

TRANSCRIPT

Sound As Ever (Australian Music Vault Podcast) Episode 1 A New Wave: Language and Genre Blending

Music: Paul Kelly – Before Too Long

Welcome to Sound as Ever, an Australian Music Vault podcast produced by young content producers and radio makers interested in exploring stories and issues in the Australian Music scene. This episode focusses on the Australian sound in the current music industry and how genre and language blending in music is creating a new wave of music exploration and creative freedoms. This episode was produced by Elsie Bath and Shejuti Hossain.

Baker Boy (in language): Yo, my names Danzal but I also come by the name of Baker Boy, and you are listening to me and we are going to talk about something that is gangster!

Baker Boy: When I was a kid back in Arnhem Land in a remote community, I walk around and then these cousins always like go round and are just talking and teasing each other, but also go round rapping but rapping in language but like mucking around not taking it seriously. Just going da da da da da.

Narration: This is Danzal. You might know him as Baker Boy. He has blown up in the last year following the release of his debut single Cloud 9. It captivated the music industry and set the 21 year old on the steady road to success.

Music: Baker Boy - Marryuna

Baker Boy: Yeah so, pretty hectic ride. Cause there's not much opportunities in Arnhem Land, back home so I wanted to get out and find it myself. And I did that, and I did, I did find it. Cause I've only just started rapping end of last year which is crazy, and it's going to be nearly a year now, cause like families always singing songlines and they sing in native tongues and all that stuff. I grew up around a lot of singers and rappers that inspired me to become a rapper as well. My dad started to get into hip hop in the 80's which was pretty sick and he kind of introduced hip hop to me and I was like "what's this? I'm in love."

Narration: Known as the "New Fresh Prince" amongst his friends and family at home, Baker Boy is one of the many musicians in Australia that are sharing their culture with the wider community through their music. In his case, this comes through incorporating his language into his sound. My name is Shejuti, and I've discovered that this emerging trend has made me enjoy music on a higher level. I'm hearing genres blended together, other languages interlaced with English, and interesting instruments brought into mainstream music. I'm curious to find out the social, political, and creative implications of this shift. How will this new wave of music from artists of colour shape the Australian sound? What motivates artists to produce culturally charged music? Well for Baker Boy - rapping in language is not necessarily a political statement; it's the clearest way he can express himself creatively while connecting with his community and his audience.

Music: Baker Boy – Cloud 9

Baker Boy: It's got this crazy tongue, sick flow I guess and it sounds like a beat and vocal. And it's also useful because young kids back home can listen to it and go: "I know what he's saying in my language, I know that language" and they understand what I'm saying. So that's why I kind of put it out there and started rapping in language as well so young kids can listen to it, and also show them that we can also have our own language in Australia too.

Narration: Growing up in the Yurrwi community in north-eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Baker Boy hails from a part of the country that has birthed major Australian icons like Yothu Yindi and Dr G Yunupingu. Straight out of high school, he was accepted into a Performing Arts School in Brisbane for his dancing. From there, he was recognised for his talents by Indigenous Hip-Hop Projects, after which he began working with them. Safe to say it's been an intense few years ending in the creation of Cloud 9.

Baker Boy: I just had this crazy moment of just mucking round I guess, cause we were totally mucking around and these brother boys, they always kinda jump into me and say "Oh can you rap for us please?" and I'm like "I can't rap, what are you talking about, I don't know how to rap!" and next time I was thinking to myself "Oh next time I might do something, so I don't look stupid or something". So I went back home and started writing. I came back a couple of days later and then out of nowhere they caught me off guard again. They started beatboxing and started rapping and then they turned around to me and said "Hey Danzal, your turn! Come on!" and I started singing Cloud 9, one of the verses they just went "Whaaat?"

Narration: There are many people in the music industry that are dissecting what Australian music *really* is by reaching out and trying to include a breadth of representation in the stories exchanged.

Sound: *All Our Stories* intro from PBS 106.7 FM presented by Jess Fairfax and Leah Avene.

Narration: Jess and Leah have been presenting a weekly show on PBS for the last 7 years where they talk to artists, including musicians, about how their stories are expressed through their work, helping to influence the sound of Australian music along the way.

Jess: I guess the title *All Our Stories* kind of says that we want to make sure that all of the stories that make up who we are as a society are represented.

