

## Dr Joseph Neparrnga Gumbula

The degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa) was conferred upon Mr Gumbula at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music graduation ceremony held at 11.30am on 4 April 2007.

### Citation

Pro Chancellor, I have the honour to present Mr Gumbula for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music, honoris causa.

Mr Gumbula is an Indigenous Australian Elder of Yolngu ancestry. He was born at the Milinginbi Mission in Arnhem Land in 1954, and is descended from a long line of prominent Yolngu leaders whose contributions to shaping productive relations between Indigenous and other Australians remain influential today. His paternal grandfather and great-grandfather worked with the Reverend TT Webb, Professor Lloyd Warner and Professor Donald Thomson following first contact in the 1920s while his parents were key figures in local government and bilingual education at Milinginbi from the 1950s to the 1980s. The representation of this legacy in ethnographic collections worldwide is the cornerstone of Mr Gumbula's scholarly work. He is the world's foremost authority on collected materials from Arnhem Land, both for the breadth of his knowledge, and his ability as a Yolngu Elder to identify, interpret and re-assess them within traditional frames of reference.

As a teenager, Mr Gumbula completed an apprenticeship in Carpentry and, in 1971, moved to the neighbouring town of Galiwin'ku to raise a family with his wife, Ms Gawura Ganambarr. He earned a Commendation for Bravery while serving as a sworn officer of the Northern Territory Police Service from 1989 to 1996, and sat on the Galiwin'ku Community Council in the early 1990s and early 2000s. His musical career gained momentum when he joined the seminal Yolngu band, Soft Sands, in 1971. With Soft Sands, Mr Gumbula spent two decades touring Australia, composed award-winning songs in endangered Yolngu languages, and mentored many young musicians in Arnhem Land including the later founders of Yothu Yindi and Saltwater. Alongside these achievements, he undertook musical training in the endangered Manikay tradition of north east Arnhem Land, and arduous instruction from Elders in Yolngu law and ceremonial leadership.

Mr Gumbula was appointed to the Yolngu leadership rank of Liya-Ngärra'mirri or Wise in 1996, and is now charged with maintaining Yolngu law and leading ceremonies as a sacred public duty. His unique scholarly work draws on his consummate knowledge of Yolngu legal and intellectual traditions, and engages his exceptional ability to articulate their complex esoteric concepts. From 2003 to 2005, Mr Gumbula held a Senior Fellowship in Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne where he worked collaboratively with Museum Victoria on the Donald Thomson Collection. He presents and writes extensively on intellectual exchanges between Yolngu and European traditions, and has recently presented keynote addresses to meetings of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Australia Council for the Arts, the Australasian Sound Recordings Association, and the National Film and Sound Archive. He tours internationally as a master performer of traditional Yolngu song and dance, and is a key figure in developing the 'National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia'.

In 2007, Mr Gumbula became the University of Sydney's first Australian Research Council Indigenous Research Fellow. Located at the Koori Centre in partnership with the University of Sydney Archives, his Discovery Project with Dr Aaron Corn examines rare materials from Arnhem Land dating from the 1920s that document his family's history. Mr Gumbula's 36-year career is one of immense contributions to cross-cultural understanding, peace and human knowledge. Today, the University of Sydney acknowledges his generosity of spirit, traditional leadership, musical and creative talents, community service and tireless dedication to scholarship with the degree of Doctor of Music. I invite you to confer the degree upon him.