

# Transformations

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The Technology, Aesthetic and Cultural Politics of a Collaborative, Transnational Music Recording Project: Veiga, Veiga and the Itinerant Overdubs

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New media innovations and the popularity of ‘world music’ have facilitated crosscultural and transnational recording projects in the past few decades. New media technology makes collaboration at a distance feasible and a market for the very eclectic genre(s) of ‘world music’ makes projects potentially economically viable. Beginning approximately in the mid-1980s with the popularity, and contentiousness, of Paul Simon’s Graceland project (Meintjes 1990) and other ‘world music’ projects such as Deep Forest (Feld 2000), academic researchers have explored the nature, legality and cultural dynamics of such recordings (e.g. Mills 1996; Zemp 1996).

An ancillary to such research has been research into the multifaceted roles of academics in such kinds of cultural production. Cultural production here includes the overlapping components of most contemporary cultural products, including their ‘circuit of culture’ (production, regulation, identity, representation and consumption) (Du Gay 1997). Such research provides insights into the processes and end products of cultural production of a particular ‘art world’ of shared aesthetics (Becker 1982), in this case popular music. Examples of such academic involvement include: production and participation in educational dance performances (Mackinlay 2001), soundscape and acoustic ecology recordings (Feld 1991, 2001; Feld and Crowdy 2002), and commercial or community-orientated music CDs (Scales 2002, Neuenfeldt 2001).

This article describes and analyses the aesthetic, technological and cultural processes informing the cultural production of Veiga, Veiga, a song recorded by 73-year-old Australian Torres Strait Islander Henry (Seaman) Dan. The song in its ‘final’ version appears on his ‘world music’ CD, *Perfect Pearl* (Hot Records 1094), recorded and released in 2003 [[Sound example #1](#)]. However, achieving that version required considerable, often at-a-distance, collaboration between songwriters, musicians and producers based in Australia (Cairns, Sydney and Thursday Island) and Papua New Guinea (PNG) (Port Moresby), several of whom are also music-based academic researchers (the authors of this article). An important focus here is the process of collaboration, regarded as a key component of cross-cultural recording projects identified by Meinjtes (2003) in her detailed examination of South African mbaqanga recording sessions. Another focus is on the assumptions of, and challenges for academics who not only perform on or produce music recordings as creative artists but also comment on their projects’ aesthetics (Scales 2002; Neuenfeldt 2001).

Essential to the recording of Veiga, Veiga was the use of multi-track digital recording software. In the multi-track musical recording process used to produce the song, each

collaborator contributed and passed on their work in a digitised format to the others. Eventually it was finally 'edited'/'mixed' collaboratively by the titular 'producers' - the two people hired specifically by the record company to deliver a musical end product in the form of a CD.

In writing this article a similar process was used; the main difference was an absence of immediate feedback at intermediate stages of the writing process and the resultant absence of on-going creative adjustments. Such adjustments are an essential part of the multi-track recording process as they are when shuffling an article back and forth between authors. The production of Veiga, Veiga involved a serial approach where, at various stages, particular collaborators handed responsibility to another to complete a stage of the recording without such feedback. Additionally, certain stages, such as the translated lyrics, were incomplete while other vocal parts were added. As a result, the final structure and aesthetics of the song remained malleable and unknown to individual collaborators until the final stages. It is this malleability and the sense of uncertainty which permeated all aspects of the project that is the focus of description and analysis here.

Several linked and overlapping questions were posed to help guide the collaborative writing and interviews used in this article. The first of these asked what assumptions did the songwriters, musicians, engineers and producers have concerning Veiga, Veiga's aesthetics, technology and cultural politics? Second, how were aesthetic decisions made, how did technology mediate them, and how did cultural politics impact? Third, how did aesthetics, technology and cultural politics impact on the process of collaboration? Fourth, what did the collaborators hope to achieve at the outset and what did they achieve at the end? By posing and addressing these questions, we aimed to clarify how collaborative musical cultural production takes place, to demonstrate the complexity of the roles of academic researchers who also produce and perform, and further to understand the role of technology in facilitating collaborative transnational recording projects.

## **Background to the Song, Producers and Performers**

There are several main participants in the project who need to be identified: lyricist, singer and translator **Gere Rupa**, singer and translator **Gima Rupa**, composer and co-producer **Denis Crowdy**, engineer and co-producer **Soru Anthony (Tony) Subam**, engineer and co-producer **Nigel Pegrum**, and co-producer and lyricist **Karl Neuenfeldt**. Veiga, Veiga was originally written in the mid-1990s by lyricist Gere Rupa and composer Denis Crowdy, who is married to Gere's sister, Gima. It was written in the Hula language from the Rigo region of Central Province in PNG. Gere was brought up mainly in Port Moresby, PNG's capital, and now lives in Irupara village, about 90kms southeast of the capital on the coast. An active guitarist and singer, he has contributed to a number of recording projects in PNG since the mid 1990s. In addition to these musical activities, he has taken a keen interest in various aspects of music technology.

