

## Credits

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**Created by** Black Arm Band

**Original Text** Alexis Wright

**Original Concept** Steven Richardson

**Black Arm Band Artistic Director** Emma Donovan

**dirtsong Artistic Director** Fred Leone

**Musical Director** Michael Meagher

**Arrangements and Orchestrations** Andrea Keller, Eugene Ball and Julien Wilson with artists of Black Arm Band

**Lighting Designer** Michelle Preshaw

**Production Management:** Daniel Gosling

**Stage Management** Kay Brocklesby

**Audio Engineer** Patrick Murray

**Screen Visuals** Natasha Gadd, Rhys Graham, Daybreak Films

**Producer** Sarah Greentree

*Black Arm Band is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. (INSERT LOGO from Image Folder here: here <http://bit.ly/2gyQMbw> )*

*Black Arm Band is supported by the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria. (INSERT LOGO from Image Folder here: here <http://bit.ly/2gyQMbw> )*

### Vocalists:

Fred Leone (Jan 19 – Feb 4)

James Henry (Feb 7 – 18)

Troy Brady

Deline Briscoe (Jan 19 – Feb 4)

Ursula Yovich (Feb 4 – 18)

Shellie Morris

Nicole Lampton

### Band

Tjupurru: Yidaki/Didjeribone

Michael Meagher: Bass

Rory McDougall: Drums

*(Please insert your local musicians below this.)*

## ***dirtsong***- Introduction

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Inspired by the words of author Alexis Wright, Australia's Black Arm Band perform songs from 11 different Aboriginal languages in this soulful show, which will bring to you the heart and humanity of the country and its most celebrated musicians.

Rich with complex harmonies and powerful melody, it will "send a shudder down your spine and bring a tear to your eyes" (*The Age*). Meanwhile, the cinematic screen behind the musicians opens a window on to the landscapes the music comes from, taking you on an immersive journey across a country you'll never see quite the same way again.

## **Songs**

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Background and credits for some of the songs currently performed in *dirtsong*

### **Far Away Home / Gungalaira**

Sung in English and Bundjalung

Composed by Graham Tardif with lyrics by Rolf de Heer. Words and music from the award winning film *The Tracker* directed by Rolf de Heer.

### **dirtsong**

Sung in Yorta Yorta

Written Lou Bennett, Alexis Wright

From the Echuca, Barmah region, the heartland of Yorta Yorta country, it is a song of the connection of people, song and country. 'Baiyan Woka' is Yorta Yorta for singing for country/land. This song comes from the depths of my knowing and understanding that we all have connection, we just have to learn 'Gulpa Ngarwal' (deep listening).

### **Coming up close now**

Devised and arranged Mark Atkins, Julien Wilson

In the spirit of the Wongi word GrunGada or 'gathering' from the Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie regions of Western Australia, this is an invitation for people, performers and storytellers to share experiences, songs and music – old and new.

### **Big Law**

Sung in Alyawarre and Yalanji

Written by Leah Flanagan, Deline Briscoe, Alexis Wright

This piece is based on text by Alexis Wright. Deline's language comes from Kuku Yalanji, the rainforest country of the Daintree. Leah has written in the language of her Nana from east of Alice Springs. She was born Ivy Upurla-Dempsey but as part of the Stolen Generation her name was changed to Dorothea (Dempsey) Berto.

*"All you People, Come and listen to this Spiritual connection to land"*

### **Giidang**

Sung in Gumbayngirr

Written Emma Donovan, Alexis Wright

Giidang is sung in the Gumbayngirr language which comes from the mid-north Coast of NSW.

Giidang means Heartbeat, and the song tells the story of my connection to jagun (country) how I am the country, how I'm keeping the heartbeat of my country going, I am asking you to ngarraanga (listen).

The other women in the song keep the heartbeat almost like a pulse, we always call our country our miminga (mother) and this song gives me a voice to call out like the mother who we have always referred to as country too.

**Yarian Mi Tji (What's My Name)**

Sung in Ngarrindjeri  
Written Ruby Hunter

A song of questions looking for answers for your name, your story, your land. Ngarrindjeri language is from the Lower Murray River, South Australia

**This Land is Mine**

Written Paul Kelly, Kev Carmody

Written by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody for the film One Night The Moon directed by Rachel Perkins. Originally set on Andyamathanha land in South Australia's Flinders Ranges, This Land is Mine / This Land is Me reflects on possession and belonging.

