

PECAN SUMMER

INDIGENOUS OPERA IS HERE

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A PATRON OF PECAN SUMMER

Dutala	\$100,000 and above	Star filled sky
Nurtja	\$50,000 - \$99,000	Forest
Biyala	\$10,000 - \$49,000	Red Gum
Dhungala	\$5000 - \$9999	River
Woka	\$1000 - \$4999	Earth
Gurtji	all gifts up to \$999	Friend

Dutala, Nurtja, Biyala, Dhungala, Woka and Gurtji are words which come from the ancient language of the Yorta Yorta people. The Yorta Yorta language is undergoing a revival driven by only a handful of custodians. The Prelude of Pecan Summer will be sung in this ancient language.

You can support the world premiere and future productions of Pecan Summer by making a donation via our sponsorship and grants partner, The Koorie Heritage Trust. The Koorie Heritage Trust Inc is a not-for-profit Aboriginal community organisation. Donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible.

Personal details:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Suburb: _____ Postcode: _____

Contact number: _____

Email: _____

Gift Details:

In the amount of: \$ _____

Cheque: Please make cheques payable to Koorie Heritage Trust Inc and return with this form to:
Deborah Cheetham, 3 Cunningham Lane, Newport. VIC 3015

In July 2006 Pecan Summer was little more than the title. Ten years on from the autobiographical White Baptist Abba Fan I knew it was time for my next major theatrical effort, but what was it to be?

After almost 20 years as a freelance soprano I felt that I wanted to do something to encourage other Indigenous singers to consider a career in the world of Classical vocal music.

It is well known that our neighbours in New Zealand celebrate their Maori opera singers, Kiri Te Kanawa being, of course, the most famous.

In 1949, a 25 year old Aboriginal tenor emerged from the canefields of Queensland. After gaining his diploma at Melba Conservatorium, he began a career that was to span almost 30 years. His name was Harold Blair. Praised in 1962 for his lead in a popular burlesque of Uncle Tom's Cabin in Melbourne and as Mundit, he sang alongside a very young Lyndon Terracini, in the Aboriginal themed opera, Dalgerie, at the Sydney Opera House in 1973. He made numerous concert appearances.

Harold Blair was the first. It is never easy to be the first.

Harold was a leader at a time when Australia wasn't sure what to do with Aboriginal or Indigenous leadership. But Harold could sing. With his voice and dedication to his professional development he far transcended the status of Flora and Fauna imposed on Aboriginal people prior to 1967.

I also bore this status for the first three years of my life, until the referendum in 1967 allowed me to be counted as a human being and a citizen of this country.

Although I have written other scripts, Pecan Summer was my first libretto. The score is my first operatic score. This is my first opera. It is dramatic and melodic and at times nostalgic, I make no apology for this. It comes from a very deep place, from genetic memory, from life's experiences.

I set out to create a pathway for Indigenous singers who wish to pursue a career in the intensely emotional world of Classical vocal music. I have built it and they have come. Thank you for helping us celebrate the creation of Pecan Summer.

Deborah Cheetham
Soprano/Composer/Yorta Yorta Woman

Pecan Summer™

written and composed by Deborah Cheetham, will premiere at the Westside Performing Arts Centre, Mooroopna, on October 9, 2010.

Mission Voices

The lives of Aboriginal people have been the most tightly regulated in Australia. They have been subject to rules and regulations aimed at controlling every aspect of their lives.

The Aboriginal stations had strict regimes that controlled every aspect of the resident's lives. Not only were there the Board's rules to adhere to, the managers often created their own.

The Aboriginal Protection Board, established in the late 1800's, encouraged confinement of Aboriginal people to the stations, as it made their job of controlling the Aboriginal population easier. The Board produced official lists of all station residents and made it an offence for listed people to leave the stations.

Families could be separated and sent to different stations. If Aboriginal people wanted to visit family on other stations, they required permission from the Board to travel, permission from the station manager they were to visit and if coming from another station, permission from their own manager to leave. Any Government official could request to see their papers and have them arrested if all wasn't in order.

Permission to travel, visit or have family moved to the same station could be refused as punishment for a small infraction of the rules.

Cummeragunja lies on the New South Wales side of Dhungala – the Murray River – on the traditional lands of the Yorta Yorta and the Bangerang peoples. The river is hugely important to the people and has sustained them for thousands of years. (Mission Voices - ABC Koorie Heritage Trust)

In February 1939, after Jack Patten was arrested and removed from the mission for attempting to address the local people, the residents of Cummeragunja made the decision to take a stand against the harsh and oppressive conditions they were living under. At dawn on the 4th of February 200 men, women and children crossed the Dhungala into Victoria and into history. My grandparents, James and Frances Little and their 18 month old son Jimmy, were amongst those who made the exodus.

These events have inspired the story of Pecan Summer. The voices of my ancestors have inspired the music and it is with gratitude and pride I offer this work in honour of their memory. Deborah Cheetham