Denis Crowdy is an Anglo-Australian who was born in PNG and returned there after completing a degree in classical music performance in Australia. He taught music at the University of Papua New Guinea's Faculty of Creative Arts for eight years. During that time he was exposed to a wide range of PNG musical styles and eventually did an MA in Ethnomusicology on village-based stringband guitar music in Central Province (Crowdy 2001). He is currently enrolled in a PhD analysing the contemporary music of the now

defunct PNG group, Sanguma. One of the members of Sanguma was Tony Subam, from Madang Province, who taught with Denis Crowdy in the same music program at the University of Papua New Guinea. As well as being an accomplished multi-instrumentalist and session musician, Tony Subam has done music research on PNG's music and music industry (Subam 1995).

In 1996 Karl Neuenfeldt heard Denis Crowdy play *Veiga, Veiga* during a research project in PNG and began recording it. However, the project was never completed and he did not recall the song again until Denis Crowdy played it during the recording sessions for Seaman Dan's *Perfect Pearl* CD which Karl was co-producing with Cairns-based Nigel Pegrum. The CD was to have a northern Australian focus, featuring songs from or about life in the tropics. Seaman Dan was born in and worked throughout the Torres Strait region and was familiar with PNG music from radio broadcasts and the many PNG nationals with whom he worked in maritime industries. He had also spent time in PNG as a mineral prospector. After hearing Denis Crowdy sing the song, Seaman Dan liked the melody, agreeing its overall 'sound' would suit his style as well as the tropical focus of the CD.

Using the Protools computer program, Nigel Pegrum initially recorded Denis Crowdy playing acoustic guitar to 'click track' [[Sound example #2](#)]. Then soprano ukulele and electric bass were added to a metronomic 'click-track'. Denis Crowdy then added a 'guide' vocal in Hula but only the main melody in what would eventually require multiple harmonies, in keeping with stringband style. Seaman Dan does not speak Hula and at least parts of the song needed to be in English, his main language. In previous recordings (his *Follow the Sun and Steady, Steady* CDs), he sang new and traditional songs incorporating Torres Strait languages (*Kala Lagaw Ya* and *Meriam Mir*). The songs would purposely always start and end in the Torres Strait languages and translators were credited as co-authors. In this instance, a translation would clearly be needed; no one at the sessions knew exactly what the song was about. Denis Crowdy had a general idea but given the lyrics were written by his brother-in-law he wanted to ensure he not only had the proper spelling of the Hula language words but also a clear idea of the intent and context of the song. Only then could an 'appropriate' and just as importantly a 'singable' translation be written and performed convincingly by Seaman Dan.

Literal translations do not always make musical sense and sometimes are not 'singable'. In a PNG stringband style song such as *Veiga, Veiga*, a recurrent melody is played on guitar. Therefore, Seaman Dan would have to sing and phrase with it which required fitting the words to the music. Consequently, Denis Crowdy asked his wife Gima Rupa (in Sydney) to do a translation into English and subsequently Gere Rupa (in PNG) also provided a separate version. It then fell to Karl (in Cairns) to fashion a singable translation in Seaman Dan's 'style' that could convey the general meaning of the song yet synchronise with the melody. However, when Karl first read the two translations (see below) they differed considerably. Although both included references to a maritime environment and a general tone of facing difficulties in life with perseverance and optimism, one was more impressionistic and the other more literal. Through a process of trial and error a 'singable' English version was fashioned.

To help Seaman Dan rehearse what was to him a new melody and words, Karl sang a 'guide' vocal for the English words [[Sound example #4](#)].

In a following session, Seaman Dan sang his English language version as well as the key words "Veiga, Veiga" which appear in the song's Hula language chorus section. While

recording on-location at Thursday Island in Torres Strait, Nigel Pegrum later added backing vocals to the English language sections sung by Torres Strait Islanders Gabriel Bani, Tony Ghee and Charles Passi.<sup>(1)</sup> However these vocals were not done in stringband style because at that stage Nigel Pegrum had no idea what harmonies the PNG vocalists would sing. Consequently, Bani, Ghee and Passi sang their vocals in English in unison with Seaman Dan's vocal [[Sound example #5](#)].