**Dron Wanga**

Sung in Gumatj  
Written Neil Murray

Performed with permission from the family of GR Burrarrawanga. This version is dedicated to GRB and sung in Gumatj from the Yolngu Matha languages of North East Arnhem Land.

**Rainstorm**

Sung in Gundjeihmi  
Written Shellie Morris, Mandy Muir, Alexis Wright

Rainstorm is sung in the language from the southern end of Kakadu National Park which is still spoken fluently all over the region. My sister Mandy Muir, with the help of her mother Jesse Alderson, a Traditional Owner in Kakadu, translated this piece for me as she is fluent in the language and helping me to regain some language in my life to feel like I belong and that I have a place.

## 'dirtsong' Background Essay

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### SINGING 'COUNTRY' IN NEW WAYS – dirtsong URSZULA DAWKINS

The Black Arm Band's first show, *murundak* (2006), surveyed the depth and breadth of contemporary Aboriginal music to date, its second, *Hidden Republic* (2008), took a step towards the future in its expression of hope 'post-apology'. Now *dirtsong* – performed predominantly in Indigenous languages from across Australia – brings past and future together and celebrates language restoration and cultural survival through songs that map the 'countries' of the band members.

Of the hundreds of Aboriginal languages that were spoken before 1788, many have been irretrievably lost or are at risk of disappearing when their remaining fluent speakers pass away. But some languages survive and are thriving, and many are being recovered, restored and learned anew by younger generations.

Remembered and passed on by the old people, or reconstructed with the help of early journals and ethnographic records, these recovered languages are helping redress the cultural dispossession suffered by Aboriginal Australia. They are also enabling the renewal of an oral tradition over 40,000 years old.

The languages in *dirtsong* come from across Australia, from the Northern Territory to Tasmania, and from east to west: Gumatj and Burrarra of Yolŋu Matha from Arnhem Land; palawa kani from Tasmania; Yorta Yorta and Mutti Mutti from southern Mungo region; Ngarrindjeri from the lower Murray River region in South Australia; Gumbayngirr, from north-coast New South Wales; Mirning, from the western Great Australian Bight – and quite a few more. Each of The Black Arm Band artists has their own particular relationship to culture through language; whether it be long-standing and uninterrupted through generations of family, recently recovered, or severed through geographical displacement.

In this sense, *dirtsong* re-maps and strengthens these cultural relationships, feeding back into the larger project of language revival in this country. Many of the songs are newly commissioned – not just reinforcing or affirming culture, but actively creating it.

Black Arm Band artist and Yorta Yorta woman, Lou Bennett, sees *dirtsong* as being much more than a concert, and language as much more than 'words' for the artists in the band.

"*dirtsong* is about land, language and people," says Bennett, "and the connection between the three is innate in us [Aboriginal people]. It's something that's always been there, always will be in humankind, but in our mob it's very evident in our everyday life. Whether we're from the cities or the country, we all come from that earth, we all go back to that earth."

For many of the band's members, the creation of *dirtsong* has been an intense personal experience – and particularly for those who are in the process of retrieving their language, or who are yet to hear their own language spoken.

"We have members within The Black Arm Band that have been dispossessed and removed from their countries," says Bennett, "and also people who are still on their countries and still speaking their language fluently – the whole gamut. And it is such an overwhelming emotional thing to go through that journey [of language recovery], even by yourself, with your family and community – let alone for a particular show."

"Language is belonging," she says. "It is tasting – it is feeling. When I speak and sing my language I feel at home. I feel a sense of belonging, and pride in my language. I also feel a sense of connection to the land where that language comes from."

*dirtsong* is about telling a story, not only musically, but spiritually, about the meaning of country and the Indigenous relationship to the land through time. According to Director, Steven Richardson, it charts a new 'territory' encompassing the many landscapes, both physical and cultural, that make up this continent.

“The performance is in some senses a map of Australia,” says Richardson, “but not in the sense that we are trying to represent specific geographical locations. Each language is specific to a place, but the music perhaps renders a symbolic portrait of Australia embracing cultural and linguistic diversity.”

This idea of a ‘map’ also suggests the traditional Aboriginal concept of ‘songlines’. The concept of songlines is complex, but for Lou Bennett it represents “the connection between the past, the present and the future.”

