MUSICAL ANCESTRIES: AUSTRALIA

Here at Classical 107.3, we acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands that we are exploring in this episode.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers and listeners are warned that the following program may contain images and voices of deceased persons.

Characters:

- JANE – Mother, from Australia, currently lives in St. Louis, Missouri (Jane de Wolff)
- EMMA – Jane's 11-year-old daughter, loves music, plays percussion (Lindsey Grojean)
- AUNT KYLIE – Jane's sister, Emma's aunt, lives in Sydney (Rebecca McDowell-Johnson)
- NARRATOR (Kathy Lawton Brown)

NARRATOR: Eleven year old Emma has loved music for as long as she can remember. Every day, she taps rhythms on tables, hums songs in the car, and listens to the smallest sounds around her. Today, she's about to discover an entirely new world of music—on the other side of the globe. Emma and her mother Jane are going to Australia to visit Jane's sister who lives in Sydney. She's beyond excited to get her first chance to learn more about the Australian side of their family. And to prepare for the trip, Emma has researched everything she could about Aboriginal culture and traditions.

EMMA: Mom, do they have real Aboriginal instruments there in Australia?

JANE: I'm sure they will, darling. Won't It be fun to see how they're played?

EMMA: Yes! I've never even seen a didgeridoo in person! I can't wait!

JANE: (*smiling*) Well, pack your excitement along with your suitcase—we're about to learn more than we ever imagined.

NARRATOR: After a long flight from St. Louis, Jane and Emma arrived in Sydney. It had been over five years since Jane had been home, and this was Emma's very first time in Australia. Aunt Kylie greeted them at the airport.

KYLIE: Oh Jane and Emma! It is so good to see you. Welcome to Sydney! How was your flight?

EMMA: It was the longest plane ride I've ever taken! Two planes and over 20 hours!

(*Jane and Kylie laugh*)

JANE: It was long, but we made it in one piece! I am so excited to see you, dear sister! I haven't seen you in five years!

KYLIE: It seems like it has been forever! Emma, your mom and I are looking forward to showing you all of the wonderful sights and sounds of our beautiful country.

EMMA: AND your beautiful continent!

(*all laugh*)

KYLIE: Yes, Emma! Australia is a continent AND a country!

JANE: The Country is called the Commonwealth of Australia, and it includes the Australian *continent* (which is the mainland), the island state of Tasmania, and numerous smaller islands.

KYLIE: Although we're close to Asia, we are separated from them by seas and the Indian Ocean to the West and the South Pacific to the east.

JANE: There are six states and two mainland territories in Australia along with six external territories. We're here in the city of Sydney right now, located in the state of New South Wales on the southeastern coast of Australia. So now you know where you are!

KYLIE: You must both be exhausted from your long trip. Let's go home, have some dinner and relax.

EMMA: And go to bed!

(*all laugh*)

KYLIE: Yes, and that, too, Emma. Let's go!

NARRATOR: Back at Kylie's house, they ate a delicious traditional Australian barbecue, known as an "Aussie Barbie." Kylie served **rissoles** (thick hamburgers) and **snags**, which is the Australian word for sausages. Alongside, there was grilled eggplant and zucchini. Then came the dessert: **pavlova**, a delicious meringue topped with a cloud of whipped cream and passion fruit.

EMMA: Mmm… smells amazing!

JANE: An Aussie Barbie brings back good memories. And you made my favorite dessert! Thank you, Kylie.

KYLIE: Of course, Jane. Anything for my favorite sister and niece! After we eat, we are going to relax, and when you're ready, you can go to bed. I've planned something special for your first full day tomorrow—an introduction to Aboriginal art, music, and dance.

EMMA: Art? Music and dance? Really?

JANE: That sounds perfect for our first day here. And Emma loves music.

EMMA: I play percussion at my school, Auntie Kylie.

KYLIE: I know. Your mother sends me videos all the time. You are quite good at the timpani, Emma. You are going to love seeing and hearing everything tomorrow. But now, let's eat!

EMMA: Yes! I'm starving!

(*all laugh*)

NARRATOR: They all ate, relaxed, and visited a while before heading to bed. Emma could hardly sleep knowing that tomorrow was going to hold such amazing music and adventure.

Morning came quickly, and the three of them left the house and traveled by ferry across Sydney Harbour to Circular Quay and then took a walk to The Art Gallery of New South Wales. The museum is one of Australia's most famous art museums and a must-see place in Sydney.