Lyrics for Veiga, Veiga  
Original Hula language lyrics by Gere Rupa

Verse 1: Avu rigo pie rigo omarai / oi pene lavu mau mu oi ao mu uga magi maparara / wau ne e pie rawali

Verse 2: E raka kala ka ge wala na / alu maguli ra ge irau irau na Gera kala ina ina ao rai / avu ra nama ra pie gia ra

Chorus: Veiga veiga ge kamuna ao nai / ao mu pane paru lele / Veiga veiga ge kamuna ao nai / gima mu paa ne kala ro wau

Gere Rupa's Translation into English:

Verse 1: My cool, cool Hula breeze / tropical cool / dancing palms / rhythmic waves / the way you make me feel so good / tropicana lad without the blues

Verse 2: The heat the breeze, it's a tropical blend / go swim in the sea or find a better shade / do what you want as long as you're happy / do something good to fill the emptiness

Chorus: Memories come popping up / scars without the pain / dreams I'm dreaming hope they'd come / let me not move for just awhile they'd come / let me not move for just awhile

Gima Rupa's Translation into English:

Verse 1: Days when the sea breeze blows / it can blow you to sleep / all the thoughts you have within / will all calm down

Verse 2: When something happens and it goes wrong / our lives are changed and things are different / but through our good deeds and words / the benefit of those deeds can be seen.

Chorus: When your anger rises / don't get upset quickly / when your anger rises / do not get violent; don't use your hands.

Karl Neuenfeldt's English Language Transliteration as sung by Seaman Dan

Verse 1: There are days when sea breeze is blowing / it can lull you off to sleep / and so all the good thoughts you may have within you now / try and let them calm you down

Verse 2: If something goes wrong or bad things happen / our lives are changed but we must carry on / and through our good deeds and through our kind words / we will gain much more than we may give

Chorus: Memories, memories when they come back to me / there's no need to be angry / memories, memories sweet ones I've been waiting for / I want them to stay with me awhile

Before Seaman Dan did his English language vocal part, Denis Crowdy had returned to Sydney with a CD of the embryonic song in a Protocols file format. A CD containing relevant files was then couriered to Port Moresby so Tony, using the multi track recording software Cubase, could produce Gere Rupa adding his vocal parts [[Sound example #6](#)].

After those PNG sessions, a CD was couriered back to Sydney, so Denis Crowdy could produce Gima's vocal parts [[Sound example #7](#)].

This was done at the studio facilities at the Department of Contemporary Music Studies, Macquarie University, where he works, and was engineered by Dave Hackett, the Department's technician and recording engineer. The CD with all the added Hula vocals was then sent to Cairns where engineer Nigel Pegrum had to extract the 'new' overdubs and match them with the original music tracks, Seaman Dan's English vocal which had been done in the interim, and the Torres Strait Islander backing vocals. As a result of the production schedule, the location of the collaborators and what technology they had access to, different versions of the song circulated. It was only when the CD got back to Cairns from Port Moresby and Sydney that there was any sense of a 'completed' song. The other participants did not know what had actually been recorded elsewhere. Most of the pieces of the song's musical puzzle were in place. It was Nigel Pegrum's dual role as main engineer and co-producer to create a complete version of the song.

Before we recount participants' comments on assembling the song from its diverse and recorded-out-of-sequence components, it is useful to address the role of Tony Subam, the PNG-based engineer/co-producer. He had not worked professionally before with either Karl or Nigel Pegrum. However, he had worked closely with Denis Crowdy so there was at least some shared notion of how he should engineer and produce Gere's vocals to maintain the song's stringband roots. As an engineer, Tony Subam had built up a digital recording set-up based around a personal computer, with the same type of software used by Denis Crowdy at Macquarie (Cubase). For Gere's vocals Tony Subam organised a quiet space at the Music Department at the University of Papua New Guinea (with the assistance of ex-colleagues of Tony Subam and Denis) and organised recording times. There are two important issues that influenced the relative ease of the sessions. Firstly, it was crucial that Tony Subam had access to suitable equipment and a suitable location. It would have been much harder logistically and more expensive had the recording been done in a professional studio in PNG (of which there are several). As well, pirating and manufacturing of illegal recordings is rife in PNG (Niles 1996) so the use of a commercial studio that was also involved in such activities had the potential to compromise the Australian record company's investment. Secondly, it was also crucial that Tony Subam had appropriate engineering skills. Although largely a self-taught engineer, he had gained some software recording and editing experience working with Denis Crowdy in the late 1990s when they wrote and recorded the music to the PNG film *Strong Connections* in a home studio using the same software application on a Microsoft Windows based computing platform. Overall, Tony Subam had a range of skills and contacts that made it feasible to send the CD of the song to PNG with confidence the overdubs would be not only technologically useable but also musically and culturally appropriate.

