BLACK & deadly

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN IN MUSIC

1903
FANNY COCHRANE SMITH

Photograph courtesy of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Fanny Cochrane Smith's wax recordings are the only recorded example of Tasmanian Aboriginal songs or of any Tasmanian Aboriginal language. The Royal Society in Hobart recorded these songs between 1899 and 1903 less than a decade after the technology arrived in Australia. Fanny performed all of the Tasmanian songs she knew, some in Aboriginal languages, others in English.

1949
GEORGIA LEE

Unknown photographer. Courtesy of Karl Neuenfeldt.

Georgia Lee, born Dulcie Pitt, became an identity in the jazz and blues clubs of Sydney and Melbourne in the 1950s where she performed with well-known bands including the Graeme Bell Jazz Band. Originally from the Torres Strait, Georgia Lee's style was influenced by the influx of American troops in the region during the Second World War when she packed parachutes by day and sang at jazz clubs by night. After making her mark overseas, Georgia Lee returned to Australia and toured with American jazz legend Nat King Cole in 1957.

1960
WILMA READING

Courtesy of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Library Sales.

Following in the footsteps of her aunt Georgia Lee, Wilma Reading's jazz ambition took her around the world. Throughout her 40-year career Wilma performed with some of the world's leading jazz musicians, including the legendary Duke Ellington band. She appeared on American television in the famous *Johnny Carson Show* and was also the musical guest on over 30 BBC television shows, including a season on Britain's highest-rated program at the time, *The Morecambe & Wise Show.*

1956
OLIVE AND EVA

Photograph courtesy of Bauer Media Pty Limited and The Australian Women's Weekly.

Olive McGuiness and Eva Bell are largely considered to be the first Aboriginal Australian duo that recorded popular songs in a commercial studio. As cousins, they spent their childhood in Cowra then Sydney amongst the Wiradjuri people of NSW. In 1955 they were finalists on Australia's nation-wide radio program *Amateur Hour*. Shortly after, they released their first record. A second, and final, release came in 1956. Olive stopped professionally performing in 1956 but Eva Bell forged a successful career. Also known as Eva Mumbler, in 1962 she won the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee Music quest. In 1970 she was presented to Queen Elizabeth II for her work with Sydney's Aboriginal Family Education Centre.

1970
AURIEL ANDREW

Photograph courtesy of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Library Sales.

An Arrernte woman from Alice Springs, Auriel Andrew began her musical career in the late 1960s, 'cutting her teeth' on the local live music circuits in Adelaide and Port Lincoln. She appeared on various live TV musical broadcasts before she became a regular on Channel Nine's *Country and Western Hour*, hosted by Reg Lindsay. In 1973 she moved to Sydney, and toured with renowned Aboriginal performer Jimmy Little. Auriel went on to perform at the grand opening of the Sydney Opera House and sang 'Amazing Grace' in Pitjantjatjara for Pope John Paul II during his Australian tour in 1986.

1988
RUBY HUNTER

Photograph by Jacqueline Mitelman. Courtesy of Jacqueline Mitelman and the National Library of Australia.

Ruby Hunter was a Ngarrindjeri/Kukatha/Pitjantjatjara woman from South Australia taken from her Aboriginal family at 8 years of age and fostered into a white family. While homeless and living on the streets, Ruby met her lifelong partner and musical soulmate, Archie Roach, who discovered her first written songs hidden in their hostel room. Archie recorded Ruby's 1989 song 'Down City Streets' on his debut album, *Charcoal Lane*. Ruby released her first solo album, *Thoughts Within*, in 1994 and was the first Aboriginal woman to be signed to a major record label.

1992
TIDDAS

Photograph courtesy of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Library Sales.

Tiddas, featuring Lou Bennett, Amy Saunders and Sally Dastey, was one of the very first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's musical groups. They began performing together as backing singers for Aboriginal band Djaambi in 1990 and formed as a trio to perform at Melbourne women's festival Hot Jam Cooking where Ruby Hunter dubbed them 'Tiddas', an Aboriginal word for sisters. Their ARIA award-winning second album, *Sing About Life*, includes the popular song *Inanay* which is sung in Yorta Yorta language.

1993
CHRISTINE ANU

Photograph courtesy of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Library Sales.

ARIA award-winning Christine Anu is a multi-talented Torres Strait Islander from Cairns. She graduated as a dancer from the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) in 1992 and performed with the Indigenous dance group Bangarra before switching to music. Her debut album, *Stylin' Up* released in 1995, went platinum and her 2000 album *Come My Way* went gold, elevating her to mainstream stardom.

2000
STIFF GINS

Photograph by Nicole Foreshew. Courtesy of Stiff Gins.

Stiff Gins are musical duo Nardi Simpson and Kaleena Briggs. Known for positive acoustic melodies in Aboriginal language they began as a trio, including Emma Donovan, after meeting at Eora College, Redfern, in 1999. The word 'gin' was originally a Dharug word for woman/wife but became a derogatory word for an Aboriginal woman. Their moniker 'Stiff Gins' reclaimed this offensive reference to Aboriginal women, a banner to guide their music in the direction of strength and pride.