It has two amazing buildings and an art garden that looks out over Sydney Harbour. Inside, you can explore old and modern art from Australia and around the world — including the Yiribana Gallery, which celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

The family discovered Australian stories and culture through the exciting exhibits.

JANE: The Yiribana Gallery has always been a favorite of mine!

EMMA: I loved it, mom! I've never seen art like that! It felt somehow…connected to the land.

JANE: My favorite was Lorraine Connelly-Northey's major commission *Narrbong-galang (many bags)* displayed in the Yiribana window.

EMMA: It was sooo cool that it was made from rusted and salvaged metals. I loved how everything in the Yiribana Gallery shows respect for the First Peoples and helps bring different cultures together.

KYLIE: So glad you liked it! Next we are going to visit more of Sydney Harbour, then the Royal Botanic Gardens. We'll end the day attending a concert at our world-famous Sydney Opera House.

JANE: I'm thrilled you got us tickets, Kylie. It wouldn't be a perfect trip to Australia without it!

NARRATOR: Sydney Harbour is easy to recognize because of its famous landmarks — the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House. It's also a popular area where people enjoy lots of fun activities like boating and sightseeing.

KYLIE: Let's walk over to where there are Aboriginal musicians performing, and you can see their instruments up close.

EMMA: I'm so excited!

NARRATOR: They walked over to hear the Aboriginal musicians and dancers perform. Emma was fascinated with the beautiful instruments and the movements of the dancers.

EMMA: It sounds like the trees and birds are part of the music.

JANE: You're right. Indoors it is amazing, but outdoors, it really feels like the land is singing with them.

KYLIE: Aboriginal music and dance has always been part of the land.

JANE: Emma, do you see how many of the dances copy the way animals move or the forces of nature?

EMMA: Yes! Most of the dance moves are strong and full of energy. The music and dance are telling the same story.

JANE: Exactly—and that's the beauty of tradition.

NARRATOR: Emma tapped her feet softly in time with the music, enjoying the ancient rhythms, the dancers, and the unique sounds of the instruments. Music, dance and the earth itself are inseparable in Aboriginal culture.

[cue clapsticks]

EMMA: What are those wooden sticks, Auntie Kylie?

KYLIE: Those are called **clapsticks.**

NARRATOR: Clapsticks are made of smooth, hard wood, sometimes decorated with traditional designs. They fit neatly in the hands and are struck together to keep rhythm. Clapsticks are considered sacred in the Aboriginal culture.

EMMA: I love the clapsticks! They're perfect for a percussionist.

KYLIE: I knew you would, Emma.

EMMA: And see that huge instrument there in the middle? That is the **didgeridoo**.

[cue didgeridoo]

KYLIE: (*chuckles*) Good job, Emma.

NARRATOR: Often called the voice of the land, the didgeridoo is a long, wooden wind instrument, sometimes taller than a person. Traditionally, termites hollow out the wood naturally. The surface may be painted with earthy red, yellow, and white designs that tell stories of the land. The didgeridoo hums deeply and continuously, because the sound is maintained with circular breathing.

JANE: That other instrument you see is the **gum leaf.**

EMMA: It looks like a leaf from a tree!

JANE: That's exactly what it is, Emma.

[cue gum leaf]

NARRATOR: The gum leaf is a simple eucalyptus leaf, plucked from a tree. It doesn't look like much, but when held to the lips and blown, it sings with a clear, whistling tone…bright and high.

EMMA: It's really cool that so many of these instruments are actually part of nature! I'm going to try making a gum leaf instrument at home.

JANE: (smiling) You're really excited about this, aren't you? Yes—I think it's a wonderful idea.

KYLIE: And I bet you will master it in no time, darling. Let's keep walking, take in the sights, and grab a bite to eat.

NARRATOR: Walking through Sydney Harbor, bustling food stalls offered sausage rolls, fish and chips, and dumplings. But the A-number one favorite street food was a treat known as the "Halal Snack Pack." It consists of kabob meat (lamb, chicken, beef, or a combination of those) and fries. It's served with different kinds of sauces, like chili, garlic, or barbecue. Emma got hers with yogurt and jalapeno peppers.

Next, the family visited the Royal Botanic Gardens, where, once again, the land and music came together. With birds calling and leaves rustling, Emma - ever the percussionist - began to realize that every single place has its own rhythm.

JANE: Look over there, Emma. That's Mrs Macquarie's Chair.

