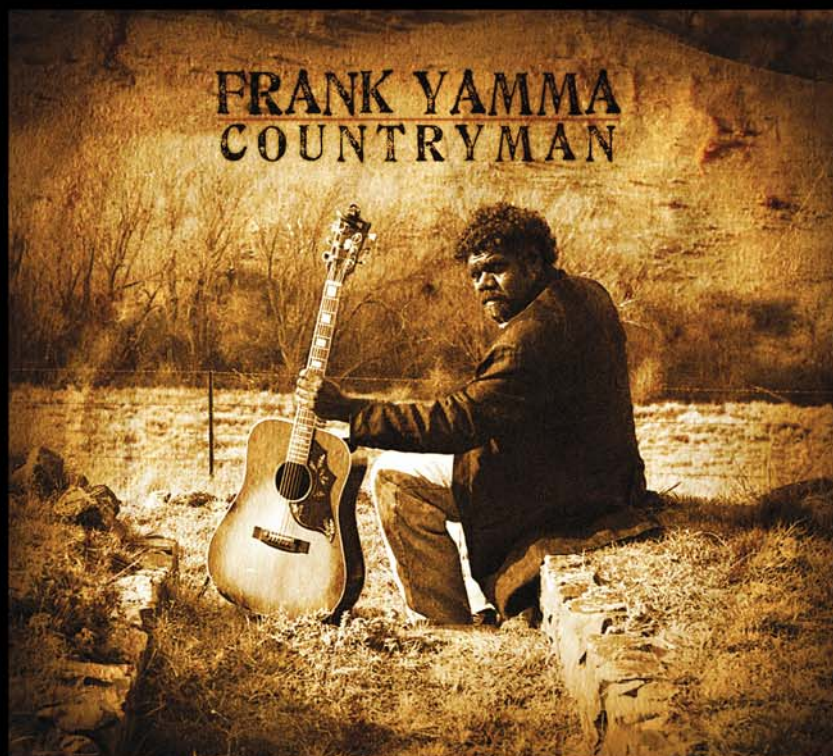


FRANK YAMMA COUNTRYMAN

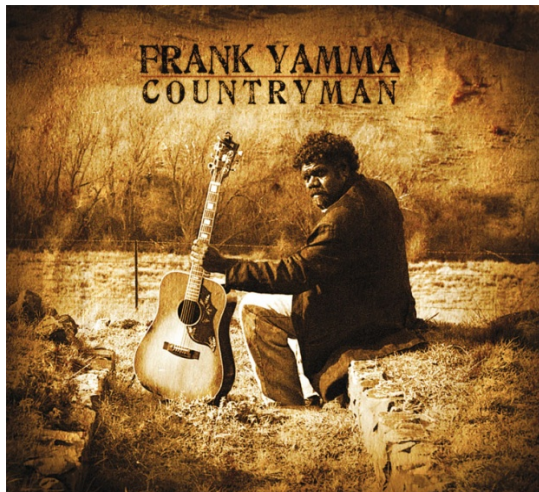


**“A truly moving masterpiece”
Seth Jordan - Songlines**



FRANK YAMMA COUNTRYMAN

Acclaimed Australian indigenous singer/songwriter Frank Yamma is recognised as a musician of intensity, able to spin the raw emotion of life and living it into his songs . Franks' latest CD **Countryman** is the first release for the new **Wantok Musik Label** – the first in Australia to focus on the unique music of the region.



"This is the record that Frank always should have made," says David Bridie about Frank Yamma's album, Countryman. "This is the record that will make white Australia realize what Indigenous Australia already knows about Frank." That he's a musical wonder, an artist with a voice full of intensity and raw emotion. The man may come from remote Australia, but his music is accessible and relevant to everyone. "

Recorded at an isolated run down country house in Taralga near Goulburn, Frank Yamma's long awaited CD "Countryman" is an album full of great songs of longing, of romance, of immense beauty". Songs of imprisonment, of the deserts great beauty, of the contradictions between Franks life as a respected initiated man and a disrespected outsider in the cities where jail, poverty and discrimination are a part of everyday life.

Recorded over two weeks last spring with production by Not Drowning Waving's Tim Cole and David Bridie, **Countryman** is a stripped back affair, just Frank's guitar and voice, with some slight embellishments from David Bridie's piano and Helen Mountfort 's cello. Bart Willoughby guests on the drums on two tracks. **Countryman** presents Frank Yamma's great songs in their raw essence.