## **Assembling the Song**

Quite often recording engineers also function as producers, whether or not they are actually credited or paid for their contribution. The engineer has a key role in not only getting the best sounds but also getting the best possible performance out of the musicians and singers and also often contributes to arrangements and may perform as a musician or singer (Mientjes 2003, Scales 2002). Nigel Pegrum is an example of a multi-skilled engineer, producer, arranger and musician. For 17 years he performed with the celebrated British folk-rock band, Steeleye Span. As an engineer/producer he has worked on more than 150 CDs and albums and has recorded many Indigenous Australian artists including David Hudson, Ashley Dargin, Seaman Dan, Rita Mills and Andrew Namok. Although he has decades of experience, the Veiga, Veiga sessions presented different production challenges because it is only fairly recently that new media software has made collaborative transnational projects much easier to manage. There also were important cultural issues to consider for this project to be successful. The following extracts are from an interview done after the final version of Veiga, Veiga was assembled and approved by the songwriters and coproducers (Pegrum 2003).

### **Nigel Pegrum's Comments**

Obviously we have to establish between the different locations which are going to be handling the recorded material that there is some sort of common system that we can all unravel the [recorded] program material through. Luckily Protools is becoming more and more common in its usage, or affiliated programs that can unravel WAV and AIFF files and can then be transferred on to the next location where that information can be unravelled again. But in this particular case it was made easier because the other locations, PNG and Macquarie University, run Protools. There are different versions of Protools but to my knowledge all versions can open files of this fairly simple nature and work on them and then pass them on in a useful form.

[Protools is] purely the operating platform but there are several possible problem areas, one of which is the transferring of the digital information between locations. We decided to courier a CD containing the information from studio to studio. It may seem to people who are used to the world of email and Internet transfers [to be] a rather cumbersome way of doing it. But I was concerned that information could be corrupted in the course of transferring it. And I suppose there was a slight security thing as well, not that it was a hit record that if it got into the wrong hands somebody could have stolen it or something like that. But I just like to keep things as private as possible and [circulating it unprotected over] the Internet worried me.

But more important than that was the possible corruption of the material, which would have just caused delays if it arrived at the other end and something was missing, especially as none of us knew what the other person was adding. So there might have been something missing that didn't get transferred correctly and we didn't know it was missing because we didn't know what was there. So all those areas were possible problem areas. By couriating [a CD] on a reliable air-service from location to location [they] were overcome.

The next thing of course is the 'pure' recorded quality decided by the equipment being used at the various locations. Computer based Protools wherever it may be is going to operate equally efficiently. But the actual audio signal that was being initially recorded and therefore put into the system is the big variance. [There are actually two aspects to this kind of situation]: the equipment itself plus the person operating it. I have had the chance to see the

little studio set up at Macquarie University and I am therefore aware that the acoustics in the rooms were perfectly adequate. And the equipment I saw there was very adequate, good quality AKG and Rhode microphones and so on, which are very acceptable high quality, studio vocal microphones. But it comes down to the actual use of the microphones of course, whether they were going to use pop-shields, etc., not to mention the ability of the singer.

We were led to believe by Denis' reports that Gima Rupa was very capable of singing the song in tune and so on. Anyways the vocal requirement wasn't quite so critical; we weren't looking for a performance in line with the Three Tenors [Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras]. We were looking for an 'Indigenous performance' with all its quirks, which are acceptable and desirable in fact in this end product. And we assumed Denis Crowdy has had enough experience to know how a vocal should be recorded, distance from microphone, etc., and one hopes he had some reasonably skilled assistant down there at Macquarie and indeed this was proven. When I did get the results back the vocal quality was very acceptable. I think they probably didn't use compressors and so forth, which I would use as a matter of course. But that doesn't matter [because] it's almost better to get an unprocessed signal which I can then work on once I get it [to my studio].

