

NEIL MURRAY

THE TELLING

Island Home Music



The storied career of legendary Australian singer-songwriter Neil Murray has been synonymous with Indigenous Australians and their struggles ever since he first emerged as part of influential Aboriginal rockers Warumpi Band back in the early-'80s. His personal relationship with Aboriginal Australia extends beyond empathy to a level almost akin to kinship itself, and it's one he's explored in great depth both during his decades-long solo career as well as in his countless books, short stories and published articles.

And a cursory listen to his new tenth solo outing *The Telling* shows that his genuine sadness about the myriad injustices faced by Indigenous Australians over the years shows no sign of abating, nor does his desire to keep shining a light on those travails and inequities with his words and music.

The follow-up to a pair of albums that dropped in 2019 with Murray's name on the cover - his own acclaimed solo effort *Blood And Longing* as well as *Tjungu (All In One, Joined Together)*, his collaboration with founding Warumpi Band guitarist Sammy Butcher - *The Telling* finds the storyteller in full band mode, having assembled a strong musical unit to accompany him on the sessions: namely Stephen 'Stretch' Teakle (keys/accordion/clavietta), David Neil (mandolin/guitar/vocals), Shane Reilly (pedal steel), Craig Kelly (bass) and long-term drummer Bill Heckenberg.

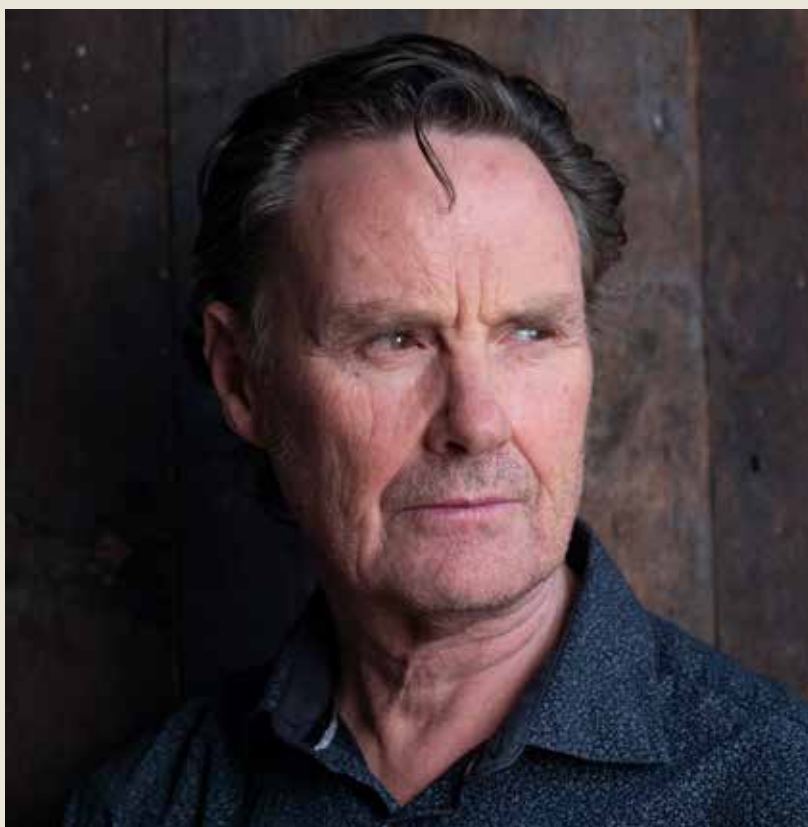
And while the recording sessions for *The Telling* were a strictly urban affair - the album's ten songs recorded in Melbourne with producer Roger Bergodaz and then mixed in Sydney by Ted Howard - the album's vibe is resolutely rural, kicking off with three strong songs dissecting the Indigenous experience from differing perspectives.

Opener 'Broken Land' starts with an upbeat full-band arrangement which sets the scene perfectly for Murray's perfectly weathered

and expressive voice to lay bare a tale reflecting upon Australia's colonisation from a First Nations viewpoint, a story that's been told before but which never fails to unsettle (especially in these ultra-authentic hands).

This is followed quickly by catchy, up-tempo rocker 'No Justice', an equally impassioned dissection of deaths in custody which asks for not only accountability but empathy as well ("Put yourself in any brother's place/To find out what it's like, to feel the hate"). Then the beautiful 'Tears of Wybalenna' slows down to a country shuffle underlying a poignant narrative about Aboriginal Tasmanian woman Truganini, another colonial-era tale of displacement and oppression.

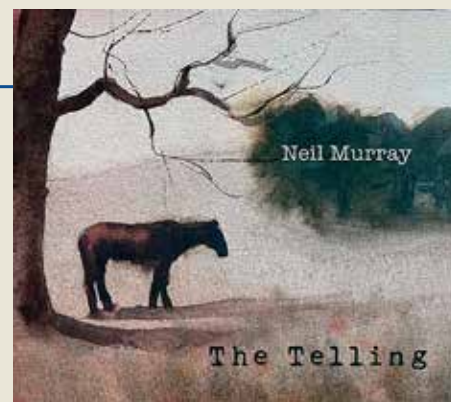
'Heal My Life' then steers things towards affairs of the heart only to disclose that there's no respite from pain to be necessarily found in these waters ("show me where the love is or let me go" Murray cajoles in a moment of great clarity), the guitars amping



Neil Murray. By Jesse Marloe.

up in unison as the singer's pleas reach a passionate crescendo.

A pair of songs in the middle section of *The Telling* reflect on the pain and reflection facing those left behind after the death of a loved one: the atmospheric 'For Evermore' a



vulnerable lament to a lost lover, while 'The Manager' slows to a crawl for a less intimate but no less affecting paean to a departed music industry comrade.

The jaunty, stripped-back country stylings of 'The Murrumbidgee' find Murray yearning for a simpler existence on the titular inland river - a simple story about life on the Aussie land despite the many factors impacting the landscape - environmental concerns which are brought into even more stark focus on

'Rainbow Serpent And A Mine', the moving co-write with traditional owner Jack Green about the McArthur River mine near Borroloola, highlighting how the impacts of such operations are often cultural and spiritual as well as physical and environmental.

Towards the tail-end of *The Telling* the mournful trumpet of Jack Howard (Hunters & Collectors) ushers in the gorgeous 'My Yuendumu Song' - an uplifting telling of life in the indigenous outback town, located some 300km northeast of Alice Springs - and the album reaches its inevitable conclusion with 'If The Wind Be Kind', a kind-hearted sea shanty hoping for love to triumph over distance and adversity.

It's an album tackling some deep and thought-provoking topics which could have been extremely heavy going in less experienced hands, but Neil Murray has become the master of melding two disparate - and most often

contradictory - worlds and viewpoints into something singular and powerful, and with *The Telling* he has crafted yet another fine collection befitting his immense reputation and legacy.

***The Telling* Is Out Now On Island Home Music, And Available On CD And All Digital Platforms (Distributed By Believe).**