Frank Yamma is a traditional Pitjantjatjara man from Australia's central desert and speaks five languages. An extraordinary songwriter and an exceptional guitarist, Frank Yamma also has an incredible voice, rich, deep and resonant. Regarded by many as one of Australia's most important Indigenous Songwriters, Yamma's brutally honest tales of alcohol abuse, cultural degradation, respect for the old law and the importance of country are spine tingling. Frank has the ability to cross cultural and musical boundaries and constantly sets new standards through his music.

Artist: **Frank Yamma**
Label: **Wantok Musik**

Title: **Countryman**
Cat No: **W0001** Barcode:



Released by the Wantok Musik Label
www.facebook.com/pages/Frank-Yamma/113119332084345

World

Going unplugged has worked a treat for Frank Yamma



FRANK YAMMA

Countryman
Wantok Musik/Planet W0001

★★★★★

Acoustic masterpiece

Frank Yamma's *Countryman* is simply stunning.

Considered by many to be one of Australia's most expressive indigenous voices, Pitjantjatjara singer-songwriter Frank Yamma, has never enjoyed the same public profile as Archie Roach, Kev Carmody or Gurrumul. But that could change with the release of this extraordinary recording. Unlike his past albums, which primarily featured electrified versions of his songs, this time Adelaide-based Yamma has opted for a raw acoustic approach, and it works wonderfully. Nurtured by the seamless production of David Bridie and Tim Cole, Yamma's thoughtful lyrics, delivered in both English and Pitjantjatjara, are like a dingo's howl – lonely and powerful.

Like Roach, Yamma writes songs combining deep sadness with a remarkable beauty, and while the touching *She Cried* is almost too

poignant to bear, the songs in language, *Kunka Kutcha* and *Nguta Waljilpa*, are no less emotive. Some of Yamma's older tunes, notably *Coolibah* and

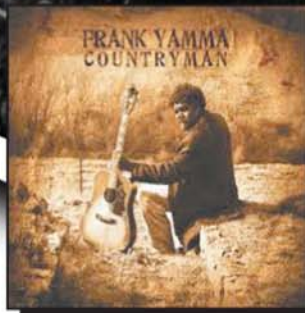
Yamma has opted for a raw acoustic approach, and it works wonderfully.

Make More Spear are given riveting new interpretations. Special mention needs to be made of cellist Helen Mountfort's sympathetic accompaniment throughout.

Evocative and occasionally heart-wrenching, *Countryman* is a plaintive cry from the Central desert, and a truly moving masterpiece.

Seth Jordan

IMPRESS 28 OCTOBER 2010



FRANK YAMMA

COUNTRYMAN Wantok Music

From the opening two minutes of *She Cried*, you can tell that the latest album from Central Australia's guitar hero Frank Yamma is going to break your heart, wipe away your tears, then make you cry some more... In the most enjoyable way possible.

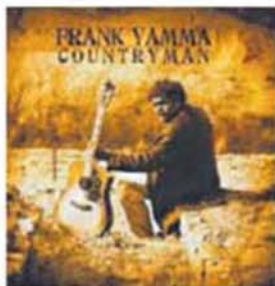
The album as a whole is stripped back, with repetitious finger-picking patterns laying a road for Yamma's overwhelming voice. Singing in both English and his native language, Pitjantjatjara, Yamma's voice tells stories of romance, cultural degradation and the love of his country. In *Remember The Day* Yamma tells stories of his encounters with love, while other songs such as *Make More Spear* give us an overview of what he has witnessed through the generations with children being born into alcohol and poverty. Each song has a lesson and is sung with such honesty and emotion that has come from a life of hardship.

The way in which each story is told gives some pretty strong imagery. Putting the album on envelops you from start to finish and it's near impossible to change the song before the story has been told.

While the foundations of most of Yamma's songs fit neatly into the genre of roots music, he has strayed from the boundaries and you can hear influences from blues and jazz making their way into the album, especially in *Calling Your Name* and *Inside*, with the addition of a gravelly electric guitar.

This stripped-back, raw collection of songs spans across many generations and cultures. His honesty and emotion will tug on your heart like any deep Johnny Cash song would and any listener, be they 16 or 160 years old, can take something away from his stories.

