

# **Mapping the Cultural Atlas of North Queensland: Ronald “Tonky” Logan a Case Study**

## **Abstract**

The ‘Cultural Atlas’ proposed by the PIP (People, Identity, Place) research cluster at James Cook University aims to contextualize cultural communities and artists in North Queensland into a comprehensive profile. Case study Ronald “Tonky” Logan is a North Queensland Aboriginal Country Western musician.

The secondary theme of this article is the appropriation of Country Western music by Australian Aboriginal groups as traditional music. This article draws on research by Dunbar-Hall & Gibson (2004), who demonstrate the relevance of contemporary music within Australian Aboriginal contexts, based on location and geography, as a means of establishing people, identity and place.

Dr. David Salisbury  
James Cook University  
School of Creative Arts  
Digital Sound

## **Introduction**

In 2005 the PIP (People, Identity, and Place) research cluster of James Cook University held an annual seminar during which the concept of initiating a Cultural Atlas was proposed. In March 2006 a PIP Cultural Atlas meeting was held and basic concepts were proposed including some preliminary boundaries of latitude 18, south to Bowen and Hayman Island, west to Mt. Isa and north covering the Gulf region (the Torres Strait Islands are not included). Possible outputs could be a Website as a primary means to maintain a collection of data and resources for tourism, focusing on eco and cultural-tourism CD's and DVD's.

Initially this article aims to establish the context in which the subject of this case study, Ronald 'Tonky' Logan, performs and lives by outlining a brief history of Aboriginality in North Queensland along with a brief history of Aboriginal music in the region. The secondary theme of Country Western music as an Aboriginal expression is then explored particularly as viewed through 'Tonky' Logan's personal history, musical influences and performance highlights. In conclusion 'Tonky' Logan's ethnography is situated within the context of other Country Western performers in the North Queensland region and is then applied to the concept of a 'Cultural Atlas'.

## **Historical Background; Aboriginality in North Queensland since 1900**

Mission life was a major component of Aboriginal existence throughout Australia including North Queensland starting in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1897 the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was passed and on 15 May 1911 the Taroom Aboriginal Reserve was opened 14 kilometres east of Taroom on the banks of the Dawson River (L'Oste-Brown, Godwin

et. al. 1995: 5-6).

Woorabinda Aboriginal Reserve was established in the Duaringa district in 1926 when the Department of Native Affairs moved nine hundred people to the site from Taroom. The first inhabitants were remnants of the tribes from the Taroom, Dawson River, Carnarvon, Emerald and Clermont areas. During the Second World War indigenous people from Northern Queensland were brought to Woorabinda until in the words of the Department, the residents today are “conglomerate descendants of different tribal groups, castes and the Cape Bedford (N.Q.) people. The bulk of the present older population is made up of removees from all parts of Queensland.”

(McDonald 1981: 198-99).

The main language groups of the region from below Bowen to the region around Tully include:

- |             |                     |
|-------------|---------------------|
| 1. Jusibara | 10. Wulguru         |
| 2. Jangga   | 11. Manbarra        |
| 3. Yilba    | 12. Njawaygi        |
| 4. Biri     | 13. Gugu-Badhun     |
| 5. Ngaroa   | 14. Bandyin         |
| 6. Gia      | 15. Girama          |
| 7. Juru     | 16. Warungu         |
| 8. Bindal   | 17. Wargamay        |
| 9. Gudjal   | (Brayshaw 1990: 33) |

Timothy Bottoms in his monograph Djabugay list the following language groups from Tully to the region above Cooktown starting with Wargamay in the Tully area as:

- |              |                       |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| 18. Dyirbal  | 22. Kuku Yalanji      |
| 19. Yidiny   | 23. Wujul Wujul       |
| 20. Gunggay  | 24. Guugu Yimithirr   |
| 21. Djabugay | (Bottoms, 1999: viii) |

This list of twenty-four language groups identifies only the coastal and immediate inland areas of North Queensland and demonstrates a diverse population for a single geographical area. The diversity of Aboriginal culture also suggests the potential of a range of cultural practices in particular musical style with its corresponding dances and ritual. There were other missions and reserves throughout Queensland including Yarrabah, just below Cairns, where Alice Moyle did some of her field recordings (Moyle 1966).