NARRATOR: Named after the wife of the first governor of New South Wales, the sandstone bench was carved in 1810. Mrs. Macquarie's Chair is one of the most famous spots in the Royal

Botanic Gardens, with a breathtaking view of [the] Sydney Harbor. Emma and her mom sat in the chair and [gasped at] were awed by the gorgeous view.

EMMA: Wow! Look! I can see the Opera House from here!

KYLIE: *(checking her watch)* Oh my! It's getting a little late. Let's head over to the Sydney Opera House for the concert!

JANE and EMMA: (*together*) Yay! Fantastic! Can hardly wait!

NARRATOR: The picturesque Sydney Opera House rises like giant white sails above the harbor, shining like seashells stacked in fading sunlight. Wide steps invite visitors in, and inside the concert hall, the beautiful wooden walls make the sound rich and warm, creating a majestic feeling. Golden light filters through glass windows overlooking the harbor.

EMMA: It looks like a giant sailboat!

JANE: It was designed to reflect the wingspan of birds and the sails of the boats on Sydney Harbour.

EMMA: I'm so excited to get to hear a concert in this beautiful place!

KYLIE: Me too! Let's go find our seats.

NARRATOR: Construction on the Sydney Opera House began in 1957 and was completed in 1973. The architect, Jørn Utzon, wanted the Opera House to feel like a living part of the water and sky, rather than simply a building. If its walls could talk, they would tell wonderful stories about the world-class performers who have graced its stage…like Australian-born soprano Dame Joan Sutherland, the powerful heldentenor Stuart Skelton, and the dynamic conductor, Sir Charles Mackerras.

KYLIE: Tonight we're hearing William Barton, an Australian composer who blends Aboriginal influences with orchestral music, showing how old traditions speak to the present.

[cue Barton]

NARRATOR: Barton's compositions are fascinating. His music weaves the unique voices of traditional instruments, including the didgeridoo, into the sound of the orchestra.

EMMA: (*whispers*) Mom, it's like what we heard today. The ***land*** is singing!

JANE: (*whispers*) Yes. That's what makes it so powerful.

KYLIE: (*whispers*) Mr. Barton calls it a conversation between cultures.

NARRATOR: After the concert, Emma could not contain her excitement.

KYLIE: So, what did you think, Emma?

EMMA: I've never heard anything like it. The didgeridoo, the orchestra… They're voices and instruments at the same time.

JANE: Absolutely!

NARRATOR: Outside, the Opera House glowed behind them. What a memorable night of music and Australian culture!

KYLIE: Alright, let's go home now. This was such a fabulous day. Just wait till you learn what's in store for tomorrow!

NARRATOR: The family arrived back at Kylie's house, where she served traditional Australian meat pies with tomato sauce for everyone, followed by lamingtons for dessert. A lamington is a small square of sponge cake, dipped in chocolate icing, then rolled in finely shredded coconut. Soft, moist, and slightly sweet, it melts in your mouth, while the coconut adds a light crunch. Sometimes lamingtons are filled with cream or jam for an extra indulgent bite.

EMMA: Delicious! Mom, we have to start making lamingtons at home.

JANE: Of course! Auntie Kylie, won't you give us your recipe? Our friends will LOVE these lamingtons as much as the Aussies do!

KYLIE: I'd love to! Every bite tastes better than the last one, doesn't it?

EMMA: (spontaneously starts singing) *Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree…*

ALL: *…Merry, merry king of the bush is he…*

Laugh, Kookaburra, laugh, Kookaburra,

Gay your life must be.

(*ALL laugh*)

KYLIE: I am so happy to hear that your mother has taught you that song, Emma.

EMMA: And that's not all! You should hear me sing, *"Waltzing Matilda!"*

JANE: Or *"Home Among the Gum Trees."*

(*ALL laugh*)

KYLIE: (small chuckle) OK… time for bed. We have a VERY early flight to catch tomorrow. Make sure to pack a suitcase.

EMMA: A flight? Where are we going?

KYLIE: To Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

JANE: Fantastic! One of my favorite places! You'll love it, Emma!

NARRATOR: Morning came quickly. Kylie served an Aussie favorite for breakfast: Vegemite on buttered toast. This delicacy is a concentrated yeast spread that's very rich in Vitamin B. For those who grew up eating it, it's delicious, but if you're from the USA and new to it, it has a VERY unique taste.

JANE: Oh, Kylie, I LOVE Vegemite! Haven't had it for years! Do you like it, Emma?

EMMA: Ummm…it's different. I'll just finish this piece, thanks.

