



The University of Melbourne

NORTHERN TERRITORY MUSICIANS SUPPORT STRUGGLING INDONESIAN COMMUNITY

A magical musical collaboration is taking place at the top end of Australia, with neighboring Indonesia.

Yilila, one of Australia's finest Indigenous music groups from the remote community of Numbulwar, is working with *Watublapi* musicians from Flores, Indonesia in a musical collaboration that is creating remarkable music, while fostering friendship and strength in both communities.

Yilila lead singer Grant Nundhirribala and musician, producer and mentor Tony Gray traveled to Indonesia from Arnhem Land in January and again July where they spent time collaborating with the *Watublapi* musicians. Tony is returning to Flores in November, where he will spend another three months collaborating with the local musicians. In a reciprocal exchange, the *Watublapi* musicians will travel to Darwin early next year as one of the final stages in the project. They will record a music CD and perform together at the Darwin Festival in May 2008.

The *Yilila/Watublapi* project was conceived and is being managed by Asialink, who aim to initiate and strengthen Australia Asia engagement. Asialink are Australia's leading centre for the promotion of public understanding for the countries of Asia.

"We are delighted that this Northern Territory community is able to play such a pivotal role in assisting other remote communities. So often Indigenous communities are on the receiving end – in this project they are able to take the lead in educating and ensuring that strategies are developed and shared with Indonesia to ensure traditions are not lost," said Ms Alison Carroll, Director, Asialink.

Both *Yilila* and *Watublapi* musicians live in extremely remote areas. *Watublapi* in Flores is situated in a mountainous, remote area in Eastern Indonesia. Surrounding towns were decimated by a tsunami that hit in 1992, wiping the destination off tourist maps and diverting the once thriving tourist diving trade to other islands. As people struggle to rebuild the community their music strengthens morale and their sense of a future. *Yilila* musicians live in Numbulwar, a remote Indigenous community in East Arnhem Land. Like many Indigenous communities across Australia, the Nuumbulwar community live a strong traditional lifestyle.

Yilila are an exceptional Indigenous band and dance group. Lead singer and songwriter, Grant Nundhirribala, has danced and toured with *Bangarra*, Australia's foremost contemporary Indigenous dance company and well-known Indigenous group *Yothu Yindi*, as well as collaborating with internationally renowned artists John Butler, Sultan Khan and Zakir Hussein. Other members of *Yilila* had the opportunity to perform to a crowd of thousands at the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000.

When Grant and Tony traveled to Flores earlier in the year it was the first time Grant Nundhirribala had been overseas. "All of my traditional music and dance is about the Maccassan traders from Indonesia, so it was very special for me to finally go to Indonesia. We found we had many of the same words in our languages and our music was also similar. The Indonesian people are like my brothers and sisters and I have really enjoyed playing and writing music with them," Grant said.

Yilila are committed to sharing and teaching their culture, and have discovered similar goals in the *Watublapi* musicians.

"We are so excited to discover that *Yilila* and *Watublapi* are following the same paths to build their remote communities through traditional music, dance and art. This project provides such a fantastic opportunity to encourage Australian and Indonesian music, while creating fresh and innovative new sounds," said Tony Gray.

Yilila's energetic live performances are bursting with culture, instrumental and vocal skill. Their sound fuses traditional elements of Aboriginal groove with raw reggae and pop styles. *Yilila* have been enjoyed by huge crowds at festivals and events nation-wide. The *Watublapi* musicians traditionally utilise a gong and bamboo ensemble, together with home-made violins, banjos, ukulele, guitars and bass fiddles to create music that is often used to mark life transitions.

The **Northern Territory-Eastern Indonesian Partnership Project** is supported by the Ford Foundation. For further information about the project please visit www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au

For more information regarding this Media Release please call

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