Tom Norton



roots

Countryman

Frank Yamma
Wantok/ Planet

★★★★★

WITH the welfare of Aboriginal Australians sharply on the national agenda, Pitjantjatjara singer-songwriter Frank Yamma's deadliest album to date could not have arrived at a more opportune time. It is a sad indictment on the lack of progress in salient areas that two of *Countryman's* most evocative songs, *Make More Spear* and *Coolibah*, which allude to the problems of alcohol abuse and the erosion of traditional values, were written decades ago

when the artist was still in his teens. Under the production values of David Bridie and Tim Cole, who first combined in *Not Drowning, Waving*, both songs attain maximum potency. Elsewhere Bridie, whose studio skills have worked for Melanesian musicians such as PNG's George Telek, employs a stripped-back approach, allowing Yamma's rich, powerful voice to resonate above piano or acoustic guitar arpeggios. The mellow cello of Helen Mountfort, another long-time Bridie associate, earths Yamma's upper register vocal delivery of *I Didn't Know Who You Were That Day*. The more ethereal *Nguta Waljilpa*, one of four songs sung in language, is as spiritually charged as any of the songs on Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu's solo CD or Archie Roach's albums; *Calling Your Name* is as hard-hitting as anything produced by Kev Carmody.

Tony Hillier

review October 23-24, 2010

 **WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN**

1. SHE CRIED 2. KUNKA KUTCHA
3. DOCKER RIVER 4. I DIDN'T KNOW WHO
YOU WERE THAT DAY 5. REMEMBER
THE DAY 6. NGUTA WALJILPA
7. MAKE MORE SPEAR 8. CALLING
YOUR NAME 9. DOWN THE RIVER
10. INSIDE 11. COOLIBAH
12. PITJANTJARA

Rhythms

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page 9

FRANK YAMMA - COUNTRYMAN -

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THE PITJANTJATJARA COUNTRYMAN

FRANK YAMMA'S GREAT NEW ALBUM COULD SEE HIM BREAK THROUGH BELATEDLY.

BY TONY HILLIER

He's one of Aboriginal Australia's deadliest singer-songwriters – as mellifluous as Gurrumul Yunupingu, as emotive as Archie Roach, as acerbic as Kev Carmody – and yet Frank Yamma is barely a blip on the radar as far as mainstream Australia is concerned, let alone the world at large. The anomaly is about to be addressed, thanks to a new album that is at least comparable to *Gurrumul*, *Charcoal Lane* and *Pillars Of Society*, the respective breakthrough releases of Messrs Yunupingu, Roach and Carmody.

David Bridie, who co-produced the album in question with Tim Cole, his associate from Not Drowning Waving days, and released it on his own Wantok Musik label, has no doubt that *Countryman* has the capacity to open doors that previous Frank Yamma releases such as *Playing With Fire* (1999) and *Keep Up The Pace* (2006) have left locked, even though both earned critical praise, the former a gong as the album of its year at the '99 Indigenous Music Awards. "This is the record that Frank always should have made," declares the Melburnian mover and shaker. "This is the record that will make white Australia realise what Indigenous Australia already knows about him. The man may come from remote Australia, but his music is accessible and relevant to everyone."

For those who don't know, Frank Yamma is a proud Pitjantjatjara man from the central desert, who sings with imposing sonority and sincerity, in his native tongue and his second language (English), about the beauty of his country and of issues pertaining to the degradation of Aboriginal culture. An extraordinarily gifted and evocative songwriter, he addresses such weighty subjects as alcohol abuse, the need to respect traditional tribal laws and ways and the importance of country. As one reviewer eloquently put it, "When Frank Yamma sings about standing on a sand dune watching over the landscape, it's as though you are standing right there with him. When he sings about the plight of Aboriginal children born into a world of chaos and grog, Frank wrenches the heart." Yamma's latest and greatest release is an album redolent with contradictory images. Songs of longing and loving, and songs reflecting the vicissitudes of Frank's life, the duality of living as a respected initiated man in the bush and as a disrespected outsider in the cities, where jail, poverty and discrimination are a part of everyday life for an Aboriginal person.

As a revered troubadour, Frank Yamma is following in the footsteps of his late father, Isaac Yamma, a charismatic singer-songwriter and cultural icon who was the first Aboriginal musician to write and record songs in his native language and a man who was instrumental in establishing CAAMA (the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association), an organisation that pioneered the recording of indigenous musicians. As a child, before he started writing and performing his own songs, Frank Yamma crisscrossed the outback performing at community functions with his father and brothers in the Pitjantjatjara Country Band, playing all instruments and singing.