#### **Aboriginal Music in North Queensland (Traditional)**

In the Yearbook for Traditional Music Vol. 28, a selected audiography of traditional music of Aboriginal Australia is compiled by Barwick and Marrett, organized by geographical region and musical style (Barwick and Marrett 1996). Under the heading of North Queensland there are two listing by Alice Moyle out of five listings total. In 1966, Alice Moyle conducted an extensive survey of traditional aboriginal music in North Queensland. She collected music from several locations in North Queensland including Cape York Peninsula. These recordings were then collated into two publications for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies that included a selection of her field recordings and companion booklet. These publications are titled *Songs from North Queensland* and *Songs from Yarrabah*. In the *Songs from North Queensland* booklet she states:

Most of the songs on this disc were sung at the collector's request. Some of the elderly singers admitted to having little knowledge ('the old folks didn't

tell us’); others sang songs that belonged to neighbouring groups as well as their own (Moyle 1966: 2).

Although this may indicate that even in 1966 some breaks in the continuity of culture were beginning to show, she goes on to say that:

Like the ‘clan’ songs of east Arnhem Land, the ‘story’ songs of west Cape York are constant reminders of the ‘countries’ or territories to which members of patrilineal groups belong. Traditionally, these groups came together for ceremonies connected with initiation. Some of the dances and acts they performed would have been generally; others were prepared by individual groups for reciprocal display. The learning of dances, and of current dance songs, is still regarded as an important part of a young man’s training for adulthood (ibid.)

The Moyle recordings establish a history of Aboriginal music and culture in North Queensland and a connection to location, geography and identity.

Hayward recounts a narrative by James Morrill who was shipwreck off the coast on Horseshoe Reef west of Townsville in 1846. After being befriended by a local Aboriginal group Morrill witnessed a ceremony that included musical and dance activity with “over a thousand souls” from “about ten different tribes” (Hayward 2001: 2). There would have been an exchange of music and dance ideas at an event such as the one described above. This type of ceremony is often called a ‘corroboree’ in current vernacular.

An Australian Aboriginal dance with music, generally performed publicly; the same word may denote an Aboriginal occasion on which public singing and dancing take place. Pronounced with the emphasis on the second syllable, the term probably originated (perhaps with different emphasis) in an Aboriginal language of New South Wales in the latter part of the 18th century, although it now has a wider currency among non-Aboriginal Australians than among Aborigines (Moyle & Wild 2002, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 7 December 2006), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>).

The article goes on to say:

Corroborees are intended for public display and may be attended by all members of the community. They are usually performed after sunset when large fires are lit for light as well as for warmth. They frequently have socio-religious connotations, but all who attend expect to be entertained. Successions of dances may last for several hours. Each finite dance item is related to a corresponding song item, the latter having a duration of one to two

minutes or less. In some traditions, the same songs and dances may be used in closed rituals which are performed in private and always some distance from the public area. (ibid.).

### **Aboriginal Music in North Queensland (Contemporary)**

Hayward describes the beginnings of cultural tourism with the account of Torres Strait Islander performances in 1930 to visitors cruising on a boat owned by Bruce Jamieson, “The Islanders performed a variety of songs in circulation in the Torres Strait” (Hayward 2001: 30). The Pitt Sisters who performed under the title “The Harmony Sisters” were often featured regularly on the radio in the 1930s and early 1940s and performed a song T.I (Thursday Island) that was recently re-recorded by Seaman Dan in 2000 (Hayward 2001: 31). This establishes that Aboriginal performers of contemporary music have been apart of the musical scene in North Queensland for over seventy years. In an article by Noel Mengel he recounts that:

US troops in World War II brought an injection of jazz influences to the north. There was also plenty of work for local musicians in keeping up morale, including the Cairns-born Pitt Sisters, Dulcie and Heather. After the war Dulcie reinvented herself as Georgia Lee, singing jazz-blues in southern cities before working in the UK in the 50s, touring in Australia with Nat King Cole and releasing an album in 1962, *Georgia Lee Sings the Blues Downunder*. Many more black Queensland women would add to this tradition, including Georgia/Dulcie's sister Heather, who cracked the Sydney circuit, and Heather's daughter Wilma Reading (Noel Mengel, *Courier Mail*, (Accessed 7 December 2006) <http://news.com.au/couriermail/extras/oq/book4song2.html>)

Dunbar-Hall and Gibson list some of the rock bands, musicians and dancers of the Cairns area or the Djabugay region as Tjapukai Dancers, Gudju Gudju, Mantaka Band, Lance Riley and David Hudson as contributing to the revival of Djabugay tradition and culture (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson 2004: 157).

