hardship of living on the land and... Well you see Bob's not, see he's not that sort of country, yet he's a very good storyteller, so I mean a lot of country music, it might be about the land, it might be about struggles in the land... but a lot of them, a lot of them are about relationships and about family and social commentary.... he writes a lot about, he's a good observer, so he'll write songs about another person's relationship, that he's observed, and he's written about that. But sometimes it'll be in the first person, so he'll be talking about it like it's him, but it's actually someone else.

Here Sue immediately jumps to rural people and rural tropes, namely that of the struggling farmer, to describe country music. However, she then moves on to draw out a range of subject areas and approaches that are “country”, but which do not relate to the “land”, rural areas or experiences. As demonstrated throughout this thesis “country-ness” is not the only authenticating narrative, things such as “family”, “friendship”, “relationships” and “community” are other potential and related discourses which run through lyrics, but are also used to describe and explain practice. Her comment about him observing the world and then writing first person, seemingly autobiographical, songs reveals how the discourse of “honesty” and the autobiographical mode are valued in the field. She sees his writing about relationships in the first person as a significant marker of his authenticity as a country artist. But the expectation of honesty is troubled in this instance – and this will be explored in further detail in “Part Four: Performance”.

Chronicler of the Bush: Slim Dusty, Heritage and Countrymindedness

As outlined above, the interrelated concepts of place, home and the country are central within the field of Australian country music. This is, in part, the result of the standard narrative history that circulates within the field about the origins and development of

country music as a genre born in rural Australia (and separately in America). Once again, Slim Dusty is the touchstone in this narrative, the model for how to be “country”.

A significant part of Slim’s performance practice (and that of the Dusty family since his death) was to constantly make reference to his childhood home in Nulla Creek, near Kempsey on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. This is connected to stories about his experience farming as a child and young man, but also his introduction to music, through local gatherings and dances, and the industry, via live radio when he and childhood friend Shorty Ranger showed up at the local radio station and asked to play on air (Dusty and McKean 1996, 14–21). Another common story told about Slim was that even after moving to the city, where in 1950s there was work for a country musician, he did not turn his back on the country, but continued to have a relationship with rural areas, community and life – through touring, travelling and the relationships he had with people in the country, particularly songwriters. I note here Martin’s observation that while Slim’s music celebrated the rootedness and connectedness of farm life, travel was central to much of his life because of the touring and performing he and Joy did extensively and consistently through Australia (Martin 2015, 72).

Slim is also celebrated for his use of lyrics and songs collected from amateur songwriters who were living in rural areas. He refers to this practice in the “Acknowledgements” of his autobiography:

To the writers who put their lives into the words they sent me – you have been part of the recording of our bush history (Dusty and McKean 1996, ix).

This idea of telling the stories of other people, those actually living on and with the land, carries through in various forms in contemporary country music – although in a different form to that attributed to Dusty. Where Slim recorded songs written by others, the contemporary tale is that artists write songs “inspired” by the tales of those they have met in the country, or on their travels – the songwriter or artist becomes the

author of the song inspired by the “locals” but not necessarily told by them. Although someone like Lee Kernaghan speaks of being inspired by a particular turn of phrase or statement made by a farmer and writing a song using their words. The “bush” or “country” is seen as a site rich with stories and that these stories are worth telling, or deserve to be told.

This is part of broader historical ideologies – namely those of the bush and pioneer legends and “countrymindedness”. The values embedded in the bush and pioneer legends were outlined in “Part Two: People and Relationships” and do not require further exploration here. What is significant here is the location of these legends in agrarian, rural places in Australia. The national character is seen to be shaped by the work, attitudes and beliefs needed to “tame” the bush, build agricultural industries and survive in harsh environments. In this model of Australian identity there is something special about that lifestyle and those people who live it which is worth celebrating (Hirst 1978; Hirst 1992; Ward 1958).

Don Aitken referred to the centrality of the “country” in a particular understanding of Australian national identity as “countrymindedness” (Aitken 1985). This ideology was central, Aitken argued, to the success of the Country Party in the 1970s. The elements of “countrymindedness” as an ideology are based on the following propositions:

- (i) Australia depends on its primary producers for its high standard of living, for only those who produce a physical good add to a country’s wealth.
- (ii) Therefore all Australians, from city and country alike, should in their own interest support policies aimed at improving the position of the primary industries.
- (iii) Farming and grazing, and rural pursuits generally, are virtuous, ennobling and co-operative; they bring out the best in people.
- (iv) In contrast, city life is competitive and nasty, as well as parasitical.

(v) The characteristic Australian is a countryman, and the core elements of national character come from the struggles of country people to tame their environment and make it productive. City people are much the same the world over (Aitken 1985, 35).

I am not arguing that these are characteristics of any universal Australian national identity, nor am I passing judgement on the value or problems with these ideas. Rather, I am acknowledging that these ideas shape the image/s of Australianness which circulate in the field of Australian country music and shape what discourses and practices are valued or recognised as “authentic”: namely stories of and from the “bush” and first person experience of rural life.

“Give Me the Road”: Touring, Authentication and Heritage

The model of storyteller, chronicler of the bush or collector of tales is one that many contemporary artists use. While “home” is a powerful discourse, it is not the only discourse used by artists to establish legitimacy in relation to place within the field. For many artists, particularly those without country “home”, the practice of touring and travel and the stories told about it become significant authenticating tropes. Travel to rural and regional places is often tied to the model of storyteller, as artists talk about the opportunities touring offers for “seeing the country”, meeting people, hearing the stories and then telling them to a wider audience. Touring is also one of the traditions to which practice is regularly articulated. Slim and Joy provide the model of touring – being out on the road for months at a time, self-sufficient in a caravan, and playing small towns as well as the big towns throughout rural and remote Australia. Live performance is a major source of income for Australian country music artists, and significantly artists mainly talk about “touring” or “being on the road” when they talk about live performance. Artists and others in the industry also often speak in terms of needing to go to the country because there is not an audience for country music in the city.

Many of the generations of artists who began their musical careers while Slim was still touring speak of the honour of being asked to join Slim's tour as a support act, how much it meant to their careers to play to Slim's audience and how much they learnt. Beccy Cole was one of these artists, touring with Slim in 1995, and she said this about the tour:

I've toured with a lot of artists, both local and international, and Slim's tour was by far the biggest honour. I actually experienced an authentic tour with the ones who started it all and when I read the pages of the early days in Joy's books²², I feel so privileged to have this experience to look back on, albeit at a more modern time (Cole 2015, 131).

Keith Urban, Lee Kernaghan, Gina Jeffries, and many other artists have spoken in similar terms about touring with Slim as support acts, as have those artists who played as members of the Travelling Country Band. These tours worked to open or shore up a young artist's position in the field, as Slim provided his endorsement to the next generation. This tradition of "stars" passing the baton by taking young artists out on tour has continued – a practice Jeremy Dylan highlighted when I interviewed him:

About every couple of decades, or generation or whatever, the country music genre in Australia goes through a kind of metamorphosis... Anne Kirkpatrick, Lee Kernaghan, Keith Urban, James Blundell, and maybe Tanya Kernaghan ... when they came along ...this was a new sound, this is more accessible this is pop-ier, but at the same time they all had tremendous respect for the previous generation, particularly Slim. Slim was one of the first people to take Keith out on the road. And Keith has this story, that he told me once, about how he was on the road with Slim and Keith was really toning his act down to try and fit in, so he was like 'I want Slim's audience to like me'. So he's toning everything down, trying to play it a bit more straight down the line. And he was getting an okay reaction and then after a couple of shows Slim came into his dressing room backstage and said, 'Mate,

²² Joy McKean has written three books about her and Slim's life in music: *Another Day, Another Town* (co-authored with Slim Dusty)(1996), *I've Been There ... And Back Again* (2011) and *Riding This Road: My life - making music and travelling this wide land with Slim Dusty* (2014).

what are you doing? That's not how you play.' And then Keith said, 'You know, I'm worried that if I play like me, and I'm doing all these guitar solos the audience isn't going to dig it.' And Slim said 'Hey, they're gonna tell if you're not being authentic to who you are. The way to win them over is to do what you do great and be authentic about it.' So, that new guard came along, changed the sound, made it a lot more contemporary, a lot rockier, got a whole new generation of kids interested in country music again. And then all through the 90s there were big stars coming one after another and there's momentum going from Blundell, to Lee, to Keith, to Gina Jeffreys, to Beccy Cole, to Adam Harvey, to Adam Brand etcetera. And then that sort of boiled down a bit, and there were few new big stars being created. And I think now we're starting to come back, and there are a few new stars in recent years, like the McClymonts, being a big example, who are taking it on another leap forward and Morgan. And Morgan has toured with, not that there's the age gap that's as big, but Morgan toured with Adam Harvey, he's played with Troy, and they have tremendous respect for the previous generation of country artists, but at the same time they have to be authentic to the kind of music that they're making. So it's just the renewal or the evolution of the genre. I wouldn't say that Adam's a heritage act, or Troy, or any of them, they've got a fair while to go yet. But at one point Slim was the Morgan Evans of his day.

In this understanding of the field, the idea of transformation, renewal and generational change is, to some extent, managed through practices of live performance and touring. Touring opens opportunities to be seen and legitimised by the "star" for a new artist, and this is a continual practice for country music artist.

Slim was not the only travelling showman offering opportunities for young artists. Brian Young, singer, champion bullrider and showman, ran the touring "Brian Young Show" which started in 1977 and ran until the mid- 2000s. These tours were long and traversed some of the most remote areas of Australia, playing through the outback and Aboriginal communities. Beccy Cole reflected on her experience:

the thought of spending another year in Sydney playing the clubs and eating beans on toast was more than I could bear. ... I took up an offer from country music legend Brian Young to tour the outback and Aboriginal communities for five

months. I think my management thought that I had won a Golden Guitar and was a little above a tour of this nature but, in so many ways, that tour was the making of me. If I was going to have a career in Australian country music, I needed to gain an understanding of the land and its people. It's not something you grow up with in Adelaide and, sadly, we were not taught enough about Indigenous culture in school.

There were eight people on the tour in two four-wheel drives. Day after day we would travel for up to ten hours along a red dirt road to an Aboriginal community in Far North Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and from the tip to the heart of Western Australia. Over kilometre after kilometre of absolute red dirt, I was getting my first look at the rural heart of Australia, and it was incredible.

Being the girl, I got the middle seat in the back. This was tough touring...

There was nothing even slightly glamorous about this tour. We slept in swags in schoolrooms, we ate microwaved pies and just-add-water noodles, and we all pulled our weight carrying and setting up gear. It was hard, it was dirty and I loved every minute of it (Cole 2015, 110–111).

These tours are spoken about by Beccy, as well as other artists like Tamara Stewart, Troy Cassar-Daley and Luke Austen, as being central to their journey as country music artists, providing them with a chance to see the country, "the rural heart of Australia". The hard, dirty, unglamorous touring is also said to provide artists with a taste of "real" touring and what life is like in the country. But telling these stories also works to legitimise their place in the field – you are definitely "country" if you can cope with that type of tough, rural touring.

The idea that the first hand experience of seeing and being in these places is essential to being "country" is a common discourse within the field. Michael Carpenter, from the Roo Grass band argued that touring was tied to authenticity within country music:

the best Australian country music, I think reflects the size of this country. I think if you are looking at things that seem authentic in Australian country music, I think that it really reflects the space in this country. You know, like I listen to, somebody

who is almost beyond criticism is Troy Cassar-Daley to me. Because he's got it all, you know, he's somebody who's clearly in love with this country. He's so talented it's ridiculous ... he sings... his songs come from a place within him that reflects his travel, his journey, you know they're not just... and there's nothing wrong about songs about pretty girls or rodeos or you know, cowboys and all that.

Amy Bauder: He does them.

Michael Carpenter: Yeah I know, but... but there's an authenticity about the way that he sings them, or the way that he writes them that feels really, really good. I think that with Australian country music, and I remember this from a conversation with Adam Brand where he said, 'I know that I can sell x amount of any record I make, but I've got to get out on the road and get out there in their town and they'll all turn up and they'll all buy. But I've got to do that and that means you're spending a lot of time in a van, driving through towns that have got eight people in them', you know. And he said 'it changes your perception of this country when you do that long enough' ... he didn't say it in a way that was bad at all... he said it in a way that made him feel quite proud of his journey and what he's done to get to the point where he's at ... I think that for the best artists in Australian country, they're the ones that have been prepared to get in the car for a loooong time and travel between towns, because it tests how much you really want to do it ... and that's where you find your commitment to what you are doing... You know, you can't drive around this country without being affected by what you see. And you can't be affected by what you see and not write about it if you are an Australian country music artist. So, one of the things that I do understand from the traditionalist point of view when they are talking about Australian country music, is the fact that there are people who are looking for shortcuts... I'm part of the problem in that regard, people who come in here and say 'I made a pop record last year but I couldn't get anyone interested but I know that if I make a country record and I make a video and I'm a pretty girl I can get it on CMC and people will watch it'. And I had that conversation before and, I've got to pay my rent, so you do the jobs anyway. And they're good jobs, they're great jobs, and I tend to be very indulgent with them and stuff like that, and there's nothing wrong with that, but trying to compare that to Troy Cassar-Daley's work is, it's like trying to compare, I was going to say the Monkees to the Beatles, but I really like the Monkees [laughter] ... there's a sense that, it comes down to that authenticity kind of thing, that whole idea that, there

are shortcuts, and you can certainly get ahead but you're always going to be THAT artist. You know? Or there's going to be that time where you are going to have to go and spend a lot of time in a van, driving between so and so and so and so to play to eight or 8,000 people, I don't really know... so I think that that makes a big difference in the way that Australian country music records sound. I think ... the good artists spend a lot of time living, you know, what they sing about, and that manifests itself in the record that they make. Whether they make them here or whether they make them in Nashville or anywhere else.

Michael relies on an idea of a traditional model of touring which is hard work, driving town to town in a van, and connects it strongly to authenticity. Contained within this discourse is a belief in the power of seeing and experiencing the country, and a that it should and will influence your music, what it sounds like, how country it is and how real it is. The Monkees versus Beatles distinction mirrors a "phoney", "manufactured", "fake" versus "authentic" distinction within the field. Touring (and other travel) is a way of "doing your time" in the right places (particularly for city kids).

I will now return to Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band's Lucky Country Hall Tour to explore in greater depth and complexity the ways in which practices associated with touring are embedded in discourses about places and spaces but also how these discourses are connected to other stories about heritage, style and authenticity. The "country-ness" of the halls is central to both how Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass band "fit" within the field, but also differentiate themselves from contemporary touring's "commerciality"

Spaces

The Rooms Themselves Become an Instrument for the Band: Fieldwork

Account

The small Cessnock School of Arts Lounge barely contains the crowd of about 40 people gathered on a rainy Saturday night show of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band's Lucky Country Hall Tour. Built in 1924, the two-storey School of Arts building curves around from Maitland Road to a double width frontage on the main street, Vincent Street. The Western-style slab serif signwriting along the awning proclaims that the substantial building now houses training and employment organisation Northumberland Network and function rooms for hire. The 2CHR Central Hunter Community Broadcasters' studios fill the shop front on the Maitland Road edge of the building. The School of Arts Lounge is a part of the space held by Jo and Michael who run "Musitopia", a music shop, music school and performance space. It is nestled behind the enclosed shop window displays that flank the door. Both windows have been dressed to promote tonight's gig – posters, gold painted poly-pipe figurines playing guitars and ukuleles, including one playing an acoustic guitar and wearing Bob's trademark trilby hat. The deco era stained glass window running along the top of the window display lets some of the light from the street into the small venue. Fairy lights, frosted glass light fittings and stage lights are the only other illumination in the dimly lit, cosy room.



Figure Six: Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band performing at Cessnock School of Arts Lounge.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

Three rows of seats are set up in front of the stage, with the overflow audience members improvising a fourth row on tables and boxes running along the wall facing the stage. A small bar sits in the far corner of the room, with some of the audience perched on bar stools or leaning against the bar. Just as Bob starts the show, thanking everyone for coming along, the doorbell chimes. Veronica, who is on the door, has a moment of indecision about whether or not the late coming couple could fit in the room but, with some people moving around, space is made and they sit down. Bob continues his introduction, "So has anyone been here before? It's an amazing place, isn't it? I've driven past here a million times and never knew how much love has been put into the place. It's lovely, so congratulations Michael and the team for creating such a beautiful spot."

Later in the show Bob begins introducing "Take Me Home, Country Roads".

"Now we've been on this country hall tour for most of the year, and we've seen all different kinds of spaces but nothing comes close to this space - it is the most unique space that we've been in. We've been in theatres, we've been in halls, and we've been finding that the buildings and the rooms themselves become an instrument for the band as well. At our first concert we set everything up, everyone had a microphone, everyone was plugged and had amps and speakers and the whole lot. By the third show it was just down to two microphones and that was about it. What we've been trying to do it come up with our own form of surround sound which is called RooGrassSound, its going to be the new big thing, kids will be wanting it for Christmas, so we'll try it out..."

He turns left and right, looking at the band, and says, "Pick a corner..."

Dave sighs, and hams up his attempt to lift, and then drag, the double bass. Bob looks at him and says, "Uh oh it's the big one!"

"What about this corner here?" asks Dave as he picks up the bass and easily carries it to the far left of stage.

After waiting for the crowd's laughter to subside Bob replies, "Yeah. I'll take this one over here" stepping off the stage and heading to the front door.

Robbie calls out "I'll be over here" while standing next to the bar, where a seat is offered to him. "GREAT - I'll sit down on the job!" yells Robbie as he sits down with the dobro leaning on his knee.

Bob has positioned himself at the end of the back row, but the cramped venue does not allow much movement, "Hello! How are you going?" he says to the guy he is standing over. Sue quietly positions herself in the remaining "corner" of the room.

The band starts playing the song, with all instruments completely unplugged and no microphones to carry the voices. At the end of the first chorus Bob calls out, "Okay, swap

sides” to the band. Dave makes a show of trying to move the bass – picking it up and carrying it across the five metre wide stage.

Again, this clownish acting is met with laughter from the crowd. The rest of the band squish through to a different corner, continuing to sing and play.

Going into the second chorus Bob throws to the audience, “Just you guys”. And the crowd sings:

Country roads, take me home to the place I belong.

West Virginia, mountain momma, take me home, down country roads.

At the end of the song Bob returns to stage. “Robbie you were so close to getting this lady’s head, here”, he says, pointing to a woman at the end of the front row who had been close to the neck of Robbie’s dobro. Robbie and the crowd laugh.

“You don’t know how close you were”, reiterates Bob.

Dave comments, “That song just had litigation written all over it.” To which Robbie responds “Whoops!”

Bob cuts in, beginning to introduce the next song, Monkey, saying it had been requested the night before.

Later, Bob starts playing the intro to “Blown Away”, and then says, “When this tour is finished and we’ve made a million dollars off it, there’s two things we’re going to buy: one is a smoke machine.”

“How close are we to the million Bob?” asks Dave.

“Let me just say, it’s going to be a long tour. So that’s the first thing, and the second thing is the pyrotechnics. They will be great in this song ... Okay, pyrotechnics, one, two, one, two, three, four”, as the whole band starts playing the first sustained note. Bob looks around, with fake awe at the explosion he imagines going off on stage.

At the bridge of the song Bob leans down, arms out, and starts again, "And then the smoke machine comes in... it is one of those ones that hovers on the ground... just about to come over the stage... the front row has just disappeared. So this is song about a bloke who didn't heed the warnings that the cyclone was coming, up in north Queensland, and he pays the ultimate price for it. Now, on tour, as I mentioned before, we've done a lot of halls, but we've also done a lot of theatres, and ah, the birth of this thing you are about to witness, started at the Dorrigo Theatre, because backstage there were all these costumes... [laughter] it was the birth of the Roo Grass Theatrical Society. Now I should really point out the exits before we start this. But, ah, playing the part of the storm tonight is Mr David Carter:

Dave starts stomping and blowing into the microphone, making wind noises.

"Is it a storm? Or is it emphysema?" asks Bob. [laughter]

"Playing the extraneous debris that's flying about in the storm: Ms Susan Carson"

Sue starts plucking at the fiddle, thunking, hitting, stomping. Turning and hitting the wall a few times.

"It's award-winning stuff folks!" says Bob.

"Where's the wobble board?" cries Sue.

"It's a rural storm. Playing all things rural: Mr Robbie Long!"

Robbie makes a noise like an exaggerated sheep, "Maaaaa", then an exaggerated cow "mooooo", ending with "buk buk bwwaaaaak"!

Bob takes back the narration, "thankfully the storm has passed... The sun comes up."

Dave, "Ta Ta Da!" [laughter]

"Because we all know a sun makes that noise as it comes up. That was a cross between a rooster and a trumpet."

"I'm never up that early, so I don't know what it sounds like."

"People start coming out from under the rubble. People start surveying the damage."

Robbie starts a high-pitched jabber – imitating the conversations of those "surveying the damage."

"We're only one step away from puppet show here."

"What do you mean one step Bob?" says Dave, lifting his arms and legs like strings are controlling him.

"There's one, lonely helicopter in the sky. There's a tv cameraman hanging out, surveying the damag."

Dave comes in with "chakk-chackk-chak-chak, chak-a-chak-akk-chk-chk-chk."

"The SES, they arrive and they start getting out all the chainsaws and all the stuff and removing the trees from the streets."

Dave, starting [softly] "bru-um... [louder] brrr-uum... brru-umm[at a high pitch]

Whhhhhaaaaaaaaaa-eeeeeeerrraaaaaarrrrraeerrr."

"Husqvarna, ladies and gentlemen!" exclaims Bob.

The band finishes the song, and at the end Bob says "The Roo Grass Musical Society! I can see it now, the beautiful Scarlett Johansson will walk out at the 2014 Oscars: Best actor for the role of Husqvarna goes to David Carter."

The Lucky Country Hall Tour

Throughout 2013 Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band undertook the Lucky Country Hall Tour. This tour used community halls, School of Arts halls, theatres and other community venues across New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland (see "Appendix Four - Lucky Country Hall Tour" for a full list of dates, venues and locations).

This tour was booked and organised by Bob and his mum, Veronica. They received financial support in the form of a \$15,000 Contemporary Music Touring Program Grant, as well as sponsorship from Toyota, Rural Press Events (who publish Country Music Capital News), and the Country Music Channel. Fender also supported the “tour” by providing an acoustic guitar that was raffled off during the tour as a fundraiser for the Melanoma Institute Australia.

The Lucky Country Hall tour was positioned as a departure from the established and dominant mode of touring for “mainstream” or “successful” country music artists in Australia. A self-organised tour, playing in small, unlicensed venues with little or no live music infrastructure and often off established tour routes and outside large population centres is not the standard for touring; instead, the bulk of country music touring acts in Australia play clubs and pubs and theatres, following a relatively well worn circuit.

While this could be an exploration of performance style, and in some ways it is, what I am interested in here is the way in which Bob and the band talk about the relationship between space and performance. The way the performance spaces, the halls and theatres, become an “instrument in the band”, or a character in the story of the band, a source of practices formed in response to and in relation to spaces. These halls are empty spaces, but they are empty spaces imbued with history, tradition and stories. These “empty” spaces are understood by Bob and the band to demand a certain approach to decoration, production, performance and the way you engage with an audience.

The way of organising this tour also differed, and was spoken about differently. While similar processes are undertaken for all tours – booking venues, promotion, selling tickets, travelling to and from the venue, setting up - the way the work was understood was through ideas of community engagement – bringing life back to disused spaces,

bringing people together – which was framed as being less commercial, or even non-commercial.

