

Citation for Shellie Morris
Doctor of Music (*honoris causa*)
Friday, 23 April 2021 – 4.30pm

Pro-Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Shellie Morris to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (*honoris causa*) in recognition of her extraordinary contribution to music performance and education, in particular for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their culture and language.

Shellie Morris was raised in Sydney by her adopted non-Indigenous family and began singing at an early age. She often performed in Church choirs in her twenties and completed a Certificate 3 in Contemporary Music at Northern Territory University. 10 years later she produced the albums *Shellie Morris* and *Waiting Road*.

Shellie creates music and sings in around 17 Aboriginal languages, many of which have been considered “sleeping” or close to extinction. Since discovering her Wardaman and Yanyuwa roots over 20 years ago, she has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians and youth, especially in the Northern Territory, by helping them to write about their stories and experiences.

In the 1990s, Shellie moved to Darwin to find her Indigenous Yanyuwa, Gudanji, Marra and Garrwa families and Elders. She worked with her Indigenous family on the Song Peoples Sessions where she recorded a collaborative album with over 11 of her elders, the Borroloola Songwomen as custodians of her own ancient Indigenous song cycles which culminated in two CDs that combined traditional and contemporary Indigenous music for which Shellie had to learn the Yanyuwa language.

In 2001, Shellie toured with Yothu Yindi and performed with Neil Murray and the Warumpi Band. She is currently a featured Aboriginal singer with the Black Arm Band and over her career has performed with many internationally renowned artists around the world including in 2011, when she sang alongside Sinéad O'Connor, John Cale, Meshell Ndegeocello, Rickie Lee Jones and Aboriginal singer Dr. G. Yunupingu for the show *7 Songs to Leave Behind*.

She was featured in the Australian film *Murundak – Songs of Freedom*, a feature documentary on Aboriginal protest music following The Black Arm Band from the concert halls of the Sydney Opera House to remote Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory.

Shellie was first nominated for a Deadly Award in 2002 and since then has won multiple awards including her first Indigenous music award, as the Female Musician of the Year at the NT Music Awards in 2004, an award which she won again in 2005. Two years later her album *Waiting Road* was nominated for Album of the Year at the 2007 Deadly Awards. She was nominated for Best Female Artist at the Deadly Awards in 2011 and received a Deadly Award for Cultural Advancement in 2013. Her 2013 Aria-nominated release *Ngambala Wiji li-Wunungu (Together We Are Strong)*, the first album by an Indigenous contemporary female singer/songwriter sung entirely in Indigenous languages of the Gulf Country.

In 2014 she was awarded the NT Australian of the Year as well as the NAIDOC artist of the year, has won multiple awards personally and for her collaborations including the landmark album *Ngambala Wiji li-Wunungu* and the internationally award-winning musical documentary *Prison Songs* which has won film and humanitarian awards around the world and was nominated for five AACTA awards, ATOM Awards for Best Indigenous Resource and a Walkley Documentary Award.

She is an ambassador for the Fred Hollows Foundation and travels the country creating songs with young people in an effort to reduce the incidence of Trachoma in Indigenous communities. She has also worked with the Jimmy Little Foundation which aims to help Australian First Nations people to live to longer, healthier lives. As a continued supporter of the Foundation, she has worked with many young people to create songs in language that talk about how to live a Thumbs Up! life - a healthy, strong and long life.

Shellie has written literally thousands of songs during her career in conjunction and collaboration with communities around Australia. She has an unshakable passion for working in communities and has an excellent reputation across the nation as a facilitator and friend to many communities. Armed with personal experience of connection and disconnection, Shellie imparts the importance of having a voice, listening to one another and that every individual is important.

Pro-Chancellor, I present Shellie Morris for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (*honoris causa*) and invite you to confer the degree upon her.