

# The Contemporary Music Indigenous Training Program

## Participation by Remote Community Youth Bands

### Rationale

Through the Indigenous Music Program (IMP), operated by the Northern Territory Music School (NTMS), students in remote Indigenous communities are provided with access to professional music instruction. Programs offered include Vocational Education and Training (VET) Certificates 1 and 2 in Music Industry, and Stage 1 and 2 Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE) courses.

The usual platform for successful instruction is to assemble groups of students into one or other of the common formats of popular music bands (for example, guitar, bass guitar, keyboards, drums and vocals), and to provide both individual and group tuition focused on specific performance targets. Another regular feature of the teaching / learning process is original composition, in both English and Indigenous languages, using popular song formats.

Participation and success rates vary from community to community, affected by remoteness, degrees of disadvantage and access to professional instructors. However, the overall positive outcomes of the IMP across remote NT communities have been attested to by teachers, principals and community representatives on numerous occasions, and are documented comprehensively in student achievement and attendance records.

A critical ingredient in this success, however, particularly for the most remote schools such as those in Arnhem Land, is the opportunity for students to rehearse, perform, record and exchange ideas on a larger stage. The Garma Festival has provided this opportunity for student bands from Arnhem Land and Darwin over the last three years. Cross-fertilisation of ideas, the opportunity to see and hear other bands performing, and the chance to work with professional sound production and recording technicians are invaluable components of the program.

Transporting the community bands and their equipment to and from the Garma site, and employing specialist technical personnel, appear relatively expensive if viewed as isolated activities related only to a single, annual event. However, the benefits of this interaction for remote community students are enormous. The Garma experience provides a platform for what can only be described as a quantum leap, particularly for female participants, in social interaction experience, performance skills and understandings for the students involved. Many are motivated by their experience at Garma to pursue their musical studies to higher levels. Many also become aware for the first time of career options and opportunities in the music and entertainment industries.

### Specific outcomes and benefits for students

Quantitative outcomes in terms of participation in 2005 were as follows:

- A total of 93 student musicians participated, playing in bands originating from Yirrkala, Gapuwiyak, Milingimbi, Maningrida, Numbulwar, Ngukurr and Galiwin'ku
- Compressing of training hours over the four day GARMA Festival
- (A total of 36 hours can be delivered in nominated modules, fast tracking module completion)
- VET music students in these communities comprise 62 engaged in Certificate 1, 32 in Certificate 2, and 6 in Certificate 3

In terms of qualitative outcomes, teachers and music instructors attest to the following specific benefits for students deriving from their attendance at the Garma Festival as performers:

- Increased music performance understandings resulting from interaction with professional sound production personnel
- Enhanced confidence in performance situations resulting from experience with a larger and more diverse audience than is available in their home communities
- Improved knowledge of and proficiency with industry standard sound production equipment (often not available in their home communities)
- More consistent performance outcomes resulting from intensive, supervised rehearsal and demanding performance schedules

- Wider musical knowledge gained from seeing, hearing and interacting with other performers and industry professionals
- Greater knowledge of career options in the music and wider entertainment industries, including technical production and support roles
- Increased motivation to pursue musical studies to higher levels

### **Sustainability**

The Garma experience is critical to the sustainability of the Indigenous Music Program because it serves as the bridge for many students between secondary school music studies and further musical education. Contact with personnel from Charles Darwin University and other providers opens up opportunities for young performers and provides them with information about available courses and support options. For students in remote communities, there is no more practical and succinct way for them to make these links than through participation in the music program at Garma.

### **Retention**

Progression to Certificate 3, or to NTCE Stage 2, retains students in the education system for up to three years. Most of these students would have exited the system permanently around age 15 (sooner in many cases) had they not become involved in the music program. Participation in the Garma Festival provides the intensive experience of many hours of music industry participation that would require an additional term or semester to complete through regular school involvement. This is often the catalyst and the enabling factor that permits students to engage in post-school music studies.