In the previous section I addressed the way in which discourses of “family” and “friendship” were used to explain practices associated with this tour and how they work to situate Bob in the field, but distance him from “commerciality” in country music. The “family” and “friends” discourses also worked to situate him within country music traditions and as “authentic”. In this section I will explore how the practices associated with tour planning, design and delivery are explained through a set of discourses about touring styles, heritage, and authenticity. The tour sheds light on the contemporary touring landscape through the ways in which Bob works to differentiate his tour from what is happening in the rest of the field. He does this with reference to three key factors – the historical tradition of both Slim Dusty and the halls themselves; a low key do it yourself (DIY) aesthetic; and connection with country communities.

Contemporary Touring Scale and Authenticity

Live performance in Australian country music occurs in two main contexts – festivals, and individual or group gigs (either one-off shows or tours). Both festivals and gigs are central to the experience of country music for both artists and fans, and are one of the contexts in which the “realness” of the field becomes apparent (this will be explored in greater detail in “Part Four: Performance”). The location, size, and organisation of live performance shapes the field, who is recognised and what is valued.

There is a vast body of academic literature on touring and festivals. Live performance is dealt with in a number of ways in the literature: as the site of consumption of popular music and the development of fan cultures (Bennett 1997); as something under threat (Gibson and Homan 2004; Walker 2012); as an ignored policy issue (Homan 2002; 2010); as a cultural industry and site of social history (Homan 2002); and as a training

ground for musicians (Finnegan 1989). Touring has been explored in relation to corporatisation of touring networks and practices (Frith 2013; Negus 1992; 1999); as a point of cultural contact between regional music scenes (O'Connor 2002); and in relation to the way touring bands reveal nationalist political histories (Cloonan and Brennan 2013). Gibson and Connell's (2012) work on music festivals and regional development explores the contribution of festivals to regional economic and cultural development, as well as the role festivals play in artists' careers as a form of musical work, but also as opportunity for exposure and connection with musical and fan communities (2012, 70-72). The thinking and conceptual framework used in this Part to explore and understand festivals as a site of research is indebted to the work of various scholars who have researched and written about festivals in Australia (see Begg 2011; Duffy 2000; Edwards 2012; Gibson 2007; Gibson and Connell 2012; Martin 2011).

Festivals and the touring circuit within Australia for country music is somewhat stratified - a correlation exists between the size of a venue or festival, or the privileged place it has within Australian culture or country music's history, and the level of "star" that will play there. Within the scene a hierarchical "star system" exists in which a small number of artists are at the top - dominating airplay, album sales, media attention and, most significantly here, live performance. "Star system" is a term used within Australian country music, including by Bob when I interviewed him, to describe the stratification of the industry. There is tacit understanding that this is related to "success" and the accumulation of economic and cultural capital. What follows is a mapping of live performance contexts, how they relate to the star system and how the different spaces and scales of venues affects performance. It is based on observation in the field but the categorisation and delineations are mine. Within the taxonomy outlined here economic factors are privileged - the scale is weighted to size of venue (and this live scale is also reflected in record sales, and airplay).

Each festival has a unique dynamic and feel for fans. The promotional material, selection of artists, design of festival spaces and other activities work to differentiate the experience for participants. These festivals also attract slightly different crowds: different sections of the country music audience.

Within this scale, each level entails choices about how an artist performs, and these choices are shaped by and shape audience expectations. Arena shows are meant to be big. And sustaining the interest and attention of 20,000 people for two hours in an arena with just a solo acoustic guitar is going to be incredibly hard work. Whereas a theatre show is more likely to fall into a songwriter mode than spectacle. The scale and the performance style options are made intelligible within the field - because of industry organisation and what has gone before.

At the same time certain venues are imbued with cultural capital, within the scene, and spill over from the broader social scene. The Opera House for example has high cultural value and legitimacy. While the arena model is a prime example of the “big business” end of the industry – material capital is valued, it is all about scale and volume.

In each of these layers different things are favoured, and this can basically be summed up as within the larger venues the visual elements, lights, wow factor and numbers, and money; while the smaller venues lay claim to intimacy with artists, quality, and musical experience.

There are ways of negotiating the position an artist “fits” in within this scale and performance expectations. I will return to Bob and the Lucky Country Hall Tour later, but he intervenes by opening a “new” space, outside the commercial logic. Other artists negotiate their “fit” through their choice in venue – for example, the choice of a theatre over a club positions an artist as a serious musician in the field, and is talked about as such.

Festivals are a central element of the live performance contexts for Australian country music (see “Appendix Five - Festivals” for a list of festivals, and a map of their locations). They all have different levels of impact and significance within the field. There are four major festivals with national prominence: Tamworth Country Music Festival, the Gympie Music Muster, CMC Rocks, and the Deni Ute Muster²³. Each of these festivals attracts large crowds. Tamworth and the Gympie Music Muster, held in the Amamoor State Forest, near Gympie (QLD) attract 50-60,000 people. CMC Rocks was held from 2011 to 2014 in the Hunter Valley (NSW) and the venue Hope Estate, claims to hold 20,000 for concert events. The organisers changed the location to Willowbank Raceway in Ipswich (QLD) in 2015 to help increase the capacity of the festival. The Deni Ute Muster, held in Deniliquin (NSW) attracts 25,000. Each of these four festivals is of a scale that provides for the viability of booking big name international acts, although Tamworth and Deni tend to have a more Australian focus than Gympie and CMC Rocks. Each of these festivals position themselves as key events for country music culture, and attract special coverage within the country music print media. Capital News and Country Update run whole sections dedicated to “previewing” the Tamworth Country Music Festival, CMC Rocks and the Gympie Music Muster. These festivals attract the biggest names in Australian country music – offering material and cultural capital through appearance fees, exposure, merchandise sales, recognition and clear inclusion within the field.

CMC Rocks is an interesting case study in the proclaimed international focus of the festival, marketed as “Australia’s biggest international country & roots festival”. It positions itself as a chance for Australian country music fans to see the big international names – mainly American “stars”. CMC Rocks is also unusual within the country music scene because it is managed completely within commercial networks. There is no

²³ I have not attended the Deni Ute Muster, even for fieldwork, so will provide little detail on this festival.

community or charity involvement in the festival organisation. It is run under the banding of Foxtel's Country Music Channel - by Chugg Entertainment and Rob Potts Entertainment Edge - in conjunction with the state agencies for the tourism and major events sector (Destination NSW, Tourism and Events Queensland), Local government and the venues. The festival avoids positioning itself within the nostalgic historical narrative of Australian country music, sponsors are more prominent than any charity concerns, and the festival is isolated from the local community. At the Hope Estate venue in the Hunter Valley the festival occurred in an isolated bubble. The venue was ten kilometres from the nearest town, Cessnock, and no obvious attempts were made to involve local community groups.

This differs from the Gympie Music Muster where charity and community involvement is central to the story told about the festival within the industry and among fans (see Edwards 2012). These elements are also central to the logic and patterning of the event. Links to the Apex Club of Gympie (and at various points their "ownership" of the event), the involvement of local community groups who run the various bars, firewood, ice and grocery stalls, toilet cleaning teams, food outlets and other services, and the (now abandoned) Rural Aid Appeal are constantly highlighted by organisers, fans, artists and the media. Edwards notes that the national profile of the Muster "can be attributed, in part, to the continuation of [the] original commitment to community and charity throughout the event's history" (Edwards 2012, 519). The community focus distances the festival from "commercial" concerns. Although changes to the festival in recent years, to attempt to halt a trend of running at a loss, have been consistently attributed to "commercial interests" by disgruntled long time Muster goers.

The Tamworth Country Music Festival is a decentralised and unwieldy beast. In an interview with Emma Swift on ABC Radio's Saturday Night Country on 26 January 2013

Dobe Newtown, from The Bushwackers, a band with thirty odd years of experience at the festival remarked:

people complain, sometimes, about the fact that it is a hard festival to get a handle on because you don't have, you know, a central committee, the artistic director, determining what people should listen to and where people should listen to it... this is an anarchists' festival.

There is no clear lead organiser of the festival – but the Tamworth Regional Council plays a significant role in providing logistical support, largely through Destination Tamworth (their tourism enterprise). The NSW state government provides financial and marketing support, as do corporate sponsors, such as Toyota or Jayco (who had both been naming rights sponsors at different points during my research). The Tamworth Country Music Festival Stakeholders' Group was established in 2009 to represent the interest of stakeholders (venue owners, country music or local media, other local business and industry veterans) to council. Individual venues book artists for the festival (either on their own or using centralised booking agents). Microcosms of experience and culture emerge at specific venues during the festival. The length of the festival at ten days (plus a lead in pre-festival period of one to two weeks) also means that a continuity and permanence of venue culture often emerges in a way that does not at a festival only lasting for a weekend. The selection of artists to play at a venue has quite a significant impact on this process of differentiation and I have the impression that venues owners, booking agents and artists and their managers work to create a particular vibe, atmosphere or even musical scene at venues through the booking and programming of acts. I think this happens in a much less structured way than happens at curated festivals where different venues are deliberately programmed with acts that fit the style or genre of that venue. Although venues such as the Balladeers Homestead and locales such as Nundle, where an “alt country” theme has been established in recent years, do deliberately curate a themed program of artists, they are the exception in

Tamworth. Most venues remain “neutral”, that is with no stated theme or genre – beyond country music. However, I think that during the festival there are other factors that play into the creation of a venue as a space marked as containing a particular and distinctive vibe or scene – such as venue location, room setup, décor, sound quality, history of the venue, diligence of security and policing of responsible service of alcohol, accessibility for children and even the style of drinks and food served. I think these things effect the culture of particular festivals other than Tamworth, but the presence of a central organising force generally sees these factors applied across the festival, and thus affecting the culture of the festival as a whole rather than creating difference across venues in the way that occurs at Tamworth. Festivals such as the Central Coast Country Music Festival (NSW) and the Blue Water Country Music Festival (Nelsons Bay, NSW) also run across multiple, independent venues but are much shorter, smaller and lack the weight of history Tamworth has.

There are other prominent festivals - which while not of the same scale as Tamworth, Gympie, Deni and CMC Rocks - are annual, established and well regarded festivals that support country music culture. These include Boyup Brook (WA), Central Coast Country Music Festival (NSW), Mud Bulls and Music (Jimna, QLD), Whittlesea Country Music Festival (VIC), Urban Country Music Festival (Caboolture, QLD), Mildura Country Music Festival (VIC) and newer festivals such as Broadbeach Country Music Festival (QLD), Sydney Country Music Festival (NSW) and Murwillumbah Country Music Festival (NSW).



Figure Seven: Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band playing to the Mud Bulls and Music Festival crowd.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

There are even smaller festivals, which are incredibly local and small scale. These festivals are often in small towns, usually only run for one day, have one stage and only a few artists on the program. This next tier holds a lesser-known and prioritised position for fans - the distance travelled is less and the crowd is generally drawn from the local area. A smaller tier again exists with niche or subgenre festivals – such as bush balladeer or bluegrass festivals.

All these festivals are advertised and promoted in national country music media (with prominence given to the bigger festivals). This media includes print media: Capital News, Country Update; radio: community radio stations, KIX Country (a network of commercial country music radio stations), Saturday Night Country on ABC Local Radio, networked or online radio shows like Nick Erby's Country Tracks Top 40, Ben

Sorensen's Real Country; television: the Country Music Channel (CMC) on Foxtel, and some travel shows such as Sydney Weekender, Queensland Weekender and various caravanning programs; and through social media networks by groups like the Country Music Association of Australia, the online presences of the print and radio media, and by artists who will be performing. The main national media for promoting country music events is print media. Radio is local, CMC is a closed network for promotion for festivals - except its own, CMC Rocks, or those artists with big sponsorship deals or ad buys are playing.

The size, scale and approaches of festivals mirrors a similar differentiation within the gig and touring context. Where an artist tours, the types of venues they play and their scale reflect something of the logic of the field. The size scale of venues is linked to economic capital, and is one way the star system can be understood, or is understood within the field. A rough rendering of this scale is "superstar", "star", "up and coming", "new star", "mid-ranged" and "beginners".

Entertainment centres and arenas

The top echelon is the "stars" or "superstars" who play stadiums, arenas and big theatre venues. These are generally international acts - the top American country music artists. In the past four years this has included Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, Lady Antebellum, Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, and Taylor Swift. Keith Urban is the only "Australian"²⁴ country music artist to play these venues as a headline act. However, his global success and American based career positions him as an "international" touring act within the field of Australian country music. Fans and industry people talk about him as returning "home" when he tours Australia, yet he retains few links with the Australian field. He

²⁴ This is in inverted commas because of Keith's complicated location within the field - he was born in New Zealand, lived in Australia as a child, and moved to America permanently in 1992. While it is regularly claimed he is an Australian artist, this is sometimes contested and he does not participate in the field as such.

also does things like scheduling the first show of his 2013 Australian tour in Brisbane, to overlap with the Tamworth Festival's final weekend. This move attracted much negative comment in the industry during the festival, but there was little public comment criticising this decision because his success in America means people still love him. In 2015 Lee Kernaghan attempted the Spirit of the Anzacs Arena Tour, which was to involve Jack Thompson as narrator, and star actress Lisa McCune, with musical performances by Lee, Jack Jones, Harrison Craig and John Schumann. After being announced mid-March, it was cancelled mid-April with promoter Michael Chugg citing poor ticket sales. This was replaced with a tour of regional entertainment centres, theatres and clubs called The Songs and the Stories in Concert (a return to the standard scale of touring for Australian "stars").

Tour stops at this level of entertainment centres and arenas usually include Sydney's Allphones Arena or the Entertainment Centre (closed 2015, demolished 2016), Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena and Brisbane's Entertainment Centre. Entertainment centres and arenas in other state capitals and regional cities are sometimes included. These venues range in capacity from 3,000 to 20,000. Selling out the larger of these venues is rare and as such these maximum capacities are often not reached, but is the only reliable guide for scale as ticket sales figures are not made publicly available. Tickets range from \$80 to \$300 (although this is creeping up).

These entertainment or arena shows are big productions with stage sets, lights, pyrotechnics, video screens, and large bands. The size of the venues, number of people and the stage's distance from a large portion of the audience calls for this.

Big theatres

The next layer is the large theatres or regional entertainment centres which exist around Australia, mainly in capital cities or large regional centres. These commercially

run venues include the State Theatre, Enmore Theatre or Sydney Opera House Concert Hall in Sydney or the Palais Theatre in Melbourne. They all seat between 1,500 and 3,000 people. Venues like this are sometimes used by international “stars” - often seeking a more acoustic based, “up close and personal”, “music experience”. This includes artists who usually position themselves within the less “mainstream” or “commercial” parts of the field, such as Emmylou Harris, Steve Earle or Gillian Welch, and who are famous, but would perhaps not sell out an arena. They also attract crowds who express a preference for the more “quality” venues where the acoustics and sound is declared superior to an arena. Alternatively these venues are used for side-shows for overseas bands playing festivals such as CMC Rocks or Gympie. The smaller venues require less publicity to sell out, and provide a “special” experience for fans who can see an artist playing a small, intimate venue.

These venues are also used for big Australian tours, often “prestige” or special event tours. Recent examples have included Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey’s Great Country Songbook tour and Melinda Schneider and Beccy Cole’s Great Women of Country tour in 2014-2015, both of which included the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall. Increasingly there is a spill between theatres and clubs – for artists like Troy Cassar-Daley, Kasey Chambers and Adam Harvey - theatres including the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall and Theatre have been added to their solo touring circuits.

Theatre shows also involve big production and a full band that is slick, smooth, professional and polished. Theatre shows are often less spectacularly staged than the bigger and louder arena shows that may have bigger focus on lights and pyrotechnics. The authenticity discourse is often used to explain a greater focus on high quality sound (because you are here for the music, not the spectacle). Ticket prices are usually

equivalent to cheaper end of the arena and entertainment centre shows, but can range from \$60-\$300.

Clubs and pubs

The next, and most prominent layer within Australian country music is auditoriums in clubs (RSL, Leagues, Bowling) and large pubs. This is where the “stars” of Australian country music play, such as Beccy Cole, Troy Cassar-Daley, Adam Harvey, Adam Brand, the McClymonts, and John Williamson.

These venues range greatly depending on the location and type of club or pub. Large clubs in metropolitan areas (or on the fringes of these areas) such as Rooty Hill RSL in Sydney (NSW) or Belmont 16fts in Newcastle (NSW) have large “showroom” style auditoriums that can hold 500-800 people. While smaller clubs in regional areas have auditoriums that seat 100-500 people. Artists play ticketed shows (\$30-60).

There are some “standard” venues that artists tour year after year, following one and other around – following “roadmaps” laid out by a combination of history, artists, venues, and fans. This is shaped by the perception of artists and industry that some areas are more country, such as Queensland, Northern and Western NSW, but also the responses of the clubs themselves. Both Jeremy Dylan and Tim Holland spoke of how some venues are more comfortable and familiar with country music than others, and that this means they are more likely to book country artists, but also that they know how to promote their shows. Fans are also familiar with the venues and know to keep an eye out for upcoming tours. The success of these shows is knowledge shared within the industry, among managers, booking agents and artists, thus shaping the routes.

This layer is most commonly associated with Australian “stars”, “professionals” or “successful” artists. This is because there are higher costs, greater risks and a requirement for a larger crowd. The performances usually have high production values -

but within the confines of what the venues are offering – including lights, amplification, a band. But the show is “professional” with sound engineers, lighting, a stage and a rehearsed show.

Smaller rooms in pubs and clubs

This is where the emerging artists or lesser stars play, in the smaller rooms of pubs and clubs. They are usually ticketed shows with a low entry price. The artist is still a headliner, where their name is used to promote the event and attract an audience. The room is separate from pokies, television screens showing football or racing and other “distractions”, but is smaller than the auditoriums, often without “backstage” facilities like dressing rooms.

There is often still an assumption that it will be a full band show, although solo performance is okay, but production is often lower quality, poor quality PA and band members mixing the sound, and simple lighting. At this and all the “higher” levels there is an expectation that the artist will play mainly original material, not just covers.

Pubs and clubs

Bars and lounges in pubs and clubs are the next layer. These shows are not ticketed; rather artists will be paid a fee or portion of bar takings. Artists will most often play alone, and there are low expectations of production – usually a simple PA speaker. There is also generally an expectation from the crowd for covers - they are in the bar because it is a bar - not necessarily to see x or y.

This is where many artists start playing to an audience regularly; where they first start getting paid to play. And it is often spoken of as “doing your time”, “learning the ropes”, or “honing your skills”. Usually by those who have risen up the scale! The scale is also linked to a narrative of career development, the idea that doing time leads to stardom, but also that playing certain places is a marker that you are moving up in the scene.

Within Australian country music exists a continuum of performance styles and approaches, which can be expressed as being from pop to acoustic. This continuum maps onto certain “mainstream”, “manufactured” versus “authentic” distinctions and venues chosen by artists or management and the touring style is linked to this continuum, in part through the way in which venues shape audience expectations. These performance styles will be explored in more detail in “Part Four: Performance”. At this point I will explore how Bob Corbett negotiated a new space in the “field”, outside this standard touring and festival circuit, through the Lucky Country Hall Tour.

“Old Time Country Halls”: Slim Dusty

Although Bob talked about this tour being different from the contemporary style of touring in Australian country music, he also positioned it as the continuation of a touring tradition - namely that of Slim Dusty. This fits within the frame of referring practice back to Slim and the “tradition” of country music he is seen to represent. This was tied to a nostalgia for what is missing or wrong with contemporary touring, and a belief that the crowd and artist misses out on something special in soulless, commercial spaces.

This could be connected to a different set of discourses and histories - it could be articulated to the emerging folk scene activities where similar tours are happening.

While unique in contemporary country music touring, this tour was not entirely unique within the contemporary touring scene. Halls have been used in the folk and indie scene recently. Fred Smith, Darren Hanlon, Holly Throsby, Sal Kimber and others have toured “non-commercial” spaces regularly - churches, town halls, old theatres, halls - often in more urban areas. But the Festival of Small Halls institutionalises the hall circuit.

Produced by the Woodford Folk Festival the Festival of Small Halls tours between folk festivals, drawing artists from the line-up of two festivals, Mullumbimby Music Festival and Woodford Folk Festival, or the Port Fairy Folk Festival and National Folk Festival.

Their promotional material focuses on the special nature of such a tour:

The artist line-up for Small Halls will always be at least one Australian artist and one International touring artist, who play music of exceptional quality and heart. They've been chosen for the tour not only because of their beautiful songs and tunes, but because they have the ability to really connect with the people they play for, whether through storytelling, the ability to tell a good joke (or a truly terrible one), a wonderful warmth and a real interest in visiting places a little off the beaten track. Each night of the tour is hosted by volunteers from the local community, so it's also a chance for a town to show off their warmest welcome and most enthusiastic audiences (Festival of Small Halls 2014).

This festival tour has been running since 2013, with multiple tours run each year in different parts of Australia (limited to Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, with Tasmania being added for the first time in 2016). Part of the story Bob told about the Lucky Country Hall Tour was that it was inspired by a tour he did supporting guitar player Bruce Mathiske, a hard to categorise performer who sits somewhere in between folk, jazz and classical. But after acknowledging this source of initial inspiration, Bob then consistently positions the tour in relation to Slim.

Bob does not reference these - instead he consistently talks about Slim and the "country-ness" of these halls. But through his media appearances and public utterances about this tour, Bob also often positions himself as doing something new in country music. By doing that he is situating himself in the country music field not the folk field (where this style of performing and touring is common). This may be intentional or as a result of being oblivious to this folk activity - but I doubt it (Robbie is within the folk field and would know).

Part of the appeal this "traditional" style of touring has for Bob is avoiding problems with the contemporary, commercial venues. When talking about why the halls he played at with Bruce Mathiske were more appealing than other venues Bob said:

I think what I loved most was it was a 'concert show' – where people came to watch the music, rather than going into a pub for any number of interests and happening to catch a band ... The music was the sole reason they were there (Rose 2013, 16).

The debate about live music in venues with poker machines is well worn ground within Australian popular music circles (Gibson and Homan 2004; Homan 1999; Homan 2008; Walker 2012). These debates often revolve around ways in which live music fits within a scene in which priorities of "performance", "entertainment" and "creativity" compete with the commercial appeal of things such as poker machines. Country music avoids these debates to a certain extent - I have not really witnessed any discussion about pokies. The centrality within country music live touring circuits of venues like RSLs and other clubs, who rely on poker machines for revenue, means many artists express some (often begrudging) gratitude to the venues and pokies for supporting their live music industry.

However, the culture of live music venues is discussed: how they value music, the way audiences engage, or not, with live music, and how space is organised. These conversations happen between artists - particularly less successful artists – and fans, who feel that something is amiss with the live music scene. Concerns are voiced about venues giving priority to drinking, gambling and sport over the performance. But the impact of this is really limited to those artists playing covers gigs or long sessions in bars – where they have to compete with these other things. This situation is talked about as being demoralising and depressing. For established artists who tour and have ticketed shows this is not an issue. The rooms they play in are separate, such as auditoriums, and people have paid to be there, so will generally sit down and listen.

Bob's main source of income for many years has been covers gigs in Newcastle pubs.

There is a clear differentiation between Bob's covers gigs, performed as Bobby C, and his

engagement with the field of Australian country music. Performance space is one way in which this differentiation occurs, particularly in relation to the Lucky Country Hall tour. The desire to put on a “concert show”, where the audience has specifically chosen to pay and come to see him and the band play is a vastly different experience for him (and the audience) to that of playing in the corner of a bar, competing for attention with the televisions showing sport, poker machines and conversation.

Implicit in this tour is recognition by Bob of his position within the field and the capital available to him when organising a tour. His profile as a “star” is not yet at a point where he can rely on attracting a large enough audience to cover the costs of using commercial venues on a long tour around Australia. However, advantages afforded to him by the hall tour style allow him to work through this - low overhead costs (hall hire ranges from \$50 to \$500 per night with most at the lower end of the scale), reward through the Contemporary Music Touring Grant for touring in rural and remote areas, and the potential to build long term relationships with communities and return for regular shows work to Bob’s strengths but also make this style of touring viable.