However, the PNG recording was the biggest unknown quantity and I am afraid that did prove to be a bit of a problem. I would think that the university there would have some sort of professionally built recording environment, and if they have Protocols that must have other equipment of a similar quality. But I have to say the vocal that came from PNG had a very narrow bandwidth of equalisation, very little high frequencies and unfortunately rather too much 'bottom end' [low frequencies]. That was creating ['pops'] on just about every /p/ sound, and indeed on other words which had some sort of explosive consonant. Consequently, I had the most enormous 'pops' to deal with. I suggest possibly they were using a Shure SM58, which is a good quality dynamic microphone for stage use, and probably singing into it as people do on stage, with their mouth literally touching the gauze ball at the end of the microphone. It certainly sounded that way anyway. So at just about every consonant that could have created a problem, it did. So when I got [the PNG recording] back to the studio here in Cairns and [transferred it to] Protocols and lined everything up, I then had to spend at least a couple of hours going through and very heavily filtering the low frequencies. On Protocols luckily we have a system whereby one can 'dip' very accurately [sound] levels throughout the recorded program. I had to 'dip' the beginning of every word which the [explosive] consonant, whether it be a /p/ or something similar. And in fact [sometimes] half way through words as well, which took a very, very long time. The result is acceptable. I can still hear a few 'pops' but [I have recently heard other successful recordings with lots of 'pops'] so I felt better about that!

I love to be surprised and it was a very pleasant surprise [when I first heard all the Hula vocals], aside from the technical problems of what came from PNG. The blend of voices [was excellent], and that would be impossible to get any other way. You can't ask [an Australian] session singer to sound like a PNG national, and an untrained one at that. There is enormous charm in the result albeit at times slightly technically imperfect both on the technical side of the recording and the singing at time wavers a little. It sounded absolutely charming. So as a producer I loved it instantly. [Although Karl had concerns about the difference between the PNG block harmonies and Seaman Dan's single voice] I kind of like that.

Whenever I am mixing anything I have a visual picture in my mind of where the people are in the orchestra or where the band [members] are standing. I just don't mix it as anonymous

sounds. I actually picture the people and place them on the stage where I want them. [In the final mix] I've got Uncle Seaman (2) up the front strumming his guitar and giving us a nice little smile. And [there's] a group of PNG people off to one side all grouped around a couple of microphones, and there's about 6 or 8 of them, they're a little family or something. And then the other musicians group behind Uncle Seaman or slightly to his right. That is how I pictured it. In fact, I didn't quite mix it like that because I needed to spread the vocals more evenly across the stereo image. It didn't worry me that Seaman Dan's voice was on its own.

[Karl had asked me to add the Torres Strait Islander backing vocals] and I think it was a good thing. [The producers] know that they are Torres Strait Islander people [singing] but of course the listener will assume that it's the same people singing in [the Hula] language who are joining in with a little bit of English. So there you are linking the two [musical styles and languages] together.

The reason I was happy to go with the arrangement as it is [in the final version] is because when Denis Crowdy was putting it together, as far as I can remember, he didn't make any effort to designate a section as being an instrumental section. So I assumed he was closer in touch with the way that the people who wrote it would have performed it. In an Indigenous music performance once they are singing and people are having a great time and it's a community thing and it's a bonding exercise, they are not going to say "we're gonna stop now so Fred can play a guitar solo". They sing because they love singing and they'll probably sing for three hours.

As I see it the [core of the] song is the sections sung by the PNG people and Uncle Seaman is the narrator. Uncle Seaman is just sort of leaning forward to us in the picture and just saying "you're listening to this lovely sound and you're enjoying the sound of it, but this is what it means in your language so you can understand what they're singing about. Now have a listen to them singing it again", so they do. And then he tells us what they've just sung. So he's the narrator in the story, in the English language of course.

And of course the world is listening to the album and saying, "Uncle Seaman chose to do that song because he knows these PNG people". They don't know that producers have a big hand in the choice of songs and the writing and arranging of them. They just assume it's the singer who does it all and we're just sitting there with a cup of tea in our hands listening to it all and saying "oh, that's a pretty song".

### **Denis Crowdy's Comments**

There are two ways in which recording Veiga, Veiga has presented me with challenges to what is usually a series of "compartments" in my professional and personal life as far as music goes. Firstly is the issue of the song and its role within my family relationships with my in-laws; it has moved from being performed family repertoire to a publicly available recording. Second is the connection between my work as a performing musician and music researcher – my very role in this article, for instance, indicates the combination of these previously separated roles.

In regards to the idea of Veiga, Veiga as a family song, I have always regarded it as a personal contribution and therefore a connection with my wife's family in a musical way. My wife Gima Rupa has composed a song that performs a similar role with my family. At a



Christmas gathering in Australia, a collection of instrument playing family members performed a blues song I had roughly arranged. On return to Port Moresby, Gima Rupa had transformed the basic structure and added a series of verses in the Hula language. This was learnt and played by all of us at various occasions while living in Port Moresby, and it is still played when we visit the village.

