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Perfect time to celebrate indigenous Oz

CONCERT

Murundak
The Black Arm Band
Fremantle Arts Centre
Review: Ray Purvis

Only 10 days after the nation said sorry to its Stolen Generation, this incredibly moving multicultural tribute to Aboriginal life and music called Murundak — which means alive in the Woivurrung language — could not have been better timed.

The event is presented by the wryly subversively named Black Arm Band — a collective of the finest indigenous performers including Archie Roach, Ruby Hunter, Shellie Morris, Kutcha Edwards, Stephen Pigram, Ursula Yovich, Dan Sultan, Mark Atkins, Lou Bennett and a pair of honorary blackfellas Shane Howard of Goanna fame and special guest John Butler.

The two-hour long concert was an uplifting experience that said more about black and white solidarity than a

million parliamentary speeches.

Set in the tribal Nyoongar land at the Fremantle Art Centre, which borders on the Skinner Street Aboriginal cemetery and is surrounded by trees, the magnificent location gave the evening a heightened sense of occasion and historical significance.

With the video screens on each side of the stage showing poignant images of Aboriginal life and the music celebrating the resilience, dignity and self-expression of indigenous people, this was an unforgettable event.

Throughout the night the talented 15-piece backing orchestra inventively matched strings and brass against the rock percussion and the earthy growl and bark of the didgeridoo.

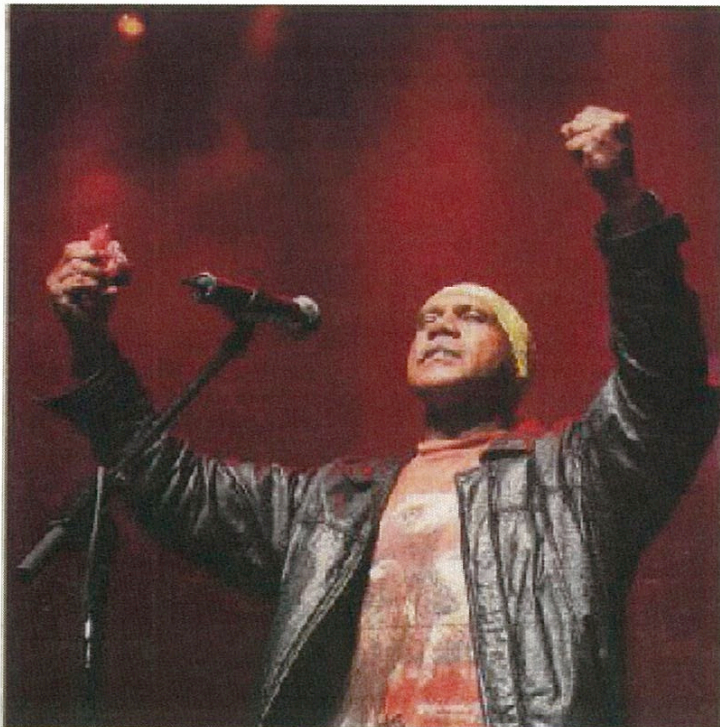
Papua New Guinea-born musical arranger Aaron Choulai (who featured on piano) ensured that the unique voices of the diverse line-up of singers were surrounded by an imaginative cushion of sound.

Among the concert's many magic moments was the spirited ensemble

performance of Yothu Yindi's familiar Treaty, shaven-headed Kutcha Edwards — a member of the Stolen Generation — dressed in a long double-breasted coat tearfully singing the heart-wrenching Is This What We Deserve? and Dan Sultan's soulful version of his award-winning Love Is Like A Song.

Also particularly impressive was Ruby Hunter, adorned in a traditional hat of feathers and woven grass, singing the gritty urban opus Down City Streets, Shane Howard's deeply resonating Land Rights anthem Solid Rock and John Butler's soaring lap steel playing accompanied by Mark Atkins' didgeridoo on the bluesy Thou Shalt Not Steal.

The encore, a version of Somewhere Over The Rainbow/What A Wonderful World sung by Ursula Yovich and accompanied by Stephen Pigram on ukulele, brought the evening to a triumphant and hopeful ending.



Aboriginal tribute: Archie Roach, a member of the Black Arm Band collective.