Leah: I think it's really important to find your community. I don't think that you can make music in a vacuum, and I don't think music is meant to be made or experienced in a vacuum. Often there's a whole movement and community behind that person or those people. Artists are really starting to reach out and see each other across all of the noise and that in itself is truly revolutionary. Because I think, for many years in Australian history it seems like the way to succeed is to modify yourself and fit in with the way that the industry and the way that culture was working. And now what I'm seeing is people standing in the wholeness of their own experience and identity and that is becoming a successful way to forge a career and that is so exciting.

Jess: And it's exciting for everybody, because it's just far more interesting and...

Leah: We all benefit.

Jess: Yeah we all benefit, there is so much more texture and colour and..

Leah: Perspective.

Jess: Totally. Yeah it's really exciting, for everyone.

Music: Sampa the Great - Blessings

Jess : It's really important for people to hear their own stories so that artists like Remi for example, or Sampa the Great, who are really forging the way and kind of telling this new Australian story and these experiences that they've gone through, and then there are these younger generations that are going to listen to that and be able to relate to that and feel a

part of this country because I think there's so many gaps in our stories and in the stories that are upheld and in our narratives, the kind of national narratives that are upheld. And if you don't hear your own story and if you don't hear something that you can relate to how on earth do you feel like you belong somewhere.

Namila: I am a broadcaster, a producer and an educator. My background is Papua New Guinian, I'm a very proud Tolai woman.

Music: Ngaiire - Around

Narration: This is Namila Benson. We first spoke about belonging and I really identified with some of the things that she said.

Shejuti (in interview): You said that you really feel so connected with your family and culture in Papua New Guinea and obviously you were brought up here so you feel connected here too and it feels like you have your feet firmly placed on both places. And I really liked that for a few reasons, because I'm someone who immigrated here when I was little, and I never felt like that, connected to my heritage back in Bangladesh which is where I come from, and I think a lot of people are in the same boat as me. What do you think helped you feel more connected?

Namila: It's exactly as you say. I think music definitely plays a big part of that, and music for all of us is connected to our histories. We've got particular forms or music that kind of sign posts for what was happening at any stage throughout our lives.

Narration: With years of being asked to comment on the union between artists' cultural background and their body of work, Namila has more than one opinion of how we talk about topics like diversity in music.

Namila: There's definitely benefits to being able to tell your own story and to be able to share your own insights on a particular issue, but that can also get really exhausting. So often First Nations artists have to explain or justify aboriginality or indigeneity just as African, Islander you know, like why do black and brown artists always have the onus on them to have to talk about those particular issues when they happen within the broader community? I mean yes, they're activists, sometimes, by virtue of doing what they do, but what if they just want to sing about partying. Why is there always this deeper sense of responsibility? You know it takes away from their creativity, and can you imagine how big a burden that is when all you want to do is focus on writing your lyrics and sometimes the message is in the lyrics and in the music, but on top of that also having to be expected like the onus of responsibility constantly on you to have to justify, explain, and talk through social and political movements and issues etc. it's just something that white artists never have to do.

Narration: Artists like Baker Boy are overcoming this hurdle of having to explain their lyrics, motivation, and inspiration as musicians by making an effort to connect with audiences through their music, instead of focussing on getting political.

Baker Boy: I try in my own way to kind of balance the world, so we could all have equality I guess. I just want to be like a bridge in the middle and just try get those two connected, two worlds so we can all come together as one and wow I wish it could work, like I wish it would happen, but not sure how long it's going to take for that to happen. But I'm going to keep doing my thing, and get as much people to do what I'm doing or jump on my boat.

Narration: By shifting the spotlight away from political struggles and onto the music, musicians and broadcasters alike are able to expose their audiences to new Australian artists without forcing them to dissect every cultural component and focus on the differences.

Leah: I think where music is headed is actually where we want it to head from an *All Our Stories* perspective and that's around music not just being a thing that we listen to or go and watch on stages, it's a culture, it's a whole story surrounding it. It's community, it's interaction, it's belonging. It's so much bigger than just the song or the artists. In music where the lyrics aren't front and centre, you just get an experience of it being around and so I think it just sinks in somewhere really beautifully and I feel like language isn't irrelevant, poetry and lyrics are so important but also you get to have this experience that is an embodied one and that is one of the gorgeous things about art and music; you can kind of experience it on so many different levels.

Narration: What a unique idea. What if we didn't have to rally any more, sign petitions or have heated conversations to change broader society's views. What if all we had to really do was listen to the beat that we've never heard before, the lyrics we don't understand and broaden our view this way. I know you have experienced music like this, everyone has, including Namila.