Deciding to arrange Veiga, Veiga and include it on a recording to be released commercially was initially of some concern to me, as that local family intimacy was challenged. At the same time though, sharing it with Seaman Dan was a way of acknowledging, even cementing, an important musical and personal relationship for both myself, Gima Rupa and Gere. Although Gere Rupa has never met Seaman Dan, he can perform a number of songs from his albums through an extended connection with me [and my involvement with Seaman Dan].

Another interesting aspect of the process of producing Veiga, Veiga for the Perfect Pearl project has been assigning authorship. This is a complicated legal and ethical component of such projects, including the vexing issue of individual or communal 'ownership' of copyright (Mills 1996, Zemp 1996). Although I perceive an agreement amongst family members that I came up with the musical accompaniment to which Gere Rupa added the vocal melody and lyrics, the act of stating authorship for legal purposes, and attempting to establish an appropriate split of percentages tends to define explicitly an element that would normally remain much more fluid. Although authorship of many songs in the village can be attributed to a specific author or authors, there are numerous cases of situations where the process is much more fluid – any other perceptions of creative contribution (by other family members, for example) are subsumed by the formal statement of authorship as clear percentage contributions. At the same time, there is the comfort of copyright protection because it is missing in so many Papua New Guinean cases (see Niles 1996).

Despite the transformations of the song into new contexts, the presence of different layers of meaning for different participants and listeners remains. The creative translations of the verses into English result in a shift in meaning. This is not meant as a criticism of Karl's work; on the contrary I think it adds to an already existing melange of meaning and potential for interpretation. The two different translations provided by Gima Rupa and Gere Rupa respectively represent the difficulties in expressing associations, even patterns of thought, into another language. Gima, for example, will often translate into Tok Pisin first of all, as it more comfortably fits with the form and structure of the text in Hula. Local words such as "avurigo", that on the surface refers to a particular breeze, also carries with it a great deal of association with the weather and general atmosphere in the village at that particular time of the year. To get this, one needs to have experienced the village at the time of the wind. Deeper layers of meaning embedded in common expressions are also lost in translation. Indeed they are lost to me, as they require sophisticated understanding of the language and its use in particular contexts.

The end result of Veiga, Veiga is not a seamless integration of the transnational elements. The song is clearly in Central Province PNG vocal style, with verses in English by Seaman Dan in his Torres Strait influenced style. The recording process has not always been smooth. At various stages there were hurdles to be overcome such as transferring files into relevant formats, reading files back into Protools, the vagaries of couriering parcels between Cairns, Sydney and Port Moresby. One of the most interesting aspects of the project comes to light when we consider the contrast in general access to technical facilities. In this instance there

was considerable, but not insurmountable, disparity between the Australian and PNG participants' access to high quality equipment, Gere Rupa lives for the most part in a village that has no electricity, where gardening and fishing are essential means of survival. It is significant to consider that it is possible for him to contribute remotely on an album that is largely put together at the other end of the facility spectrum – a professional air conditioned studio in an affluent city where the idea of no electricity for more than a few hours would be exceptional. Although access to portable technology at a moderate cost is the main bridge over this clear technological and economic divide, access to skills to actually use the equipment is equally important. This might seem obvious, but such skills are rare in PNG; a history of lack of access as a result of the divide just discussed has led to a paucity of people with the requisite skills. As a result, Tony Subam's role, then, is actually critical as a catalyst to allow the production of the key elements that provide the song with its particular stylistic identity – that of a rich harmonic vocal style common in the Central Province of PNG. A larger budget might have been a solution to bridging this divide as well, although the fact that Gere Rupa and Tony Subam were allowed some autonomy over their own contribution to the project no doubt assisted in the character of the vocal parts.

The success of the process has also occurred because of prior relationships between the participants, an understanding of musical background and skills of each, and therefore appropriate levels of trust in the results of each of the stages of overdubbing. The final point of creative decision-making, however, is left to Karl Neuenfeldt and Nigel Pegrum as 'official' co-producers in dialogue with the artist Seaman Dan. Although final aesthetic judgments of such a project are ultimately couched in commercial terms – the album is, after all, a commercial venture by a record company – the fact that Veiga, Veiga is a track that, as far as the CD's coproducers are concerned, sits comfortably with the other songs, indicates that there is future potential in the process. It does seem from the experiences of the authors, however, that more traditional components and elements of the creative process are essential to such a project's success. Trust, prior working and personal relationships, good communication, preparedness to step back and rely on the skills and judgments of colleagues involved in the project are all key components – regardless of the technology used.