### **Additional outcomes**

#### **Wellbeing outcomes**

Students experience improved self-esteem, personal and community pride and awareness of opportunities outside their home environments through the Garma experience. These are invaluable contributors to well-being and resilience, which are widely acknowledged as critical in preventing the substance abuse, self-harm and dependency that are endemic to many remote communities.

#### **Pre-training outcomes**

The intensive educational experience provided by participation at Garma establishes a platform for entry into higher levels of music education for many students. Without this experience, their readiness for further training would be impaired, necessitating the establishment of bridging programs to bring them to entry level.

#### **Saving of professional development funds**

Participation by instructors and teachers in the Garma music program provides them with experience and access to expertise in sound production and the management and facilitation of musical performance that would otherwise have to be gained through externally provided in-service education.

### **Summary**

Involvement in the music programs and the Garma Festival is an invaluable educational and developmental experience for young music students from remote Indigenous communities. While their studies at school through the IMP constitute the basis for their well-documented academic and personal success, the Garma program provides an essential boost to their knowledge, confidence and experience. This is the critical link for many of them between school and further musical education, with the added possibility of eventual employment in the industry.

While Garma is an essential component of the IMP, it cannot be funded through the operational budget of the NTMS without reducing the number of schools and communities served by the IMP, and thereby reducing access to the program for students and employment opportunities for instructors. Thus the IMP relies on additional funding provided by the Employment and Training Division of DEET to make participation possible. The Yothu Yindi Foundation is very appreciative of this funding, which is essential for the ongoing health and development of the IMP in remote Indigenous communities.

*Graham Chadwick, Assistant Principal, Northern Territory Music School*

## Charles Darwin University Remote Music Training Workshops

As a prelude to this year's Garma Festival and in conjunction with the Yothu Yindi Foundation, Charles Darwin University (CDU) ran a five-week VET music course for musicians from the north east Arnhem Land region.

Based at the Yirrnga Studios the course was facilitated by Stuart Kellaway (course lecturer) and Mat Cunliffe (studio engineer) and supervised by Cal Williams CDU Contemporary Music Coordinator. The focus of the course was on song writing and recording and preparing bands to play at the Garma Festival.

25 students signed up for the various courses with some continuing students from a course held at Yirrkala in early 2005.

A selection of the recorded music will be released on CD mid-October 2005. This is a not for sale CD and will be provided to the music students and used for promotional purposes by the Yothu Yindi Foundation and CDU.

The skill range varied from songwriters recording for the first time (Cert II students) through to experienced bands such as T-LYNX band from Ngukurr (Cert IV students).

Much effort was also put into encouraging female musicians and songwriters from the region to participate, with a week set aside in late July 2005 to work exclusively with the female students. This 'unearthed' some serious talent and some great demo songs were recorded and included on the compilation CD.

On the performance side various bands played at the main Garma stage over three nights and every act performed magnificently to appreciative audiences.

The CDU equipment was used to set up an alternative stage for the Yirrkala School bands that played during the day, with much success as well.

Many thanks must go to Stuart Kellaway and Mat Cunliffe for their hard work and long hours.

It is anticipated that we will run a similar program for next year's Garma Festival and possibly other courses at Yirrkala to follow up and continue the VET training.

We are also consulting with Stuart and Mat for practical ways of assessing and delivering course content so it has a relevance to remote music students.

### Music Material Produced

A compilation CD of all the following material will be released by CDU as a part of their remote delivery course documentation.