Music: The Preatures - Yanada

Namila: I love those moments, where I'm driving in the car, and I just have to pull over or I'm at home around the house, and I just have to stop what I'm doing, so I can listen and be in the moment with what I'm hearing, you know, at any given point in time. Because my sensory perception towards this sound aesthetic, whatever it might be - a song, or a person's voice, or their story etc., it pulls me in. What's that famous saying, where they say music gets into places where words can't? Yeah, I don't need to understand the lyrics of a particular song, in order for it to spark an emotional response in me. It might not necessarily be the response that's intended, but I think that's part of being a musician, is once you create this beautiful thing, you send it out to the world and it's actually no longer yours - like you have no control over how someone is going to receive that and respond to it.

Music: The Fifths – Raahi Hoon

Narration: Having sent many songs out into the world, three of the members from Melbourne band The Fifths joined me in the studio to talk about how they mesh cultural influences and language together in their tracks. By using a mix of Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and English, The Fifths are breaking language barriers in music one electro-pop Bollywood beat at a time.

The Fifths: I'm Rohan, one of the singers for the fifths. My name is AP and I'm the drummer in The Fifths. And I'm Sarang and I'm the keyboardist in the band. And we have Harsha in absentia who is the guitarist and another one of our friends and another one of our friends Adi.

Rohan: We've been a band for about I think 3.5 - 4 years now?

Sarang: It's been longer man.

AP: 5 years man, come on, keep up.

Rohan: The cliché goes time flies when you're having fun. I think the Hindi and English you would've realised when you listened to it. It comes naturally cos we all speak Hindi, but cos we spend so much time overseas, it's just a natural blend. And for those of you who didn't quite understand the lyrics, it's about good riddance - getting rid of that ex or that girlfriend who you knew was a bad idea.

Sarang: Or boyfriend.

Rohan: Or boyfriend. From the start. So that's what it's about, it's a just a fun song about I'm so glad not to be with you anymore.

Shejuti (in interview): Yeah and it's so true about how natural it feels cause I'm the same at home I switch between English and Bangla all the time and when I was listening to that it didn't feel stilted at all, it felt like how I would talk. I would just throw in an English word or a Bangla word like that.

Narration: The Fifths have created a unique sound by blending their influences, and this is not a one off. Artists are breaking down barriers of genre more and more, resulting in a new wave of music.

AP: Sarang is classically trained. I originally, before The Fifths, was a predominantly heavy rock, metal drummer and Rohan's had Hindustani classical training, so it comes in in every single new thing that we try, new song that we try - we bring in these elements one way or the other. I mean it came to a point where when people asked us "What kind of music do you play?" you know we don't want to say Bollywood because we don't just play Bollywood. It's got electro elements to it, it's got poppy elements to it, it's got a bit of rock in there as well but not too much.

Rohan: We had another word in there right, we had..

Sarang: We went through a bit of a journey ..

Rohan: We had a word 'blues' in there it was Electropop Bollywood Blues or something along those lines.

Narration: So the result was a new band with a new Australian sound, defying genre labels, not intending to make a huge cultural statement with their music, but drawing on both their ethnic backgrounds and upbringing in Australia to express who they are.

Music: The Fifths – De Chamaat

Narration: Authenticity. What does it mean to you? With so many people that I talked to this was an idea that came up again and again. That someone could be inauthentic in such a creative industry blows my mind but it seems - in reality to be a trait that is sometimes in short supply. Artists like The Fifths and Baker Boy are injecting their own experience into their work breathing new life, and authenticity into the musical landscape. Part of this for The Fifths, is singing in Hindi, and developing their unique Indian dance flavour.

Rohan: I think if anything people have welcomed the Indian dancey kind of sound, so I think it's worked in our favour. When it's a mixed crowd or it's a more Australian crowd, everything's new so they just enjoy it and I think the fact that we're Indian actually helps us - it's a selling point. People come out and people dance, people have fun. And at the end of the day, everybody is happy.

AP: It's like building your history, it's like building a legacy I guess. We are finding it easy to express our message or feelings through Hindi and English, which is 'Hinglish'.

Music: The Fifths – Karavaan

Rohan: I wondered, music is so universal right. It just makes me think wow this is like talking thousands and thousands of years ago, people are learning essentially the same thing and it makes a lot of difference where you essentially bring the same set of rules together. And the music just gels, it's really great.

Like you know ten years ago you'd ask someone hey what sort of music, what sort of music do you like listening to? Hip hop or...? I think today it's become a lot more fluid, like you transact songs - not so much genre.