### **Aboriginal Country Western Music as Traditional Music**

In the film documentary *Buried Country* one of the first scenes features Jimmy Little singing a country song in a movie. The narrator states that Aboriginal

musicians have been telling their stories through Country Western music for nearly a century only most of the time most of white Australia wasn't listening (Walker 2000).

In their monograph *Deadly sounds, deadly places: Contemporary Aboriginal music in Australia*, Dunbar-Hall and Gibson state that:

Study of the extent and uses of country music style by Aboriginal musicians, however, reveals a wide-ranging musical aesthetic, particularly in various representations of Aboriginality and the expression of opinion on issues relevant to Aboriginal listeners and pertinent to understanding current Aboriginal strategies for recognition (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson 2004; 103).

Both of these sources establish a connection of Aboriginality to country music as a traditional music in a contemporary setting. John Castles emphasizes the relationship of Country Western music in Aboriginal culture stating:

In the cities and big country towns a tradition of family-orientated C & W outfits stretches back to Harry and Wilga Williams and the Country Outcasts, who began playing around Fitzroy in Melbourne in the 1960s (Castles 1998: 13).

He goes on to point out that:

But the prevailing sound, even in the song sung in Aboriginal languages, is Gospel-tinged C & W. Often the 'lost lover' strand of C & W is adapted and made to speak of a stretch of country instead of a person (you can hear this surfacing in the Warumpi Band's 'My Island Home' (1987)) (Castles 1998: 14).

The quotes from Castles demonstrate a thirty to forty year history and usage and adaptation of Country Western music by Aboriginal performers to identify with location and geography. Castles mentions several notable performers including "Roger Knox, Serina Andrew, Sharon Mann, Kathleen and Lucy Cox" (Castles 1998: 13). Narogin makes the explicit statement that "to many Aboriginal people, Country and Western was traditional Aboriginal music" (Narogin 1990: 63).

To summarize, the writers cited in this section of the article have demonstrated that there is sufficient evidence to establish a long history of Aboriginal appropriation and usage of Country Western music as a traditional music.

## **Ronald ‘Tonky’ Logan**

Ronald ‘Tonky’ Logan was born in Hughenden but grew up on the Woorabinda mission outside of Rockhampton (R. Logan 2006, per. comm., 26 May). His language group in the Hughenden region is Jirandali with alternate names of Yerrundulli, Yerrunthully, Irendely, Dalebura, Dal-leyburra, and Pooroga. He states that his uncle showed him a few chords on the guitar and that was the beginning of his musical adventure (R. Logan 2006, per. comm., 26 May). Tonky earned ‘The Golden Swaggie Award’ in 2000 for Best Aboriginal Performance. He has performed on stage with such notables as Jimmy Little, Roger Knox, Troy Casser Daley, Gus Williams and Col Hardy. He claims to be just as happy performing at the Townsville Cultural Festival or various schools in the region (R. Logan 2006, per. comm., 26 May).

Tonky’s life story is a difficult one, due to poverty, displacement and alcohol abuse. He is now a recovering alcoholic he has devoted himself to helping other change their path to sobriety. He is 57 and started playing the guitar at the age of eight or nine and also plays a little bit of drums (R. Logan 2006, per. comm., 26 May). He was first attracted to performing after seeing a Country Western performance in Blacktown New South Wales in the late 1980’s that featured top Aboriginal Country Western artists. His first performance in 1987 and 1989 in Tamworth was ‘busking’ for “a nice bit of money”. For years he worked as a radio announcer on 4K1G a community radio station in Townsville producing ‘*Tonky’s Country Country*’ music show for listeners throughout North Queensland and the Torres Straight Islands (R. Logan 2006, per. comm., 26 May).

Tonky has worked various jobs and traveled around Australia many times when working as a welfare officer, helping alcoholics and drug addicts. He worked as a railway worker but spent much of his life in the bush as a station hand. In 1994 he



released a CD titled *Singing a Memory* dedicated to his late sister, Gloria Logan. Tonky says “it brings him back to when he was in the park playing music and how they would all sing along” (R. Logan 2006, per. comm., 26 May). Tonky wrote an original song for the CD titled *So Many Times* which he states “is about lifting yourself up and getting on with life” (R. Logan 2006, per. comm., 26 May).

