

Milkay Mununggurr
HARD TONGUE DIDGERIDOO
Exercises in Northeast Arnhem Land Yidaki Style



English



BIOGRAPHY

Milkayŋu Munuŋgurr (Milkay for short) is from the Djapu clan of the Yolŋu cultural group of Northeast Arnhem Land, Australia. He was born at the coastal community of Yirrkala in the very building this CD was recorded in, but his true spiritual homeland is Wandawuy, further south and inland. Milkayŋu has played yidaki in ceremony since he was a teenager, and came to worldwide attention while recording and touring with the band Yothu Yindi, representing his people and all of Australia around the world. He continues to be an influence on players in Arnhem Land, such as his son Buyu, pictured with him on this CD. The imagery of father and son crossing yidaki represents transmission of knowledge.

Pictured on the cover and painted on the yidaki used most on the CD is Gudurrku, the Brolga. Milkayŋu says:

Gudurrku is a bird that I admire most. It gives me strength physically and spiritually whenever I imitate the calls of this magnificent bird on my yidaki. My old man made my first proper yidaki for me. And he called that yidaki Gudurrku.

CREDITS

Yidaki and Instruction: Milkayŋu Munuŋgurr

Production, Recording, Clapsticks, Liner Notes, Artist & Scenic

Photography: Randin Graves – courtesy Ginger Root Records,

www.gingerroot.com

Brolga Photo: David Webb

Design and Illustration: Brandi Chase and Randin Graves

Recorded at Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, NT Australia

Yidaki on this CD are from the centre's stock, made by Milkayŋu

Munuŋgurr and Burrŋupurrŋu Wunuŋmurra. Buy Yolŋu instruments to play Yolŋu style!

To hear Milkayŋu playing with Yolŋu song, check out Yothu Yindi's early CD's. For these and other recordings of Yolŋu music, visit www.yothuyindi.com.



Yolŋu people of Northeast Arnhem Land call the didgeridoo *yidaki*. Their *ŋānarr-däl*, or hard tongue, style has been called the hardest didge playing to learn.

On this CD, Milkayŋu Munungurr, ceremonial *yidaki* player and original member of the band Yothu Yindi, distills *yidaki* playing to the basics. Spoken and written instructions (in English but with translations on the internet) accompany the exercises. Rhythms are recorded at various speeds, with both the sound of the *yidaki* and the breathing audible.

If you play didgeridoo and have struggled to learn the Yolŋu *yidaki* playing style, this is the primer you need. Play along!



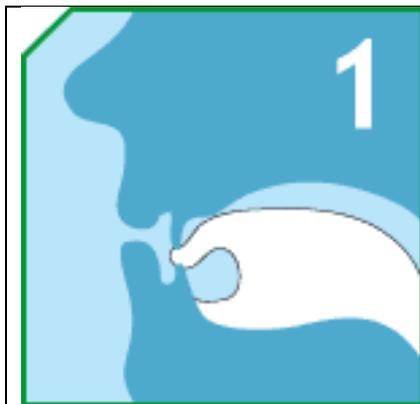
Notes on Yolŋu Spelling and Tongue Positions

On this CD, Milkayŋu sings the exercises for you before playing them. The sounds he makes are natural for Yolŋu-speakers, but use tongue positions others might not know. We've written these instructions using Yolŋu spellings and diagrams that tell you exactly where to put your tongue.

Not every Yolŋu person plays exactly the same. While this recording features the predominant style heard in Northeast Arnhem Land today, there are different styles due to change over time, clan and song-specific techniques, and individual creativity. The following techniques are fundamentals upon which all styles are based. Use what you learn here to study other Yolŋu recordings and create your own variations.