But this style of touring also offers an experience of live music which differs, even from the ticketed auditorium gigs at pubs and clubs. As outlined in the fieldwork accounts through this part, the band is able to move around in the venues while playing and the music making happens close to the audience. The size and nature of the venues create space for direct connection, interaction and participation between the band and the audience (sometimes a physical connection as they accidentally hit you on their way past). It is participatory. The acoustic, unplugged approach offers an unmediated live music experience. In this respect the tour and performance is consistently referred back to a traditional style of music making which exists outside the highly commercial and produced pop world. This is not to say that any of these practices – the closeness, the

connection, the participation, the unmediated liveness – never occur in commercial spaces, or in conventional touring. They do, but generally not together or sustained over a whole show or tour. It is because of the combination of these things, and the unusual venues, that the band, the media and fans, position the tour as unique and special. But it is also authenticated through the tradition of Slim's touring and old-fashioned music making to which it can be connected.

Do It Yourself Aesthetic

The acoustic, old-timey, low-key aesthetic of the tour is drawn into a story about the roots and heritage of country music and the styles of touring that existed before pop and rock music and commercial interests began to influence country music. The aesthetic is also linked to the venues themselves - and what is interesting is the ways in which the band are experiencing the venues as a thing/person/character within the tour. The way in which they engage with the spaces of the hall, responding to them as a physical space, but also as a history. I have discussed who does what and how that is talked about, but this section is about how they talk about where they are doing it. This happens both directly and indirectly. Bob told and retold the story of the first weekend of the tour - where they started with a full PA set-up and each instrument "plugged" in, but each night on that four stop weekend they "unplugged" a little more, and by the third stop had abandoned the PA completely. The band often talked about walking into a venue, singing or playing a bit to judge the acoustic resonance and echo, and then working out where to set up and what amplification was needed. Responding to the "space" also occurred in relation to how they decorated and used the space. While there is an eye to presentation, professionalism and the goal of putting on a good show, the spaces also allow a certain rustic, homespun and low key aesthetic. This was also an effect of budget and the limited space the band had in cars to carry decoration.

The do it yourself, or DIY, aesthetic worked because of a set of factors - by playing in these spaces in which acoustic, low key production works and “fits” (in the Bourdieudian sense) - because of history, expectations, limitations, and the direct referencing of the old school touring by Bob - there is no need for the band to try to produce the “full show” and carry a full light rig, smoke machines, a full PA with top of the line speakers, mixing board and the like. The band does not need to incur that cost and effort. The audience was not expecting a rock show; in fact, it would not make sense in the context of the spaces, branding, style, and music of Bob and the band.

There was also a sense that these things were not important to Bob in this touring experience. What was important, and the focus, was the music, the experience of seeing the band play music, up close and personal. And for the band it was about enjoyment, meeting people, seeing these communities and being on the road with friends. It was also about making money and developing a bigger fan base, but the volume expected was not high.

This also worked at a meta level - with Bob consistently making a connection between the nature of the halls, their position in communities and their historical position provided inspiration for things like poster design, performance style and the story told about the tour.



Figure Eight: Poster for South Australian leg of the Lucky Country Hall Tour.

Image credit: Bob Corbett

Connection with community

The fieldwork accounts in this Part reveal what the band actually do when they “meet” the country hall spaces. The accounts, when considered alongside the public statements Bob makes about the tour, reveal an understanding within the band that the way of doing things is quite different. The activities undertaken by the team may be similar to the activities undertaken by a team working within the “commercial” touring scene, but the stories told about it and the meanings these acts have to those doing them are quite different.

In doing this tour Bob chose not to engage in the style of touring which has been more recognisable and established in Australian country music over the past thirty years. The Lucky Country Hall Tour differs in the venues, but also their location and size. The tour took in many of the smaller towns, those towns within about one hundred kilometres of a regional “city” like Tamworth, Newcastle, Toowoomba or Gosford, rather than just playing those larger centres. The logic of attracting people from a whole region to a central place is rejected, with Bob talking about taking the music to the people instead. There is a realisation that attempting to attract people from a large geographic area relies, to some extent, on stardom and profile. Bob was unsure his “star” and profile was sufficient to attract a large enough crowd who had to travel long distances. But in many ways this concern was eliminated from his public discussion of the tour. It became secondary to a narrative of connection with place, people and community. In an interview on ABC Newcastle with Carol Duncan, the week before the tour began in the Hunter region of NSW, Bob said:

I went to start organising this tour thinking that I’d be dusting off these old halls that hadn’t been used in a while. But sixty to seventy per cent of these halls that we’re doing have been preserved by either a hall committee or by a preservation society, or just by a group of volunteers that want to keep the lifeblood of the hall pumping ... I don’t know whether it’s going to be a tour that swims or sinks. But it is going to be an interesting case study to see whether communities embrace the fact that there’s an act, an event coming to town, in their hall ... It will just be interesting, because the way I see it is a lot of the smaller towns would usually have to go to their nearest regional centre or city to go and see a show. And I know that I’m blowing my own horn here, but I know that we do put on an excellent show. It is a really diverse, funny, entertaining show ... And I’m throwing it in there, obviously, to promote the tour. But how do you let a community know that this is coming to town: through a simple poster, you might see that in your local supermarket shop window, but what is that other factor?

Carol Duncan: Well, you’re coming in here for starters.

Bob Corbett: Yeah that helps, all this helps, coming in and playing.

Carol Duncan: But not everyone is going to hear this. Lots of people will.

Bob Corbett: Maybe we should get the old Blues Brothers police car with the megaphone and just drive down the street [silly voice] “Ladies and gentlemen...

Bob Corbett and Aunty Sue.”

Sue Carson: I think we’ll be hitting the shops in the afternoon and saying hi and talking to people beforehand (Duncan 2013).

In this interview both Bob and Sue speak about techniques for trying to draw out the local community, and this is underpinned by discourses of “community” and “localism”. These discourses were used throughout the tour as another way of talking about why it was special, important and unique.

Promotional practices for this tour did differ from those used by other artists playing the usual pub and club circuits. The standard approach to promotion involves: advertising, in local newspapers, on radio and occasionally television for those artists with more money to spend and in regional areas where television advertising is cheaper; posters which are distributed to locals and displayed in local businesses; media interviews, usually on community radio or ABC local radio and in local newspapers; social media promotion; and advertising and promotion undertaken by and at the venue. These methods were used by Bob, albeit on the cheaper end of the scale – there was little budget for paid advertising. Instead, Bob relied on small scale, local, community networks for promotion. Advertisements and media releases were printed in local newsletters, such as the “Paterson ‘Psst’ Newsletter”, rather than regional newspapers. Part of the promotional practice which evolved throughout the tour, but which was hinted at by both Bob and Sue in the above interview, was on the day, on the ground, engagement with the local community. Jenny, a friend of the band, who travelled with the band as a roadie, to sell merchandise and tickets and generally help out on the road, was central to this. She would approach people in pubs, cafes or on the street, telling

them about the show, telling people to come along and spread the word. She also arranged opportunities for the band to play at community events, like playing half time at a local footy match on the day of the gig in Murrurundi, NSW. These practices were consistently discussed as engaging with the community, not at PR, promotion or advertising, although it was clear the aim was to build an audience.

This was also referred back to Slim's approach to touring. Bob said:

It was hard work for Slim. I talked to people like John Elliott, who spent a lot of time on the road with him. You've got to make sure the town knows you're coming and cover all aspects of the media. You do it, you do it again and you keep going around until you build it up. That was really valuable advice from someone who's been on the inside (Corbett quoted in Rose 2013, 16).

This idea of the slow build, through the development of relationships with communities and individuals, is common in discussions of country music traditions. There is a sense that this is the best, most "authentic" way of doing things – rather than "buying" an audience through expensive advertising and hype. It also reflects a reality of touring – artists do tour extensively and consistently – even "stars". Beccy Cole, for example, plays hundreds of shows around Australia each year (see "Appendix Six - Beccy Cole 2013 Touring Schedule" for an outline of her 2013 touring). Beccy's touring is on a different scale to Bob's hall tour, but the idea that you establish and maintain personal connection with fans in a particular area by visiting regularly guides touring practice. As discussed in "Part Two: People and Relationships", the one to one relationship between artist and fan in country music is central to the organisation of the industry.

Part of what happened on the Lucky Country Hall Tour was that the slow build would occur within a tour leg. The small scale of about one hundred kilometres per leg meant that often people would see the show in the first town and then either return or tell

friends to go see another show on that leg. The proximity of towns meant that this worked in a way that it would not have if the distance between shows was longer.

The central position ideas of "community" had in this tour was highlighted by Bob at the end of the first leg which took in Paterson, Scone, Murrurundi and Gresford (all in the Hunter region of NSW). Bob posted on social media:

Another interesting dynamic that we became familiar with by the third show was not knowing if anybody was going to show up until the doors opened... "Do we set up a 100 chairs and then look like a dick if 3 people show up? Or do we start at around 30 chairs and then see what happens?" Thankfully, not one of the shows flopped and the towns came out for a great night.

Another interesting thing to witness was that everyone stacked their chairs at the end of the show. Ha! Well, it is 'their' hall after all. On other occasions I witnessed locals setting up their own hall tables (and packing them up). Others arrived to find that they could BYO so they quickly ducked down to the pub to bring back some refreshments - spreading the word about the show while they were down there - bringing back one or two extra people. Gold.

Before the tour started I threw around the word, 'community' in a lot of the advertising and interviews. Coming out of this first tour leg, my understanding of the word 'community' has evolved. At one show, I had just walked off stage, the crowd was still cheering, I walked backstage to find some youths trawling through our stuff. They saw me and bolted out the back door. Word quickly spread (as I didn't know if they had stolen anything). Within 20 minutes the town had tracked them down, bag searched them and verified that nothing had been stolen - they were just being kids with nothing better to do getting into places they shouldn't have been in - they should've come to the show instead. Props to Stephen and Debbie for finding them up a tree. Ha!

This whole 'Hall Tour' thing may seem counter-intuitive in today's industry but it is by far the most heart-warming and real musical experience I've ever had. To be able to break the line between 'performer and audience' so easily and sit on a chair and play a song next to an 80 year old woman and then look across the room to see Dave on his double bass in another corner, Robbie playing the dobro next to a 6

year old boy and Sue walking amongst the crowd with her fiddle ringing in the rafters while everybody in the hall sang along was an unforgettable experience.

It's hard work to make a tour like this come to life but I am finding that the rewards are bigger than I had ever anticipated. I can't wait for the next leg where I'm sure we will learn even more about the joys of country halls and their people (Corbett 2013).

This "blog post" highlights the value for Bob outside the "commercial" and serves to distance Bob from that kind of touring and music making. Again, I believe that Bob genuinely feels this way, and I do not want to position this as a cynical manipulation of the field. But the connection of touring practices to ideas of "community", relationship with audiences, "real musical experiences" and a sense of joy and gratitude establishes Bob as doing things for the "right" reasons.

The balancing act for artists within the field of Australian country music, between the parts of the field underpinned by commercial logics and the value placed on "independence", "creativity", "integrity" and "authenticity" is evident in practices related to touring, although the logic differs from that in other areas - recording, songwriting, performing. The commercial style of touring would be categorised by established "retail" or corporate venues like clubs, RSL, Bowling and Leagues clubs in particular, and pubs which have established live music presence as well as food and drink sales, poker machines, or theatres which have some of these commercial facilities. Forging different styles of touring is often part of a desire to be "independent" and outside of the commercial world, and this is what Bob did in the design of this tour. I am not suggesting Bob consistently rejects these venues, but rather, the design of the Lucky Country Hall Tour was a deliberate attempt to work somewhat outside their logic.

The way that the practices revealed in the fieldwork accounts (and many others) - the on-the-ground setting up of the room, the meeting people, the ways of engaging with

them and performing - are connected to a story of what it is to be a country music artist - the space Bob is carving out for himself in that field which brings together what he values and desires in the field: connection, musical experiences, enjoyment. The combination of the halls' histories, the connection to Slim's touring style, their distance from commercial venues, the style of performance the halls are seen to enable or demand, the ideology of DIY espoused and the halls' location in the rural "community" all work to authenticate Bob and the Lucky Country Hall Tour and position him as legitimately country.

Part Four: Performance

Watching the Band Play: Fieldwork Account

Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band's launch party for their 2013 Lucky Country Hall Tour is being held on Oxford Street in Darlinghurst in Sydney. Ginger's is an opulent, art deco inspired cabaret bar above the Oxford Hotel, with a monochrome colour scheme and heavy curtains providing accents of red velvet. The stage is nestled into a corner of the room, backed by two spectacular arched windows that take in the activity of Oxford St and Taylor Square. Sadly, the curtains are drawn for the gig, shutting out the lights of the road and surrounding city, but enhancing the feeling of warmth and intimacy, particularly against the torrential rain falling outside.

At the start of the set Bob takes to the stage, alone. He plays "Bush Band from Botany Bay". An acoustic guitar introduction leads into Bob's vocals on the opening verse, and this sparse arrangement continues throughout the main body of the song. Then he begins to slowly build up the song using a loop pedal to record and layer guitar parts, vocal percussion and harmonies as the song progresses. This reaches a crescendo with a "la di da da" ad lib, when the main vocal line (la di da da da da) is layered with harmonies, looped with vocal beat boxing, percussive guitar percussion and a series of vocal runs. Once the Bob choir has been set up on the loop pedal, Bob leaves the stage, wandering through the room, encouraging the crowd to wave their arms in time to the music.

Sometime drummer with the band, Michael Carpenter, is playing with the band tonight, differentiating this gig from the rest of the tour that will, by design, be acoustic. With drums the band has a greater rock tone, picking up volume and intensity. Michael has a strong background in power pop and brings the forceful drums of that genre into performances with the Roo Grass Band. The difference between the two styles of

performances is deliberately highlighted when Michael is asked to leave the stage for a few songs, to show off what the tour will sound like. The energy remains high, and it is not that there is a dramatic drop in volume, but the band becomes a bluegrass, folk band, whereas while Michael is on stage playing drums they make a move into more rock territory (early country rock).

At the start of the set the band unplugs, leaves the stage and plays “Blackberry Special” from within the crowd. Wandering through the venue throughout the song they meet back up in front of the stage to finish. This is repeated later on with a rendition of “Flame Trees”, also unplugged. Each member of the band takes a position at a different point in the room, with Michael stuck on stage playing an electric bass with lead that is too short for him to roam through the crowd. The band plays and provides vocal harmonies while Bob wanders through the room singing lead vocals and playing rhythm guitar. This provides him with an opportunity to interact with the audience, making eye contact, serenading individuals (particularly those with cameras), and demanding the attention of those who are distracted: he seems to have a mission to spread the love throughout the room. This unplugged performance is nothing new to the band’s repertoire, although it is being used more regularly in this tour. I saw them do it the very first time I saw them play, at the Gympie Muster in 2010. They jumped off the stage mid set, taking position as a band directly in front of the stage and played “acoustically” for two or three songs. Bob is also known to jump off stage mid-song and either run through the crowd encouraging hand waving or clapping during instrumental breaks and solos, or to move through the crowd microphone in hand (or as far as the lead will let him) continuing to sing the song. This tour the “unplugged” performance will be expanded to many songs during the show and named “surround sound” or in one case “roosurround sound” (Wollombi, 4 July 2013).

The band plays with their whole bodies, unable to stand still. Whether in bluegrass or rocky mode, there is none of the stiff, static performance that often plagues folk and bluegrass in particular. Sue, dressed in a black rockabilly 50's style dress adorned with fluoro pink and purple My Little Pony-esque unicorns, black short sleeve cardigan and mid-calf black lace up boots, plays mandolin and fiddle. At points she stands grounded on her left foot. Her right foot taps in time with the music, setting off a wave of rhythmic movement through her whole body. Her head, as though connected to the hand strumming the mandolin, nods in time with the mando chops. When she steps up to the microphone to sing harmonies her feet are grounded and her hips take over, swaying along to the full pelt, presto tempo of the song. Her head remains still only long enough to sing the lines, and then shifts between nodding and swaying along to the melody. On fiddle, at other points in the night, there is no less movement. Her hips sway, knees bend and bounce, she leans into playing certain phrases, flicking her chest back on others; all the time her head moves and bobs in time to the music, barely contained by the chin rest. I find her endlessly hypnotising to watch, and was shocked the first time I met her and she was just an ordinary human.

Robbie, in jeans, a white shirt and a waistcoat and trilby hat, plays various guitars and bass, and is the least energetic of the group. His kinetic energy is directed to his playing, and for most of the show a serious diligence is demonstrated to this, foot tapping and slight swaying often the only physical distractions. Occasionally, he emerges as a comical figure, with exaggerated facial expressions and some rather awkward and geeky moves are busted out.

Dave, in blue jeans and a black T-shirt, on banjo, plays like he is in a rock band in the 80s. Moving from rock lunges, one leg out nearly straight behind him, while leaning into the other leg which is bent in front of him (Dave spends a fair portion of any show with his

legs spread widely apart); to standing with his pelvis and knees thrust away from the rest of his body, head thrown back, rocking or bouncing in time with the music. His basic mode is an in-between stance of bent knees, with a foot energetically tapping, which even in its ordinariness still oozes rock cool. It is hard to incorporate the power chord strum hand flicks common in rock while playing bluegrass picking banjo, but he manages, throwing them in at the end of lines. He should seem out of place, but the energy of the band as a whole allows for the theatrics and his often seem more natural and essential to his being than Bob's burlesque rock moves.

Tonight Bob's moves are limited; the stage is small so he is unable to travel around the stage like he would in a larger venue. He moves to the microphone for each of the lead vocal lines, leaning in, but stepping back or to the side for even the shortest break in singing. While singing he is constantly swaying, bouncing time to the music, or to emphasise lyrics, a foot tapping throughout the song. He throws his head back on some lines, his near permanent enormous smile transformed momentarily as he belts out the end of a chorus or sustained note. During instrumental breaks and solos he steps away from the microphone. He usually moves as close as he can to the soloist, facing his body and guitar toward them, listening with his whole attention, occasionally dropping to his knees, kneeling in front of them, in embodied reverence for their playing. At other times he pogoes or duck walks through solos, or in the most classic of rock moves, places one foot on the fold back speaker, leans back and pulling the neck of the guitar up toward his head, riffing away (generally playing rhythm guitar, with Robbie actually playing the solo). He only ever makes it back to the microphone just in time to launch into the next verse.

Performing Country

Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band are unique performers in the field of Australian country music. They bring together a range of musical styles, from country, bluegrass,

rock and roll, blues and folk, but they also engage in a set of embodied performance practices drawn from a variety of contexts, often moving between distinct performance styles within the one show (acoustic, comedy, rock and roll, experimental loop-pedal solo performance). They have carved out a position within the field, differentiating themselves from other participants through the distinctiveness and quality of their live show. While their show is unique, they are not the only participants within the field who negotiate their position on the basis of live performance. As a field which values live performance most artists turn their attention to how they understand, and approach performance and how they position themselves within the cultural logic of the field through performance practices and how they are on stage. This Part will draw on Bob Corbett and Beccy Cole as the central examples to explore how performance practices and personas are part of how artists negotiate a position of being authentically country.

This Part is about how country music is performed, specifically about how it is performed live on stage to an audience. It will explore how certain ways of being on stage (moving, playing music and presenting yourself) are understood, valued and practiced within the field of Australian country music. It will also explore how performance practices work to mark out subgenres within country music, fidelity to tradition, or challenges to the established order and rules, and how being on stage in particular ways can mark you as properly or improperly country. This section is underpinned by the idea that performance is performative. Drawing on Judith Butler's work, which will be explored further below, Auslander notes that in rock music:

authenticity is performative, ... rock musicians achieve and maintain their effect of authenticity by continuously citing in their music and performance styles the norms of authenticity for their particular rock subgenre and historical moment, and these norms change along with changes in the prevailing discourse of authenticity (Auslander 1998, 7).

This Part will start by continuing the exploration of how country music artists entertain and what they do on stage, how genre conventions and norms are established and maintained – who plays, what they play, how they play, where they stand, how they move and what they say – all work to position the artist at a particular point within the field. As argued throughout this thesis a series of distinctions shape the cultural logic – “country” versus “city”, “tradition” versus “new”, “independent” versus “commercial” and “real” versus “fake”. These distinctions are calibrated as they relate to different aspects of the field – and in relation to performance there are three key distinctions in operation: “acoustic” versus “electric”, “authentic singer songwriter” versus “entertainer” and “spontaneous” or “natural” versus “contrived”.

Within Australian country music, the distinction between “acoustic” versus “electric” maps onto ideas of traditional acoustic music, in which the music itself is valued over the potential mass audience or entertainment value of the performance²⁵. For “acoustic” the focus and value is in the musical talent and creative expression of music. Acoustic music is also tied to ideas of tradition and an idea that the origin of this musical performance was an acoustic based folk culture in which the music was played for enjoyment, but not money. “Electric” represents a broadening and growth of the audience, which is at times viewed as a negative because commodification and commercialisation comes with this growth, but this growth is also celebrated (sales, crowds, money are important within the field). The shift from acoustic to electric styles of performance is also sometimes

²⁵ It should be noted here that I am not arguing that this distinction between “acoustic” and “electric” is unique to country music, or that my identification of this distinction is an original contribution to popular music studies. I acknowledge the work of scholars to whom I owe an intellectual debt for their contributions to ideas about authenticity, liveness, unmediated performance and the distinctions made about quality in relation to these types of performance. This work includes Walter Benjamin’s on the role mechanical reproduction plays in transforming the “aura” of an original work of art into a commodity (2007); Roy Shuker’s acknowledgment of the division between acoustic based folk traditions, which are seen as non-commercial, and chart oriented pop recordings, aimed at a mass market (2001); Simon Frith on distinctions between live and produced performance in rock ideologies (1998, 2007) and as a marker of the difference between rock and pop music (1996, 2011); Keir Keightley on the tension between “mass” and “art” as defining dynamic in the development “rock”, the influence of folk music cultures on the emergence of “rock”, and the subsequent distinctions between “authentic” acoustic traditions and “artificial” electric instruments within the folk scene (2011, 109-114); and, the work of scholars like Gavin Carfoot on the cultural identity of the acoustic and electric guitar (2006).

viewed as a rejection or move away from tradition. The role and acceptability of technology is also caught up in this distinction. Within country music the unmediated and “real” is privileged, labelled as “acoustic”, and this provokes trepidation about any technology that may take away from the human playing an acoustic instrument mode. Acoustic performance often works to imbue an artist with authenticity through faithfulness to tradition. Electric performance is seen as an exciting and entertaining new development in the genre, which is also valued within the field. While this mapping of “acoustic” and “electric” is overly simplistic, the distinction between them is evident in the ways that artists connect performance practices to broader discourses to position themselves within the field.

The “songwriter” versus “entertainer” distinction reveals how ideas of self-expression, honesty, and openness are valued within the field. The songwriter is the dominant position within the field of Australian country music. Almost all artists position themselves as authors of at least a small number of the songs they perform (at times questions are raised about the potential that a songwriting credit is provided to the artist to “authenticate” their relationship to the music they record and perform). Artists who only record other people’s songs are often required to justify that position, in media interviews, discussion with other artists and interactions with fans. The incident which was explored in the Introduction of this thesis, where John Williamson, as President of the Country Music Association of Australia, questioned the merit of Adam Harvey and Troy Cassar-Daley’s *The Great Country Songbook* album in its nomination for Album of the Year at the 2014 Country Music Awards of Australia, reveals the way in which original music is valued within the scene. In relation to performance practices, the primacy of an autobiographical mode of performance is often set up as being better than performers who position themselves as “entertainers” within the field. Strategies of deliberate distancing between the “real” offstage person and the “character” are often

used to legitimate the position of “entertainer”, or artists work hard to reconcile the two positions within a performance.