When asked about some of his musical influences, Tonky describes a Country Western music festival in Blacktown he attended in the Western suburbs of Sydney in 1987 and heard Auriel Andrew, Roger Knox, Annie Briggs and other top Aboriginal performers. Roger Knox is:

The Koori King of Country, Mr. Roger Knox, has made music his life. He grew up on the Toomelah mission near Boggabilla on the NSW/QLD border and then took to the streets of Tamworth during the early days of the town’s country music festival. Roger, a Gamilaroi man, began his early days as a gospel singer, with his relationship with his family, the law, and surviving an horrific plane crash in the early 1980’s being the inspiration behind his many songs (Message Stick/ABC Australia (Accessed 12 December) <http://www.abc.net.au/message/radio/awaye/stories/s858423.htm>).

Tonky’s performance highlights include the Australian Country Music Buskers Championship; Tamworth Country Music Festival; Charters Towers Country Music Festival; Townsville Multicultural Festival; All Black Football Carnival and collaborations with many notables such as Jimmy Little, Roger Knox, Troy Casser Daley, Gus Williams and Col Hardy (R. Logan 2006, per. comm., 26 May).

### **Other Aboriginal Musicians in North Queensland**

Although there are other Aboriginal musicians in North Queensland there are relatively few that are primarily country western musicians. Tonky lists a couple of older musicians that he knows of in the region such as Trevor Pryor and Fred Doolan.

In an interview with Lloyd Wyles, a station manager for 4K1G radio station based out of Townsville, he lists Trevor Pryor; as well as, Noel Buchannan; and Mick

Thaiday all from Palm Island; Doctor Bones and Monica Whiteman from Townsville; Sylvana Doolan (Blues Singer) and her brother Shane Doolan; and Johnny Nicol from Ayr. Wyles points out that “some of these musicians are not really country” (L. Wyles 2006, per. comm., 25 September).

In an interview with Dion Lee an indigenous dancer and performer from Mossman above Cairns, he lists Barry Cedric from Yarrabah as a Country Western musician. He also lists several musicians from a group in the past called Broken English such as Andrew Namok better known as ‘Drewz’ from the Torres Strait Islands and King Kadu – (aka Ricardo Idagi) from Murray Island in the Torres Strait. One of the more prominent musicians in North Queensland is that he listed is David Hudson from the Cairns region and member of the Tjapukai tribe in Kuranda, North Queensland (D. Lee 2006, per. comm., 25 September). Of those listed above only Barry Cedric is an established Country Western musician:

During his 10-year career as a singer/songwriter, Barry Cedric performed at Brisbane’s World Expo in 1988, won amateur male vocalist at the Tamworth Country Music Festival in 1986 and made it into the final of the Starmaker Quest in 1989 (Vibe Australia 2006 (Accessed 16 December 2006) [http://www.vibe.com.au/vibe/corporate/celebrity\\_vibe/showceleb.asp?id=5](http://www.vibe.com.au/vibe/corporate/celebrity_vibe/showceleb.asp?id=5)).

The article continues:

In 1993 Barry brought out his debut album *Where You from My Brother*, the release of which coincided with the International Year of Indigenous People. The following year he toured Cape York again, with further funding from the Australian Arts Board. The album includes two songs about his beloved hometown of Yarrabah, of which he is proud and very knowledgeable (Vibe Australia 2006 (Accessed 16 December 2006) [http://www.vibe.com.au/vibe/corporate/celebrity\\_vibe/showceleb.asp?id=5](http://www.vibe.com.au/vibe/corporate/celebrity_vibe/showceleb.asp?id=5)).

Barry’s music would be considered traditional Aboriginal music from Yarrabah as it establishes his connection to land and people of the North Queensland region.

To summarize, although there are many Aboriginal contemporary artists in the North Queensland region very few of them have focused on Country Western music

solely. This situates ‘Tonky’ Logan as one of the foremost advocates and promoters of Country Western music in the North Queensland region.

