

SOUND AS EVER – SEASON 2 EPISODE 2 – I Still Call Australia Home (Peter Allen) AN ICONIC AUSTRALIAN SONG

INTRODUCTION

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which the Sound as Ever podcast was made, the people of the Eastern Kulin nations, and pay our respects to their ancestors and elders, past, present and future, and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Please be aware there is some strong language use in this episode.

INTERVIEWER

Welcome to Sound as Ever, an Australian Music Vault podcast created by music industry, journalism, and sound design students at RMIT University. This podcast celebrates iconic pieces of music created by Australians from an array of backgrounds, casting an eye to our country's cultural future.

INTERVIEWER

Throughout this podcast the elements that contributed to *I Still Call Australia Home*'s long and lasting legacy will be explored, including its impact and influences on Australian culture and the idea of national identity, as well as its idea of [distortion] homesickness and the notion that the song carries the title of Australia's unofficial anthem.

MUSIC: Live performance of *I Still Call Australia Home* by Peter Allen

FEMALE SINGER

Let's do this all together!

[CROWD sings final lyric – "I still Call Australia Home"]

[CROWD cheers]

[MUSIC ends, sound of footsteps]

MARGARET MARSHALL

The history of, of how he wrote that song's quite interesting. He wrote it when he was here in Australia. He'd come out in 1980 with a show called *Up in One*, which was a, um, a concert performance that he did in New York and LA and then brought it to Australia.

And while he was here he expressed the sentiment to the audience that, "I still call Australia home." And apparently a Festival Records executive suggested that he write a song with that title. So he did that while he was doing this, this show, *Up in One*, he wrote the song during intermissions when he had a chance to do it and then he actually performed it on the last night in Melbourne. And it was a roaring success. And he recorded a single while he was still here in Australia with Festival Records and then included it in his next album as well.

So I think it was-... yeah, him being back home and him communicating to his people here that he was still an Australian. That, yes, he was living overseas and leading a life in New York and California but he was essentially an Australian.

INTERVIEWER

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Australian singer-songwriter, Peter Allen, a name with such prestige nationwide with a long lasting legacy. Peter Allen's song, *I Still Call Australia Home*, was initially released in June of 1980, welcomed with great critique. Over the years the song has been used in many different ways and platforms to present different marketing strategies, political points of views but most importantly to represent what it means to be an Australian. Now in the year of 2019 the impact of the song is still greatly prevalent in the lives of a large majority of Australians in more than just the original context of the song.

BRONTË PITCHER

Hi, I'm Brontë.

MAREE PEARSON

Hi, I'm Maree.

MADELINE KERNS

Hi, I'm Maddie.

MUSIC: *I Still Call Australia Home* studio version plays

[MUSIC fades]

INTERVIEWER

For this podcast we interviewed Carl Gardiner, former Mushroom music executive and one of the organisers of fund raiser music concert Sound Relief; Mark Puddy, a musician and composer who has been working with the Australian Girls' Choir since 1993; as well as Margaret Marshall, curator of the Peter Allen exhibition at Arts Centre Melbourne.

We have spoken to these people to find out what Peter Allen's song, *I Still Call Australia Home*, means to them.

MARGARET MARSHALL

Peter was right at the peak of Australian patriotism in the 1980s when that song came out and he was invited back to Australia on numerous occasions for large scale events like royal charity events, um, the America's Cup victory, to perform *I Still Call Australia Home*.

So it, it became one of the songs that every time there was a great moment of national pride Peter Allen would sing that song. Everybody loved him, he, he was a really generous person. Fun. I think he brought a lot of people a lot of joy. And, yeah, the, the conversations I had were very positive about his legacy.

CARL GARDINER

If you look at the, uh, you know, the earlier times with Peter Allen and his Australian-ness, uh, and his connections were taking Australia and Australian music entertainment on a world stage. So from the early days that song I think's had, had a really important role to play in helping us identify who we are as Australians, but also where Australia does fit on the world stage.

MARGARET MARSHALL

I think he was genuine in his loyalty to Australia but it, it was also a very, it was just a very wise choice. And, and we've seen it with other performers such as Dame Nelly Melba (spelling) and

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many other Australians who leave their country but they maintain this sort of sense of who they are and someone like Peter retaining that connection to Australia, and he often came back and performed here, did that regularly. And writing this song I think underlined that real sense of belonging that endeared him to Australians.

MUSIC: Choral performance of *I Still Call Australia Home*

[MUSIC – lowers volume]

INTERVIEWER

The 1998 Qantas advertisement strongly contributed to the long lasting legacy of Peter Allen's song *I Still Call Australia Home*. It allowed the song to gain exposure nationwide through not only commercial television, but used as a crucial identifier of the Qantas brand.

Today the Qantas commercial featuring the song is still used on Qantas flights during the in-flight safety video. The Australian Girls' Choir and National Boys' Choir were both directly involved in the filming of the advertisement, having travelled all around the world to film the advertisement that is now a part of Qantas and arguably as well Australian history. Both choirs now, in particular the Australian Girls' Choir, have strong linkages to the song, having performed it countless times not only in Australia but all over the world, leaving another generation's legacy on this iconic Australian song.