Hitherto, several factors have conspired to prevent Frank Yamma's solo career from fulfilling its enormous potential. As his mentor, David Bridie, opines, "I think Frank is one of this country's greatest songwriters and performers – black or white. He certainly has had recognition amongst the indigenous community, but he hasn't had the general recognition he deserves partly because of the lack of infiltration many of his releases have had into the wider musical community, and the fact that he has often lived in relatively remote places such as Alice Springs, Port Augusta and Docker River, and even on the streets of Adelaide. Also, artists like Frank need management and this has not always been possible for him – again the remote area factor – although there have been many big supporters of his work who have made substantial efforts to get his music out there."

Bridie's cynical side might surface in the observation that musical recognition and success do not always go hand in hand with talent, but he is optimistic that the new album will raise Yamma's profile exponentially over the next few months. "With songs such as 'She Cried', 'Make More Spear', 'Coolibah',



Photos by Murray Lui

'Nguta Waljilpa', 'Pitjantjara' and 'Calling Your Name' on it, I think *Countryman* has the potential to be an Australian classic. It is rare to have so many great songs on the one album."

Yamma, a humble man who speaks about himself with a degree of reticence, has characteristically modest aspirations for his new album and his career in general, although he drops his guard a bit when he admits that he wouldn't mind if the kind of success enjoyed in the past year or two by Gurrumul came his way. "I'd like to travel around creating good music, playing it to people who would like to hear it, and having fun... I'd like to take my songs to all people who'd like to hear them, whether here in Australia or overseas. It's a big world out there."

Frank says he enjoyed making *Countryman*, a sparse, acoustic album that offers a sharp contrast to his previous release, *Keep Up The Pace* – an explosive set that mixed up-beat dance rhythms and hip hop with reggae and roots. The new CD was recorded over two weeks last spring at a makeshift studio in Taralga, outside of Goulburn in NSW.

"I am very happy with this album. To record it in the country at this beautiful old farmhouse was a great experience. It is a different record for me, all stripped back and simple, but it works. It is a very laidback sound. There's no rushing, it's just like taking a deep breath."

David Bridie elaborates: "Yes, we were in a farmhouse. It was all dusty and rural, and *Nebraska*, a Bruce Springsteen album I truly like, was in the back of my mind and also Tim Cole's. I had done demos of a few of the songs ten years earlier and it was the stripped back tracks 'Coolibah' and 'Nguta Waljilpa' that were really special. I also over-produced the demo of the classic 'Make More Spear'

with strings and timpani, and it truly sucked and it made me realise that raw and simple was the way not to ruin Frank's songs. Often it's your failures that influence your next moves."

Bridie says they chose to use the rural retreat rather than a city studio like Melbourne's Sing Sing, where he generally records, for "atmosphere, space and fresh air." He points out that you don't need a flash studio to create a stripped-back album. "I have taken Pro Tools and a computer and microphones to Broome for *Bran Nue Dae* and *The Circuit*, and I recorded much of *Succumb* (Bridie's 2008 release) at a farmhouse in Blackwood, Victoria. Tim and I have the on-site rural recording process down pat by now. It also gets you away from phones, emails and other distractions. It was good for Frank and Tim and me. Every day we'd stop for a break at three in the afternoon and go for a walk with the sheep in the paddocks." The excellence of volunteer chef Tim Cole's cooking ensured artist and co-producer were well nourished!

Good food combined with clean country air certainly worked the oracle – not that there is anything remotely languid about Yamma's vocal performance. Frank instils genuine and palpable emotion into songs such as 'Remember The Day', which is hardly surprising when he explains, "I was in the lock up, and I got lonely for my ex-partner. There was no visiting rights, so I wrote the song out of a broken heart."

Yamma delivers the lyric to another potent song, 'I Didn't Know Who You Were That Day', in a piercing falsetto, accompanied by a high-end guitar arpeggio and the earthing cello of Helen Mountfort, long-time Bridie associate and band-mate in My Friend The Chocolate Cake, whom Yamma has supported over the years. 'Nguta Waljilpa', which he sang in language, is as spiritually charged and as haunting as any of the songs on Gurrumul's high selling solo release. "That song is just about being in a lonely place," Frank relates. "Everyone had left me, so I wrote a song about that feeling. It's a good place, that feeling, but a sad place too."

'Kunka Kutcha', another song in language, is a love story. "It's about young lovers creeping out at night time, and hanging out all night, and then going back home at sunrise," he says. 'Pitjantjara', *Countryman's* reverb soaked sign-off track, also concerns an affair of the heart. "It's about my cousin's sister," Frank reveals. "She took off with this young lover. They disappeared. My uncle made an announcement on stage during a concert, asking for everyone to keep an eye out for them." As the title suggests, it's yet another song that he sings in Pitjantjara. "That's my proper language; it's just another everyday language back at home," says Yamma, who can speak in four other tongues.

