



IMAGINING WIKO  
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After thirty years as a classical, jazz, and world music violinist/composer, including artist residencies in Paris, Budapest, New York City, and the Dominican Republic, I moved to Australia with my partner Jon Rose to realize our Great Fences of Australia project. My book *Post Impressions: A Travel Book for Tragic Intellectuals* documents how we circumnavigated the continent as musical cartographers bowing outback fences. In the desert of Western Australia, I had an epiphany. I heard a startlingly arresting birdsong performed by several pied butcherbirds (*Cracticus nigrogularis*), each contributing to an antiphonal trio in rich, clear voices. This and several subsequent encounters with the species made such an impact that I decided to devote myself to researching their vocalizations. I pursued a Ph.D. across the disciplines of zoology and musicology (or zoömusicology, if you will) at the University of Western Sydney, followed by a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at Paris' Musée national d'Histoire naturelle and then my Wiko Fellowship. Currently, I am a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Technology, Sydney. – Address: University of Technology, Sydney, PO Box 123, Broadway NSW 2007, Australia. E-mail: Hollis.Taylor@uts.edu.au

Whenever I send in a proposal, I imagine success. I do this not out of New Age optimism to somehow increase my chances. Quite the opposite – I do it from a pessimist's point of view. Assuming the reply will be “no”, I can take full pleasure in the possibility until the result arrives. However, there is one application for which I never got around to imagining a “yes” – the one to Wissenschaftskolleg. How could it work? Forty Fellows forming a temporary community in a Grunewald lakeside villa pursuing projects of their choice ...

even as an outsider, I could only vaguely imagine it – none of the 40 Fellows would be me. When I received Wiko’s “yes”, I was as befuddled as I was thrilled.

My own work I *could* imagine, and there was lots to be done. Since few songbirds have been studied in depth or in situ, much of our limited knowledge is based on several “white rats” of the bird world. I am the first researcher to devote herself to the vocalizations of the pied butcherbird. As a field musicologist, I spend four months per year immersed in their song culture.

I believe that this species could revolutionize the way we think about birdsong, human exceptionalism, and the core values of music. Both sexes sing, including in duos, trios, and even larger choirs. In the spring, they sing nocturnally for up to six hours, especially on moonlit nights. Their magnificent, flute-like songs are dynamic and change annually – no two mature birds sing the same. My previous research included compiling many examples from their song culture that display a striking overlap with human music and the human sense of musicality.

Long songs could be pertinent to comparisons of birdsong and human language, to statistical regularities related to human melodic organization, to issues of memory, and much more. And yet, current birdsong research scarcely contains representatives of the more sophisticated singers among the birds, because they are difficult to breed and house in a laboratory and because their songs in the wild are problematical for biologists to analyze. But such a methodology has been developed in Western art music, with its formal notation and analytic apparatus.

Early in my Wiko stay, I invited the Swedish neuroscientist Björn Merker, co-editor of *The Origins of Music*, to be in residence for several days. We reviewed what I knew to date about the species and brainstormed about how to code or export my many long song transcriptions. During one lunch, Björn was speaking about the important work of evolutionary biologist Mike Ryan, to which a voice at the end of the table replied, “That’s my work!” (Mike was a short-term Fellow.) Another lunch with short-term Fellow Avril Coghlan was also fortuitous – she guided me in the process of exporting my music transcriptions into a format amenable to various statistical analyses. Thus, Björn and I began collaboration with linguists to analyze the syntax and structure of pied butcherbird long songs.

There is much groundwork to be laid when introducing an unstudied species to the research community. My second project was to prepare an overarching summary of where, when, and what song types they sing, including reviewing 650 hours of field recordings and observations. The methodology entails numerous measurements and

statistical analyses, including items of interest to both zoologists and musicologists. While in Berlin, I was able to meet weekly with Professor Constance Scharff, Head of Animal Behavior at the Freie Universität Berlin, with whom I am writing this vocal ethogram paper.

I was also able to take two detours onto birdsong transcription projects that had been on hold for several years. I had been given copies of fifteen pages of Australian birdsong transcriptions from Olivier Messiaen's *cahiers d'oiseaux*. These resulted from three recordings given to him by my Australian colleague, the ornithologist Sydney Curtis. (As a bonus, there are six pied butcherbird examples.) With only a couple of instances where it is known that Messiaen transcribed from recordings, his transcription accuracy has remained a difficult subject for musicologists to prove one way or the other. Pairing these recordings and transcriptions gives us new insights into Messiaen's birdsong studies.

The second detour allowed me to spend several weeks transcribing and analyzing songs from three years of fieldwork by my superb lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*) research group. All of these projects were more fully spelled out in my colloquium, and I benefitted both from the formal comments and questions and from the informal ones given at other times. The philosopher of science Philip Kitcher's introduction to my colloquium and ongoing support of my project were one of the year's highlights. The "weekly" colloquium occurs, of course, much more frequently, given the large number of short-term Fellows and other fascinating scholars who cycle through during the year. My partner, Jon Rose, contributed his own, during which Alfred Brendel appointed him his "honorary Dadaist". These colloquiums took time away from my work, but they also fed it, even if indirectly.