The distinction between “spontaneous” or “natural” and “contrived” performance is applied to judge and categorise the quality of performance within the field. This distinction also works as a logic to shape how artists talk about the way they approach performing. There is a cognitive dissonance within the field when artists speak about performing – ideas of natural and spontaneous performance, where no thought, planning or rehearsal is behind the appearance on stage, compete with an idea that performance is a skill which is learned or rehearsed, mainly expressed as “doing time” in bad gigs, tours and the like where an artist learns how to perform on stage and thus earns their position within the field.

This Part will expand on the practices and themes raised in the opening fieldwork account and the key distinctions outlined above to explore how artists perform, but it will also explore the idea of stage persona or characters as a way that artists may mediate their on and offstage experiences. I move away from a focus on Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band at this point, and instead use Beccy Cole as the central case study. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, after years of engaging in the field of Australian country music playing a straight, highly sexual, man crazy, divorcee character, Beccy came out as a lesbian in 2013. The renegotiation of Beccy’s performance in light of this provided an opportunity to explore how the expectation of “honesty” and “realness” work within the field. Secondly, Beccy publicly claims to play a character on stage – thus troubling the idea that country music performance is “natural” and “real”. The idea that artists adopt a persona or character challenges ideas of authenticity as an essential or inherent quality, highlighting the constructed and deliberate nature of performance and the ways that artists work within the field to construct a performance which “fits” and is valued.

Why Live Performance?

Live performance is a significant part of the field of Australian country music. Live shows and touring are often claimed to be the most significant sources of income for artists. The Australian country music industry has been subject to the same shifts in consumer behaviour away from purchasing recorded music. When I interviewed Chris O'Hearn, who runs publicity and project management company Thrillhill Music, he argued that:

The record business is in decline ... you know, 20 years ago an artist would go on the road and tour but selling albums was still the key thing. That was where they made their money ... Touring was just the cherry on top... These days, touring is where they make all their money. The album [has] really just become another piece of merchandise. It's not the key factor of why you go out and tour. It sits there on the table with your T-shirt or whatever it is ... It gives them really an excuse to go out and tour because they've got a new album out, whatever.

Artists also regularly assert that touring and festivals are primary income sources. Bob spoke to me about the importance of corporate sponsorship of festivals in sustaining the industry. He reasoned that:

industry partnerships, like the 'Jayco Country Music Festival' or whatever... if it wasn't for Jayco²⁶, Toyota, the Volkswagen Amarok or Bundy²⁷ sponsoring events at which so many individuals can get up and play... you wouldn't be able to do it without that.

While the position of sponsors and their role in sustaining the industry could be an area for investigation, what I am interested in here is Bob's belief in the importance of the events which corporate sponsors are funding, that artists need the opportunities to get up and play to sustain their careers.

²⁶ Caravan, campervan and motorhome manufacturer.

²⁷ Bundaberg Rum, a dark rum produced in the south east Queensland town of Bundaberg.

Beccy Cole has regularly spoken about being a “gig pig” and loving being on stage playing music. She tours consistently and extensively. But her early career success is also attributed to the work she put into developing a reputation as an engaging live performer, and that without that she does not believe she would have been offered a second recording contract after the disappointment of her debut album (Cole 2015, 171–2).

The crucial position of live performance as a source of economic capital is not just a result of shifts within the music industry away from record sales but is also an effect of the structure of the Australian country music industry, particularly the lack of commercial airplay and support from mainstream media, and the disconnected and underdeveloped network of country music media. Commercial radio stations and networks that are not specific “country music” formats rarely play Australian or American country music. A handful of broadcasters mainly working in talkback formats, such as Ray Hadley on 2GB in Sydney and John Laws on Sydney’s 2SM and the Super Network which covers NSW and South East Queensland, have played country music over the years and have artists appear on their show as guests. Ray Hadley also hosts the “Ray Hadley Weekly Country Countdown” which is the “official” broadcast of the Music Network’s Official Australian Country Music Airplay Chart and which is syndicated to more than 60 radio stations around Australia (The Music Network 2015). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Local Radio network includes country music within their music catalogue and regularly includes country artists as guests across their programming (often associated with album or tour promotion). ABC Local Radio also includes “Saturday Night Country” from 10pm to 2am in their weekly schedule. ABC also includes a digital/online radio station ABC Country, which is a music only station available through online streaming and through Australia’s limited DAB+ broadcasting service (which is only broadcast in capital cities).

A collection of dedicated country music radio stations does exist around Australia, in both the commercial and community radio sectors. The biggest is KIX Country (formerly Top Country or Hot Country Network) owned by Grant Broadcasters (with some stations 50% owned by Capital Radio Network) with 45 stations around Australia. The network is programmed out of the eponymous station in Bundaberg, Queensland. Cheaper narrowcast frequencies²⁸ are used for about half the locations KIX Country is available. There are a number of small, amateur dedicated country music community radio stations around Australia such as TodaysCountry94one on the New South Wales Central Coast or 98.9fm in Brisbane Queensland (owned by the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association and broadcasting a mix of country and indigenous music). Other community radio stations around Australia include country music specific programs, such as All Kinds of Country on Sydney's 2SER from 5am to 7am on Saturday mornings, or alternative country programs like In The Pines on Sydney's FBi Radio Tuesdays 9pm to 11pm, Acid Country on Melbourne's PBS 106.7FM 3pm to 5pm Thursdays and Twang on Melbourne's Triple R 2pm to 4pm Saturdays. There are a number of programs that focus on and play music which fits into the "Bush Ballad" style. These programs often fall outside mainstream country music formats and awareness but are catalogued by the Australian Bush Balladeers Association (Australian Bush Balladeers Association 2015). The Country Music Channel (CMC), which is only available through subscription television service Foxtel, is primarily a music video format. It does include some live festival programming, such as CMC Rocks specials, country music related content, such "Rollin' With" which features country music artists hosting and participating in events

²⁸ Narrowcasting is a category of broadcasting service under the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (Cth) as a service whose "reception is limited" because it is targeted to a special interest group, intended for a limited location, provided for a limited period or event, provides programs of limited appeal or for other reasons has limited reach (s.18). KIX Country have argued that country music is of "limited appeal" or a "niche" format and as such complies with the definition of narrowcasting under the Act (see Australian Communication and Media Authority Investigation Report No. 1926, http://acma.gov.au/webwr/_assets/main/lib310804/kix_country_fm_report_1926.pdf).

such as the Variety Club Bash²⁹, as well as country music related television programs from America. Country music is featured on mainstream television, such as the breakfast and morning shows, but this is infrequent and only provides exposure to and for “stars” such as Kasey Chambers, Beccy Cole, Troy Cassar-Daley, John Williamson and Lee Kernaghan.

There are two main country music magazines in Australia, the monthly *Capital News* and quarterly *Country Update*. Distribution for both is irregular, particularly in metropolitan areas, where they are often not available in newsagents.

This small and often difficult to access media network means that the live performance context, through gigs and festivals, is a significant point of how the music is experienced. It is in this context that the music becomes connected to cultural practices, gains significance and is contextualised within a broader framework of country music culture. A question I asked throughout this research, of both fans and artists, was about how they got involved in the Australian country music scene, and the most common answers entailed festivals or gigs. Artists spoke about their first festival, often the Tamworth Country Music Festival, or gig as a member of a country band as being the start of their involvement. Fans also talk about the first country music festival they attended marking the start of their involvement in the scene – often couched in terms like “I had always listened to some country music, mainly really popular stuff, but it was when I first went to the Gympie Muster/Tamworth Country Music Festival/CMC Rocks, it all changed and I became a huge fan.” There is a sense that the live performance context is where the music becomes “real”. It also enables exposure to a wider range of artists than just those a fan (or even artist) has in their CD collection³⁰. There is also a belief in a special

²⁹ The Variety Club Bash is a fundraising car rally, which raises money to help children. The rally includes only cars made before 1976 and travels through “outback” Australia.

³⁰ Social media and the online availability of music has altered this somewhat, but it has not replaced the centrality of live performance contexts in country music experience.

quality of live performance, its originality and “realness” in contrast to the mediated forms of music, records, videos, which is particularly valued in a field which places such high value on “authenticity”.

Travelling Showmen: Roots and Heritage

A set of ideals guiding performance practices, personas and the relationship between the on and offstage identity of artists can, once again, be traced to stories circulated in the scene about Slim Dusty and other pioneers of Australian country music. There is somewhat of a disconnect between the publicly stated beliefs of contemporary artists about the “naturalness”, “authenticity” and “honesty” of Slim’s performance and public image and those of other pioneer artists like Tex Morton’s, and competing tales of constructed personas, deliberate choices about performance style and the development of an idea of authentic performance. Powerful connections are made within the field of country music between the signifying practices of performance and a set of values associated with country music. Additionally, contemporary artists and fans reference Slim and other pioneers’ “style” as the ideal from which all subsequent performance styles stray from or maintain.

Slim’s performance style is invariably discussed within the Australian country music community in terms like natural, modest, humble, accessible and real. Simple guitar and vocals, focus on the story and message, with none of the ostentatious rock and roll business. Beccy Cole focused on Slim’s down to earth performance, on and off stage, when talking about what she learnt from touring with Slim early in her career:

I watched the brilliance that was Slim Dusty night after night. The generosity of his performances was truly magical, and then he would spend hours with fans for photographs and autographs, staying for as long as it took. Slim was everybody’s mate, from the bloke who set up the chairs to the mayor and his wife attending the performance, and they loved him for it. Watching him operate was invaluable for

me – the fact that he never acted like a star made him the brightest star that country music has ever had (Cole 2015, 129).

Toby Martin recounts one of Slim's performances at Canterbury-Hurlstone Park RSL on the edge of Sydney's Inner West from 2002, highlighting Slim's performance "persona" which was

most clearly expressed in the sound of his voice. It belied his age. It was strong, direct, laconic, warm and humorous. He sang as if he were speaking, yet never sounded out of tune. The conversational style of his delivery immediately drew in the audience, seemingly unmediated by technique or style. The stories sounded like they really happened to him. Its feeling of authenticity immediately distinguished him from the popular clichés of showiness. Further, he was dressed in his 'real' clothes – a waistcoat and Akubra hat (an iconic symbol of Australia) that, as photographs and film footage would suggest, he wore offstage as well as on. Of course the sense of realness was itself a performance style that contributed to this sense of historic timelessness (Martin 2011, 2).

Martin continues, arguing that the unadorned, simple and "authentic" performance was in contrast to the presentation and performance of the band, who were "slick": playing a "minimal style of country rock" while dressed in a uniform of red country shirts and black pants, Western cowboys in contrast to Slim's "iconic Australian dress" (Martin 2011a, 3). Martin argues that this contrast between the presentation of Slim and his band was part of a process of "denaturalising and renaturalising"³¹, where:

reality was denaturalised via the flashy, overtly cowboy clothing of the band and the clearly honky-tonk style of their musical performance, and renaturalised by Slim's voice, clothes and conversational stage persona. He was the comforting, reassuringly human part of the professional show (Martin 2011, 3).

Slim himself refers to the constructed, or selected, persona he created within country music. In his "autobiography" (co-written with wife Joy McKean) Slim recounts the "birth" of Slim Dusty:

³¹ These terms are drawn from the work of Aaron A. Fox (1992, 54-55), but Martin's application of the concepts differs somewhat from that of Fox, so I am relying on Martin here.

By the time I was eleven, I was darned sure that I wasn't going to be Gordon Kirkpatrick in my glittering future, no way. Gordon couldn't do this, Gordon couldn't do that, and Gordon wasn't allowed to do or say this or that. But, by hell, someone like a Slim Dusty, for instance, could and would do all the wonderful things I had in mind. That's how Slim Dusty was born, and I was so sure of it that I wrote the name in pencil across a photo of myself as a serious small boy in short pants and a striped blazer. That photo showed me as the family expected me to be, not as I wanted to be (Dusty and McKean 1996, 15).

The "real" Slim Dusty was the product of a kid with a dream of making it in showbiz, who wanted to escape family expectations and limitations. Plucky and precocious – Gordon Kirkpatrick took steps to register the name "Slim Dusty" as a business at age 15. But the adoption of a *nom de guerre* is positioned as opening a space to escape shyness, determinism and a feeling of despair, and be the "real" person he wants to be:

My shyness as Gordon Kirkpatrick disappeared the minute I put on my stage clothes and picked up my guitar. When I hit the stage, Slim Dusty took over and he was the person I wanted to be, not 'that Kirkpatrick kid from up the Nulla'. It's a funny thing. Slim Dusty was doing what he wanted to do; Gordon Kirkpatrick was tied to a farm, and felt a nobody. The farm wasn't so bad – it was a good life – it just wasn't the life I wanted. As my sister, Kathleen said, 'You can't be what someone else wants you to be' (Dusty and McKean 1996, 23–24).

Even in his explanation of the adoption of a *nom de guerre* a connection is made between performance and authenticity – the persona becomes a means for "true" expression of self. This trope is repeated endlessly within country music (and other music styles) – performing and performance personas allow artists to be or express their "real" or "true" selves.

Martin argues that the claims another pioneer artist, Tex Morton, made (and were made about him in the press) regarding being a "real cowboy", having worked as a drover, stockman, boundary rider, shearer, and itinerant worker, were essential in establishing his authenticity. Martin argues that these claims:

perpetuated the notion, also expressed in his songs, that he was untrained in music, yet well trained in life. Further, given that the subject matter of his songs was about rural working life, it gave him the authority from which to sing about such a life (Martin 2011a, 47).

Further, Martin states that:

Morton's public pronouncements, along with his visual image and song selection, helped to distinguish him from other performers working in Australia at the time and to present him as a 'true' hillbilly. There was nothing especially 'innate' in this persona. Rather it was a strategy developed in response to the growing public interest in real-life stories of a rural or hardscrabble life (Martin 2015, 22).

Tex Morton's public persona or image was characteristic of a modern (or postmodern) kind of celebrity – which emphasises authenticity as a person, or the "real" life of an individual, rather than their career or talent - with focus on "the person behind the persona" (Matthews cited in Martin 2011a, 48).

The manufactured personality of Tex Morton worked to convey the idea that he was a "real" cowboy, stockman or boundary rider: a real hillbilly. The connection with some sense of the "real" represented a break in Australian popular culture at the time and "reflected a growing interest in 'real' people in Australian culture at the time" which was in contrast to the vaudeville and variety culture (Martin 2011, 67).

Just as his pure hillbilly repertoire and sincere sound marked Morton as something real, within manufactured, professional culture, so did his image. The cowboy was a real person in the midst of the potentially phony and untrustworthy products of modernity. The audience could trust the cowboy to lead them through simulations, play-acting and projected shadows to a place where things were real and true (Martin 2011, 55).

Martin also posits the way in which the gaudy, rhinestone cowboy image of Tex's early career (and Slim's) gives way to a more "naturalistic" aesthetic as the point at which agents within country music culture began to work to inscribe notions of "authenticity"

and the “real” as lacking in showy-ness and bearing some relationship to the “real” people, such as farmers, that the artists are representing.

The tension between persona and authenticity and honesty is present in the field of Australian country music from the early stages of its development. Always present is a requirement that there is a connection, however tenuous, between the onstage “persona” and the offstage “real”. Part of this is also that onstage and offstage are not great delineating concepts – because it is expected the performance be maintained offstage – so for example, Slim works to maintain that he is Slim Dusty all the time. Participants in the field express belief that there is a continuity between these on and offstage personas, and artists, such as Beccy, witness and value the importance of those offstage performances where Slim maintains the friendly, open and humble persona, rather than acting like a “star”.

Woodford Folk Festival: Fieldwork Account³²

Late afternoon on a Sunday in December 2013, I sit in a marquee at the Woodford Folk Festival, sweltering in 43-degree heat. I am waiting for Beccy Cole to take the stage for her first appearance at a folk music event.

The marquee is full, the country singer has attracted a sizeable audience: people have been drawn away from offerings at one of the 28 other stages such as big-name Australian reggae act Blue King Brown, Belle Jar (a gypsy French pop swing outfit), as well as Irish sessions and political workshops with Simon Sheik of GetUp!. The band tunes up, sound check is complete and the MC introduces Beccy, “Our next performer has a very long resume, she’s played at many, many country music festivals all over Australia, but this is her first time at Woodford. Now, this wonderful lady has nine

³² I acknowledge that material and arguments included in this Part have been previously published as Bauder, Amy. 2016. “Playing Beccy Cole: authenticity, performance and characters in Australian country music.” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 30 (1): 100-113. The material is presented here according to Taylor & Francis’ reuse provisions for use in dissertation.

Golden Guitars, three gold records, was the 1985 under 16s softball champion. Out and proud. Blonde. Lesbian. Sheila. Please welcome to stage Beccy Cole.”

The crowd cheers, and the band begins to play. Beccy bounds on to stage in black mid-calf lace up boots, black leggings, a Celtic cross covered black mini dress, and a sleeveless cardigan, her hair piled simply into a claw clip. This is a change from the skin-tight jeans, sparkly tops, heels and big hair I am used to from her. She straps on her guitar and greets the crowd.



Figure Nine: Beccy Cole performing at the Woodford Folk Festival, 2013.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

“Well hello! Look at you. I love you folkies! You look like a rootin’, tootin’, scootin’ hootin’, electrocutin’, ball bursting country crowd to me.”

She pauses to adjust her guitar, singing a vocal riff to the band’s introduction as she does, and then continues, “Jeeze, you’re good lookin’. You’re much better lookin’ than a country crowd aren’t you?”

Beccy then launches into her first song, “Lifeboat”. At the end of the song she introduces the crowd to the self-deprecation that is central to her stage persona, pulling out the regular joke about talking too much, with the invitation to the crowd to tell her to “shut up and sing” when she rambles. This, as always, is met with an almost instantaneous heckle “shut up and sing” and Beccy’s response “you paid to be here, so I’d shut up and listen if I were you”. She continues, “I can’t help it, I was out there practising my folk face, ‘cause you’re not allowed to have such an animated face, and I was out there going like that [she puts on a rather blank expression – with a slight frown and crinkled brow of concentration], but I came out and went like that [grins: all teeth, stretched cheeks, wide eyes], so I’ll really try to keep it down for you.”

Playing to a Different Crowd: Changing Performances

Beccy Cole adopts and adapts various characters, or roles, within various contexts in the Australian music scene, most notably the country music scene, but also recently, the folk scene, the gay and lesbian scene, and the cabaret scene. The account above provides an example of the stated awareness Beccy has that performance is read differently, and has different norms, within different musical fields. Later in this Part I will be exploring how Beccy plays with identity, demonstrating a shrewd awareness of how performance can be used to develop stage personas or characters as a way of situating yourself within cultural fields. There are many iterations of the Beccy Cole character, which are subtly or dramatically adapted to fit the context. In country music Beccy’s characters (for they are even adapted within the country music scene, which is a diverse culture) are collections of practices, which have consciously drawn on iconographies of the working class, femininity, rural culture and Australian-ness. Beccy frames her performances in a Goffman-esque paradigm playing roles: on-stage “characters” and an off-stage “real” (as expressed by Beccy) (Goffman 1959).

At Woodford, Beccy, as a newcomer to the folk audience, worked fast to establish a character: the self-parodying joker. She recycled lines and performance practices used in the country music context, but showed an awareness of the new cultural context. The light-hearted joke about “folk face” reveals Beccy’s sensitivity to how performance conventions in folk differ from those in the country music scene.

The ways Beccy, and others such as Bob, move between fields and the adjustment required to performance reveals the regulatory function of genre and audience expectation – there are identifiable norms in each field – evident through tradition, discourse, rewarded with applause and recognition or punished with poor audience response. But, as with musical styles and artists, these norms are never fully contained or constrained by the particular field – rather there is always slippage and movement – and this works to shape and reshape the fields.

Performance Styles

Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band’s acoustic, bluegrass style, with elements of rock and vaudeville, while not completely singular and out of the ordinary, is a particular rendering of the possibilities for action that are present within the field of Australian country music, as well as other musical traditions. It is important to note that the field of Australian country music includes a diverse range of performance styles and conventions.

An artist like Lee Kernaghan regularly played in the same festival line-up as Bob. Lee takes to the stage with a band of six, including drums, electric bass, acoustic guitar, two electric guitars, and back-up singer, a full light show, smoke machine and pyrotechnic effects. Part of Lee’s show has been a rendition of “Great Balls of Fire” which climaxes with Lee standing, playing the keyboard with both hands and one foot, strobe lights flashing all across the stage, and his four guitarists and sequin clad back-up singer

gathered around him making a lot of fairly indecipherable noise, all while a giant beach ball printed with flames is bounced through the mosh pit. Lee's show also includes an explosion of fireworks bursting from the neck of Lee's guitar at the conclusion of a song. Another mainstay of country music festivals during my research period was John Williamson who often plays sitting down, unaccompanied, just his acoustic guitar and stomp box as musical backing. His movement is constrained by his seated position, and there is little showiness. Bob, Lee Kernaghan and John Williamson not only sound different, but they also inhabit the stage differently, draw attention to different elements of their performance and feel different to the audience. This is both an effect of their position in the field in the ways discussed in the previous chapter – Lee is a “star”, working in a “larger” performance context to Bob. But John Williamson is also a “star”, he is just working to position himself very differently in the field: as a serious singer songwriter and traditionalist. The differentiations in these performance styles, and those of other artists within Australian country music reveals the way techniques, styles and aesthetics are used as strategies to position artists within the field. Bob's unplugged performance, Lee's pyrotechnics and John Williamson's seated performance all fit and make sense within the field, and these performances are part of a range of strategies used to mark out the artist as a particular type of country music artist. An aspect of this is the way in which certain performance elements are prioritised - musical performance, spectacular effects, stories, close attention, grand scale - and from what traditions they are drawing their practice - bluegrass, rock and roll, bush balladeers.

Bob is also working to renegotiate performance conventions within the subgenre of bluegrass. The band perform in a way that is the antithesis of “bluegrass face”³³, a serious and unanimated performance style that is common within traditional bluegrass

³³ This is a term I picked up from other bluegrass fans or performers. It predates my thesis research and as such I can not place it.

performance. The convention within bluegrass is to stand still on stage, unsmiling, serious; the fast and virtuosic guitar, banjo and mandolin picking is the focus. The Davidson Brothers, one of the most popular and successful bluegrass acts in Australia stand still and staid while playing. They do crack jokes and ham it up, playing at being larrikins, but this occurs between songs, not while they are playing their instruments when a serious, focused concentration takes over. Mustered Courage, a bluegrass band from Melbourne, also perform within this musical virtuosity frame, with their live shows being all about the picking. While their live shows lack the energy and excitement of the Roo Grass Band's, this is not to say that their live performance is any less valued within the scene – Mustered Courage is incredibly well regarded and popular at festivals – largely because of their “chops”, or musical virtuosity. These are different positions within a musicianship versus entertainer distinction (which mirrors the songwriter/entertainer distinction in many ways).

There are strong social connections between the Roo Grass Band and Mustered Courage, underpinned by respect and awe for the other's talent – with both bands making efforts to see the other play festival gigs. During Tamworth in 2014 I attended a Mustered Courage gig with Bob, Sue, Michael and another country musician Chris Murphy. At one point Sue stopped and declared:

“They are just so good. It makes me stop and realise how much better I need to get to compete. We just have nothing compared to their technique. I have to practice so much more, start taking it more seriously.”

“But you guys are brilliant,” Chris retorts.

“I have nothing on these guys – I can't play those licks or pick like that on the mando.”

“But they can be really boring to watch once you get past the fast picking. You guys are never boring to watch,” replied Chris.

Sue conceded, “I guess”.

This small snippet highlights the ways in which certain elements of performance (musical virtuosity, entertainment, stage craft) are valued differently in different parts of the field (or subfields). Sue’s insecurity was in some ways a product of the Roo Grass Band’s attempts to position themselves within bluegrass performance traditions. Within that field authenticity and value is tied to musicianship and virtuosity, and while these things are valued in country music, they are tempered or displaced by the demand within country music for scale and popular appeal, under which stage craft and other ways in which artists use the stage to entertain and draw attention is valued.

