

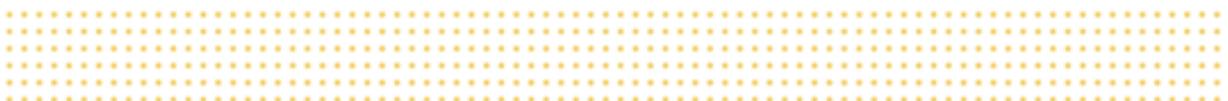
PRISON SONGS

NEWSLETTER
MARCH 2017



Prison Songs continues to cut through politics and statistics and touch an emotional chord with those fortunate enough to see and hear it. It is turning passion into positive action by opening audiences' hearts and creating empathy.

With over 60 screenings across Australia and a national screening on NITV, nearly half a million Australians have viewed Prison Songs in less than 12 months. We are excited and honoured to be working with such a ground-breaking documentary that gives voice to those who need to be heard.



Take Action

- 1) Follow us on social media - help spread the word about Prison Songs and our campaign around reducing indigenous incarceration rates
- 2) You can also [host a screening](#) of Prison Songs to raise awareness in your community, school, or workplace
- 3) Join Amnesty International in calling for justice targets to secure a brighter tomorrow for Indigenous kids in Australia. [Indigenous Justice](#)
- 3) Take the pledge to [Change The Record](#)

A conversation with composer, Shellie Morris.

“I wanted the job so badly because of the high incarceration rates of people in the Northern Territory,” Morris says, describing imprisonment in Berrimah Prison as like a modern-day initiation ceremony. “Working in the prison was truly sad and wonderful. It was a privilege to work alongside my brothers and sisters who are incarcerated, so honestly and in a way that underlines the fragility of life and promotes understanding and empathy.”

Morris worked with songwriter/composer, Casey Bennetto, whose credits include the musical *Keating!* Writer/director Kelrick Martin encouraged them to forget about being politically correct and to use many styles of music to attract a broad audience and convey the breadth of experiences found in the prison.

Music is at the heart of Prison Songs



The music at the heart of Prison Songs was written by much-loved Darwin-based multi award-winner singer/songwriter **Shellie Morris**. She has written thousands of songs in collaboration with people living in more than 70 remote Australian communities and has conducted music workshops for women at Berrimah Prison for more than a decade.

The starting point was the transcripts of the interviews with those in prison. Using their words along with the video images, the pair looked for themes with the potential to be the basis of songs. They wrote the songs and composed the music in a collaborative process that also included Jone Vuqa. They then recorded demos of each song for the creative team and the participants who would eventually perform them.

“We had a week together and they were huge days,” says Morris. “It was gruelling but not yucky gruelling; gruelling for my brain! It was absolutely wonderful to be working alongside Casey. He pushed through and pushed me.”

Bennetto describes song as communicating from the heart and therefore it is a shortcut into the emotional state of the person singing. Imprisonment doesn't mean human existence stops, he adds. “Particularly hip hop is understood to be a direct expression of personal hardship,” he says. “Hardly any of the original lyrics to that song remain in place and I can't stress how terrific I thought that was.”

He explains that all those in the film were encouraged to change the lyrics to suit themselves and this happened particularly in the case of Max and Dale and the song *The Middle*, which is about how they feel caught between two worlds.

“We had the opportunity to make this documentary musical about the individuals in a prison and one of the reasons it has worked so well is because many come from a culture that is significantly based around song and dance.”



Key Dates

16 March 2017: National Close the gap day

15 April 2017: Anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (2016 marked the 25th anniversary)

26 May 2017: National Sorry Day - 20th anniversary of the Bringing them Home report

27 May - 3 June 2017: Reconciliation Week

3 -10 July 2017: NAIDOC Week

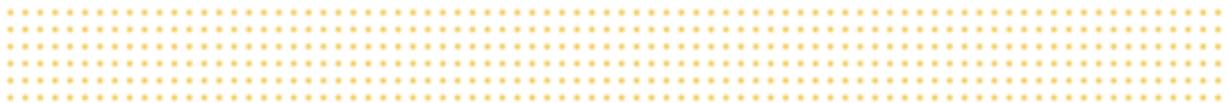
4 August 2017: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day

9 August 2017: International Day of the World's Indigenous People

August: National Day of Action to Change the Record (date TBC)

25 November 2017: International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

10 December: Human Rights Day



Prison Song's Impact

Successful, impactful and emotional screenings continue to happen far and wide, from the Footscray Community Arts Centre in Melbourne to Macquarie offices in Sydney and Brisbane to the Kuranda Social Justice Group in far north Queensland.

“The film invoked a discussion about the circumstances of Berrimah Prison but also a wider conversation around sentencing laws in Australia and law versus traditional lore. The effectiveness of delivering these stories through song was poignant but also helped the viewer consume the devastation and heartbreak. Thank you so much for allowing us to screen the film.” (FCAC Organiser)

Human Rights groups are using screenings of Prison Songs to collect petitions to Prime Minister Turnbull calling on the Government to adopt justice targets.

“Wow - the depiction of intergenerational trauma, loss and sadness in song and interspersed with narrative is profound. Every young person should see this film - indigenous or non-indigenous.” (Audience member at YETI screening (Youth Empowered Toward Independence))

In Victoria, a number of high schools have also shown the film through their school network outreach programs. The teachers viewed it first and loved it so they've integrated into their lessons. One teacher said "Prison Songs was the best Indigenous rights focused film resource we have used."

Change The Record members OXFAM and Amnesty International action groups have screened Prison Songs in venues across Australia to create awareness of the harsh reality of Indigenous incarceration and inspire and motivate people to take action in their own way.

Grass roots organisations are using Prison Songs to speak to their Indigenous members about how to build resilience through relationships and culture and stay out of prison.

"People were blown away by the film, people were crying and laughing and thoroughly enjoyed the film. We screened the film outside, passers-by stopped and spoke with us and two even joined the screening of the film." (Swamp Screening organiser)

The tide is turning on this issue and we are seeing an increasing national debate on the impact of the current criminal justice system, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Thanks for your continued support of Prison Songs and the campaign to reduce the over-imprisonment of Indigenous adults and children around Australia.

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Prison Songs Impact Producers

Prison Songs enjoys the strong and active support of the following partners:



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