Zoömusicology seeks to bring musicology and other humanities into conversation with biology. It also understands that birdsong is not entirely told by notation, sonograms, numbers, graphs, charts, text, and other formal analysis. There is another way to knowing, and I wanted my Co-Fellows to experience the wonders of a pied butcherbird in the Australian outback as much as possible. I designed a concert that began with field recordings of this species: birds delivering nocturnal solo song in the still of a full-moon night, birds participating in dynamic diurnal antiphonal song, and birds mimicking other species. I followed this with songs of the Australian pied butcherbird performed by me on violin accompanied by other field recordings – various birds, insects, mammals (kangaroo, dingo, and *Homo sapiens*, such as the Australian Air Force taking off in a helicopter as I recorded on a remote Arnhemland airstrip) – whatever I encounter on my trips. My (re)compositions do not seek to develop so much as to illuminate and celebrate pied butcherbird vocalizations, including the melodies, rhythms, timbres (when possible), and

other conventions. Much of this concert's material was prepared while in residence. I was fortunate to have Raghavendra Gadagkar, a Wiko Permanent Fellow, introduce my concert (any encounter with him is both an inspiration and a revelation).

The year offered a number of terrific lecture/concerts by Fellows, notably Alfred Brendel, Thomas and Clara Christensen (four-handed piano), and Mauricio Sotelo. I was honored to contribute to two evenings devoted to the work of Hoda Barakat: first, readings from her novels, and subsequently, a reading of her three-act play along with Susannah Heschel.

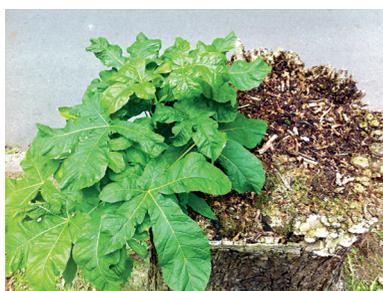
From the outset, I designed a heavy work agenda that I knew would not allow time for trips outside Berlin. I made three brief exceptions, to give papers and/or concerts in Paris, Utrecht, and Monte Verità (for a Neuroscience and Music conference). From my apartment on the ground floor in the back of Villa Walther, I kept an eye through the seasons on the foxes and punk-looking red squirrels (I never did see a wild boar), as well as the swans (the five cygnets were teenagers when we departed), Eurasian coots, Mallard ducks, and a host of other bird species. I prepared a booklet for the Fellows of the birds most likely to be seen in the area. I managed a May outing to Beelitz (south of Potsdam) when the asparagus was up and the birds were singing – we counted 54 species in all that morning. We also saw roe deer, ermine, hare, and the tracks of the *Marderhund* (sable dog).

I cherish a number of conversations with partners of Fellows, many of whom could have been Fellows in their own right: in fact, Patricia Kitcher had been.

Reflections on my stay involve not just the Fellows but also the staff. Luca Giuliani and Joachim Nettelbeck can be exceedingly proud of the team they have assembled. The expertise and enthusiasm to attend to our every need was apparent in each staff member – there was no weak link. For example, you would be forgiven for supposing, as I initially did, that Vera Schulze-Seeger (whose office is at Wiko's front door and whose e-mail address reads "Empfang") is a receptionist. Ironing out full-blown crises or little irritations, greasing the wheels of life, solving in a minute what would take me an afternoon – she never waned. One wonders if the whole endeavor might collapse without her.

As Vera is much more than a receptionist, so Eva von Kügelgen is much more than a German teacher. Eva attended our colloquia, sponsored evenings of German films, distributed clippings of German cultural events, and organized outings. She both aided us in taking part in the larger German community (and its culture) and was part of our small community herself.

My first "passport" was a library card, and I have never found a library I could not praise. Nevertheless, Wiko's library staff outdid themselves. For example, I had ordered a



Three seasonal views of the tree trunk in front of Wiko.

book by German composer Heinz Tiessen, who is virtually unknown for the work he did notating blackbird songs and then composing based on them. Later, I ordered some of his sheet music. Head Librarian Sonja Grund noticed this pattern of interest in my orders and wrote me an e-mail to say that the Heinz Tiessen Archives were located in Berlin. She facilitated my visit and successfully intervened when the bureaucracy determined I could only have 20 photocopies from amongst the many treasures I had found.

My final thank you goes to my fellow Fellows. We were 40+, but for a short while, we were one, with all the dynamics of an extended family. Some talked too much; others not enough. Some provoked; others joked. Some had good questions; others good answers. Everyone shaped the year and made me, at some moment or at many, think differently. Imagining Wiko, I imagine you.