### **Cultural Atlas**

The basic definition of a Cultural Atlas is based upon a Geographic Information System (GIS) that can function on several levels simultaneously by combining place, time and topic. One example is the Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative (ECIA) developed by Michael Buckland Co-Director, Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative University of California, Berkeley, and Lewis Lancaster Director, Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative University of California, Berkeley. The ECIA site posts the following:

Goal: The Cultural Atlas is designed to be a tool for visualizing and analysing historical and cultural phenomena. With the capacity to create customized maps based on a theme, era and region of interest, you can quickly answer--or at least frame--questions that would once have taken a lifetime. What religions had pilgrimage sites along the Silk Road? Was there much regional variation in mortality in nineteenth century Britain? The Cultural Atlas can be used for research, teaching, advocacy, and resource discovery (Buckland & Lancaster, 2004, D-Lib Magazine, (Accessed 25 September 2006) <http://www.ecai.org/>).

Their abstract states:

The Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative was formed to encourage scholarly communication and the sharing of data among researchers who emphasize the relationships between place, time, and topic in the study of culture and history. In an effort to develop better tools and practices, The Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative has sponsored the collaborative development of software for downloading and editing geo-temporal data to create dynamic maps, a clearinghouse of shared datasets accessible through a map-based interface, projects on format and content standards for gazetteers and time period directories, studies to improve geo-temporal aspects in online catalogs, good practice guidelines for preparing e-publications with dynamic geo-temporal displays, and numerous international conferences (Buckland & Lancaster, 2004, D-Lib Magazine, (Accessed 25 September 2006) <http://www.ecai.org/>).

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a system for creating, storing, analyzing and managing spatial data and associated attributes. It is a computer system capable of integrating, storing, editing, analyzing, sharing, and displaying geographically-

referenced information. GIS is a tool that allows users to create interactive queries (user created searches), analyze the spatial information, and edit data (GIS. ( 2006). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. (Accessed 16 December 2006) from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://www.search.eb.com.elibrary.jcu.edu.au/eb/article-9396653>).

Traditional maps are abstractions of the real world, a sampling of important elements portrayed on a sheet of paper with symbols to represent physical objects. A topographic map shows the shape of land surface with contour lines; the actual shape of the land can be seen only in the mind's eye. To situate 'Tonky' Logan in a conventional map with Townsville as the only point of reference ignores his Worrabinda and Hughenden existence and does not correlate him with other musicians in the region or with his language group or in relation to other language groups in the region.

Some of the layers included in situating Tonky in the North Queensland cultural atlas would be:

- Ethnicity – Aboriginal
- Language Group – Jirandali
- Birthplace – Hughenden
- Residences – Hughenden, Woorabinda, Townsville
- Musical Genre – Country Western
- Occupations – Musician, Radio Announcer, Station Hand, Railway Worker
- Performances in North Queensland – Charters Towers Country Music Festival, Townsville Multicultural Festival, various schools in the region, Paluma Bush Dance, Andy's Roadhouse in Ingham
- Other Aboriginal Country Western musicians
- Other Aboriginal contemporary musicians
- Other Aboriginal language groups
- Other Aboriginal missions or reserves

Due to the constraints mentioned above the map below would display only his current residence of Townsville with no way of clearly displaying the other information listed above.