CARL GARDINER

I certainly can understand why a number of people might associate that song very strongly with Qantas because that was a... an amazing campaign backed up by amazing visuals. I think it ran over an extended period so, you know, it's got into everybody's psyche.

But also I think it was a really good brand fit. Uh, I think there are times when the brand fit between music and whatever it is associated with i... is sometimes a bit tenuous, but I think in that case, as you pointed out, for any of us that have flown overseas and flown Qantas I'd like to think we carry our Australian identity as a bit of a badge of honour wherever we go. And when you are a long way from home you get on a Qantas plane and you hear that song, it reminds you of where you come from, and it, and it connects you back to here and often it's doing that as you're about to embark on a journey either away to foreign shores or coming back from foreign shores to Australia.

MARGARET MARSHALL

The Qantas airline commercials for very many years... that's enhanced its reach as well. I, I remember touching down in a Qantas plane coming home from overseas and it's spine-tingling that they play it and you just, you just think, "Yes, that... that's who I am. I, I still call Australia home. Yes, I've been far away but this is where I belong."

And I think that resonates with so many people.

MARK PUDDY

My name's Mark Puddy, uh, I'm a musician. I've been working with the Australian Girls' Choir for [inhales] more years than [laughs] I can remember. No, since 1993, so 26 years. And I've been a tutor with them and, uh, I do quite a lot of arranging.

Well, it's actually been a, a very important part I think of the, the choir's sort of growth. Um, I first

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came across it actually working with the choir and, um, I started in '93 and in '95 we went on an overseas tour [background footsteps] my first overseas tour.

And we performed the song in America, and we've been performing it ever since. The-... what it has meant is that girls have had the opportunity to travel a lot overseas, uh, whether it was with the filming of the advertisement or whether as a result of their other performance opportunities within and out of Australia.

So there's been a lot of chances for people to [inhales] go overseas or be filmed in iconic locations around Australia.

MUSIC: piano and cheering crowd

[MUSIC ends]

CARL GARDINER

There's no question for me, and I think quite a few people involved in it, that it's the highlight, and I think always will be, of my musical career.

MUSIC: KYLIE MINOGUE singing *I Still Call Australia Home* with CROWD

[CROWD sings final lyric]

KYLIE MINOGUE

Keep it going!

[MUSIC ends]

INTERVIEWER

Kylie Minogue's performance of *I Still Call Australia Home* at Sound Relief in 2009 has not only been a legendary performance that has gone down in Australian music history, but was a pillar for something that was a fantastic combination of Australian spirit and community.

Sound Relief was a music concert held in March of 2009 to assist in raising funds for the Red Cross Victorian Bushfire appeal, in wake [sic] of one of Australia's worst natural disasters. During Kylie's performance the crowd was captured in her solo acoustic version of the song singing along with her the patriotic lyrics that *I Still Call Australia Home* possesses, capturing a real moment of celebration of Australian culture and its community.

CARL GARDINER

Well look, I'd, I'd have to say, of any event I've been connected with in my career in the music industry, Sound Relief was the greatest. And the irony of it being because it was connected to one of our greatest tragedies but I think what it did was-... it was a great example of how music can bring everyone together for a common good cause.

And I think when Kylie sang at the concert, pretty much unaccompanied in front of maybe three thousand people, it just galvanised everybody. As did a number of other performances that day but I think, in this case, because of the actual subject matter of the song, it was just a wonderful example of the compassion and sharing spirit of Australians and, and I just think music was the

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glue that brought it all together and, and on a more broad perspective, Sound Relief did that on numerous occasions on that day.

What I often like to remind people is that it raised I think now in excess of eight million dollars, so, so that alone is a significant achievement and a significant contribution. But the Australian public overall, the various organisations on a state and federal level in the public, collectively I think raised over 300 million dollars so if you were to measure the benefit of Sound Relief in economic terms, while it's important, I don't think that's anywhere near the, the real key importance of it. I think the key importance was to all the individuals and communities that were impacted by those natural disasters, and here in Victoria obviously by the fires, to know that the whole music community, not just locally but internationally, was behind them. Was, was trying to do something to help their spirits in, uh, really, really challenging times. And I think the knowledge of that on an ongoing basis can, can be, I hope, an ongoing assistance to the people who are still rebuilding their lives and probably will be forever. And that's something I'll, I'll be, um, incredibly proud of, the way our, our institute responded to it. For me, Sound Relief probably was the best single example of the power of music to galvanise the spirit of Australians in times of need.

I think it was because it is such an iconic Australian song, because I think it, it reflects and captures the spirit of whatever it is that makes us uniquely Australian, and I think that spirit was very much on show on, on a number of other levels, during the day because it, again, it was 83,000 people, international and local artists, lots of different genres of music, probably line-ups that you would never see together, I think, normally. And all in their own way were there to, to show their support for all the people that had been impacted by both the floods and the fires.