Although he currently resides in Adelaide, and hasn't lived in Alice Springs for five years now, he says the Northern Territory town will always be home for him. When he's back in the Territory, Frank likes nothing better than to kick back with his acoustic guitar in the bush.

"When I find some really relaxing place, where I can sit near the campfire with the guitar, where there's a million stars all around, I like to play solo songs. It's a different way of speaking when you're making a song with sounds in the background."

The anthemic 'Make More Spear', assuredly one of *Countryman's* highlights, addresses the issue of young Aboriginal people losing their traditional ways – a problem that clearly concerns him greatly and has done for some period of time. Remarkably, he composed that song when he was only 16. "It was the first song I wrote," he reveals. "It's about the things we have lost. Some young fellas never have made spears, done the traditional thing. It's very sad really that some people have lost their culture. They have just lost their life in

grog... it's so sad. Lots of people drink so much because they've lost their mother and father."

Alcohol abuse is also the thrust of the equally potent 'Coolibah', another song that Frank wrote while still in his teens. "It's about a fella who went down to the river for a walk one day and found a lot of money lying around in the creek while crossing the river," he says. "Anyway, he was happy to go and buy himself a coolibah (*cask wine*). After a while he got sick, poor fella – he'd been drinking so much."

David Bridie is in awe of the raw emotion that Yamma generates, the timbre in his voice and the power of his words – not to mention "the finesse" of his guitar playing. "He has a great sense of melody and chords. He also has a great turn of phrase... the lyrics in 'She Cried', 'Coolibah' and 'Down the River' are breathtaking." Those songs, he says, offer a unique take on the difficulties of balancing being a respected traditional man and a social outcast in the white cities of Australia. "He's a phenomenal songwriter who cuts right to the heart of the matter, both lyrically and musically. This is a legacy he received from his father, Isaac."

Frank does not deny his dad's influence. "I've got a lot of memories," he says. "When I was a kid, I used to carry his guitar around and go to all his gigs. He taught me everything I know about music. I follow in his footsteps." Like Isaac Yamma, and so many other Aboriginal singers, songwriters and guitarists, Frank Yamma is an instinctive musician who has a great ear for a tune. It's not something he consciously works on. As he imparts, without sounding in any way blasé, "I just grab that sound floating around in the air, and play it."

Yamma reveals that his father wrote the only song he didn't pen on *Countryman*, though it is not acknowledged in the album's sleeve credits. "'Docke River' is a song my old man wrote. A couple of my brothers played on the original version. It's a very old song... it's about a place five kilometres from the West Australian border, ninety kilometres from South Australia. Everyone knows this song out Docke River way."

Apart from Isaac Yamma, Frank cites the Warumpi Band, Coloured Stone and Joe Geia as influences on his own music, although he quickly adds, "There's a big mob of great Aboriginal artists and bands – it's hard to name them all." He says he started off listening to country music – "country's big out in the desert" – and singles out the legendary American singer-songwriter Hank Williams as a particular source of inspiration. "I have always had a fondness for his music. *Countryman* follows that simple, slow Hank Williams sound." If the great man had recorded in the Pitjantjara language, which admittedly takes a huge stretch of imagination, he might have sounded a wee bit like Frank's version of his dad's 'Docke River'.

Although *Countryman* is predominantly laidback and acoustic, there are reminders here and there that Frank Yamma can rock out, as he does on 'Inside', via an unexpected burst of lead electric guitar behind the bass drum thump created by Bart Willoughby, and the skewed electric riff that permeates the evocative 'Coolibah'. Elsewhere, on 'Down The River' and 'Pitjantjara', typical David Bridie piano figures provide the requisite ambience. Bridie, incidentally, is hoping to produce an album for Bart Willoughby down the track. "I believe it will happen at some stage. No Fixed Address and Mixed Relations were two of my favourite Australian bands, and Bart's performance of 'Message For Young And Old' for this year's Dreamtime at the G football game, in front of a live audience of 50,000 and however many on the TV coverage, was very powerful. Bart's songs have amazing attitude. He has written some great new songs and is very keen to record them."

