
NEIL MURRAY

BRING THUNDER AND RAIN

ISLAND HOME/ABC MUSIC

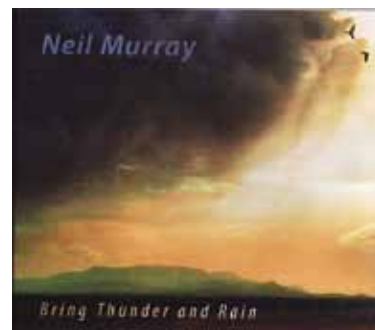
roots

Unlike his closest contemporaries Shane Howard, Archie Roach and Paul Kelly, who also draw on quintessential Australian themes, Neil Murray rarely receives credit commensurate with his consummate talent as a songwriter and recording artist. It would be poetic justice, then, if *Bring Thunder And Rain*, the Victorian's first album with Craig Pilkington, garners a raft of long-overdue accolades. Pilkington's production and sound engineering/mixing expertise has helped elicit one of the finest albums of Murray's 25-year recording career, certainly in terms of his singing and quite possibly in the arrangements as well.

The songs, which are among the strongest he's

written, draw on musical styles and subject matter that have served him well throughout a productive career. The hard-driving opener, 'Get Up', for example, is a legacy from his rock 'n' roll days with the Warumpi Band. With 'Malamia', delivered partly in Tjapwurrung (a language no longer spoken), Murray has made a fresh connection with indigenous Australia. The title track, a beautiful ballad embellished by Jim Moginie's keys, slide guitar and percussion, also alludes to said clan and the western part of Victoria where Murray was raised. The country/gospel reminiscence, 'Wait For Thee', featuring soaring call and response chorus vocals from Emma Donovan and Deline Briscoe (which also add succour elsewhere), transports the composer back to days of yore.

Evocative outback scenarios set in other states are the backdrop to this inveterate traveller's bluesy Dylan-esque road rocker 'Along The Kidman Way', the mellow 'Whispering Casuarina' and an intriguing ballad based on the memoir of the monk who founded WA's

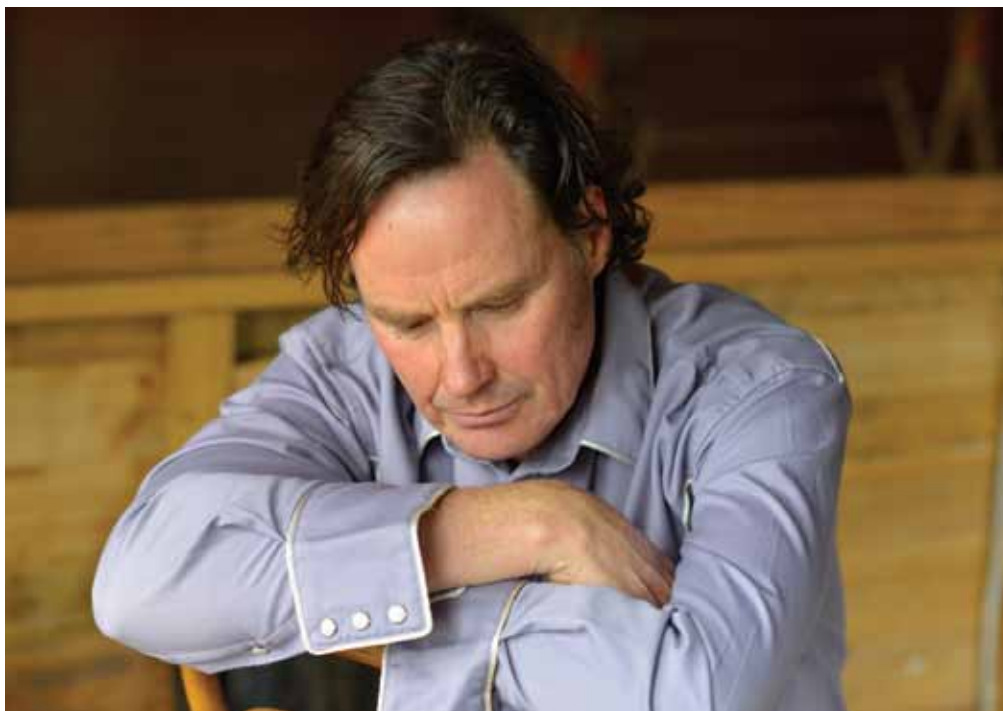


New Norcia ('Is That What You Heard?'). The folksy mandolin and accordion-decorated 'It Was Told', based on reported pre-colonisation encounters between Aborigines and Europeans, is another ripper. Indeed, there isn't a single inferior track on Murray's deeply philosophical and impeccably produced 12th solo release. *Tony Hillier*

MURRAY'S MIND

The Recording: I was looking to record in Melbourne, in a slow way. I didn't want to travel far or be rushed. When I approached Craig Pilkington, he liked what I had and was keen to be involved. I've often struggled with vocals - I could never quite make them how I wanted - but this far on, I think me and my vocals have arrived at an understanding, and a lot of that was to do with Craig's expertise, his discerning ear. I relied on him to judge what was working or not. Craig brought in Bruce Haymes (keyboards), Dave Folley (drums - five tracks) and Steve Hadley (bass). I had Jim Moginie (various instruments), Matt Earl (drums - five tracks), Garret Costigan (pedal steel) and Damian Neil (acoustic and electric guitar, mandolin) all earmarked. I asked Emma Donovan to do backing vocals and she brought Deline Briscoe with her. Everyone made excellent contributions.

The Songs: 'Get Up' dates from 2004. I was holding it in case the Warumpi Band ever got going again. All the others date from 2009 through to 2013. The last song written was 'Bring Thunder And Rain'. I wanted to call the album that, so I went and wrote the title. 'Wait For Thee' came in a rush out of left field one night in Maleny, in Queensland. 'Is That What You Heard?' came to me fairly readily after visiting the monastery town of New Norcia. The emotive sweep of 'One Shining Star' came to me suddenly and powerfully while driving along a dirt road in the Western Desert. 'Come Away From That Country' was passed over for the *Witness* sessions before Craig's interest resurrected it. I probably put more of a studied, conscientious effort in to the other songs. 'Malamia' is my way of acknowledging the intellectual heritage of my own country and doing a small bit to bring some of it back. I'll concede there was a lot of guesswork, although it was conceived with great empathy, humility and respect. I drew on the grammatical rules of a living indigenous language I'm conversant with and consulted with linguists and elders.



The Outback Factor: There are songwriters everywhere writing about all kinds of well-trod stuff, most of it badly.

My interest is in getting a new take on something. It just so happens there are few who write about this land or places in remote country with any kind of eloquence or freshness. So there's a role for me there and there's meaning in elevating our appreciation and understanding of the ancient land we inhabit.

So if that's been one of my signatures, I do return to it. During the course of doing live work, I find myself all over the place and songs can come at anytime, of their own accord it seems. However, traversing different country, entering new places certainly stimulates the senses. If the songs are philosophical, it seems a natural trajectory for the wondering kind.