

# The New Sound

Inspired by the Journey of Self Discovery in Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*

By Darcy Phelan

The Bloke gazed into the desolate expanse of the Tanami, listening for the serene sounds of this lonely stretch of desert. It had been a dream of his since early childhood to be a great musician, inspired by the ethnomusicological research of John Lomax and his son, Alan; specifically, their recordings of African American blues music. Yet dreams *rarely* manifest, and The Bloke's career shifted into ethnobotany, the study of a region's plants through utilising local cultural knowledge. This change of career granted The Bloke the gift of monetary gain, and useful skills, but hadn't given him pleasure nor contentment. He'd been stationed within the marginally viable dirt-farming town of Jamulu for months, touring the sparsely populated Outback to conduct ethnobotanical studies for the CSIRO.

He had noted that *Carnegiea gigantea*, an invasive breed of cactus, had effectively colonised the desert, gradually replacing native species. Warlpiri locals had schooled The Bloke on how to survive the desert by utilising native plants – plants that were getting harder to find.

These same locals had also informed The Bloke about a local legend known as *Langarr-panu*, which loosely translates to 'able to hear', or 'The New Sound'; *Langarr-panu* was a unique noise heard in the deepest desert that, when heard, transforms the listener into a state of mind akin to having one's greatest desires become instantly manifest. There was something about this myth that had invaded The Bloke's consciousness, as if his mind was this desert and the legend, cacti. Inspiration had morphed into intense determination, and finally, into an obsession to find this 'New Sound'.

Driven by a mix of desperation to change his life and just plain naivety, The Bloke had decided to undertake a pilgrimage to find the *Langarr-panu*. He set off from the isolated Katabasis bus stop, walking in the direction of the sun, in accordance with local instruction.

He sang as he wandered further into the Tanami; finding snippets of old blues tunes that had formed the soundtrack of his infancy. He knew this journey was a product of an unshakeable *ennui*, a feeling driven by a burning dissatisfaction with what his life had become. He knew the quest he was embarking on was likely to be a slow walk towards death. The quest was a pretext; he would find either salvation, or the great desert would grant him the peace of oblivion.

As he walked, he would remember happier times, back in the city; when he lived among his mates, playing music in dim-lit pubs and living on fish fingers - the staple diet of an impoverished musician. The memory increased his determination, a determination to return to this lifestyle - minus the poverty. He had blamed his lack of musical success on his impoverishment. In his heart, he knew it could not excuse his lack of prowess.

*Tread the path to the middle way, the balance between music and money, happiness and stability,* The Bloke scribbled in his notebook while on a rest break, meditating under a *Corymbia Opaca*. He'd come to believe these smooth-barked trees, with their blood-red sap, were the Tanami equivalent of the Bodhi Tree, *Ficus Religiosa*.

He resumed walking. The taste of fish fingers lingered hauntingly within his mouth for hours afterward.

*Delusion was setting in.*

In the shimmering distance, The Bloke noticed a fellow wanderer setting up camp for the night. He reminded The Bloke of a *fedayeen* warrior, a memory of past travels. The Fedayi donned a checkered *keffiyeh* that complimented his thistly black beard, his eyes as green as the invasive cacti. The Bloke walked over and The Fedayi extended his hand forward. As the two shook hands, a deep shiver flooded through The Bloke's body. The whole interaction had been a daze.

He gazed down at his right hand, burning with a sharp pain, besmeared in blood and infected with small black thorns. The Bloke whimpered faintly, before collapsing into a deep slumber under the shady underbelly of an eolian dune. Only upon awakening, in a brief interstice of lucidity, did it occur to him that there had been no Fedayi, just more cactus, *Carnegiea gigantea* draped in a forgotten scarf.

Clenching his eyes shut against the painful glare, he staggered onwards. Walking towards the sun had taken its toll. A melodic chirping slowly permeated The Bloke's perception. Clenching and unclenching his eyes, he attempted to take stock of his surroundings.

He had reached the end of the road; a paradisiacal oasis, unlike any he'd previously seen. Towering golden palm trees, *Dypsis Lucensis*, guarded an azure pool of water, wind chimes hung from their branches, accompanied by vividly coloured birds creating a hypnotic soundscape. A droning hum assaulted The Bloke's ears as he was drawn towards the water. He was enthralled at his reflection. '*What had he become?*' The Bloke pondered while smiling, observing his peeling skin and skeletal figure. He plunged into the water, the humming becoming increasingly louder as;

He went *deeper*

*deeper..*

*deeper...*

Until he reached rock bottom.

Upon touching the oasis bed, a sound beyond sound, a sound no words, no poetry, could capture, overpowered his consciousness. A beautifully warm rush flooded every nerve-ending, every muscle, every sinew in his body.

*For a brief moment, he'd found the New Sound.*

The Bloke's katabasis had ended and he was pulled to the surface, baptised, transformed. All he wanted to do was listen to the melodies of nature; and he was in the perfect place. His skin felt healed and his energy rejuvenated. The water's taste reminded him of fish fingers - A taste he would never have to experience again.

Grinning like an idiot, he cleared the water from his ears and stared at the still singing birds who had welcomed him in song, but heard *nothing*. His grin faded into a frown.

The Bloke made a *mortifying* revelation:

A tranquil sound.. a *nothingness* had overtaken his hearing,

*His passion, silenced. He would never again hear anything of the outside world.*