### **Tony Subam's Comments**

I received an email from Denis Crowdy on 7 February 2003 asking me if I would be willing to record Gere Rupa's vocal harmonies for the song Veiga, Veiga. As I was using the recording software Cubase VST 24 on my iMac then, the request from Denis coincidentally came at the same time I was recording corporate jingles brought in by a musician friend, so I was in a kind of recording flow.

There was no question of whether I could do it or not, but more a fascination, a thrill that modern technological advancement can enable music files to be sent by compact disc from such as distance in a matter of days to enable a creative process to be accomplished by capturing the required part which is miles elsewhere, and I was to be involved in the process.

Getting in touch with Gere Rupa was easy as Port Moresby is not such a big place and Denis had already done that and filled Gere in on the project.

I got the CD sent by Denis Crowdy on the morning of 13 February and Gere being aware of it was picked up after lunch after I had picked up my iMac and my stereoplayer that I hook up to the computer to use as monitors.

The problem of not having a room secure from external interference was solved earlier in the week when I contacted by Denis Crowdy's and my previous colleagues at the Music Strand of the Performing Arts at the University of Papua New Guinea, who allowed me to use one of their practice rooms which actually was quite ideal for our purpose.

The audio files sent by Denis Crowdy were used as guide tracks from which Gere Rupa would lay his vocal tracks – harmonies. I recorded three of his harmony tracks that afternoon and two more the next morning (Friday). Friday night I cleaned up the five tracks and burnt them into a CD. I sent the CD to Denis Crowdy by Express Mail on Saturday morning.

There were some issues that arose. I was having memory problems on my computer when using the recording software but this was resolved thankfully at that time when Denis Crowdy acquired a RAM upgrade and sent it to me, which gave my computer a lift.

Some of the minor issues faced were finding a secure room to record, nonavailability of a good mixer and good monitors. Then again, we only had to move a computer, stereo-player and cables. As far as mixers and monitors, well I am one for doing the best with whatever I have.

All in all, it took about two full working days. That is both of recording and driving back and forth getting things together to accomplish the project here in Port Moresby.

Finally, a special word of thanks to Denis Crowdy for his invaluable assistance and big heart in inspiring me with the 'computer recording' stuff and then availing me to much of what I have and know about it through software, hardware, books on the subject and being helpful wherever and whenever he can.

### **Karl Neuenfeldt's Comments**

A collaborative music project is always a gamble. Some don't work out for whatever reasons, regardless of the initial hope they will work out to everyone's benefit. However, in this case the track did work in the end. It created something that is a hybrid but a logical one given the proximity of the Torres Strait and Papuan regions and their long connections via trade and performance culture such as music and dance.

Musically the stringband style of Veiga, Veiga was not 'new' for Seaman Dan. For his first CD, *Follow the Sun*, he recorded the title track in stringband style and it was Denis Crowdy's underlying guitar part that set the mood and tempo of that song. There had been positive feedback from radio people and consumers and the song was also used for an ABC Television documentary soundtrack for an episode of its *Media Nomads* series (2002). Therefore, it was not a stretch to include a more outright stringband song in a Seaman Dan CD. It was just serendipitous that Denis Crowdy played Veiga, Veiga while we were considering songs for the *Perfect Pearl* CD. It has a 'tropical' ambience even if the listener has no idea of what the song is about. Its simplicity and relaxed energy are major parts of its

appeal, even without the harmonies that really mark it as something uniquely Central Province PNG.

When recording the instruments Denis Crowdy played, it was important to capture the ‘sound’ of stringband music. After the characteristic open-tuning guitar part any instruments added had to maintain the essence - the lightness - of stringband recordings in part to complement but not distract from the harmony vocals. One production technique that worked well was to string a soprano ukulele with light gauge nylon strings and put it in an A-D-F#-B tuning to get an almost banjo-like sound. Denis Crowdy also used an electric bass guitar with foam wedged under the strings to give it a deader sound. Taken together the ensemble sound is not too slick and retains the ambience of a ‘low-tech’ recording. Of course the ‘bed tracks’ are just the foundation upon which the song is constructed. Listeners would mostly be unaware of the constructed nature of many recordings but such considerations are what producers are hired to attend to.

