

Keynote Address

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The Yidaki (Didjeridu): a triumph of mind over matter

Unplugging the cultural and musical intricacies of the Australian yidaki (didjeridu). It is an ancient wind instrument originating from the northern regions of the continent, made from a slender tree trunk initially hollowed out by the action of termites. Paradoxically, its primitive appearance belies a surprising depth of musical versatility, cross-cultural iconism and acoustic complexity. Many cultures discovered the pipe as a musical instrument, but ethnomusicologists acknowledge that none achieved the heights to which the yidaki was taken by the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Now the instrument has become popular worldwide, yet relatively little is actually known about the musical acoustics of the instrument, apart from the fact that it is much more difficult to understand than standard Western lip-driven wind counterparts. At present an Australian based team (UNSW, UM and ANU) is investigating the acoustics of the instrument.

This talk will bring together many facets of the didjeridu illustrated by performances and demonstrations: from its origins and cultural context, through musical acoustics and playing techniques to the connections with dinosaurs, MRI machines and Tuvan throat singing.