(Laughs from Jane & Kylie - then a giggle from Emma)

NARRATOR: They headed for the airport and boarded the plane for Uluru…or actually, the **Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park**. The Park centers around an enormous sandstone rock formation that rises out of the ground, with flat land all around it. Also for some years known as Ayers Rock, Uluru is reddish in color and is located near the center of Australia. It is absolutely stunning to see, and is surrounded by many springs and waterholes, plus rock caves with ancient paintings inside.

They visited the Cultural Centre first so they could learn more. Here, they discovered Aṉangu culture and the park's wildlife and nature through fun exhibits and talks with Aṉangu people and park rangers, who explained how the people used fire to care for the land.

JANE: It's so interesting that this ancient rock is sacred to the Aboriginal people of the area. AND it's listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

KYLIE: You know, there's a place to rent bikes here, and I signed us up. Are you up for a bike ride, Jane?

JANE: Oh absolutely.. Bring it on!!

EMMA: Wait. We're going into the desert?

JANE: (*chuckles*) Well, Emma, maybe the better Aussie word would be the "Outback." We will ride on a biking and walking trail around the perimeter of Uluru.

EMMA: Ohhhh, good! I was worried!

NARRATOR: They checked in for their bikes and completed their self-guided tour around Uluru, then spent the rest of the day with activities that were full of fun and discovery at the incredible park. They returned late that afternoon, tired but animated.

EMMA: I'll never forget that bike ride!

KYLIE: My favorite was the guided ranger tour and the Mala Walk.

JANE: It was really interesting to learn what the rock art means and watch a demonstration of the traditional tools used by the Aṉangu people.

EMMA: And it was great to listen to the creation stories about how the rock formations were made…Whoa! Something smells divine!

KYLIE: That's our barbecue. I hope you're hungry.

JANE and EMMA: (*same time*) Very!

(*All laugh*)

NARRATOR: As the day cooled, they enjoyed a **"bush tucker"** barbecue of traditional Aussie foods: **barramundi** (a whitefish), prawns on skewers with onions and **green and red capsicum** (which are called green and red peppers in the U.S.), and **quandong**, a type of native fruit.

Afterwards, a guide led a stargazing tour from the Uluru sunset viewing area, pointing out spectacular constellations in the sky and sharing local stories about the stars. They saw Uluṟu light up like a giant magical canvas as the sun set, changing colors from fiery red to glowing orange to deep purple.

EMMA: It was like the rock came alive with color! And this night sky is incredible! I've never seen so many stars!

JANE: Yes, indeed. The constellations are as gorgeous as the stories being told about them! Oh look, Emma! There's the southern cross constellation! It was used by the sailors to navigate.

NARRATOR: Back at their hotel, Kylie, Jane, and Emma chatted for hours about the mysteries of the desert surrounding Uluru and their feelings of awe when standing before that breath-taking rock.

Over the course of two weeks, they ventured way up to Queensland in the northeast, discovering differing cultures and the wonders of nature at the Cairns and Great Barrier Reef region and the ancient Daintree Rainforest region, with some of the oldest rainforests in the world.

From Sydney they also took a road trip south to the city of Melbourne in Victoria, then west along the Great Ocean Road. They saw wild koalas, impressive rock formations, and gorgeous coastlines.

Each of these experiences was a fantastic adventure to be treasured for a lifetime. Jane and Emma could have easily stayed in Australia for months, but it was time to head back to St. Louis.

JANE: I can't believe it's time to go home already. These two weeks have flown by.

EMMA: I wish we could stay longer! There's so much more to see.

KYLIE: That just means you'll have to come back, Emma.

EMMA: Yesss! Definitely! Right mom?

JANE: Absolutely! Emma, what do you think was the biggest lesson you learned over here?

EMMA: Well, I'll never forget all the traditional instruments, the incredible art, the beautiful dances or the fabulous food! But I think THE most important thing I learned was respect for the Aboriginal people and their music. It isn't just sound—it's everything—stories, land, culture all woven together.

KYLIE: You're very wise, young Emma, and you'll be a fine musician. You understand that connection of heart and culture. Good bye, my precious niece…good bye, dear Jane.

JANE: Bye for now!

EMMA: Love you, Auntie Kylie! Thanks for everything!

KYLIE: Love you both. Keep in touch!

NARRATOR: With swirling memories of stories and dances, rhythms and flavors, Jane and Emma return home to St. Louis. They carry souvenirs, yes—but more importantly, they now carry the living voice of Australia's First Peoples in their hearts, and the understanding that music is something that truly lives within every culture.