|                          |       |   |       |
|--------------------------|-------|---|-------|
| <b>Yirrkala CEC Band</b> | DUR.  | <b>Yirrkala CEC Girls</b>                         | DUR.  |
| 01 intro                 | 03:17 | 38 water of life                                  | 03:17 |
| 02 curfew                | 04:09 | 39 keep on walking                                | 04:07 |
| 03 gathapanga            | 05:43 | 40 wanna be loved                                 | 03:50 |
| 04 white mans' mine      | 07:07 |   |       |
| 05 yarriny'ya            | 05:32 | <b>Yirrkala CEC Band &amp; Yirrkala CEC girls</b> | DUR.  |
| 06 death adder           | 05:16 | 11 ganbulapula                                    | 05:29 |
| 07 gumatj country song   | 02:37 |   |       |
| <b>Arian Pearson</b>     | DUR.  | <b>T-Lynx Band (Ngukkur)</b>                      | DUR.  |
| 08 guwak                 | 04:10 | 12 harris creek                                   | 04:42 |
| 09 freedom               | 03:55 | 13 kudjuk boy                                     | 03:21 |
| 10 narrpia               | 05:45 | 14 mothers' land                                  | 02:39 |
|                          |       | 15 ngukkur crying                                 | 05:20 |
|                          |       | 16 amarranga                                      | 05:04 |
|                          |       | 17 pretty lady                                    | 03:37 |
|                          |       | 18 love   | 04:22 |



## Performance Group Profiles

*"Through music we tell our stories about life, people, land..." Blackstone Band, Elcho Island*

**Arafura Dance Association**, a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, performed this dance piece co-choreographed by Rachael Wallis (formerly of Bangarra) and Lewis Lampton. Originally performed at the Arafura Games' Opening Ceremony as the Indigenous Welcome, Rachael describes it as Indigenous contemporary dance. History is held onto through the dance, celebrating and expressing an enduring and evolving culture. This innovative and exciting group builds bridges and understanding of Yolŋu culture, linking Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu together. The dance group is an opportunity for town kids to strengthen their culture, along with having the opportunity to perform at large events. Rachael says it helps the kids to dream, and, she says, "That's important in a small town..." The most important aspect of the Arafura Dance Association is bringing black and white kids together. For them, Garma is a chance to come together and build some more of those bridges!

**Blackstone Band** was a hot favourite at Garma 2005. Blackstone Band from Elcho Island has been making music for two and a half years. With a repertoire that includes reggae to rock, hip-hop, pop and ballads, they sing in their traditional languages including Djambarrpuygnu as well as English. They sing about what is touching their lives and so we heard from them about land, history, their ancestors, dancing, the dangers of sniffing petrol, and community life. These guys dream about traveling with their music, finding fame so that they can represent their people along with educating Njapaki about Yolŋu. The Blackstone Band members say that music is important because it is an outlet, a way to talk about feelings and about life.. "Through music we tell our stories about life, people, land..."

**Burala Band** from Gapuwiyak CEC School has been performing together for at least three years. Singing in Djambarrpuyngu language as well as English, this nine-member band play a fusion of reggae, pop ballads, rock, techno, rap and hip-hop. With a repertoire of songs about walking around at midnight, Muriyana, and Romeo and Juliet, the Burala Band performs a funky rendition of The Specials' infamous ska track "A message to you Rudy" with a clever switch to "A message to you Yolŋu".

**Clovers Girls Band** really knows how to sing sweet and fresh! Coming from the Numbulwar CEC School, they have played at Garma the last two years. Feeling at home in the laid back beat of reggae, this group show a commitment on stage which will ensure them plenty more places within concert line-ups.

**The Djambang Band** is named after the tamarind tree at Milingimbi school and have been learning and playing together for the last five years. Aged between 14 and 19 years of age, these young musicians sing in Yolŋu and English about animals, culture, homeland, seagulls and the dangers of sniffing petrol. Attending Garma for their third time, the Djambang band has also played in a tour which took them across Arnhem Land playing at various schools. Exciting times are ahead for the band as they are about to do their biggest gig at the Mindil Beach Sunset markets three weeks after Garma.

**Eastern Reggae Band** was on a special visit from Saint Teresa, south east of Alice Springs. This lively reggae band drove here especially to play at their first Garma. With more than four years of experience playing together in the Arrrente language, they saw advertisements for Garma on the NT Indigenous TV channel IMPARJA, got excited, contacted their Uncle Mandawuy and found themselves invited to perform. Travis Alice, Eastern Reggae band's lead singer says he's happy they've come to Garma, especially because they have the opportunity to record for the first time. Through their rock and reggae they sing about hunting, culture, language and also about the bad things happening to their people like drinking too much and smoking marijuana.