But I think the lyrical content, uh, of *I Still Call Australia Home*, the opportunity for the, the fans there and probably the fans watching on television, all to join Kylie in singing it. And I think just the, the way Kylie presented the song, and very much embraced the spirit of it and got the crowd to go on that journey with her was, was very special.

MUSIC: Studio recording of *London Still* by The Waifs

INTERVIEWER

The impact of *I Still Call Australia Home* remains broad, allowing other modern day artists to write songs with similar ideologies. Ideas of homesickness and remaining true to the Australian identity greatly resonate among Australian artists. A prime example of this is the song *London Still* by the band The Waifs, which pertains to this idea of homesickness that Peter Allen explores within *I Still Call Australia Home*.

[MUSIC continues]

[MUSIC fades] This idea of homesickness is very relevant to the song, not only in the way that it was written but in the modern context it has, such as with its association to Qantas, linking this to the idea of national identity and patriotism and how proud we are to be Australian.

MARK PUDDY

Whenever... particularly when you're overseas, I think, more than anything else, that you get a lot of, um, expatriate Australians who really react very, very favourably to the song. They will [laughs] get very emotional with it, and sometimes that really surprises them because they're, you know, sometimes, uh, people don't realise how much they miss Australia. I don't think you realise at the

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time, um, how much the songs can mean to people. I sort of think about it in relation to even getting-... people who are not musicians get a lot more out of the song, I think.

CARL GARDINER

It's so firmly ingrained, for me and I think many Australians, as being connected with Qantas and the flying kangaroo and, and that whole thing that no matter where an airline like Qantas or any other airline takes us, and no matter how long we may be in foreign parts of the world, well, we still identify very much with coming to home to Australia. And I think the, you know, the chorus, "I still call Australia home," is just a wonderful way of summing that up.

INTERVIEWER

As well as this idea of [distortion] homesickness, *I Still Call Australia Home* in this modern context has also been seen to feed into topics such as politics, specifically in regards to the same-sex marriage plebiscite where Tim Minchin wrote a parody of the song, titling it *I Still Call Australia Homophobic*, and uploading his parody to Facebook.

The song gained over 4.5 million views online and was a huge advocate for the "Yes" side of the debate. Tim Minchin largely sparked great political amongst Australians, creating a discussion space for the ideas around same-sex marriage.

MUSIC: *I Still Call Australia Homophobic* by Tim Minchin

[MUSIC fades]

This moved the song *I Still Call Australia Home* away from one of its meanings of homesickness to the movement of LGBTQIA+ rights which Peter had dealt with in his life. The modern take on the song shows its ability to be relevant to today's generation, as well as its flexibility of being able to be interpreted by many individuals and demonstrates the song's broad audience impact.

MARGARET MARSHALL

My audience is that he didn't really come out. Maybe right at the end of his life he, he spoke about his sexuality. He certainly referenced it, he, he was a real tease on-stage, and, and he was full of double entendres and he let people interpret as they wished.

So, you know, if, if you had knowledge of that side of his life and you interpreted that way you would get a, a certain meaning but he also wanted to maintain a mainstream audience. So he, he was never a sort of spokesperson for gay rights but he lived a life with a partner and he was certainly open it-... about it in his private life. He, he didn't hide that.

INTERVIEWER

But most importantly the song has had a huge impact on Australia's national identity and what it means to be a true Australian. It is argued that the song is Australia's de facto national anthem and is one that will forever remain a staple within all repertoires in Australia.

CARL GARDINER

I think that while we have other official songs for the-... obvious reasons and the right reasons, I think songs like *I Still Call Australia Home*, they in many ways capture the, the spirit of Australia and, dare I say it, sometimes maybe the larrikin spirit of Australia, really well.

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MARGARET MARSHALL

I've placed it with Waltzing Matilda. I think it's definitely had its place in that sort of unofficial anthem status. I think it will remain, I think there's something that taps into all of us.

MARK PUDDY

To me, I think it's just given me a lot of opportunities, um, and it's, uh-... I, I guess it's easy when you're doing a lot of arranging of various songs to get, "Oh, here's another song. Here's another song I have to arrange," and all that sorta stuff.

MARK PUDDY

But this one always-... I always sort of think of it in terms of how it has impacted other people and what effect it's had on other people. Uh, so it's hard to be sort of cynical about the song at all, you know? People do send it up a bit [laughs] and, you know, you've had occasions where I've seen it on TV and someone-... various people sending it up, but when it comes down to it, it's the effect it has on other people.

MARGARET MARSHALL

I think it's probably that sense of loyalty that I mentioned already, and love of our country. I, I think we all respond to that song, and we-... a lot of us are travellers, because Australia's so isolated we travel overseas, we-... people live overseas, but that sense of, "I'm still an Australian, I still call it home, it's in my heart," um, I think he's-... he captured that so well in the song.

MUSIC: Choral rendition of *I Still Call Australia Home* by Peter Allen

INTERVIEWER

You've been listening to Sound As Ever, an Australian Music Vault podcast produced by RMIT music industry students Brontë Pitcher, Maree Pearson, and Maddie Kerns; journalism students Stephen Jauw Waludin, Annie-Mei Forster and Rio Davis; alongside sound design student D.A. Calf.