Narration: The Fiftys have managed to tap into the idea that we are all complex beings, capable of having varied wants, needs and tastes in every aspect of our lives including music - so of course we are going to like a range of genres not simply pop or rock. As a musician, creating your own genre is not only a way to define your identity, but also a way to reach your audience without being pigeon holed into writing music in one genre or another. Namila believe this process of identification however goes far beyond genre.

Music: Ngaiire – Dirty Hercules (feat. Nai Palm)

Namila: I think there's also a shift in terms of how many creatives choose to identify - and definitely within music but also across other areas of the arts - is that a lot of people do choose to identify as Australian for instance even if they are of another diverse background and I think when it comes to music one thing that kind of irritates me a bit is that artists of colour are referred to as world music artists even though they might be doing hip hop or they could be doing jazz etc., just by virtue of being non Anglo, it's almost like their race, precedes their creativity and their music. And I think that that's something that the Australian music industry needs to really address.

Narration: In the history of Australian Music, there have been numerous cases where non-white artists have been stereotyped by their race. Dismissed as 'not of high enough quality', indigenous and ethnic artists have been excluded from mainstream music in the past. The band 'Mixed Interracial Brothers' for example, were outspoken about their difficulties dealing with the hierarchy of the music industry, who hindered them from getting distribution or air time, despite their music being well received by their audience. Similarly, talented indigenous artist Dr Mark Bin Barker was told in 2014 by promoters that he would not have been booked if they knew he was aboriginal. The situation is improving, but often ethnic and indigenous artists are still solely labelled as world music artists or only promoted as part of a "cultural" festival. Namila shares her thoughts on how she perceives the cross section of racism and creativity in music.

Namila: You know like we just don't even know how to address this issue of racism, and it's like a festering wound on this nation's psyche that won't heal and I know that artists by virtue of being creatives have always kind of been a reflection of their times, but I tell you what black and brown artists have got it harder than anyone else and I don't think anyone can argue with that. You have so many wonderful artists who are very proudly black - and that's a political thing in this country. There's so much about that that people find problematic, but I love that despite what their clear politics is about, you know, you go to their shows, and it's overwhelmingly white audiences, and that is just a such a poignant and significant way to decolonise a space.

Narration: The music scene is indeed changing, as a richer collection of artists and musicians feel more comfortable contributing, creating a more open space not only for musicians, but for the audiences too. Baker Boy has experienced this positive move first hand in his performances, as well as through his youth mentoring.

Baker Boy: Some people were just open mouthed just staring at me like: “Oh my god, what has he done, what is he doing?” But I think it was also like pretty cool to see people like “He’s speaking in language?” and you can see their face like lit up like smiling and excitement on their face. Because I work for Indigenous Hip-hop Projects and I’m one of the main artists that go around and teach young Indigenous kids and also non-Indigenous kids to be confident and it’s like a youth leadership program but through dance I guess. There’s a lot of kids that looked up to me and said “I want to be like you” which is really good, it just melts my heart. And also makes me feel yes you are doing your job right.

Narration: As well as seeing more of the youth in his community explore rapping or singing in his own language, Baker Boy would also love to hear a range of other languages in music from the variety of cultures Australia is a host to.

Baker Boy: Cos there’s a lot of languages in Australia and damn it would be pretty cool to have all of them out there so everyone’s like wow this one’s this and this one’s that, this language grooves with this one like all that would be so cool you know.

Music: Baker Boy - Marryuna

Narration: Genre and language blending in music is becoming more and more prominent. This is not only allowing artists more creative freedom, but growing and strengthening community bonds and ties between cultures. While there are barriers such as accessibility, representation and racism in all its varied forms, creatives in the music industry are taking it in their stride, feeding off these obstacles in order to create a richer Australian Music landscape for the generations to come.

The more Australians embrace the blending of culture and language, allowing artists to create their own space and legacy, the more people in our beautiful country will be able to connect with and understand each other. Jess and Leah express their sentiments towards this elegantly.

Jess: The song men and women of a country are the ones that uphold culture, we just need to have a bit more diversity within the mainstream space to allow these new song men and women to come up and be the upholders of these new stories that do create an Australian identity. I’m hopeful, I’ve seen a lot of change just in the last few years. I think it’s music that’s going to save this country actually. I think it’s the artists and their voice and their stories that’s really going to save us as a nation.

Leah: They’re repairing the split of music, self, other, land, place, belonging. They are repairing it and bring all those things back together. Which means we’re finding ourselves again. It’s amazing, there’s an element of healing, musicians are kind of healers in that way.

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