Bob and the band’s performance incorporated more movement, through swaying, dancing, rock and roll inspired posing and dancing, than many bluegrass artists. These visual cues work to differentiate Bob from traditional bluegrass, further marking out his position in the field. They are also shaped by their location in the field – as performers with over 20 years of experience playing pub rock and covers, with a love of bluegrass, but also of pop music, glam rock, musical theatre and showing off.

Jump Endings, Smoke Machines and Rising Stages: Fieldwork Account

After accelerating through their upbeat, lick-filled, busy, bluegrass version of Paul Kelly’s “Sydney from a 747”, Bob sings the last of the repeated “Have you ever seen Sydney from a 747 at night?” lines and the band slows, almost imperceptibly, as if taking a collective breath. Bob sings the last line, “I’ve never seen Dallas from a DC-9” and the band play a final concluding coda, flicking arms, or in the case of Sue, the fiddle bow, in a dramatic flourish as they play the last note.

“Oh! We forgot the jump ending!” Bob declares.

“I’ll have to explain the jump ending to you: Robbie and I went up to Goondiwindi to play at this River Jam Festival a while back. We had to play at this school; it was both the

state and private school had come together in this one big hall and we played this concert for them. Afterwards there was a young band who had won the band competition and they taught us how to do the jump ending. What you do... you all take this home and practice it, okay?" says Bob as he turns side on to the microphone.

"You've got to jump up." Bob puts his weight on his left foot, which is behind him, knee bent, and then flings his right foot forward. He also starts to curl his head down toward his chest.

"Legs spread like that."

Bob bends his neck, tucks his chin into his chest.

"But you've got to put your head down as you jump, because then it makes you look like you're jumping higher".

He tucks his head down again, reacting to the crowd's groans and laughter.

"I've tried it, I've looked at myself in the mirror, and it is the truth! So watch out for the jump ending, we just missed the moment! We're sorry. But there are plenty of other opportunities. We can do this."

Robbie starts strumming, Bob follows and the whole band hunch forward, assuming the jump ending position.

"We can make an opportunity!" says Bob. The strumming continues, building to a two note ending and all four members of the band jump, throwing one leg out in front, the other tucked under their body, head bowed, chin folded into their chests, their backs parallel to the ground.

"We'll give you a warning. That's not the only one. We just hope the smoke machine is not broken next time!"

Later in the show, Bob begins the spoken bridge in “Blown Away”: “I said at the beginning of the tour, if this tour was successful and we made a million bucks, the first thing I was going to buy was a smoke machine. Guess what!?”

Smoke emerges from a small smoke machine set up at the front left hand side of stage.

“I’m not satisfied with just a little bit of smoke. I want us to see nothing; I just want the room completely filled. So no one can see a thing,” Bob says, somewhat ironically, looking at the infinitesimal volume of smoke the machine is producing. At this point smoke begins to billow from the right of stage where someone has secretly set up an industrial smoke machine.

“What?!” exclaims Bob, “A second smoke machine!” He looks around grinning, shocked and questioning, trying to work out where the smoke came from.

“We must have made two million dollars!”

The stage completely fills with smoke. Dave starts fake coughing and calls out,

“I seem to have lost my band, where’s my band?”

A kid yells out, “How do you make that?”

“I really don’t know how to answer that. How do you make it?” Bob asks.

“Oh its just really vicious chemicals, don’t worry,” replies Robbie. Bob starts singing,

I got my first real six-string

Bought it at the five-and-dime

Played it 'til my fingers bled.

And the crowd takes over,

Was the summer of '69.

Bob looks around, shocked and ecstatic. “Oh the song, the song, we’re playing a song... what’s the next line?”

During the encore at the end of the show, the band pauses for a second at the end of a chorus of “Glory Days”, just as the song is about to shift gears and build to the finale, a bagpipe-led jig. Bob calls out, “Rising stage!”

The four members of the band immediately drop to a crouching position. Dave starts playing the first phrase of the jig on the bagpipes, and then the band starts to slowly rise. They move up steadily over about ten seconds, in complete synchronisation. Once standing they begin jumping up and down. The bagpipes dominate the second half of the song, with the band coming in and out with “na na’s” and exaggerated strums on the downbeat.

Bringing Van Halen Theatrics into Acoustic Bluegrass Country

A significant element of Bob’s performance style is a certain predilection for elements of rock and roll performance practice. The three incidents are accounts of performance elements that were consistent parts of the Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band show during the Lucky Country Hall Tour (as well as festival performances in the study period 2012-2014). It is an affirmed and deliberate approach for Bob. When I asked about his performance influences he did not hesitate:

Rock and roll! David Lee Roth and Van Halen: the beginning, the middle and the end! ... If you are going to get up on stage you may as well use the bastard. And Diamond Dave, I mean he might have worn Spandex, and had the holes cut out for his butt cheeks and stuff like that. But you don’t have to go that far.

Michael Carpenter also highlighted the imagined scale which underpins Bob’s use of the stage: “it’s a stadium act: every night for Bob Corbett is Madison Square Gardens.”

Michael also notes that this could be written off as a novelty, but that it should be appreciated as effective entertainment and a quality show. It is also clear that neither Bob, nor the band, are a rock and roll band; they temper the potential showiness and

scale with acoustic elements, self deprecating jokes, and a touring style which, as outlined in “Part Three: Places and Spaces”, is articulated to traditional country music.



Figure Ten: Bob Corbett “rockin’ out”.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

The Relationship Between the Showiness of Rock and Roll and Country Music

There is a popular narrative that Australian country music underwent a significant shift in style in the 1980s, heralded by artists such as James Blundell and Lee Kernaghan. These artists and this shift brought elements of rock and roll into the traditional bush ballad sound and style.

Lee Kernaghan writes about the impact that seeing the Rolling Stones had on him:

It was a thumping, rocking, pounding musical Big Bang. I stood there surrounded by the energy and excitement, thinking, ‘What if we could take this – this sort of music – out on the road?’ I wasn’t converting to rock, betraying my country roots, denying the music I loved. I was on the verge of heading into the studio to record a

new album, and there – as the place went nuts – I had an epiphany. If I had anything to do with it, rock’n’roll wasn’t going to have all the fun (Kernaghan and Buchanan 2015, 95).

There is a sense of danger and risk in Lee’s account of including rock and roll in his style – not that it would be unpopular – but that it would be seen as a rejection or turning away from tradition. He consistently writes about it in terms of danger, “ignition” and “the infectious, potentially hazardous, high-octane kick of old-time rock’n’roll” (Kernaghan and Buchanan 2015, 107).

Lee is held up, in part, as being responsible for the shift in Australian country music from a traditional bush ballad sound and style of performing. This relies on a somewhat false belief that Australian country music was all quiet, acoustic based music with sedate stage craft prior to the 1980s. Slim toured with a full, electric, honky-tonk band from at least the late 1970s and a significant alt country scene developed in the 1970s. However, a distinction between country and rock and roll carries through. Part of Lee’s success in “transforming” the field could be attributed to the marrying of certain rock and roll performance influences (the danger, the fun, the energy, lights, noise, pyrotechnics) with a sensitivity to traditionalist themes: he goes to great lengths to authenticate these performance practices with reference to his “country heritage”, bush ballads and the connection he has with the land. The inclusion of rock and roll influences remains a source of consternation for country music traditionalists – for destroying the “real” country music, being too showy, not serious or at worst for overwhelming the stories and the music.

The incorporation of rock and roll performance styles by Bob Corbett works through a different cultural logic. Such style is nestled within acoustic, bluegrass sounds, a low key homespun aesthetic, the choices he makes about touring, relationships and business

practices and the discourses he uses to explain them. They all serve to differentiate Bob and the Roo Grass Band within contemporary mainstream country.

The way in which Bob explicitly names rock and roll as a performance influence is also of interest here. Part of the negotiation of the field is the way in which possibilities for action that are present within the field are incorporated into the embodied performance of country music. The citation of influences articulates an idea that artists learn and position themselves in relation to other performers from both within and outside the field of country music. These performers are sometimes not even musicians, with guitar player Robbie Long citing Mr Bean as his inspiration. Watching other people perform is understood as a way of learning the craft of performing – learning to move, communicate, connect and express yourself. Influences and inspirations are more regularly cited by artists in relation to singing style, instrumental playing style or songwriting than they are for how an artist inhabits and moves around a stage. For most artists there is still a privileging in their public statements of the “playing music” aspect of being on stage over their stagecraft. This is part of a discourse of “naturalness” or “spontaneity” which is tied to authenticity.

Natural or Rehearsed? Performance as Skill

Within the field of Australian country music the discourses of “mastery”, “practice”, “professionalism” are set up in opposition to those of “naturalness”, “honesty”, “spontaneity” and “being real”. This often involves a conflation of the idea of the scripted, rehearsed show with contrivance, dishonesty and faking it. The goal of performance within country music is “connection” with an audience, often thought of in relation to emotionally charged connection (making someone cry is more valued than making someone laugh for instance). The rehearsed, scripted or performed show is seen as a faked connection – it is not real – because it is not spontaneous.

Tim Holland, former A&R Manager for ABC Music (one of the biggest labels in Australian country music), told me in an interview that the big stars in country music are generally those artists who:

were great entertainers. I don't think there's enough emphasis on the art of performing. Every act who makes it is great live, as well, ultimately. A lot of artists get up and just perform a bunch of songs and they don't actually put on a show. People who pay money to see a musical or a show, they're paying money to see a show. They're not paying money to see an artist go up there and play a song. It would all be about them feeling good about what they're doing, you know? There's an indulgence in their own kind of thing. Again, these artists who are at the top get that. Sometimes it's quite obvious that they have scripted a show and there's choreography and sometimes it's not obvious but they're doing it. They're not just making it up, up there. It looks like they are because they're very good and they have prepared themselves very well. But you see someone, like a singer-songwriter who knows how to perform a show and it looks like they're just getting up and singing a song and having a chat with you versus someone who is actually just making it up as they go.... I think there's a mentality that you shouldn't do that, to a certain degree, and that you're not a real artist if you script a show. It's complete rubbish because the art of putting on a good show is preparing one properly and rehearsing and that's what people go to see. The punter isn't a musician at heart. They're not going there to get a musician's ... to feel how a musician feels about playing music. They're going there to be entertained. That's the only reason they're paying money. They are not doing it because they should do it, because they should like this music and they should appreciate music because a musical authority says so. I don't think there's a lot of emphasis put on the art of entertaining people, more emphasis is put on being a 'real' artist.

For Tim this is about watching other artists, thinking about what works for people, learning from them and then working up your own show, practicing and then playing that set show for a few years until you "Just get it right and go out there and nail it every time". He argues that this runs counter to the discourses of authenticity which circulate within the field: "I think it's about being seen as authentic and real and make it look like

they're getting a unique experience each time". He argues that from his position of understanding the music business and success this discourse of authenticity as attached to spontaneous performance is a hindrance.

Michael Carpenter presented a complicated picture of the Roo Grass Band and "spontaneous" versus "rehearsed" performance:

the thing I love most about Bob's shows, is that there's just this honest sense of the moment... I love the sense of adventure in his shows, and the fact that it can go anywhere. Plus, he's got the most amazing foils with, you know, Dave and Sue and Robbie. The fact that he plays off them... It's like the perfect crystallisation of incredibly talented people going 'where's our adventure going to be today?' ... I don't know what it's like to be in an audience for one of their shows, but I know what it's like to see the audience at those shows. And when they're there and they really let themselves go with him, it's the best thing that they see at these festivals... they'll just come up to me and they'll go 'oh my god, that show was amazing, so we came back and saw it three times'. So, for me for what's important from a performance point of view, is, the connection with the audience. But the connection with the audience comes as a consequence of the connection of the material and the musicians. You can get, I've been in great bands that don't say anything, you know? Great bunch of players, learning their parts, playing it spot on, but the show's boring. It's boring. And it doesn't go anywhere.

These comments about the "in the moment"-ness of a Roo Grass Band show rely on a sense of spontaneity and making it up as you go along, yet within this account, and the rest of Michael's discussion of performance and authenticity, there is also an acknowledgement that that takes work and practice. He cites the reason he can play Beatle-esque music so authentically (he plays in tribute band Beatnix) is because he has been studying, listening to, playing, and being with the music and performances of The Beatles for his whole life. This watching, listening, copying and repeating is central to "authenticity".

The resistance to ideas of scripting, planning and rehearsal for the non-musical performance elements of country music relies on a disconnect between ideas of musical mastery (which relies heavily on rehearsal, practice, repetition) and authentic performance which is somehow more “real”. But it also works against the discourse which does have immense currency within the field of Australian country music – that of “doing your time” – which is used to either authenticate a level of success for an artist who has spent enough time playing bad, unfulfilling, poorly played gigs, or to cut down an artist who is seen to have had success too early, too quickly or who has poor stagecraft.

“The Story of My Life”: The Autobiographical Mode in Australian Country Music

One of the key performance conventions (which is also a songwriting convention) is the autobiographical singer songwriter mode. Part of this mode is that songwriting is valued over the ability of an artist to entertain, thus helping to limit discussion of performance. It also works to inscribe an expectation that the songs artists sing, what they say on stage and off, and how they present as people is autobiographical and “true”. For many artists much work goes into creating a sense of consistency between on and offstage personas, and artists make regular public declarations about their “honesty”, “realness” and that “what you see is what you get”. Extreme honesty becomes a performance strategy in and of itself.

The probability that artists are singing songs they have written has intensified in the past thirty years. Songwriters were valued in the early stages of the development of Australian country music – Slim is lauded for his ability to chronicle the bush. However, there was also space within the field for artists, including Slim, to record the songs of others. There was still an expectation of what Martin terms “autobiographicalness” -

that the singer has personal experience of what they are singing about (Martin 2011a, 19).

The importance of honesty and directness and its relation to the “real” person is revealed through the overwhelming dominance of an autobiographical mode of performance. This mode is supported through lyrical content, stage banter, media and social media engagement, and attached to a professed discourse that artists are sharing their private lives with the country music community – singing songs and telling stories about their family, relationships and experiences (love, death, birth, breakups, illness). Artists do this to varying degrees, some are protective of their children, partners or other parts of their lives, while others bring their kids on stage, share details of their breast cancer treatment, tell all on their divorces. There is always a level of editing though.

There are strategies artists use to circumvent this expectation of honesty – such as characters, or performing comedy acts. These allow artists to own the “deception” and at times protect a more serious country music career. John Williamson had a suite of characters who emerged for certain songs during his shows throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but this seems to have largely been retired as a strategy for John, who instead adopts the autobiographical songwriter mode completely. Bob Corbett performs as Bobby C when playing covers gigs in Newcastle, thus protecting his country music persona and career through an act of renaming. Beccy Cole performed as “Randy” the male session guitarist for emerging artist Chris E Thomas. She dressed in jeans, plain, baggy T-shirt and baseball cap, put on a deep voice and barely spoke. This served to mark this performance out as distinct from her solo career. Outside of these strategies there is an expectation that the first person is autobiographical in Australian country music.

The expectation of similitude between the public persona of an artist and their offstage “real” life is in part a result of the accessibility of artists by fans. Fan ownership of artists means there is a demand that artists will be, at least sometimes, available. This accessibility is largely a virtue of the size of the scene, a big solo gig often only has a crowd of a few hundred people, but is also a result of the ways in which space, gigs and relationships are negotiated (see “Part Two: People and Relationships” and “Part Three: Places and Spaces”). Meet and greets or merchandise signings after the show are almost universal, to the point that Adam Brand holding his before the show is a cause of much comment and complaint. Artists often attend or participate in festivals and gigs as audience members, and are expected to engage in conversation with other fans in these cases. Many artists also spend a great deal of time working at online engagement with fans. These practices are discussed in relation to discourses of friendship in “Part Two: People and Relationships”, but they also work to establish an expectation that fans are engaging with “real” people. The discourse of authenticity works to shape the practices. There is fan expectation that who they meet offstage, casually, is recognisably the person from onstage (or in the media). This plays out in two main ways: artists maintain that they are their “real” selves on stage, and any persona work is limited; or that the performance continues into the real world. During the Tamworth Country Music Festival most female artists will not leave their accommodation without having their hair done, being made up and dressed in “stage clothes” because they believe they will be approached by fans. Bob Corbett always wears his trademark hat during festivals, Slim did the same (only taking it off if he did not want to be recognised). There is a tension here between a crafted persona and an idea of “naturalness”.

Playing Beccy Cole: Persona, Performance and Authenticity

Beccy Cole plays a series of characters in the different situations she performs throughout the Australian music scene. In creating her array of characters and personas

Beccy plays with these and other performance practices in ways which call into question, and even mock, the expectations of honesty underpinning Australian country music, thus uniquely revealing the “work” that goes into authenticity in this genre.

I am not arguing that there is a “real” Beccy Cole, but rather attempting to reveal practices that produce public personas or characters. There is an expectation, or even requirement, of honesty in country music, most often expressed within the scene as “authenticity”. This expectation of honesty often obscures the Goffman-like framing of on-stage “characters” and off-stage “real” (Goffman 1959). So while artists such as Lee Kernaghan, Adam Brand and John Williamson also adopt performance practices which deliberately draw on iconographies of the bush, rural culture and Australian-ness to situate their stage personas within country music culture, work goes into convincing the audience that the on-stage persona and off-stage self is identical, that who they are on stage is the person they are at home with their family, or who the fan would meet at the petrol bowser or pub.

The characters of Beccy Cole work to disrupt notions of authenticity in performance in the Australian country music community, their “literal staginess” (Jagose 1996, 86) provides an entry point for critiquing the ways in which the “real” and “authentic” are privileged in country music. Beccy’s “coming out” and public statements about playing a character throw unique light on the constructed nature of her stage persona or character.

I am most interested in the ways in which these practices and characters are performed live on stage. While these characters are developed and observable in recorded product, lyrics, video clips and marketing material, these materials are not the focus of this thesis. The performance practices of Beccy Cole offer a more nuanced understanding of the way

in which discourses of honesty and authenticity are connected to the practices of Australian country music artists.

Drawing attention to the constructed nature of identity, takes up the work of Richard A. Peterson whose work was outlined in the Literature Review. But to refresh, Peterson views authenticity as one of the distinguishing characteristics of country music in America, but not as a fixed quality inherent in the music, style, look or production, but rather something that is fabricated as part of the production of country music and the development of country music as a genre (Peterson 1997, 3). He explores the tension between an authentic real (which may or may not exist) and that mediated through the commercial world, which calls for regular, recognisable product, and the element of artifice that always exists in this context. Peterson's model of fabricated authenticity primarily explores markers of authenticity genre wide (Peterson 1997, 83), it provides a starting point for the investigation of how an individual artist fabricates authenticity through the development and performance of stage personas or characters.

Of particular relevance to my argument here is Peterson's conclusion that "maintaining the sense of authenticity takes work" (Peterson 1997, 223). He is at pains to point out that the use of the word "work" is intentional, to "signal that authenticity is a contrivance that takes a conscious effort to achieve and to maintain" and that part of the work is to make the "act" seem "natural" (Peterson 1997, 267).

In his work on Australian country music, Graeme Smith posits that "authenticity" in country music is judged on much more than the musical sound. According to Smith, authenticity is about "proper relations between music, the individual and society" including styles and contexts of performance, audience-performer interaction and modes of creation and production (Smith 2005, xiii). Smith provides a way of understanding how concepts of authentic Australian-ness, country experience, and

patriotism function to mark Australian country music and thus become possibilities for action for artists, such as Beccy. While the reminder in Peterson's work of the labour that goes into presenting as "authentic" prevents one from searching for the real, and rather looking toward discursive processes which underpin any identity or cultural form. These conceptualisations shape my exploration of the importance participants in the scene place on honesty, directness and emotional resonance as defining features of country music, how this is structured and how this is balanced with the commercial realities of country music which calls for regular, mass mediated product.

The prevalence of an autobiographical mode of performance, in lyrics, stage banter and media appearances, as well as the privileging of the singer-songwriter over the performer, are examples of how the ideals of "honesty" and "directness" shape practices within the scene. There is a tacit understanding and expectation that artists are singing songs and telling stories about their lives, families, relationships and experiences, and being themselves on stage. Beccy Cole's performance practices and public statements about her on-stage "character" begin to trouble these understandings and expectations.

Performativity, Practices, Characters

This analysis of Beccy Cole's performance is couched within a framework that builds on Erving Goffman's work on performance and everyday life, Judith Butler's concept of "performativity" and Bourdieu's "practices" and "habitus". Goffman's perspective uses theatrical performance as a model to underpin an exploration of:

the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining the performance before them (Goffman 1959, Preface).

My use of the terms "stage persona" or "character" to refer to Beccy's on-stage or public performance and "real" Beccy for her offstage persona is couched within Goffman's

paradigm, but also reflects the way in which Beccy speaks about the different contexts of her performances. In other words, she talks about her “real” offstage self as opposed to her “onstage persona” or “characters”. None of these performances are marked by an essential truth or “real” which is not present in the others, but rather, as an actor in Goffman’s framework Beccy has “a repertoire of ‘faces’ each activated in front of a different audience, for the purpose of creating and maintaining a given definition of the situation” (Tseelon 1992, 116).

Drawing on Judith Butler, I see Beccy’s stage persona or character, as performative in the sense that it is a “stylised repetition of acts” which, to a point become natural, but this naturalness is a trick performed under the pressure of disciplinary threat (Butler 1999, 176–179). In other words, the norms, ideals and expectations of the Australian country music community provide a framework of possibilities for intelligible and acceptable identities within that community, and the community also operates to reward or punish the ways in which these norms are adopted. The industry personnel and fans that comprise the country music community demand particular identities and modes of performance, with fame or popularity acting as some of the most obvious disciplinary threats. Her character is a performative identity, which has some relation to her offstage persona, but which she has consciously and unconsciously shaped to appeal to the community of country music, as a form of negotiation between the two. Beccy has consistently stated on stage and in the media that she has developed a character (or characters) over the course of her career which work to mitigate various aspects of her “offstage” life: as a way of dealing with shyness, her metropolitan upbringing, supposedly posh Adelaide accent, gayness, and other characteristics which may not be desirable in the country music community. The length of time Beccy has been performing this character has rendered the appearance of this repetition natural; people believe the character is the “real” Beccy, an authentic performance.

The conceptual frame in which I am working also draws on Bourdieu's work. The "character" is a collection of practices, in that, to quote Maton, it "results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social area (field)" (Maton 2012, 51). So the character of Beccy Cole is actually a practice, which is used to negotiate the relationship between her habitus (gay, woman, urban upbringing, shy), her position in the field and the available capital she can access (as a country "star" who can play on markers or stereotypes of a particular "country"³⁴ identity: drinking, crassness, sexuality) and the field or circumstances in which these other two factors exist (the community of country music.)

In developing this concept of the "character", I am taking the idea that habitus is not a deterministic and invisible mechanism but rather it is a "generative principle which is another name for the structural limits observable in practice itself" (Codd 1990, 138). Dispositions are neither mechanistic causes nor voluntary impulses, but rather things that enable us to recognise possibilities for action while also stopping us from recognising other possibilities. As a whole they constitute habitus, which is "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu and Nice 1977, 78). The character of Beccy Cole is a regulated improvisation, developed within the possibilities available in the country music community. These possibilities are made visible by the practices of the country music community through the social interactions that include routines, gestures or actions (Snell 2012, 39), as well as influences and role models, as well as other artists. Additionally, those in positions of power in country music also explicitly or implicitly express possibilities for artists: managers, record companies, media personalities, other artists, venues and even fans provide feedback or advice on how artists could or should alter their image for success, and some sets of

³⁴ Country, not rural.

practices are rewarded more generously than others, through popularity, sales, awards and bookings.