It was challenging for Denis Crowdy and I to do ‘guide’ vocals. The song is in the key it was written in; not necessary in the key either of us would perform it. As noted above, for Denis Crowdy it was also a challenge because of the familial connections and cultural considerations. He readily admitted to having only a vague idea of what the song was all about and he was uncertain of all the pronunciations. Nonetheless, what he sang suggested the two languages would not clash. For me, it was a challenge to do a ‘guide’ vocal in English that would familiarise Seaman Dan with the lyrics and melody without over-determining how he sang it. Because he is a stylist, he will change a melody or phrasing to what is natural for him. That is the ultimate goal but with new songs there is no assurance it will happen quickly or easily. It is an easier process if the producers are aware of what the singer does well and fashion the song to use those strengths. The melody is at the very bottom of Seaman’s vocal range but his vocal was done quickly. He would not hear the finished song with its intricate harmonies until after Nigel Pegrum had assembled it. He trusted we would only use it if it were of sufficient quality to satisfy not only us but also the record company.

For me it was interesting to hear the assembled song because I had not heard either the PNG language vocals or the unison English language backing vocals done at Thursday Island. On first listening I felt the two languages and vocal styles worked well together and I also felt the instrumental tracks were lovely. It was interesting to be a listener and not a producer. My input was mostly in writing the English language part. Producers have to try to remain objective about the songs but that can be difficult if they are writing, performing and producing. Therefore, ‘extra ears’ are always welcome; at least from people whose opinions one respects. The participants had worked together enough to know some shared aesthetic of ‘getting it right’ would prevail. There was an unspoken assumption that the project was a success if the song worked both as a song the original writer and composer would like and as a ‘Seaman Dan song’. In some ways it was not the song the initial composer and author had created but it was something they might not have thought it could be [[Sound example #8](#)].

Unquestionably, at-a-distance collaboration was facilitated by the new media technology of recording programs such as Protools. Short of bringing all the singers to Cairns – which was beyond the modest budget for the CD project – sending computer files was an effective way to move around the pieces of the musical puzzle we were trying to solve.

## Conclusions

To return to the general questions posed at the outset, it is clear the participants shared some assumptions. As their comments show, each also brought valuable skills, knowledge and experience to the project. It is also clear that new media recording technology such as Protools or Cubase assisted as a medium for aestheticising culture although it also presented challenges. The overdubs may have been itinerant but they did have an ultimate destination. As in the cases of research on mbaqanga music in South Africa (Meintjes 2003) and powwow music in Canada (Scales), the final version of Veiga Veiga was influenced by the shared production aesthetic of a musical 'art world' (Becker 1982), sufficient although somewhat unequal technological access and expertise, and the participants' willingness to experiment with cross-cultural and transnational collaboration.

It is fitting the final words are those of Seaman Dan (2003), the artist and the impetus for recording Veiga, Veiga:

When I first heard it I thought it sounded good and [recording] it would be a challenge. I said to myself "I'd like to try that". The melody and tempo, that's what attracted me most to the song. When I heard the finished product I thought, "that sounds great"! The lyrics fit the kind of song I would sing. What set me back a little bit at first was the PNG language but when we decided I'd sing it in English I thought, "Well, let's go ahead". I had heard a lot of PNG music in Torres Strait and when I worked in New Guinea in 1971 working with a mining company. I stayed up there in the Eastern Highlands for six weeks at a place called Kainantu and we heard a lot of the stringband songs. We were boarded in a village there ... and you'd hear this kind of song every night in the village itself. Veiga, Veiga has a PNG and Torres Strait Islander feel, they've all done a good job there.

**Acknowledgments:** Thanks to Hot Records for permission to use both edited sections and the final version of the song. Thanks to Grayson Cooke for compiling the MP3 files. They can be accessed at the URL sites noted in the text and are: 1. Original drum machine 'click-track' and guitar (00:38); 2. Denis Crowdy's Hula and Karl Neuenfeldt's English 'guide' vocals (00:49); 3. Seaman Dan's English vocal (00:29); 4. Torres Strait Islander backing vocals by Gabriel Bani, Tony Ghee and Charles Passi (00:21); 5. ukulele and bass (00:34); 6. Gere Rupa's Hula vocals (00:40); 7. Gima Rupa's Hula vocals (00:54); 8. final mix of song as it appears on Seaman Dan's Perfect Pearl CD (3:34)

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## Endnotes

1. Portable recording equipment undoubtedly offers great potential for such collaborations, as well as allowing recording to take place at home. A good example of this in PNG is provided by Thomas Lulungan's studio in East New Britain where his house in the village of Pila Pila (near Rabaul) doubles as a studio (Crowdy and Hayward, 1999). [\[back\]](#)

2. 'Uncle' is a term of respect used for male Torres Strait Islander elders and does not necessarily denote a kin relationship. [\[back\]](#)

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## **Discography**

Perfect Pearl Seaman Dan Hot Records #1094.

Veiga, Veiga Composed by Denis Crowdy Written by Gere Rupa, Gima Rupa and Karl Neuenfeldt

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