

eye4 music

## NEIL MURRAY

### Islands In The Stream

**Renowned for contributing some iconic songs to the Australian songbook, Neil Murray returns for one special show at Kulcha this Tuesday, December 21.**

This year Neil Murray has seen his legendary song *My Island Home* become immortalised... in a children's book. Joining the ranks of *From Little Things* by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody, the One Day Hill publishing house approached the singer-songwriter as they planned their next selection of inspirational books with lyrics from Australian songs with proceeds going to the Ian Thorpe Foundation for Youth.

"So they wanted to do more and they approached me about *My Island Home* and also Shane Howard for *Solid Rock* and Archie Roach for *Took The Children Away*," Murray begins. "Last year I went into the outback sourcing artwork from kids out there that we could use in the book. That was all sorted and it was released in September and I've been promoting it for the last couple of months with Shane and Archie. I believe we're coming over to Perth to present that book at the *Perth International Arts Festival*."

Murray still recalls when he found the inspiration to write the song for his friend George Burarrwanga. "I originally wrote for the lead singer of the Warumpi Band," he recalls. "I basically wrote that song for him to sing because he was our lead singer. It was always hard for him to get his head around a song in English that he would want to sing, so I was pleased to get that one because I knew it would have a lot of meaning for him. I wrote it for him a few weeks after visiting him on his island in Arnhem Land. I spent an incredible four or five days with his family just living off the land and the sea. It was like paradise. Then I went down to Melbourne and Sydney in '85 to promote the band and I had to catch a bus to Sydney overnight and in the middle of the night it came to me and the chorus just came to me in my head and once I had the chorus I thought I had to write this song for him to sing."

"I took it back to Alice Springs and played it for him on the car stereo," he continues. "So he sang it and we released in '87 and it never cracked the mainstream, but it was a hit in Indigenous communities all over Australia. It wasn't until the mid-'90s when Christina Anu did her version of it and it got picked up by the mainstream."

Murray's time in the Warumpi Band

also saw him open the *Big Day Out* in 1999. "I just remember our lead singer being really angry about Marilyn Manson," Murray says. "He wanted to spear him! I kept saying that it's just an act. He was pretty horrified by Marilyn's look and show."

More recently, Murray has released a new solo album *Witness*. It was recorded with his long term friend and founding Midnight Oil member Jim Moginie in Sydney. "Jim's been a great supporter of my music - we've known each other since about '86," the singer/songwriter says. "He's played on a lot of my albums. He basically got the studio up and running and he said 'Why don't you come over here and do it?' I said okay. I've always trusted his judgement, so I sent him some demos and told him to pick out what he wanted to do, so we just went for it. He's got a few old instruments in there. We did it pretty quickly. It's kinda organic and rootsy."

Now he's set to collaborate with a different musician for his show next week at Kulcha. "I'm actually doing the show with David Hyams, who's going to accompany me," Murray informs. "We're going to work out a set of my songs that we can play together. It will be fairly intimate thing because it's only going to be the two of us. It will be semi-acoustic. I'll do a bunch of stuff from the latest record, but I'll be doing a scattering of songs from my previous releases. And a couple of golden oldies too going back to the Warumpi Band."

To complete his year of being all over the media, Murray even contributed an opinion piece to the Fairfax group of newspapers and websites. Speaking of seeing his beloved Sydney Swans destroy the Eagles in the 2005 AFL Grand Final, he told *X-Press* of his time centre stage at Subiaco Oval (or Patersons Stadium, if you will) in 1999.

"My claim to fame is that one year I had the opportunity to flip the coin at a Dockers-Swans match," says Murray. "It was organised through Deckchair Theatre. They were organising halftime entertainment and I was just thrilled to bits because Paul Kelly, the Swans captain, was my hero and he's coming up looking like all muscle and I'm shaking with the coin. Then at the halftime break I had to mime *My Island Home* as part of the entertainment they had. That was my thrill. Someone from the Swans did their knee in that day, but the Swans did win."

MATTHEW HOGAN