2002
SHAKAYA

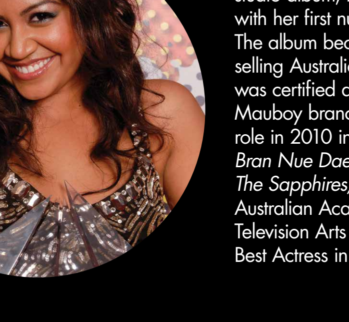
Self titled album cover.

Shakaya was a two-piece girl group who achieved fame in the early 2000s. The girls, Naomi Wenitong and Simone Stacey, met at the Cairns-based ATSIC Music College in 1999 and went on to sign with Sony as Shakaya in 2001. Their debut single released in 2002, 'Stop Calling Me', went platinum establishing the duo as Australia's premier female urban pop act, which led to tours with Destiny's Child, Usher, Kylie Minogue and Ja Rule.

2004
CASEY DONOVAN

Photograph by Ben Symons.

Casey Donovan was the youngest and first female winner of *Australian Idol*, winning the second season at the age of 16. Donovan is a multi-award winner and nominee, including an ARIA No 1 Award for 'Listen with Your Heart' and Deadly Awards for Best Album, Best Single and Most Promising New Talent. After the hype of *Australian Idol* died down, Donovan re-established herself as a solo independent artist, and as one of Australia's most promising Aboriginal entertainers. She has since starred in the concept show *Women of Soul*, the stage production of *The Sapphires* in 2010 and *The Mamas and the Papas* stage musical in 2011 as Mama Cass.



2006
JESSICA MAUBOY

Photograph by Amanda James. Courtesy of Amanda James.

Jessica Mauboy is a popular R&B artist who was launched into the public arena as a runner-up on *Australian Idol* in 2006. She subsequently signed a contract with Sony Music and released her debut studio album, *Been Waiting*, in 2008, with her first number-one single, 'Burn'. The album became the second highest-selling Australian album of 2009 and was certified double platinum. Jessica Mauboy branched out for a starring role in 2010 in the Aboriginal musical *Bran Nue Dae* and in the 2012 film *The Sapphires*, which earned her the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role.

2012
THELMA PLUM

Photograph by Carine Thevanue. Courtesy of Leanne De Souza.

New to the music scene, indie-roots musician Thelma Plum was in the first intake of students to graduate from Brisbane's Music Industry College in 2011. She was soon discovered on Unearthed by triple j with her song 'Father Said' and invited to perform at the 2012 National Indigenous Music Awards (NIMA). Her 2013 debut EP, *Rosie*, includes singles 'Around Here' and 'Dollar', which have earned her accolades including the NIMA for New Talent of the Year.

2014
LEAH FLANAGAN

Contemporary-folk singer, songwriter and guitarist Leah Flanagan studied Classical Music at the Elder Conservatorium of Music, Adelaide. In 2010 she released her debut album, *Nirvana Nights*, after which she has spent a number of years touring nationally, establishing herself as a performer on Australia's live festival circuit. In 2016 her LP *Saudades* was selected as feature album by ABC, RRR and PBS Radio with its songs 'Chills' and 'Old Fashioned' charting top spots on Australian Independent Radio and AMRAP metro charts. Her well-respected status within Australia's First Peoples' musical community has led to collaborations with Paul Kelly, Ursula Yovich and Archie Roach.

2017
CRYSTAL CLYNNE

Crystal Clynne's vocal technique ranges across hip hop, soul and jazz. A Kokatha-Greek woman from Ceduna, South Australia, she records as spoken-word lyricist MC Lady Lash and soulful diva Crystal Mercy. For her first EP as MC Lady Lash (*Pearl*, 2010), she was awarded Redfern Records' 'Female of the Year'. In 2012 she released the album *Crystal Mercy: The Fisherman's Daughter*, leading to her receiving a Victorian Indigenous Performer Award for Most Promising Act and an Age Music Victoria Genre Award for Songlines Best Indigenous Act in 2013. In 2017 Crystal commenced production on a documentary detailing her journey back to country.

2017
THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S CHOIR

The Central Australian Women's Choir (CAWC) consists of combined members from community choirs throughout remote Northern Territory. Townships cover Australia's central desert and coastal regions including Areyonga, Titjikala, Ntaria, Mutitjulu and Docker River (Kaltukatjara). The experience of its members ranges from two years to near sixty and crosses family generations. Whilst the CAWC formed in 2010, its choral tradition began over 100 years ago in the late 19th century, when German missionaries arrived at Ntaria. With their arrival they brought Lutheran hymns that they translated to local language and taught to community. As such, the choir's repertoire today presents 53 German hymns steeped in tradition but near lost to time and sung in languages including Pitjantjatjara, Western Arrernte and Pintupi-Luritja.

2018
EMILY WURRAMARA

Emily Wurramara was born on Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory, home to the Warnindhilyagwa. Now based in Brisbane, she sings in both Anindilyakwa and English. Her songs tell of the contrasting worlds of Groote Eylandt and her life on mainland Australia. Her debut EP *Black Smoke* (2016) spent 10 weeks on the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project charts, reached number 17 on triple j's *Unearthed* and resulted in her signing to Mushroom Records. In 2018 she released her first full-length album, *Milyakburra*, named after the island of her grandparents. The single 'Ngarrukwujenama (I'm hurting)' was written in response to the mining on her island home and has been awarded the Queensland Music Award's Indigenous song of the year (2018).