I have observed a transition in the Beccy Cole character from around the time of her coming out, and believe that an accrual of symbolic capital in the country music community enabled a new, or altered, performance of this character, as an “out lesbian”. As an agent Beccy has negotiated a new position in the field, whilst remaining in that field and subject to its constraints. This was not a sudden change, but rather a subtle and gradual shift occurred over a number of years. She has also moved into new fields, such as the gay and lesbian and the folk scenes where the “coming out” provided an accrual of capital, but which also required renegotiations and alterations to her character to remain intelligible and appealing to the audience (in addition to performing at Woodford Folk Festival in 2013, Beccy appeared at the Port Fairy Folk Festival in 2014).

The Clown

The character of “Beccy Cole” was born around 1993 when Beccy stepped away from Wild Oats, her mother Carole Sturtzel’s successful country band, and the Chamber’s family Dead Ringer Band to try to make it as a solo artist. This was not the first *nom de guerre* adopted by the girl born Rebecca Diane Thompson. She had shortened her name to Beccy (“Grandma was the only one who still called me Rebecca” [Cole 2015, 40]) and taken her mother’s surname “Sturtzel” upon joining her mother’s band at 14. In the Australian Story episode, Beccy recounted that Deniese Morrison, a prominent country star at that time, was mentoring her in the lead up to Beccy’s Star Maker win. Deniese:

had told me that Beccy Sturtzel was no name to have as a country singer. So, she sent me a letter and she said when you turn the page you’re going to see your new name. And I turned the page and it said ‘Introducing Beccy Cole’. I thought oh, righto (Cole in Cheshire 2012).

This story is told with a laugh, but highlights the first move into the character of “Beccy Cole” as a disavowal of the “real” Beccy Sturtzel/Rebecca Thompson. The Australian Story episode establishes a narrative which highlights a distance between the public and private Beccy. This narrative also mirrors that of Slim Dusty – the *nom de guerre* and character adopted early in life to enable entry into the country music industry, and also to give name and shape to an alternative persona. Early in the program Beccy intimates at the constructed nature of her public character:

I feel like Beccy Cole is, in some ways, a character that’s developed over the years: a part that I get to play. Beccy Cole can’t get a bloke and she makes jokes about that, and she sings songs about it, and she’s been accused in the past of being a bit of a man basher. It’s all tongue in cheek and it’s all a whole lot of fun. But I know I say things up on stage that I would never say in real life (Cole in Cheshire 2012).

In the Australian Story episode this “character” was set up as a way of protecting and covering for Beccy’s offstage life.

At other times Beccy has also spoken about the development of a clown persona as an extension of her being a “natural born idiot”, but also as a way of dealing with shyness in real life. At a Songwriter’s Masterclass in 2012, she recounted stories of her younger years when she was unable to order take away over the phone, unless she put on a ridiculous voice when placing the order. This spilled over to her public and stage personas as a confidence boost and protective shield.

The character Beccy Cole has been developed with some reference to a number of key influences, which provide “possibilities for action” in her regulated improvisation. In the Australian Story program she states:

Any philosophy I have about being a performer has probably come from a mixture of my mother and Dolly Parton. I never had any lessons other than watching and absorbing, especially my mother (Cole in Cheshire 2012).

At other times Beccy has also cited Bette Midler and Chrissy Amphlett as performance influences. At the Woodford Folk Festival in 2013 Beccy paid tribute to Amphlett, the “quintessential Aussie rock chick”, with a performance of “Pleasure and Pain”. In introducing the song, Beccy said:

I would love to, in my little country way, pay tribute to her right now, because she was at home on the stage, and I loved her so much. My dream was always to take some of her sass and humour and her attitude and bring that to country music. I don't know how much I've succeeded, but I still love her.

These women's stage personas are models of contrived, deliberate and staged character performance, with elements of the comic forming part of their performance. Her listing and explanation of these influences position Beccy's character as an “entertainer”, which sits in tension with the “authentic singer songwriter” subject position favoured in Australian country music. It also serves to highlight the antecedents for the importance to her of the production of a “character”.

I would like to stop here to note that I am making no claim to be interrogating class and gender, and to acknowledge that Beccy's performance of gender and class could be seen to play to conventional norms and stereotypes of femininity and female performers³⁵. My argument is more concerned with the way in which the “work” of her performative practices are rendered visible because of her coming out, the alterations of her “character” across performance contexts and the public claims to be playing a character on stage, and what this reveals about “authenticity” within Australian country music.

“Girls Out Here”

So what are the performative practices Beccy undertakes to help negotiate this character? One of the key songs in Beccy's repertoire is “Girls Out Here”. The song was co-written with Rod McCormack and Gina Jeffreys and appeared on her 2005 *Feel This*

³⁵ For examples of in-depth discussion about the performance of femininity and sexuality in popular music see Leonard (2015) and Whiteley (2000, 44-48).

Free album. In her live show Beccy recites a fairly standardised introduction for the song. It sometimes includes the following:

I had the Adelaide knocked out of me that night. I went up to the bar and asked for a chardy. I was met with a blank look and silence fell in the noisy bar. So I nervously proffered, 'Oh a Bundy?' And they cheered. (Singleton, 17 August 2012)

However, the version released on Beccy's *Live @ Lizottes* album is the mainstay version of the introduction:

At about 3 in the morning we were all drunk and this chick came up to me and she put her arm around me and said, 'Dalby mate, Dalby is where men are men and so are the women.' I said okay, yes, lovely. ... I said it's nice and all that, and she said 'Mate, Dalby' she said 'I gotta get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and cut a sheep's throat'. I said oh gosh, how lovely for you. I said you girls are tough out here, and she said 'mate you don't f- mess with the girls out here' she said. I popped back to the hotel room and thought these girls need a drink, no they need a song about drinking. In country music we do sing a lot of songs about drinking, but I thought it was about time we had our own drinky winky song. Not that I indulge. I mean, occasionally I might have half a glass.

These stories serve to highlight some of the cultural capital Beccy brings to her character: drinking. She also effects a double movement, both positioning herself inside and outside the field. The references to her drink of choice "chardy"³⁶ and her "Adelaide accent" and the use of words like "lovely" and "gosh" position her outside the milieu of the Dalby girls. Yet she is also in a bar in Dalby drinking Bundy at 3am. In performing this story she embodies both her character and the Dalby character through the modification of voice and accent, and a change in her physicality – tall and smooth in "her" part and crouched, stiff and coarse in the Dalby character.

There is also often a joke within this introduction about her knowledge of farm animals, which generally boils down to confusion about milking sheep and shearing cows. Her

³⁶ Chardonnay, a variety of white wine.

position in the country music community has not been built upon strong ties to farming culture, and this introductory joke serves to remind the crowd of that.

The song itself is a kind of rough country girls' power anthem, with the narrative voice given over to the "girls out here" as a group (note the inclusionary here, not there). The "girls" position themselves as outside the mainstream media's representations of femininity and different to "movie stars" who "don't know how much they miss". The song highlights valued markers of country-ness – "hard living", straight talking, life-smart "graduates of hard knocks school", heavy drinking (particularly of Bundaberg Rum) women who you should not mess with. They are what they are and do not care to conform to "city" norms.

When performed live her vocals in this song are rougher and more ocker than in other songs and her embodied performance matches this. Unhindered by the acoustic guitar, she moves around the stage: a model of performance which is not that common in country music. The common mode, for both male and female artists, is that artists stand, tethered to a microphone on a stand with an acoustic guitar strapped on³⁷. Differences in Beccy's stage character are often marked by the absence or presence of the guitar – serious songwriter Beccy plays it, while the wild, clown Beccy of this song (and others) puts the guitar down, removes the microphone from the stand and strides around the stage.

³⁷ There are some exceptions to this mode, such as Adam Brand, Adam Harvey, Amber Lawrence, Jasmine Rae and Jayne Denham.



Figure Eleven: Beccy Cole and Lyn Bowtell performing “Girls Out Here”.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

At the mid-point of the song, during the guitar solo, Beccy asserts her position as one of the “girls out here”: by pouring a glass of beer and sculling it on stage. The performance of the song is a practice in country-ing up – for a time Beccy becomes a rough, unpolished Dalby girl, and is then further imbued with the capital which an ability to scull a beer in less than 10 seconds attracts. This is very well received in parts of the country music community, and while cheered at the Woodford Folk Festival the crowd was not as enthusiastic and the “scull, scull, scull” chant did not take off. Beccy accrues capital by drawing on the heavy drinking characteristics of the country music crowd, by sculling the beer, but also consistently referring to drinking in her stage banter. As Dolly Parton, Beccy's hero has said, “People don't come to see the shows to see you. They come to see you be them and what they want to be.” This is one of a number of ways she

had managed to successfully position her character within the field of the country music community.

Strong Enough to Bend

But Beccy's character was also positioned in the country music community as straight. So how did she negotiate an alteration of this character's sexuality? Particularly when this change is one that had the potential to be rejected by the country music community, as a result of conservative social values but also because she had been "lying" and thus challenging demands for authenticity in the country music community.

The first publicised solo gig she played following the airing of the Australian Story episode was at Club Singleton in the Upper Hunter on a Friday night in August 2013.

I was one of a crowd of about 250 people waiting for Beccy Cole to come on stage. The lights dimmed and the band broke into the unmistakable, bass led, opening bars of Dolly Parton's 9 to 5. This was a new opening number for Beccy's show.

For years she had started gigs with "A Better Woman", a power anthem for women who are divorced and unlucky in love. The song had always established the character of Beccy Cole within one song: a strong, cheeky, heterosexual divorcee who, while hapless in love, is still looking for a "man" albeit a better (or younger) one. It positioned her culturally: reading self-help books, trying fad diets (Slimfast to Atkins) and exercise classes (tae bo) and "squeezing in the latest fashions", which given the other markers and Beccy's stage costume, one assumed were the chain store chic parodied by Kim in the Australian television comedy show *Kath and Kim*. All this had been accentuated by Beccy's embodied performance which drew attention to her body, touching her breasts, imitating the tottering walk of someone in high heels and tight clothing, and simulated dry humping various band members. She constantly marks herself as sexual.

A particular demographic responded to this aspect of Beccy's persona. These women usually attend the gigs in large groups, their bleached hair teased and preened, their skin showing wear and creases, rheumy eyes lined with heavy applications of the blackest of mascara and liner, and coloured in pastel blues, pinks and purples, they wear skin tight jeans and singlet tops, both having been attacked by bedazzlers. They laugh and applaud Beccy's jokes about men and her jokes about her hopeless love life. The men in the crowd all seemed to think they have a chance of seducing Beccy: I remember watching Beccy on stage at the Muster the year prior to her coming out and having a bunch of men in their 40s stand beside me, yelling out how they thought she was hot and would like a chance with her. The "secret" of her sexuality was not particularly well guarded in the few years prior to her "coming out". There had been an earlier public "coming out" when she appeared with a girlfriend in a *Woman's Day*³⁸ (March 1, 2010) story on the country music fraternity based on the Central Coast of New South Wales (with Gina Jeffreys, Rod McCormack, Adam Harvey, Felicity Urquhart and Glen Hannah). However, aside from occasional double entendre jokes that were misunderstood or ignored by some fans, her homosexuality was never mentioned on stage, and heterosexuality was constantly asserted.

To return to Singleton in August 2013, the alteration of her standard set to open with "9 to 5" (and drop "Better Woman" completely) following her coming out marked a renegotiation of her character. The character was no longer straight, or at least had no need to continue to maintain a mimicry of heterosexuality for the stage. But this was a mere alteration of some practices that comprised her character. After initial hesitation when she was obviously nervous about how the crowd would respond, she resumed a performance of hyperfemininity established prior to coming out. Singing "9 to 5" she suggestively danced with each member of the band, but with a definite bias to Lyn

³⁸ This is a weekly Australian tabloid magazine aimed at women.

Bowtell, the only female band member. Engaging the front rows of the crowd she leant down, often on one knee, pointing, waving, winking and smiling at individuals (both male and female): flirting. Her platinum blonde hair had been blow-dried and curled to considerable volume. The tan, false eyelashes, enormous jewelled rings and rhinestone encrusted black top completed the model of overblown hyperfemininity.



Figure Twelve: Beccy Cole performing at Club Singleton, 2013.

Photo credit: Amy Bauder

Later in the show, during an instrumental break, Beccy made her way back to Lyn, they looked each other in the eye, turned toward the audience so they were standing shoulder to shoulder, assumed a duck lipped selfie facial expression and then started jumping up and down. They emphasised the movement in their chests and shoulders, to gain maximum boob wobble. They stopped, laughed and Beccy commented, “You don’t see that on *So You Think You Can Dance*. This is dancing with the tarts”.

The effects of her life-long adoration of Dolly Parton have always been evident in Beccy's character. But there has always been a fair bit of the Aussie sheila mixed in: Beccy is lewd, rough, brassy, strong and very ballsy. This was not a new collection of practices, but with the character divorced from its heterosexuality they were rendered more obviously drag-like, and camp – the “literal staginess” (Jagose 1996, 86) is revealed.

The character/s “Beccy Cole” has been developed over more than 20 years as a way of negotiating and negating certain forms of capital, which has enabled Beccy's recognition, intelligibility and acceptance in the field of country music. Since coming out she has made moves into other musical and cultural fields – appearing at folk festivals and gay and lesbian community events and venues. Her appearance at Woodford Folk Festival was marked by some awareness that a renegotiation of capital and practices may be required. For one the hyperfemininity on display at Singleton was less overblown, replaced with a more understated rock chick presentation and performance. For her second performance at that festival she emerged in a checked mini skirt, black singlet and diagonally striped tie – part Chrissy Amphlett, part Angus Young from AC/DC.

However, for most of her career, Beccy has cultivated a set of characters that respond and appeal to an often working-class, rural audience and Beccy could quite easily be written off as crass and unsophisticated. But there are also ambiguities in this character.

There is a tension between the on stage character and the off stage “real” which is rendered most obvious by her “coming out” as a lesbian on *Australian Story*. Within Beccy's career, there is a tension between the “character” of a clown-like entertainer, which is a minority mode of performance in Australian country music, and the privileged or majority mode of performance in the scene: that of the serious, authentic singer songwriter. I argue that the ambiguity in her performance highlights the masquerade of the Beccy Cole character. My research within the Australian country

music scene, finds that authenticity is a dominant discourse, with artists, industry personnel and audiences all relying on “authenticity” as an organising, moderating and experiential concept when talking about music and performance. However, it is often understood as some kind of expression of a true essence of identity, and used to justify judgements of taste. Audiences and the industry expect and at times demand “honesty” from artists and in performance. Yet as Peterson argued in relation to American country music authenticity is a contrivance, and its fabrication takes work (Peterson 1997). I believe that the “literal staginess” of Beccy Cole’s performative characters reveal the contrivance, which calls into question ideas of authentic performance being an expression of truths of identity or culture in country music.

Conclusion

This Part explored how performance is understood within the field of Australian country music. In discussing the performance practices of Bob Corbett and Beccy Cole and the ways in which these practices are understood, valued and explained a contradiction emerges between ideas of “authentic”, “honest” and “natural” performance and an acknowledgement by artists of the work that goes into performing as country artists. The distinctions drawn between “acoustic” and “electric”, “authentic singer songwriter” and “entertainer” and “spontaneous”, or “natural”, and “contrived” shape the positions and possibilities for performance in Australian country music. For both Bob and Beccy their performance is explained and positioned at points between these distinctions – there is a fluidity about how they negotiate the tensions between each – Bob through acoustic performance laced with rock and roll bravura and Beccy as a character who challenges the very notion of “natural” performance, but who also works in an autobiographical songwriter frame. The ideals of the “acoustic”, “authentic singer songwriter” and “natural” performer dominate the field, but what these ideals look like shift through the way artists play, or perform, in the game.

Part Five: A Coda and Conclusions

Coda: America, Nashville and Americana

Playing to a Room Full of Aussies in Nashville: Fieldwork Account

It is five thirty on a Tuesday, and thirty people are lined up outside Nashville's Bluebird Café. The group shrinks from the last of the brutal afternoon sun into the shade of an unimpressive shopfront, recognisable only by its iconic blue awning. The crowd is waiting for the chance to grab a last minute, unreserved seat for the six o'clock *Australiana@Americana* Showcase: the first of two Australian showcases that the venue is hosting tonight.

I slip past the waiting line. I am one of those fortunate enough to have nabbed an online reservation for the show. Both shows were "sold out" within ten minutes when reservations opened online, two weeks ago. As I pass, a staff member announces to those waiting that because there are so many artists playing in the showcase tonight there are a very limited number of unreserved seats, as artists' guests are taking up those seats. She is met with groans from the crowd, and counters with, "I can probably guarantee there will be fifteen to twenty seats, but not many more".

A guy in his late fifties or sixties, in a green polo matched with white shorts, socks and boat shoes, who is more than twenty deep in the line, responds "But what? We've come all the way from Denver and we may not get in?"

They are not here to see the Australians play. They are not even here because of the Americana Music Festival, which officially starts the next day. They are there to catch a show at the iconic venue where stars like Garth Brooks and Taylor Swift were discovered, or, increasingly, the venue featured on the TV series, *Nashville*, where Gunnar and Scarlett (among others) work, perform, fall in love, and are offered

recording deals. The Bluebird has experienced a surge in popularity in the wake of the show's broadcast.



Figure Thirteen: Australian artists in the round at the Bluebird Café.

Left to right: Sal Kimber, Daniel Champagne (standing), and Melody Pool.
Photo credit: Amy Bauder

Tonight, it is a bunch of Australians taking the stage as a preview event for the Americanafest. The aim is to highlight some of the forty-ish Australian artists attending the festival, including Kirsty Lee Akers, Imogen Clarke, Sal Kimber, Melody Pool, and Kevin Bennett.

The small, slightly battered room holds only one hundred people and is full of Australians. There are the artists who will be featured throughout the night plus Dobe Newton, who will be tonight's MC. But the artists' families, friends, Aussie expats, Aussie tourists and many of other artists over for the Americana Music Festival are the bulk of the crowd.

Dobe's job tonight is to introduce each round of songwriters, and more importantly, in a nod to Australiana, run raffles in the change over between songwriter rounds. The prizes are a mix of Australian themed goods: Australian wine, Sounds Australia T-shirts,

Blundestone boots, Akubras and a Christian romance novel called *Australia* that Dobe found that morning in a Goodwill charity bin. Although everyone in the audience is given a raffle ticket, Dobe only conducts two “raffles” by actually pulling stubs out of a hat – instead he picks winners at whim and fancy – for furthest travelled, loudest cheer, because he liked the look of someone. The small number of Americans in this crowd, and at all the other events, were somewhat baffled by the raffle concept, but were enthusiastic about free stuff (even poor Australian wine).

Included in the showcase is Melbourne-based group, The Mae Trio, who are really the only artists to buck the night’s acoustic guitar trend. The group are playing their fiddle, cello, ukulele, banjo and guitar, and three-part harmony infused folk music in Nashville for the first time. Sisters Elsie and Maggie comment about how the third member of the band, Anita, “who is a sister, but neither of ours” is losing her mind about the fact that they are playing the Bluebird: “She’s the only one of us that watches *Nashville*”.

Mid set, Elsie comments, “Excuse me if we look or sound tired or vague, we’ve just had the longest Monday ever: it started at 3am with an early flight out of Melbourne and ended sometime about 40 hours later in Nashville. We flew for 40ish hours, slept for 15 and now we’re in a room full of Aussies. It’s odd.”

Her sister, Maggie, asks the crowd, “Are there any Americans in the room?”

About 15 people raise their hand in the room of over 100.

“A few. How authentic.”

Australian Country Music in Nashville, Country Music’s Home

Each September a group of Australian artists, media representatives and other industry personnel travel to Nashville for the Americana Music Festival and Conference, a five-day live music festival and industry conference. The artists are not just country artists (as in, they are not all embedded in the musical, social, media and performance

networks that comprise and constitute the loose, yet identifiable, field of Australian country music). They come from folk, indie pop, rock, folk, bluegrass and the Melbourne alt country scene. This disparate group is drawn together under the umbrella of Sounds Australia's "Australian delegation". Most of the forty artists have not been selected for official festival spots by the Americana Music Association (five spots are reserved for Australian artists) but have made their own way to Nashville for the festival, to play, but also to network, songwrite, seek publishing, recording, booking or management deals, produce albums, learn about the music or the business or just to be in and experience the home of country music, Nashville. Sounds Australia runs a number of showcase events that give these artists the opportunity to play at the festival, but they also provide support to the delegation for networking, promotion and navigation of the festival, Americana and the Nashville music industry and scene. In 2014 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at the Americana Music Festival and Conference with the Sounds Australia delegation of Australian artists, media representatives and industry personnel.

Throughout this thesis I have almost exclusively focused on the practices of Australian country music artists as they perform and work in Australia. While I opened this thesis with an account of an incident in which the distinction between Australian and American country music and national identity was central – namely John Williamson's complaints about the Americanisation of Australian country music – I have devoted little time to exploring that distinction throughout this thesis. This is not to say that the tension is not present, there is a tension between an inward Australian focus in country music and an outward American focus. This focus often shifts over time, for individual artists and within the industry as a whole. But my description and analysis of practices and discourses in the field is an explication of the logic of the Australian field – and a discussion of Australianness versus Americanness would have distracted from this.

Many in the field of Australian country music see Nashville and America as the “home” of the genre. This sits awkwardly with the idea that Australian country music is Australian music. I want to use the Americana Music Festival as a kind of counterbalance to the “just make sure it is Australian” attitude of John Williamson highlighted at the start of this thesis. It would be easy to argue that America, with its huge industry and large crowds, or Americana, with its well-developed sense of authenticity, is a logical goal for many within the field of Australian country music. But this argument would be lazy and not reflect the complex collection of practices, discourses, strategies and aims which those artists who do want to engage with American country music or Americana use to position themselves in the field.

Toby Martin recounts an appearance by Nicole Kidman on the *Late Show* with David Letterman where she had to explain how her husband, Keith Urban, could have heard country music. A confused exchange took place about the difference between Australian and American country music, and Martin argues:

Letterman’s confusion and Kidman’s answers were understandable. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Australian country music had become so localised, so intertwined with national content and contexts, that it operated largely independently of its American progenitors. While American country artists such as Garth Brooks, Shania Twain and Taylor Swift had been popular in Australia in the 1990s and 2000s, they used different strategies, images and musical styles to those of popular local country artists such as Kasey Chambers, Troy Cassar-Daley and the perennial Slim Dusty. Australian country music had, by this stage, so profoundly distanced itself from its American inspiration that it was able to position itself as a quintessentially Australian genre (Martin 2015, 115).

I find this argument of Martin’s interesting in the way it both holds true and is false, depending on which part of the field you examine. The John Williamson school of thought does see the fields as (at least ideally) distinct. Yet the Americana Music

Festival, as well as the mainstream Country Music Festival held in June each year, see dozens of Australian artists engage with the field of American country music.

Returning specifically to the fieldwork account with which I opened this Part, there are a few things I would like to note. The first is that for the most part what I observed of the Australian delegation during the Americana Music Festival was Australian artists performing to rooms full of Australians. I knew most of the faces in each room, and could easily have been in a pub in Tamworth, rather than a bar in Nashville. There were “locals” at most of the gigs, but they comprised a very small proportion of the often-small crowds. There was no excited chatter about bigwigs being there either. The forty odd Australian artists who were part of the Australian delegation, plus their entourages of family, friends, and managers were often the bulk of the crowd. There is no doubting that Australians will support Australians. But if exposure to the Americana fan base and industry is the aim then the usefulness of flying half way around the world to play for a room full of Australians is questionable, as is the value add Sounds Australia are offering in organising these events.