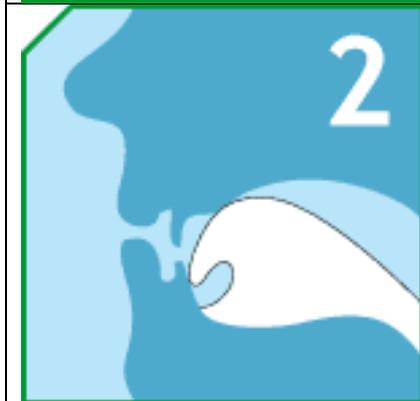
Ŋ/ŋ - tail-n

The tail-n represents a soft 'ng' as in 'singer'. Look for it in words like *Yolŋu* and *Milkayŋu*. In words like *Munungurr*, the soft tail-n is followed by a hard 'g' as in 'stronger'. It could be argued that *dhu* should be spelled *dhuŋ* and *lo* should be *loŋ*, with the breath on the 'ŋ'. Some Yolŋu use the term *dith-thuŋ* to describe *yidaki* playing. Tail-n is not used in the exercises.



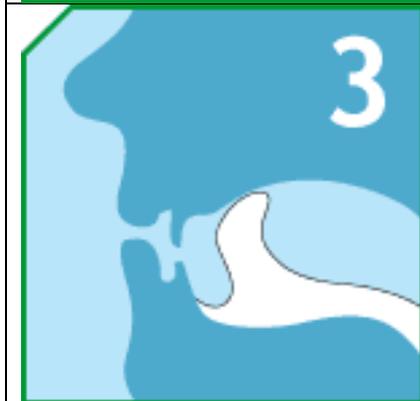
dh/th – interdental position

'th' is not pronounced exactly as in English. Place the tip of your tongue between your teeth, the blade of the tongue against your gum ridge, and pronounce a 't' as you would in English. Same goes for 'dh'. Say the letter 'd' with your tongue starting from that position. In *dith*, your tongue lands in this position. In *dhu*, your tongue pushes away from this position.



dj/tj – alveodental position

The tip of the tongue touches the back of the bottom teeth while the blade, or middle of the tongue, touches the gum ridge. In *witj*, the tongue moves from rest to this position, and in *dju*, the tongue pushes off from this position.



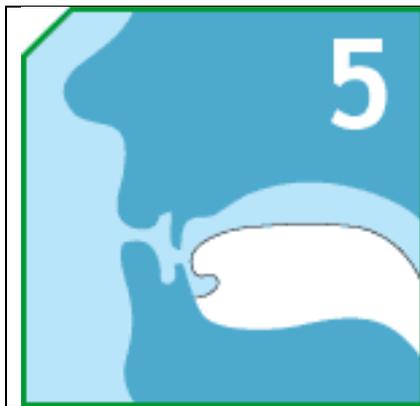
d/! – retroflexed position

The tongue curls back just a bit so that the bottom of the tip of the tongue touches the edge of the gum ridge just behind the top teeth. The tongue does not push any further back towards the roof of the mouth. In *dith* and *dup*, the tongue starts in this position and forcefully flicks forward and down. In *dhirr!*, the tongue lands in this position after a forceful movement.



rr – rolled r

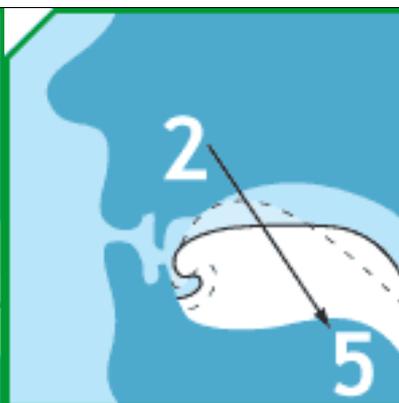
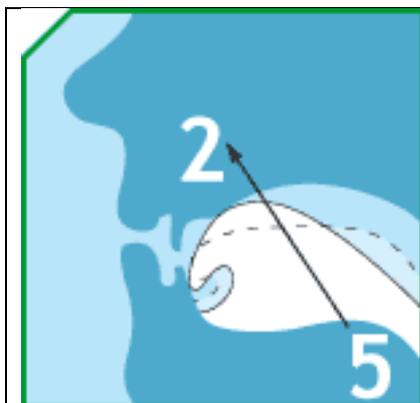
The tip of the tongue, moving quickly backwards from just behind the top teeth, flicks the gum ridge. It's one quick flick, not to be confused with the long Spanish rolled 'r'. In *dhirr!*, the tongue starts between the teeth and drags back, flicking a 'rr' on its way to the retroflexed position.