Frank Yamma might be the first Aboriginal artist to have an album out on David Bridie's Wantok Musik label, which puts a focus on Melanesian music, but their association goes back a good few years. "I did some demos with him ten years ago that did not turn into an album," Bridie reports. "Of those, 'Coolibah' – the version on *Countryman* actually – was one of the tracks on the *Corroboration*



compilation CD that triple j released. I wanted to finish off what we had started all those years ago. Brian Tarranto, who does the merchandise for the Big Day Out, is also a huge fan of Frank's. Through the Wantok Musik Foundation, he made a donation to enable Frank's album to be recorded. We are very grateful to him – it shows a way that albums can be made without the funding circus so often required. This is one of the benefits of the Foundation and we thought we could be the best label to make this great Frank Yamma CD due to the history Frank and I had. And here we are."

Somewhat anomalously, Frank Yamma – unlike Bart Willoughby, Archie Roach and company – has not yet featured with The Black Arm Band, the travelling Aboriginal roadshow masterminded by Shane Howard, but he did perform as part of the Sing Sing shows that David Bridie was musical director of at The Melbourne Concert Hall and The Sydney Opera House in 2007. "It featured different tribes from Indigenous Australia and Papua New Guinea, all different mobs joining together creating a new sound and blowing people's minds away," Yamma recalls.

David Bridie is hoping that *Countryman*, which Yamma introduced at the 2010 Deadly Awards in September, will herald a new era for his charge. "Frank is playing a whole bunch of Australian festivals over the coming year. I hope the Australasian World Music Expo in November opens some doors for him internationally. It's fairly simple and inexpensive to tour this act and I believe Frank Yamma is something very special."

Countryman is available through Planet.

Frank Yamma will be in concert at Melbourne's The Toff on November 20 as part the 2010 Australasian World Music Expo. He also performs at Footscray Community Arts Centre Amphitheatre in Melbourne on November 21 and the Queenscliff Music Festival on November 26.



WANTOK MUSIK FOUNDATION

"Music is what we all share. It's our history, our lore, it's our future, our education, it's our hurts, it's our joys, it's our injustices, our struggles, it's our future, our love, and our hope.

This is how it is for all cultures, this is common, and it's through music that we hear, share and learn these things. Music can and has crossed every cultural barrier imaginable and will continued to do so.

There may be different sounds, different beats, different instruments, but we are singing the same things, we are talking with a common language – with one talk."

Drawing on the rich musical talent of our region, The Wantok Musik Foundation, an Australian-based not-for-profit organisation, promotes and facilitates various cultural exchanges and a greater level of economic empowerment for Melanesian and indigenous artists and their communities.

Aims and objectives

The Wantok Musik Foundation aims to generate and foster various cultural exchanges between Australia and our neighbours throughout Oceania by establishing a leading, not-for-profit Music Label representing indigenous and world music groups of this unique region., that will:

- Record, release and promote music from Indigenous Australia and Melanesia
- Raise the local and international profile of Indigenous and world music groups based in the region
- Provide greater economic opportunity for artists and long-term career sustainability by providing a viable outlet, and distributing royalties/profits through equitable and culturally appropriate mechanisms, While simultaneously managing various initiatives to:
 - Address various social issues with creative, culturally focused approaches
 - Increase Australians' understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures of their region
 - Cultivate 'capacity building' for music recording within the region
 - Increase the cultural exchange between Australia and countries within the region

Context

There is a diverse mixture of cultures in the Australasian and Oceanic region that yield many rich musical traditions and talent. Whether it's the string-band music of the PNG highlands, traditional Indigenous Australian songs, or artists of the Torres Strait Islands fusing contemporary styles with traditional languages and stories, the Indigenous and world music landscape of our region is a complex and vibrant one.

However, an interested and informed Australian audience keen to learn more about the cultures shared in our region, can often struggle to access and enjoy such music due to a distinct lack of representation in the commercial sphere of Indigenous and world musicians from the region.

There is also a number of extremely talented Indigenous and world musicians from the region whose work is not being released or achieving the attention it deserves.

It is to provide a greater level of economic independence for the musicians and their communities, to address the gap in the musical tapestry currently available to the Australian public, and to create opportunities for meaningful and lasting cultural exchanges between Australians and some of our closest neighbours, that the Wantok Musik Foundation has been established.

The focus of the Wantok Musik Foundation is the recording and support for traditional, contemporary, folk, roots and fusion music played or created by musicians that identify with a particular culture from within the region.

Wantok Musik will also capitalise on expanding international markets by elevating our region's music and artists on to the global stage through high quality recordings and performances at competitive rates.

www.nigeldclaments.com



Photo: Nigel Clements