Secondly, Australian artists are keen to get to America and make “real”, through experience, a music industry and scene that is presented to them in numerous mediated forms (most recently the television show *Nashville*). America and Nashville are strong parts of the cultural imaginary for many artists in Australian country music. They listen to music from America, they follow artists and are constantly reminded about the scene in the media, discussions and networking. Most of the Australian artists who performed during the Sounds Australia events referred to their trip as a “pilgrimage”, particularly if it was their first time in Nashville or the United States. That was certainly what it felt like to me as a long-time country music fan. The relationship between Australian country music and American country music should not just be understood as a copying of American style, or a desire to move over and make it there. Instead, it should be

understood as one of many points of identification and inspiration from which Australian country music artists draw. It is an adjacent field, in which artists might choose to watch or play, learn some new rules, share their rules, and maybe try them out back at home. But they usually are also identifying with the Australian field, with Slim, with festivals, with other artists and shaping their practice in relation to those influences as well.

Americana as a Field

The festival showcased the broadness of the church that is Americana. As a genre or industry category it is deliberately and proudly broad, diverse and open. When I interviewed him, ex-pat Australian, Mark Moffatt, who was then President of Americana Music Association, observed: “It is really more of a place than a genre”. The Americana Music Association defines it as “contemporary music that incorporates elements of various American roots music styles, including country, roots-rock, folk, bluegrass, R&B and blues, resulting in a distinctive roots-oriented sound that lives in a world apart from the pure forms of the genres upon which it may draw. While acoustic instruments are often present and vital, Americana also uses a full electric band” (Americana Music Association 2015). A number of interrelated stories circulate about the motivations behind the development of Americana as a radio format in the mid 1990s. Mark Moffatt, told this story:

It started as an industry body 15 years ago, mainly in reaction to the marginalisation of artists who weren’t young, who weren’t pretty, who weren’t commercial, as country music really became more pop and more corporate driven, as corporate radio networks took over the radio industry suddenly that was a big market for them, but suddenly it was all minivan mums listening to commercial country. So a lot of people felt they had nowhere to go, and no alternative but to start their own organisation, at that point it was alt country.

Following the development of “Americana” as a radio format (which in part emerged out of/in relation to alt country), the Americana Music Association was established in 1999 as a professional, not-for-profit trade organisation with the mission to promote awareness, provide a forum and advocate for the creative and economic vitality of the Americana music genre.

This is not meant to be a detailed explanation or exploration of Americana. But I want to briefly address the way the field of Americana is organised - it is hard to pin down as a genre, and while the “roots” element does shape the sound, it is actually Americana’s industry model that is more interesting in the context of my research into the field of Australian country music. Americana should perhaps be thought of as a sensibility, a way of doing things, rather than as a genre³⁹. The logic of the field of Americana is distinct from that of mainstream American country music, whose commercialism and corporate culture is deliberately rejected. Americana does not eschew commerciality; it is still a popular music form, seeking airplay, sales, and a paying audience. When I interviewed Jim Lauderdale, Mr Americana, his explanation of Americana was constantly referred back to the radio format and radio chart. The AMA administers the Americana Chart, sales/spins are valued, but so are other things. This makes more sense in the American context than the Australian. In America, Americana is a reaction against the way the mainstream country music industry was organised and functioning – as a closed shop, with a small number of big labels and corporations controlling the musical landscape, where an artist’s record sales and radio airplay figures are valued above all else, and which leads to a narrow range of musical expression. The field of Americana also places value on the creativity, originality and quality of artists. I am really wary here

³⁹ I note here complications that arise from the adoption of the term “genre” to segment the popular music market. Particularly the way it is so predicated on ideas of stability and stasis, when popular music, as a commercial (and creative) form, is based on change and novelty. For work unpacking genre in popular music studies see (Fabbri 1981; Fabbri 1982; Hesmondhalgh 2005; Holt 2007; Negus 1999; Straw 1991; In film studies see Neale 2000. In game studies Apperley 2006.)

of falling into a dichotomy in which “mainstream” music is understood to be bad (aesthetically, creatively, morally and ethically), while “alternative” music is seen to be unproblematically good, but these observations are based on the formal and informal interviews I conducted in Nashville.

In many ways the Americana music scene more closely resembles Australia’s country music scene than the mainstream, Country Music Association led scene in America. But what I am interested in exploring further is how Americana is often quoted as a model for how the Australian country music could be – a broad umbrella for a style of music making and doing business. The combined rejection of overproduction, big business, with the pragmatic aim of facilitating the development of an audience, performance and airplay opportunities, and as Mark Moffatt commented, “very little argument about what constitutes it”, are appealing to Australian artists who themselves feel marginalised within the Australian country music scene – because it is small and hard to sustain a viable career, because of a perception that the mainstream is narrow and tightly controlled, and because of the consistent debates about what Australian country music is which often assert “Australianness” as preferable to any acknowledgement of the American roots of country music. It can also be seen as a step between highly commercialised country music and the more proudly amateur and open folk scene. But Americana is also recognised as an “easier” or more appropriate entry point for Australian artists wanting to perform, record and participate in country style scenes in America. The role that organisations such as Sounds Australia can and do play in facilitating the mix of Australians with the international markets or scenes requires further investigation and interrogation. Not only is the marketing of Australian music to America of interest to me, but also how Sounds Australia’s work affects the mix in Australia, when the artists who were a part of the delegation return home and engage

with the field of Australian country music (or other scenes) and perhaps reshape the field.

Conclusions

In this thesis I explored Australian country music as a “field”; that is, a discrete and autonomous social microcosm which, while located within social spaces like Australian society or the music industry, is an identifiably different space, with its own shape, feel, sound and culture. This field is ruled by logics which are “specific and irreducible” (Bourdieu in Wacquant 1992, 97) to it, which are different to those regulating other fields, and this thesis began to explore these logics of the field of Australian country music. It explored relations within the field, those within the industry, such as working relationships, between artists, and between fans and artists, and the discourses used to explain, justify and define these relationships, in order to explore how these relationships defined positions in the field and shape practices within the field.

It found that participants in the field work to establish positions, authority and influence within the field – to be recognised as successful or authentic country music artists (or both). Success is the result of accruing capital (economic, cultural, social or symbolic) in line with what is valued in the field. This value is defined by discourses and stories which are connected to practices.

I found that history, tradition and roots have immense authenticating value in Australian country music – and that the figure of Slim Dusty provides a “touchstone” for contemporary practice. This thesis also found that discourses about relationships, places and performance are implicit in the practices of Australian country music artists. The discourses, such as “family”, “mateship”, “home” or “honesty” are used as strategies by artists to define what country music is and what is valued within the field. These discourses are used to support claims to “authenticity” in Australian country music

culture and an artist's "fit" within the field. After attempting to avoid the question of authenticity, dismissing it as a vague and unproductive concept, I found that "authenticity" is a central concept used within the field to define value and legitimacy. This thesis explores how discourses of "authenticity" are sutured to business, promotional, musical, performance and social practices in Australian country music. The term sutured is used throughout this thesis to refer to the way in which the connection or join between practice and discourse is created and visible, like seams in sewing, or stitches in medicine. The connection between practice and discourse is not natural or essential, but contextual and contingent.

The trope of authenticity is used by artists with separate discourses and practices concerning relationships, place and performance styles to establish positions of authority and influence in the field. What is widespread in the logic of the field is the negotiation of a tension between "authenticity" and commercial realities of country music as a popular music form. While these two objectives are not incompatible, there is a tension between them and artists work to position themselves as unique within the field through their negotiation of this distinction.

This is but one of a number of distinctions that shape the field. This thesis explored four key distinctions, "country" versus "city", "tradition" versus "new", "independent" versus "commercial" and "real" versus "fake". These distinctions are an amalgamation and condensed cataloguing of the many distinctions that operate within the field, and various related and sub-distinctions are explored such as "acoustic" versus "electric", "authentic singer songwriter" versus "entertainer" and "natural" versus "contrived". These distinctions are used within the field to determine what is valued within the field – what is authentic, legitimate, and successful or a "fit" within Australian country music. They provide a framework for establishing meaning and significance. The focus within

this thesis is on how agents negotiate these distinctions, and use them strategically to position themselves in the field. This expands on other studies of popular music which utilise Bourdieu's theory but which tend to focus on the way in which social and cultural fields shape the tastes of audiences and identity in popular music (Frith 1996; Frith 2007; Bennett 1999; Wilson 2007; Thornton 1996). The focus on the experience of artists also diverges from an inclination within popular music studies to study the consumption of music by fans rather than the production or performance of music. The use of ethnographic research allowed me to explore how artists negotiate their place in the field through more than just musical sound.

This thesis was an attempt to move the discussion about country music beyond debates that attempt to define and fix a sound as the "real" country music. By actively working to move beyond a "systematic study of [the] outward given forms" (Jackson 1996, 25) of country music, such as recorded music, media texts and promotional material, this thesis revealed a diverse set of stories, understandings and experiences within country music. My experience as a fan made me realise that country music was about more than just the musical sound. I had experienced it as a culture and a community. My fieldwork reinforced this idea that the everyday, extra-musical activities were as significant, if not more, in understanding country music as the musical product. This thesis extends existing work and builds on approaches which take the mediated products of Australian country music – such as recorded music, lyrics, promotional material or media – and explored how these sources were created, used, understood, and experienced by participants in the scene. By focusing on where country music is performed (musically, socially and culturally) I have found that performance and interpersonal interaction are central to people's experiences of the scene.

The methodological and analytic approach taken in this thesis allowed for an exploration of the position of the main case study, Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band,

within the field of Australian country music. The thesis explored how they are attempting to be recognised and legitimised within the “mainstream”, by seeking big festival bookings, participation in the Star Maker competition, and connecting practices associated with their business, relationships, touring, recording and performing to dominant traditions and discourses of Australian country music, and what this reveals about the field more broadly. But, the way in which Bob and the band work to differentiate their position in the field, as “independent” and “real”, through involvement of family, DIY approaches, touring small halls, and performance styles which may not always be recognisably country. The position Bob and the band have negotiated within the field is unique, but each artist has a unique position within the field. The recognition of the uniqueness of each position and approach to the game allows for the study of a music culture which reflects the messy complexity of lived experience with its points of conflict and play, but the framework of the “field” also allowed for exploring common practices, rules, discourses and histories which create a sense of consistency across Australian country music.

In exploring the lived experience of people active within the field of Australian country music, particularly artists, this thesis provides a more nuanced and complex explanation for how Australian country music is made, both as a product and a culture. This thesis offers no simple definition of the music or culture, but rather reflects that it is a complicated social and cultural network in which practices, values, stories and sounds are used and changed by individuals.

Future Directions in Research

While this thesis is a comprehensive ethnographic exploration of a section of the Australian country music scene, there is great potential for future research, which could take the form of a larger study of artists from other states of Australia and in other parts

of the field, such as the alternative country scene, bush balladeers and rock. Spending time observing and talking to more artists, from a wider range of positions in the field, would build on this thesis to develop a more complex and detailed account of the culture of Australian country music. Further research into recording practices would also enhance this research. Additionally, a greater exploration of the relationship between Australian artists and the American country music industry would shed light on this significant point of distinction within the Australian field.

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Appendices

Appendix One – Sales, Charts and Accreditations

When referring to “charts” throughout this thesis I am denoting those charts that rank the popularity of country music albums, singles and video clips via sales or broadcast numbers. Where I am referring to a particular chart it will be named in the text.

The charts that rank the popularity of country music in Australia include:

- Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) charts that rank albums and singles based on volume of retail sales to consumers. The charts that contain country music are the ARIA Country Album Chart, Australian Artist Album Chart, Australian Artist Singles Chart, and the Streaming Chart⁴⁰. Each of these charts is produced in a weekly form, based on seven days of retail sales, and an annual, End of Year Chart, form which is based on year long sales. An album or single can only be submitted to one genre category at a time (for example, Country Album Chart). However, Australian artists can also be included in the Australian Artist Chart (where a country album which achieves a number 1 spot on the Country Album Chart will usually appear much lower on the Australian Artist Chart), and the Streaming Chart.
- Radio airplay charts which are generally stated as being based on weekly spins across all or a group of radio stations across Australia, or the spins at a single station. The two most prominent of these charts are the Official Australian Airplay Chart, compiled by The Music Network and compiled from data provided by eleven country radio stations, networked stations, digital stations and the

⁴⁰ Australian country artists rarely feature in the Streaming Tracks Chart. No Australian country music track has been included in the End of Year Chart in this category since it was introduced in 2013.

music channel on Foxtel, The Country Music Channel [CMC]) and the Country Tracks Top 30 (compiled by Nick Erby under the County Music Radio banner, an online digital station that Erby owns.)⁴¹ There are also a number of station specific or regional charts which are calculated from spins, requests or other public voting methods.

- The CMC Top 50 Countdown Chart that ranks video clips played on the station based on number of plays on CMC and public requests.
- The iTunes Charts based on the number and rate of album or singles being purchased at any time through the iTunes Store.

Generally an artist or band at the top of one chart will be ranked near the top of one or more (if not all) of the other charts.

ARIA also accredits albums, singles and DVDs when they reach certain volumes of sales from ARIA Member Wholesalers to retailers (rather than volumes purchased by consumers at retailers as used in the calculation of the charts). The thresholds are:

Singles:	Gold - 35,000 units
	Platinum – 70,000 units
Albums:	Gold – 35,000 units
	Platinum – 70,000 units
	Diamond – 500,000 units
Videos/DVD	Gold – 7,500 units
	Platinum – 15,000 units ⁴²

By way of international comparison the thresholds for album Certification by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) is as follows:

Gold – 500,000

⁴¹ This chart is often criticised on the basis of its calculation method – with many active in the industry believing it to be merely a selection of Erby's favourite songs, artists and friends.

⁴² All information about ARIA charts and accreditation presented here is taken from the ARIA Charts website (Australian Recording Industry Association 2014).

Platinum – 1,000,000

Diamond – 10,000,000⁴³

Australian country artists have achieved Gold and Platinum Accreditation from ARIA in the period this thesis covers (2012-2015). These accreditations include:

Album

2015	Platinum	Lee Kernaghan, <i>Spirit of the ANZACS</i>
2014	5xPlatinum	Slim Dusty, <i>The Very Best of Slim Dusty</i>
	Platinum	Keith Urban, <i>Fuse</i>
		Russell Morris, <i>Sharkmouth</i>
		Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey, <i>The Great Country Songbook</i>
	Gold	Busby Marou, <i>Busby Marou</i>
		The McClymonts, <i>Chaos and Bright Lights</i>
2013	Gold	John Williamson, <i>Absolute Greatest: 40 Years True Blue</i>
		Keith Urban, <i>Fuse</i>
		Lee Kernaghan, <i>Beautiful Noise</i>
		Lee Kernaghan, <i>Ultimate Hits</i>
		Russell Morris, <i>Sharkmouth</i>
		Troy Cassar-Daley and Adam Harvey, <i>The Great Country Songbook</i>
2012	3xPlatinum	Keith Urban, <i>Be Here Now</i>
	Platinum	Keith Urban, <i>Get Closer</i>
		Keith Urban, <i>The Story So Far</i>
	Gold	Keith Urban, <i>Keith Urban</i>

Video/DVD

2014	Gold	Adam Harvey, <i>Best So Far</i>
2013	5xPlatinum	Keith Urban, <i>Livin' Right Now</i>
	Platinum	John Williamson, <i>John Williamson in Symphony</i>
	Gold	Troy Cassar-Daley, <i>Live</i>
2012	4xPlatinum	Keith Urban, <i>Livin' Right Now</i>
	Gold	John Williamson, <i>John Williamson in Symphony</i>

⁴³ Information taken from the American Record Industry Association website (RIAA 2016).

The only country single to be accredited in the 2012-2015 period was Keith Urban's "Somebody Like You" which achieved Gold status in 2012. This is reflective of the trend toward consumption of music in album form by country music fans and a lack of artists releasing singles on CD within Australian country music.

Appendix Two – Sites of Observation of Bob Corbett and the Roo Grass Band

Date	Event	Event/Venue	Town	Band
Thursday 5 - Sunday 8 April 2012	National Folk Festival	Exhibition Park	Canberra, ACT	Solo, with Robbie Long
Thursday 17 May 2012	'Newey to Nashville' Show	Gallipoli Legion Club	Hamilton, NSW	Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
Saturday 26 May 2012	Ben Ransom Album Launch	Ruby's, Oxford St	Paddington, NSW	Solo, support
Saturday 7 July 2012	Hats Off to Star Maker	Tamworth Town Hall	Tamworth, NSW	Roo Grass Band
Thursday 23 - Sunday 26 August 2012	Gympie Music Muster	Amamoor State Forest	Amamoor State Forest, QLD	
	<i>Every Day is a Festival</i> Album Launch, Thursday 23 August	Muster Club		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	2 x 45 minute sets, 24 and 25 August	The Wine Bar		Roo Grass Band
	Campfire jam			Solo, campfire
Saturday 20 October 2012	<i>Every Day Is a Festival</i> Album Launch	Belmont 16s Club	Belmont, NSW	Roo Grass Band (with Justin Ngariki on drums)
Friday 26 - Sunday 28 October 2012	Dorrigo Folk and Bluegrass Festival	Dorrigo Showgrounds	Dorrigo, NSW	
	Songwriting Workshop			Solo
	Saturday 27 October	Main Hall		Roo Grass Band
	Sunday 28 October - Gospel Concert	Main Hall		Roo Grass Band
	Sunday 28 October	Marquee		Roo Grass Band
Saturday 3 November 2012	Mud Bulls and Music Festival	Mainstage	Landcruiser Mountain Park, near Jimna QLD	Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
Friday 16 November 2012	<i>Every Day is a Festival</i> Album Launch	Wests Nelson Bay Diggers Club	Nelson Bay, NSW	Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
Friday 18 - Friday	Tamworth Country		Tamworth,	

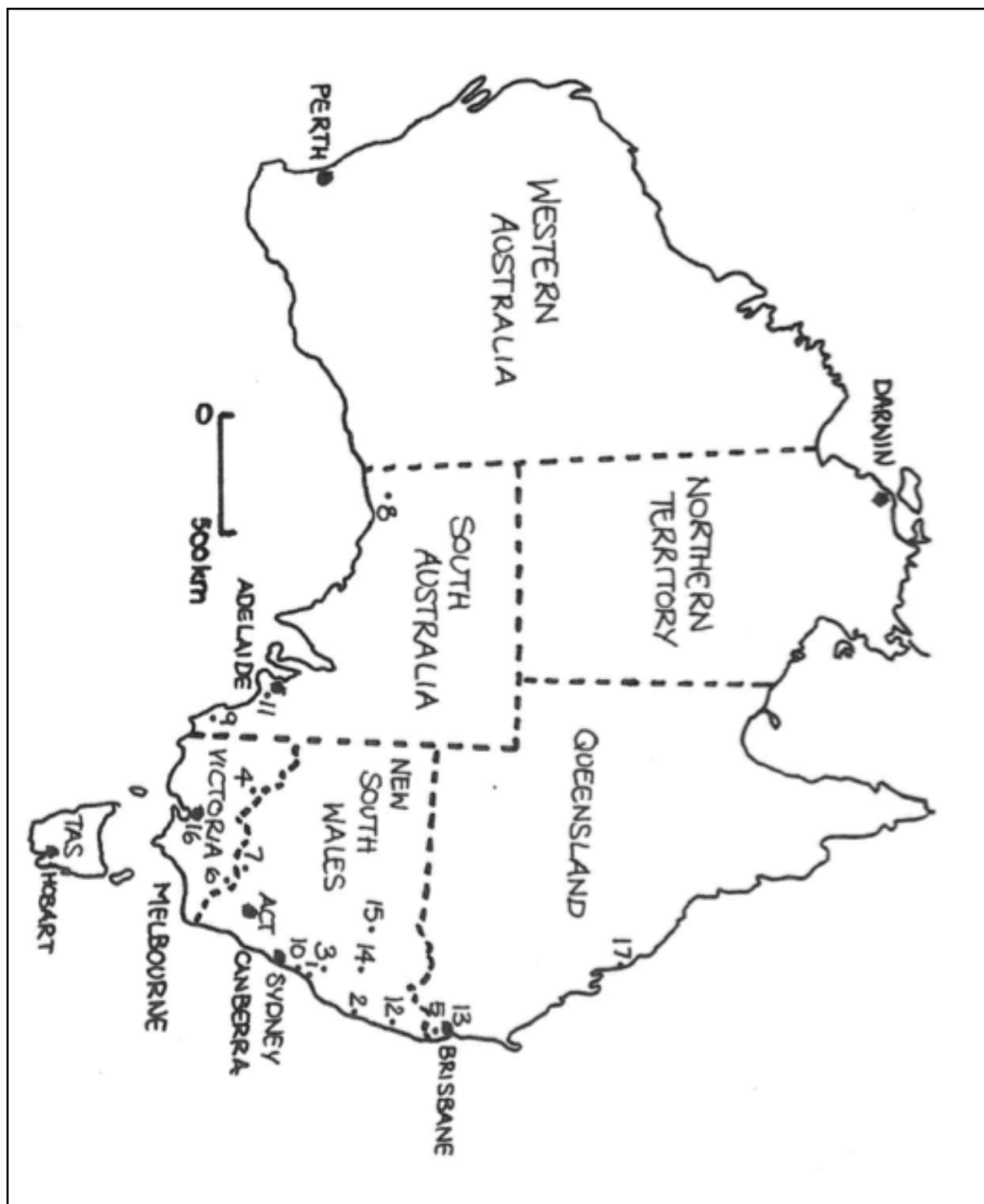
Date	Event	Event/Venue	Town	Band
25 January 2013	Music Festival		NSW	
	Friday 18 January	Toyota Fanzone, Peel Street		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Friday 18 January	Opening Concert, Bicentennial Park		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Saturday 19 January	The Longyard Hotel		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Sunday 20 January	Star Maker Grand Final, Tamworth Regional Entertainment and Convention Centre		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Monday 21 January	The Family Hotel		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Tuesday 22 January	West's Leagues, Legends Lounge		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Wednesday 23 January	The Pub		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Thursday 24 January	The Longyard Hotel		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Thursday 24 January	ABC Local Radio Evenings Outside Broadcast, Peel Street		Solo
	Friday 25 January	Toyota Concert in the Park, Bicentennial Park		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Playing in Mark Wells' band with Robbie Long and			

Date	Event	Event/Venue	Town	Band
	Dave Carter			
Saturday 16 - Sunday 17 March 2013	CMC Rocks the Hunter	Hope Estate	Pokolbin, NSW	
	Saturday 16 March	Oz Artists Stage		Roo Grass Band (with Justin Ngariki on drums)
	Sunday 17 March	Oz Artists Stage		As a member of Mark Wells' Band
Thursday 4 April 2013	Lucky Country Hall Tour Launch	Ruby's, Oxford St	Paddington, NSW	Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
Thursday 11 April 2013	Lucky Country Hall Tour	Paterson School of Arts Hall	Paterson, NSW	Roo Grass Band
Sunday 14 April 2013	Lucky Country Hall Tour	Gresford School of Arts Hall, Gresford NSW	Gresford, NSW	Roo Grass Band
Friday 17 May 2013	Mark Wells' Big Band Benefit for Cystic Fibrosis	Hunter Theatre, Hunter School of Performing Arts, Newcastle NSW	Newcastle, NSW	As member of Mark Wells' Big Band
Friday 7 - Sunday 9 June 2013	Blue Water Country Music Festival		Nelson Bay, NSW	
	Friday 7 June - Roo Grass Band	West's Nelson Bay Diggers Club		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Sunday 9 June, Bobby C	Mavericks		Solo covers, with Robbie Long
	Sunday 9 June, Love That Hat	West's Nelson Bay Diggers Club		Love That Hat – Roo Grass Band members Sue Carson and Dave Carter side project (with Mikey Stove)
Sunday 23 June 2013	Broadbeach Country Music Festival	Envy Hotel	Broadbeach, QLD	Roo Grass Band
Sunday 30 June 2013	24 Strings	Warners at the Bay	Warners Bay, NSW	24 Strings (Bob Corbett, Paul Elliot, Dave Carter and Ngariki)