**Lightning Band** made up of nine members from the Numbulwar CEC boy's school band has been playing music together for two years. Reggae is their forte which they fill with topical lyrics in Creole language. For them the music is important because they can talk about what is affecting their community such as petrol sniffing, living in Darwin, history, culture and the Berrimah jail.

**Nigel Yunupingu and James Ganambarr** almost teased their audience with a brief performance, but everyone was thrilled nonetheless! Nigel is an inspiration to many young musicians of the area, starring in the Saltwater Band with past Yothu Yindi member Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu. In 2004 Saltwater won the 'People's Choice Award' at the inaugural NT Indigenous Music Awards and also the 2004 Deadly Awards 'Album release of the year,' for their album Djarridjarri (Blue Flag).

**No Limit** is the latest band to come out of Maningrida, a place with a rich history of traditional and rock music. Following in the footsteps of the Sunrise Band and Letterstick Band, these charismatic guys sing in Burarra language from the Blythe River area of Arnhem Land as well as Guningu from the upper part of the Liverpool area of Arnhem Land. With 14 performers on stage at times, these boys evoked a true sense of pride within their Garma audiences, grooving the young (and some of the old) into a frenzy in what, for many of the band, was their first public performance.

**Sheppies' Crew** members have been playing together for little more than a year, come from Shepherdson College on Elcho Island. With a core of six girls and two boys, the Crew writes many of their own songs such as "Come to school" and "Yolŋu people", the latter written by the band collectively. Treating audiences to dreamy tracks about helping their own kind, the band is mainly influenced by local bands such as the Saltwater, Soft Sand and Blackstone. These youngsters sing both in English and Djambarrpuyŋu.

**T Lynx** a rock and reggae band from Ngukurr has several members from the Yugul Band and all are studying music at Charles Darwin University. This Garma has been T Lynx's first big gig together after playing the Darwin Festival last year. They also played the week before Garma with the Australian Art Orchestra led by Paul Grabowsky. With a demo under their belt they dream of taking the band overseas while also wanting to teach younger ones at home to play and strengthen their culture. Lyrics evolve around motherland, what comes from their heart, country and what they do at home. Ultimately, T Lynx would like to reach the point Yothu Yindi have.

**Warren H Williams** is a much-loved country music singer and song writer well known to many at Garma. An Arrente man, his home town is Hermannsburg 120 kilometres West of Alice Springs. Warren has toured extensively throughout Australia and in 2004 he was kept busy with the 'Mates on the Road' tour through New Zealand with John Williamson and Pixie Jenkins.

**Wild Honey** from Yirrkala has been around for five years, strumming out sweet tunes of funk, reggae and a bit of just about everything! Singing in Yolŋu Matha and English, Wild Honey, originally an acoustic group which has expanded to include rhythm, bass, drum kit, vocals and brass originated at the Yirrkala CEC. The band has written a theme song for Garma about the spirit ancestor Ganbulabula and his activities at Gulkula, the Garma site, a reflection of their close ties to Yolŋu culture. Having played in Darwin, Sydney, Melbourne, Geelong and Canberra, this eclectic group of young men and women have dreams of taking their music around the world playing with AC/DC and South African reggae star Lucky Dube. They say music gives them a future, being an important vehicle for talking about what's happening on their land, its animals and issues such as racism.

**Yirrkala CEC Primary School Students.** These 50 school children aged between 5 and 12 years performed the Gunbulabula story which is a Yirritja story connected to the land Garma is held on. Yolŋu teachers have instructed the students through Galtha workshops that are part of a thematic approach to term by term curricula in the Yirrkala School. Garma is a forum where the children can perform Manikay for the public, keeping their culture strong, dazzling their audiences and making many Yolŋu spectators feel proud!

**Yothu Yindi**, the band everyone had been waiting for were an inspiration for all the young bands playing at Garma. Yothu Yindi, Australia's best known Aboriginal Band, needs no introduction. They are simply inspiring and mesmerizing, and to see them on their own land is an amazing experience.

*Elise Fitzpatrick- RMIT University*