

Mr Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu

The honorary degree of Doctor of Music was conferred upon Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu by the Chancellor Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO at a special ceremony held in the Great Hall at 5.30pm on Saturday 10 November 2012.

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Cate Blanchett and Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu before the ceremony.



The Chancellor conferring the honorary degree upon Geoffrey.



Geoffrey performing following conferral of the honorary degree: 'Bapa', a homage to Geoffrey's father, & 'Baru', a song about Geoffrey's totem, the Saltwater Crocodile.



The Chancellor, Robin Warren, Kate Grenville, Lord Rees, Geoffrey Yunupingu, Cate Blanchett and the Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence.



Geoffrey performing.



Geoffrey in front of the jacaranda tree in the Quadrangle.

Citation

Presented by the Associate Dean, Learning & Teaching, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Professor Anna Reid:

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to commend Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa). He has distinguished himself through his outstanding contribution to the promotion of music and culture in Australia and overseas.

His extraordinary voice combines fragility with emotive power to sing about his identity, spirit and connection with the land, its elements and his ancestors. Yet the inspiration he takes from his homeland resonates far beyond northeast Arnhem Land. Coupled with his quiet, reserved demeanour, his music has forged a spiritual bond with audiences in Australia and around the world.

Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu grew up as a member of the Gumatj nation on Elcho Island. Largely self-taught, he plays drums, keyboards, guitar and didgeridoo. He was a member of the renowned Aboriginal band Yothu Yindi in the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to perform with the Saltwater Band.

The release of his debut solo album, *Gurrumul*, in 2008, led to international acclaim. The album has sold half a million copies worldwide, and his second solo album *Rrakala* (2011) has had a similar impact; *Rolling Stone* magazine has called him "Australia's Most Important Voice".

In 2008 he was nominated in four categories for the Australian Recording Industry Association awards, winning Best World Music Album and Best Independent Release. He also won three Deadlys, the awards that honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement in music, sport, entertainment and community.

In recognition of his impact beyond the world of music, he was the 2009 Northern Territory recipient of the Australian of the Year award and, in the same year, the subject of a portrait by artist Guy Maestri that won the Archibald, Australia's major art prize.

Since his emergence on the global stage, he has been invited to perform for Queen Elizabeth II, US President Barack Obama, and Crown Prince Frederik and Princess Mary of Denmark. This year, he was a vocalist on a commemorative single for Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, which featured

artists from across the Commonwealth. In June he was one of only two Australian performers at the Diamond Jubilee Concert, appearing before a crowd in front of Buckingham Palace and a worldwide television audience estimated at more than 100 million.

This success has come even though most listeners will not immediately comprehend the lyrics of his songs, as he rarely sings in English. Nevertheless, as a Sydney Morning Herald reviewer has said, it is impossible for the listener to remain unmoved. "It is as though Yunupingu has reached into a wellspring so deep it transcends cultural barriers," the reviewer said. "He has found an emotional bridge which is genuinely universal.

"Listen to Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu ... and you will instantly surrender to the greatest voice this continent has ever recorded."

Chancellor, I present Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (*honoris causa*), and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.