Date	Event	Event/Venue	Town	Band
Friday 6 July 2013	Lucky Country Hall Tour	Wollombi Community Hall	Wollombi, NSW	Roo Grass Band
Saturday 3 August 2013	Bobby C	The Mark Hotel	Lambton, NSW	Solo covers
Friday 13 September 2013	Lucky Country Hall Tour	Matcham Hall	Matcham, NSW	Roo Grass Band
Saturday 14 September 2013	Lucky Country Hall Tour	Cessnock School of Arts Hall	Cessnock, NSW	Roo Grass Band
Wednesday 18 October 2013	Nadine Quinn	Lizotte's, Lambton	Newcastle, NSW	With Robbie Long, Dave Carter and Sue Carson as members of band
Sunday 17 November 2013	Lucky Country Hall Tour	New Lambton Community Centre	New Lambton, NSW	Roo Grass Band
Sunday 1 December 2013	Dave Carter Ten Tall Tales Album Launch	The Croatian Club	Wickham, NSW	Dave Carter with Band
Friday 17 - Friday 24 January 2014	Tamworth Country Music Festival		Tamworth, NSW	
	Friday 17 January	The Longyard Hotel		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Saturday 18 January	The Pub		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Sunday 19 January	Attending the Country Music Cocktails, SSS BBQ Barn (event designed for artist/fan interaction), performed a single song.		Roo Grass Band
	Sunday 19 January	Southgate Inn		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)
	Thursday 23 January	The Longyard Hotel		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)

Date	Event	Event/Venue	Town	Band
	Friday 24 January	The Pub		Roo Grass Band (with Michael Carpenter on drums)

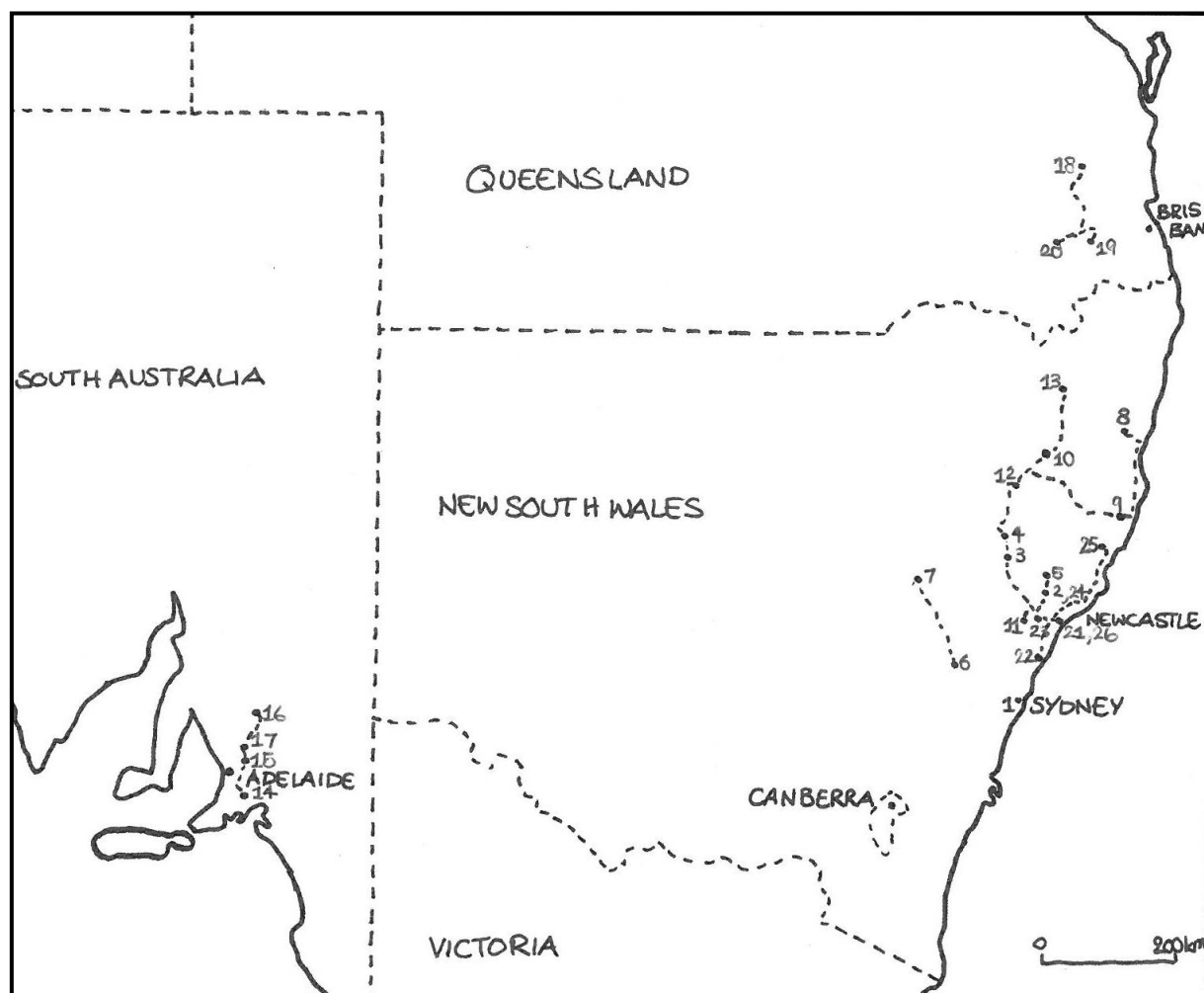
Appendix Three – Where Artists Live



Map Ref	Artist	Town	State	Region	Remoteness ⁴⁴	Relationship
1	Bob Corbett	Newcastle	New South Wales	Newcastle	Major City	Home
2	Slim Dusty	Nulla Nulla Creek near Kempsey	New South Wales	Mid North Coast	Remote	Childhood Home
3	Joy McKean	Singleton	New South Wales	Lower Hunter	Inner Regional	Childhood Home
4	John Williamson	Quambatook	Victoria	Mallee	Outer Regional	Childhood Home
5	John Williamson	Springbrook	Queensland	Gold Coast Hinterland	Inner Regional	Adult Home
6	Lee Kernaghan	Cooryong	Victoria	Upper Murray	Outer Regional	Birthplace
7	Lee Kernaghan	Albury	New South Wales	Upper Murray	Inner Regional	Childhood Home
5	Lee Kernaghan	Springbrook	Queensland	Gold Coast Hinterland	Inner Regional	Shack
8	Kasey Chambers	Nullabor Plain	South Australia and Western Australia	Nullabor Plain	Very Remote	Childhood Home
9	Kasey Chambers	Southend	South Australia	Limestone Coast	Outer Regional	Childhood Home
10	Kasey Chambers	Copacabana	New South Wales	Central Coast	Major City	Adult Home
11	Beccy Cole	Blackwood	South Australia	Adelaide Hills	Major City	Childhood Home
10	Beccy Cole	Copacabana	New South Wales	Central Coast	Major City	Adult Home
12	Troy Cassar-Daley	Grafton	New South Wales	Northern Rivers	Inner Regional	Childhood Home
13	Troy Cassar-Daley	Brisbane	Queensland	Brisbane	Major City	Adult Home
14	Felicity Urquhart	Tamworth	New South Wales	New England	Inner Regional	Childhood Home
10	Felicity Urquhart	Central Coast	New South Wales	Central Coast	Major City	Adult Home
12	The McClymonts	Grafton	New South Wales	Northern Rivers	Inner Regional	Childhood Home
15	Kevin Bennett	Wolleybah	New South Wales	Pilliga Scrub	Remote	Childhood Home
16	Jasmine Rae	Melbourne	Victoria	Melbourne	Major City	Home
17	Karrie Hayward	Mackay	Queensland	North Queensland	Inner Regional	Childhood Home
16	Mustered Courage	Melbourne	Victoria	Melbourne	Major City	Adult Home

⁴⁴ Remoteness determined using the Australian Standard Geographical Classification information provided by the Australian Government Department of Health (see <http://www.doctorconnect.gov.au/internet/otd/publishing.nsf/Content/locator>, accessed 13 January 2016)

Appendix Four – Lucky Country Hall Tour



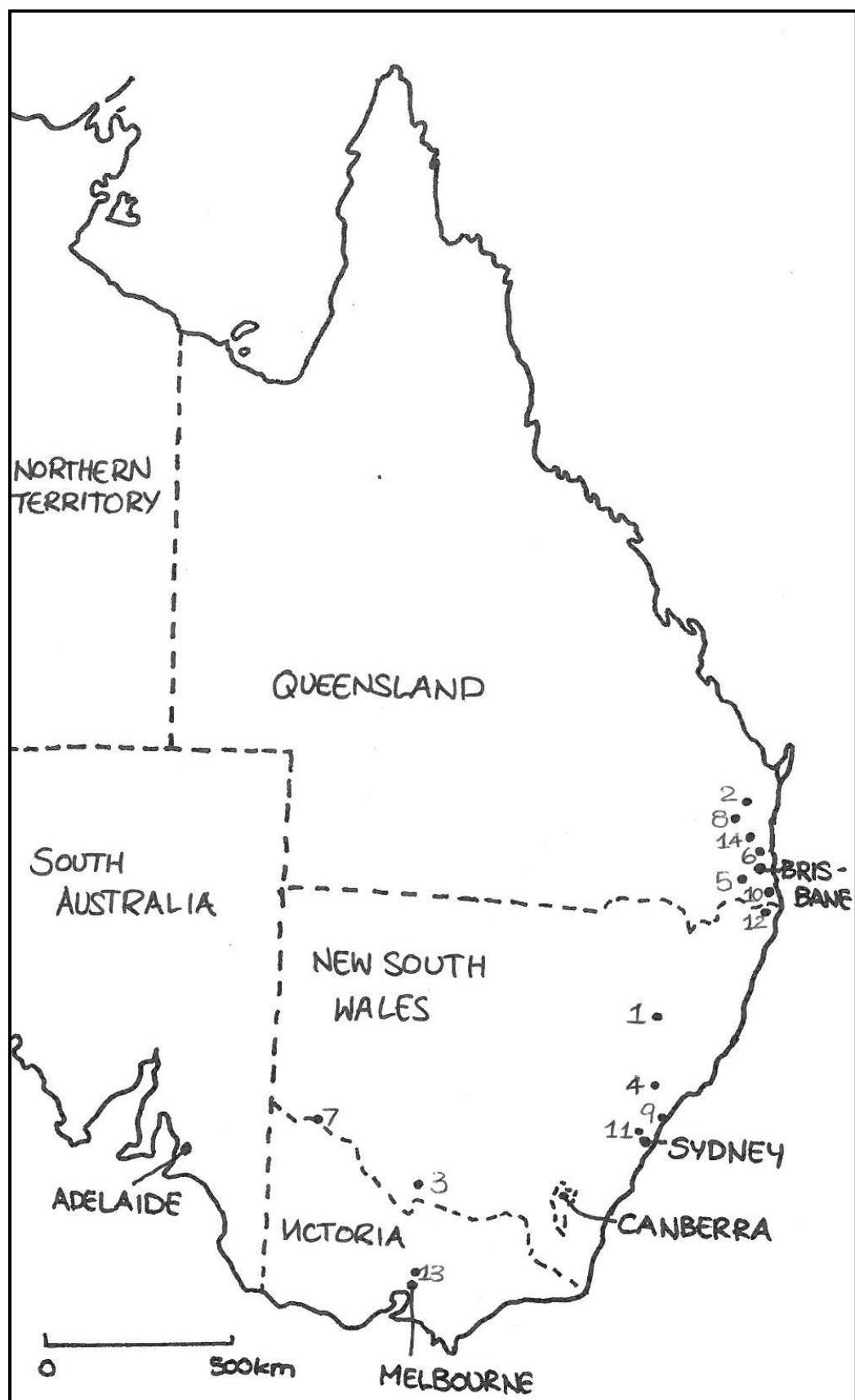
Map Ref	Date	Time	Venue	Town
1	Thursday 4 April	8:00 PM	Ginger's Oxford Street	Darlinghurst, NSW
2	Thursday 11 April	8:00 PM	Paterson School of Arts Hall	Paterson, NSW
3	Friday 12 April	8:00 PM	Scone Arts and Crafts Hall	Scone, NSW
4	Saturday 13 April	8:00 PM	Murrurundi RSL Hall	Murrurundi
5	Sunday 14 April	2:30 PM	Gresford School of Arts Hall	East Gresford, NSW
6	Saturday 18 May	8:00 PM	Union Theatre	Lithgow, NSW
7	Sunday 19 April	2:30 PM	Prince of Wales Opera House	Gulgong, NSW
8	Friday 31 May	8:00 PM	Old Gazette Hall	Dorrigo, NSW
	Saturday 1 June	AM	Dorrigo Showground Hall ⁴⁵	Dorrigo, NSW
9	Saturday 1 June	8:00 PM	Wauchope Arts Hall	Wauchope, NSW
10	Sunday 2 June	2:30 PM	Macrossan's Mill	Uralla, NSW
11	Friday 5 July	8:00 PM	Wollombi Community Hall	Wollombi, NSW
12	Saturday 6 July	1:00 PM	Longyard Hotel ⁴⁶	Tamworth, NSW
13	Sunday 7 July	2:30 PM	Chapel Theatre	Glen Innes, NSW
14	Thursday 18 July	8:00 PM	Strathalbyn Town Hall	Strathalbyn, SA
15	Friday 19 July	8:00 PM	Gumeracha Town Hall	Gumeracha, SA
16	Saturday 20 July	8:00 PM	Eudunda Town Hall	Eudunda, SA
17	Sunday 21 July	2:30 PM	Lyndoch Hall	Lyndoch, SA
18	Friday 16 August	7:30 PM	Nanango Cultural Centre ⁴⁷	Nanango, QLD
19	Saturday 17 August	1:30 PM	Fordsdale School of Arts Hall	Fordsdale, QLD
20	Sunday 18 July	1:30 PM	Mary MacKillop Hall	Pittsworth, QLD
21	Sunday 24 August	7:00 PM	Newcastle Conservatorium Concert Hall	Newcastle, NSW
22	Friday 13 September	8:00 PM	Matcham Hall	Matcham, NSW
23	Saturday 14 September	8:00 PM	Cessnock School of Arts	Cessnock, NSW
24	Friday 15 November	8:00 PM	Paterson School of Arts Hall	Paterson, NSW
25	Saturday 16 November	8:00 PM	Wingham Memorial Town Hall	Wingham, NSW
26	Sunday 17 November	3:00 PM	The Savoy Room, New Lambton Community Centre	New Lambton, NSW

⁴⁵ Sue Carson Vocal Workshop at Dorrigo Markets

⁴⁶ Part of the Hats Off To Country Festival

⁴⁷ Cancelled - only two people showed up

Appendix Five – Festivals



Map Ref	Name of Festival	When Held	Location
1	Tamworth Country Music Festival	January	Tamworth, New South Wales
2	Gympie Music Muster	August	Amamoor State Forest, Queensland (32km from Gympie)
3	Deni Ute Muster	September	Deniliquin, New South Wales
4	CMC Rocks the Hunter	March (until 2014, no longer run)	Pokolbin, New South Wales
5	CMC Rocks QLD	March (since 2015)	Willowbank, Queensland
6	Urban Country Music Festival	May	Caboolture, Queensland
7	Mildura Country Music Festival	September - October	Mildura, Victoria
8	Mud Bulls and Music	October - November (until 2014, no longer run)	Near Jimna, Queensland
9	Central Coast Country Music Festival	November	The Entrance, New South Wales
10	Broadbeach Country Music Festival	June	Broadbeach, Queensland
11	Sydney Country Music Festival	November	Bella Vista, New South Wales
12	Murwillumbah Country Music Festival	October (since 2015)	Murwillumbah, New South Wales
13	Whittlesea Country Music Festival	February	Whittlesea, Victoria
14	Woodford Folk Festival	December - January	Woodford, Queensland
Not on map	Boyup Brook Country Music Festival	February	Boyup Brook, Western Australia

Appendix Six – Beccy Cole 2013 Touring Schedule

Date	Venue	Town	Tour, Show or Festival Name
Saturday 19 January	Blazes Showroom, West Tamworth Leagues Club	Tamworth, NSW	The Cat's Out of the Bag, Tamworth Country Music Festival
Friday 25 January 2013	Blazes Showroom, West Tamworth Leagues Club	Tamworth, NSW	The Cat's Out of the Bag, Tamworth Country Music Festival
Friday 8 February	Mundaring Weir Hotel	Mundaring, WA	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Saturday 9 February	Drakesbrook Hotel	Drakesbrook, WA	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Sunday 10 February	Albany Entertainment Centre	Albany, WA	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Wednesday 13 February	Broken Hill Entertainment Centre	Broken Hill, NSW	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Thursday 14 February	Settlers Hotel Mildura	Mildura, VIC	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Friday 15 February	Hahndorf Old Mill	Hahndorf, SA	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Saturday 16 February	Hahndorf Old Mill	Hahndorf, SA	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell) (this show was originally to be held in Mount Gambier but was cancelled due to a conflict with a local country music festival, the Lake Charlegrark Country Music Marathon)
Wednesday 20 February	West Gippsland Arts Centre	Warragul, VIC	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Thursday 21 February	Regent Multiplex	Ballarat, VIC	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Friday 22 February	East Bank Centre	Shepparton, VIC	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Saturday 23 February	Kinross Woolshed	Thurgoona, VIC	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Wednesday 27 February	Slide Lounge	Darlinghurst, Sydney, NSW	A Country Outing
Thursday 7 March	Brolga Theatre and Convention Centre	Maryborough, QLD	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)

Date	Venue	Town	Tour, Show or Festival Name
Friday 8 March	Ipswich Civic Centre	Ipswich, QLD	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Sunday 10 March	Wickham Hotel	Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, QLD	Big Gay Day
Saturday 9 March	Lismore Workers Club	Lismore	I Was Here Australian Tour, with Adam Brand (supported by Travis Collins and Matt Cornell)
Friday 10 May	Lizotte's Lambton	Newcastle, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 4 May	Rockhampton Heritage Village	Rockhampton, QLD	Rise and Shine Queensland Free Community Concert
Saturday 11 May	Lizotte's Dee Why	Dee Why, Sydney, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Sunday 12 May	Lizotte's Central Coast	Kincumber	Mother's Day Show
20-24 May	Norfolk Island Country Music Festival	Norfolk Island	Norfolk Island Country Music Festival
Friday 7 June	Club Old Bar	Old Bar, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 8 June	Laurieton Services Club	Laurieton, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Sunday 9 June	South West Rocks Country Club	South West Rocks, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Friday 21 June	Kedron-Wavell Services Club	Kedron, Brisbane QLD	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 22 June	Jupiters Casino	Gold Coast, QLD	Country on the Coast, as part of the Broadbeach Country Music Festival with Adam Harvey, Gina Jeffreys and Sara Storer
Sunday 23 June	Toowoomba City Golf Club	Toowoomba, QLD	Beccy's Big Hits
Friday 28 June	Rooty Hill RSL	Rooty Hill, Sydney, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 29 June	Castle Hill RSL Club	Castle Hill, Sydney, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Thursday 11 July	Wellers of Kangaroo Ground	Kangaroo Ground, VIC	Beccy's Big Hits
Friday 12 July	Hallam Hotel	Hallam, VIC	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 13 July	The Gateway Hotel Corio	Geelong, VIC	Beccy's Big Hits
Friday 19 July	The Abbey	Canberra, ACT	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 20 July	Commercial Club	Albury, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Friday 26 July	Cessnock Supporters Club	Cessnock, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 27 July	Belmont 16 Footers	Belmont, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Thursday 1 August	Armidale Ex-Services Club	Armidale, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Friday 2 August	Inverell RSM	Inverell, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits

Date	Venue	Town	Tour, Show or Festival Name
	Club		
Saturday 3 August	Gilgandra Services Club	Gilgandra, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Thursday 8 August	Yamba Golf Club	Yamba, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Friday 9 August	Ballina RSL	Ballina, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 10 August	CEX (Coffs Harbour Ex Services Club)	Coffs Harbour, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 31 August	KD Stewart Centre, Deakin University - Warren Ponds Campus	Geelong, VIC	With Adam Harvey
Saturday 21 September	The Fishing Club	Bowen, QLD	The Bowen Fishing Classic and Wet Weekend
Thursday 26 September	Wickham Hotel	Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, QLD	The Queer of Country Show
Friday 27 September	Eric Lenton Memorial Sports Ground	Winton, QLD	Outback Festival
Saturday 5 October	Greg Cooley Wines	Clare, SA	Long Weekend Show featuring Libby O'Donovan
Sunday 6 October	Greg Cooley Wines	Clare, SA	Long Weekend Show featuring Libby O'Donovan
Monday 7 October	Greg Cooley Wines	Clare, SA	Long Weekend Show featuring Libby O'Donovan
Friday 1 November	St Georges Basin Country Club	Jervis Bay, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 2 November	Cooma Ex-Serviceman's Club	Cooma, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Sunday 3 November	Club Sapphire	Merimbula, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Wednesday 6 November	Mudgee Brewing Company	Mudgee, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Thursday 7 November	Bathurst Panthers	Bathurst, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Friday 8 November	Parkes Services and Citizens Club	Parkes, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 9 November	Dubbo RSL	Dubbo, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Wednesday 13 November	Fowlers Live	Adelaide, SA	Barnyard Cabaret (with Libby O'Donovan), as part of the Feast Festival
Thursday 14 November	Fowlers Live	Adelaide, SA	Up Close and Intimate, as part of the Feast Festival
Friday 15 November	Fowlers Live	Adelaide, SA	Big Hits Tour Party Show, as part of the Feast Festival
Friday 22 November	Young Services Club	Young, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 23 November	Cowra Services Club	Cowra, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits

Date	Venue	Town	Tour, Show or Festival Name
Saturday 7 December	Lizotte's Lambton	Newcastle, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Saturday 14 December	Lizotte's Central Coast	Kincumber, NSW	Beccy's Big Hits
Sunday 29 December	Concert Stage	Woodford, QLD	Woodford Folk Festival
Monday 30 December	The Grande	Woodford, QLD	Woodford Folk Festival

Appendix Seven – Ethics Final Approval

From: **Amy Bauder** amy.bauder@students.mq.edu.au
Subject: Fwd: Conditions Met Final Approval - 5201200632(D)
Date: 15 February 2016 at 2:58 PM
To: Amy Bauder amy.bauder@mq.edu.au

A

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Faculty of Arts Research Office** <artsro@mq.edu.au>
Date: Thu, Sep 13, 2012 at 12:04 PM
Subject: Conditions Met Final Approval - 5201200632(D)
To: Dr Peter Doyle <peter.doyle@mq.edu.au>
Cc: Faculty of Arts Research Office <artsro@mq.edu.au>, Ms Amy Bauder <amy.bauder@students.mq.edu.au>

Ethics Application Ref: (5201200632) - Final Approval

Dear Dr Doyle,

Re: ('Beyond the bush ballad: authenticity in Australian country music since the 1980s')

Thank you for responding to the points raised during the Ethics review process. In regards to section 6.2 in particular, we appreciate the clarification in regards to your intentions and processes. Under the circumstances outlined, and since you have not indicated any intention to publish any of the visual data as part of the research, the proposed video/photographic recording will be fine and you may now commence your research.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Peter Doyle
Ms Amy Bauder

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 13th September 2013
Progress Report 2 Due: 13th September 2014
Progress Report 3 Due: 13th September 2015
Progress Report 4 Due: 13th September 2016
Final Report Due: 13th September 2017

NB: If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of Final Approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have Final Approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Faculty of Arts Research Office at ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of final ethics approval.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mianna Lotz

Chair, Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee

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Amy Bauder
PhD Candidate
Macquarie University
Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies
Email: amy.bauder@students.mq.edu.au
Phone: 0414759504
<http://mq.academia.edu/AmyBauder/About>