For Bennett the creation of a songline does not depend on a traditional approach.

“Even if I’m using English, [if] I’m using a different type of melody, [if] I’m not necessarily using traditional instruments, it’s still a connection to my land, it’s still a connection to my belief system. It’s not just a pop song – it links me to that ancestral land.”

Songlines, says Bennett, relate not only to time but also to places, “like little veins that run through the country”.

“You know, some of those old men and women that travel through bushland, they sing the country; and when they sing the country they know where they are. It’s like a map to them, and that’s more of the depth of what songlines are to me.”

Transplanted to a contemporary setting, perhaps there is a relationship between the singing of the old people and the map that The Black Arm Band creates through this show. dirtsong’s title track, written by Bennett, acknowledges the depth of tradition while retaining a clear focus on the present.

“[The song, dirtsong,] is about the songs that come up from the country – that have been coming up from the country for a very long time. And if you listen to that country, you hear the songs, you hear that oldness, you ‘Gulpa Ngarwal’ – you start to listen deeply.”

“It’s not just about looking to the past and to the ancestors, it’s also happening now: we are still singing our country, but in other ways.”

**Original text that inspired 'dirtsong' by Alexis Wright**

This is dirtsong – It comes from where we bin start off.  
Comes from country line.  
Long time singing song for country.  
dirtsong coming up from where everything start off.

Coming up from ancient song for making country good – looking good all of the time.  
Singing it up, singing it up, looking after it well.  
Should be like that, very important for spinifex, gidgee, mulga,  
Plenty good food, plant, water hole, animal each country place,  
Sky place,

Sea place – looking after em.  
Keeping story alive for country, make it alive – singing the songs,  
Living the stories,  
Holding the knowledge,  
Following the story,  
That is the Aboriginal law belonging to us.  
dirtsong – happening now!

Country!  
Country for me! You listening?  
Are you listening to me?  
Coming up close now.  
I am country. Listen to me!  
I am your government – I am the land.  
This country speaks proper way.  
Law right up top.  
It has to be above other laws.

That Canberra law underneath – any Australia law underneath – only little law.

Yeah, I reckon old Law is everywhere.  
See it over there in the hill where the old spirits lives, inside rock, tree, wind, sky, all animals and these old ones are  
coming through the elders singing the country with all the knowledge for big law.  
I cannot be any other way.  
I am not your way.  
Everyone must listen to the land to live strong.

Land strong with Law.  
Indigenous law.  
He is the right constitution for this country.  
I am here.  
Sitting down here.  
My country, he's alright, very good.  
I am happy now.  
First time I am happy.  
I like that country and go back and stay there.  
It is desert country, all flat, and big range on side – that far – and all the sandhill going the other way.  
We done ceremony – making corroboree, and all that for our own country.  
I know everything: what Dreaming I got, law that my father lend me.

I am here.  
Sitting down here.  
Sitting where grandparents' grandparents lived.  
Watching my country, watching story – creation story, law story.  
Growing up children.  
Growing up country.  
Looking after.  
Side by side.  
Proper way for this country.

I don't know what other people do to the country.  
I cannot understand it.  
It is a crying shame to see the country like this.  
Yep! We have seen all the change.  
There were a lot of good things right through this country – but memories now.  
Still though, the Indigenous law for land stands strong, I don't know how, but it does.

We got to make the stories.  
Sing the stories back.  
Bring the country back.  
Singing it up.  
Bringing it back.  
Bringing up feeling.  
Feeling it in the heart.  
Giving it back to the country.  
Listen for the heartbeat.  
The heartbeat now – with the pulse of the land,  
The bird; The tree; The grass and the wind.  
Bringing it up.

Dry country some places now  
Too much  
I don't know if we will get rain soon.  
Who will make it rain?  
I can't make it rain  
Some of them old people passed away now, you know, the rainmakers.

They been make it rain.  
Make it rain and the country come back.  
You got to look after the rainmakers.  
People need to listen  
Listen carefully  
The wind blows strong  
Through the tree it blows  
Come visiting you  
Spirit talking to you  
It comes in dreams  
You can hear it too  
We are made the same, you and I  
Hot wind bringing the goose  
Bringing fish  
Rain storm.

Alexis Wright's words written in recognition of the recorded voices of elders in the books *Take Power and Story About Feeling* by Bill Neidjie.

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