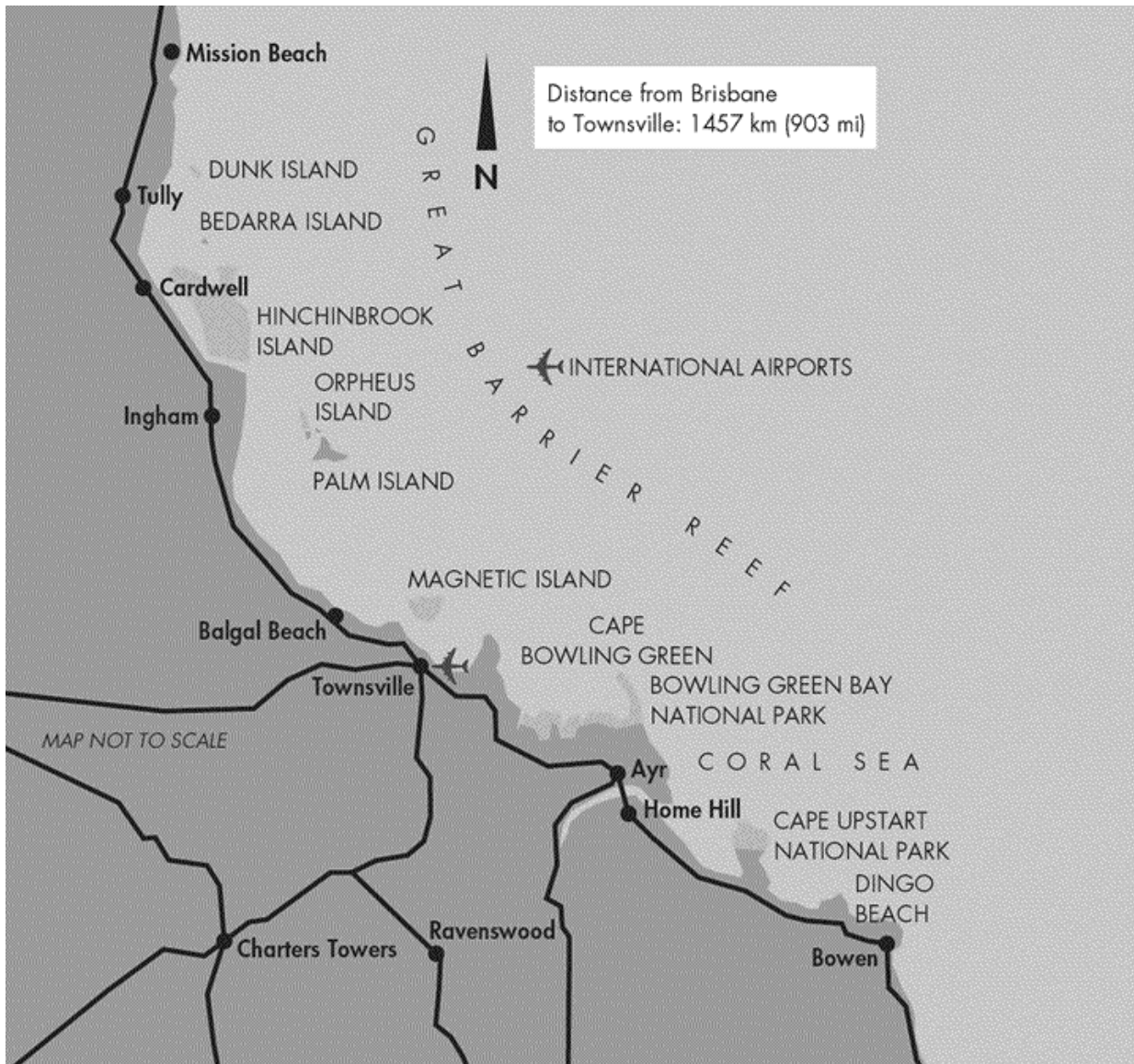


Figure 1) Map of Townsville Region (<http://www.queensland-australia.com/100170.php>)

## Conclusions

In conclusion it has been shown that creating a cultural atlas of the North Queensland region would be beneficial in displaying a range of data in a GIS format that would allow for the retrieval of multiple layers of data within a cohesive display and context. This would allow for the contextualization of Country Western musicians

like Ronald 'Tonky' Logan as well as musicians, performers, artists, cultural centers such as the Tjapukai Cultural Centre outside of Cairns.

This article has also demonstrated that Ronald 'Tonky' Logan has established himself as a contributor to the Aboriginal tradition of Country Western music in North Queensland both as a performer and advocate. His radio show had a broad listening audience and he was able to promote Aboriginal country music within the North Queensland region. He is part of a fifty year history of Aboriginal Country Western musicians who have established Country Western music as a traditional music of Aboriginal culture and identity and has a lifelong connection to North Queensland Aboriginal history and land. Although younger indigenous musicians are gravitating towards other forms of contemporary music, the tradition of Country Western music will remain strong in Aboriginal communities.

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<http://www.grovemusic.com>

## Interviews Conducted

Logan, Ronald 'Tonky'

26 May 2006, James Cook University, Vincent Campus, Townsville, QLD

Wyles, Lyle

25 September 2006, 4K1G-TOO DEADLY Radio Station, 271 Sturt Street, Townsville, QLD.

Lee, Dion

25 September 2006, Private Residence, Thuringowa, QLD