Neutral

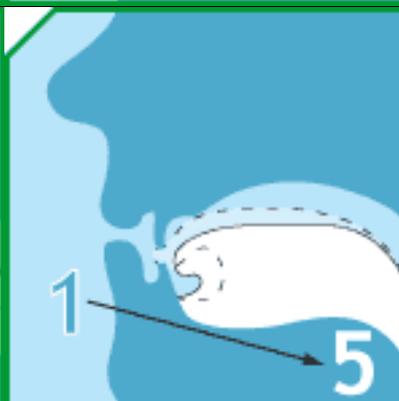
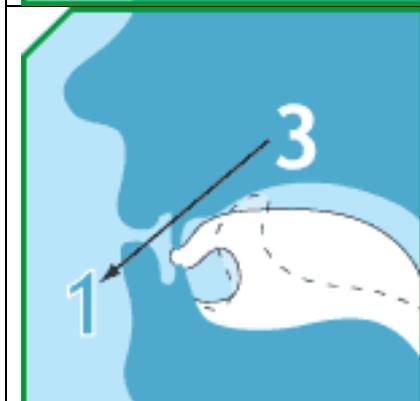
On the 'o' of *lo* and 'u' of *dhu* and *dju*, the tongue is in a more relaxed position in the middle of the mouth.

Tongue Motions Used in the Exercises



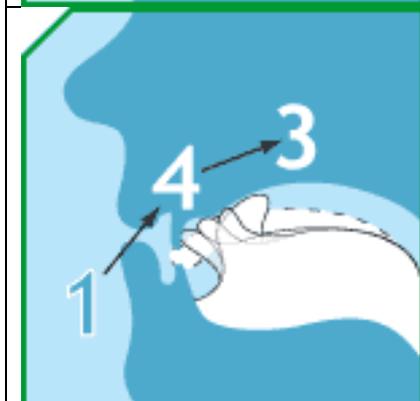
witj-dju

The tongue starts resting in the mouth in a neutral position 5, whips to the alveodental position 2, then pushes back to the starting position 5.



d̥ith-dhu

The tongue starts from the retroflexed position 3, whips to the interdental position 1, then pushes back to relative rest in a neutral position 5 in the middle of the mouth.



dhirr!

The tongue starts in the interdental position 1 and drags back, flicking a rolled 'rr' 4 along the way to the retroflexed position 3. In fast rhythms, a breath is snatched through the nose at the end of the motion.

		<p><i>dhirr!-lo</i></p> <p>After the <i>dhirr!</i>, the tongue pushes down to a more neutral position in the centre of the mouth.</p>
	<p><i>dup</i></p> <p>This refers to the higher trumpet sound, whether the tongue motion is used or not. In slow, isolated higher tones which are used in Yolŋu songs and ceremony, the trumpeted note is played simply with tightened lips (preferably just a small portion at the middle of the lips) and strong support from the diaphragm. You will hear this in the slow <i>dup</i> and transition exercises.</p>	
	<p><i>dup-pu</i></p> <p>In faster playing, when the trumpeted note is quickly alternated with the lower drone note, the tongue pushes off from the retroflexed position, supported by a strong burst of air from the diaphragm, then as the</p>	
<p>lips close towards a 'p' position, the trumpet note sounds. The lips quickly relax back to the lower drone note, which is re-articulated with the <i>pu</i> sound.</p>		

While these motions are crucial, there is more to Yolŋu yidaki playing than just the tongue. The diaphragm provides a burst of air at the beginning of each of the motions. There is also extra pressure provided by subtle use of the throat muscles. Listen carefully to this and Milkayŋu's almost constant use of voice, such as the harmony with the drone on the *dhu* of *dith-dhu*. Lastly, think about the shape of the mouth and how it changes the tone. Milkayŋu doesn't play the high harmonics that are popular in non-Yolŋu didgeridoo playing.