

Q1. Westwind concerns Yidaki (aka Didgeridoo) master Djalú and his attempt to pass on sacred songlines to the next generation. How did you first come across Djalú and what inspired you to film his story?

I was working on a different film in a different part of Arnhem Land with producer Kate Pappas. We met a gregarious, electric eyed English Didgeridoo and Yidaki (Yidaki is the original Yolngu name for this instrument) collector called Colin Goring (aka Bear Love, deadset legend and master of the world's largest symphonic gong). He had a Didgeridoo gallery in East London close to where I was living at the time and was travelling through Arnhem Land sourcing instruments. I returned to London and a couple months later Colin called me and told me he had met his spiritual guru Djalú Gurruwiwi, I actually had no idea who he was talking about. Colin was bringing Djalú to London and wanted me to make a documentary about the tour. Amongst other things Djalú was intent on playing for the Queen as an act of reconciliation. I met Djalú and his extended family (Dopiya, Jonathan, Balpatji and Jeremy) at Heathrow one early morning, over the next few weeks he told me that he wanted a documentary made that would inspire the next generations back home; so they could see that Balanda treated him really well overseas and they could tread the same path. He also spoke of his wish to bridge the gap between Yolngu (his people) and Balanda (non-indigenous) people.

The performance for the Queen never happened; however, we travelled through mainland Europe together as Djalú worked his magic at different seminars and music festivals to thousands of fans, it was all a revelation to me, I wondered why Djalú wasn't known more broadly as he was an incredibly powerful, talented and charismatic personality. I could see Djalú actively bridging the gap and healing people with his music. We became closer and things grew from there. It was perverse that this Europe trip was a crash course for me in Yolngu ways that I never learned about in Australia, it was clear Djalú's stories and songs were intrinsically linked to his land and I hadn't experienced them together. We talked about how I would have to come to Arnhem Land to his land to learn more, it took a while to get there, but was well worth the wait.

Q2. Westwind examines the life of Djalú and his family in intimate detail. How long did you spend with Djalú and his family before filming this documentary and what approach did you take when planning these intimate shoots?

It took years after the initial Europe trip to get funding to go and visit Djalú. When I finally got there I could sit down with Djalú and the family I hadn't met in Europe and listen to more perspectives on what was happening in their world. Over the years I made a lot of trips up there, I would film constantly and after each trip watched the footage back to study, there was a lot of new information to process before going back for new experiences and to ask more questions. Often Djalú and family would tell me what I should and shouldn't film, Djalú would tell the stories and put on ceremonies he believed were important to capture on film.

As the film has progressed myself, the film producers, Djalú and the family often sat down and talked about the story and where it was going. If I suggested I might bring some new Balanda friends up to meet them, the family was really accommodating. Things evolved and younger members of the family became a lot more vocal and engaged in the process, supporting Djalú's vision. There's no way we could have filmed most of this without the Gurruwiwi's guidance, they've facilitated some incredible experiences.

Q3. You've documented Djalú's journey extensively and captured lots of powerful imagery. What was your approach when editing down the material? What was the integral message of the film that you felt you had to deliver?

We had tonnes of footage, some amazing stuff hit the cutting room floor and we could have told so many other interesting stories, but you have to be a little ruthless in the edit process and keep aligned with the chosen narrative.

I wanted to stay close to a narrative that incorporated the original messages Djalú kept repeating; Djalú wants to heal and inspire the next generations to keep their culture strong and he wants to bring Yolngu and Balanda people closer together, the sound of the Westwind carries the power to do both.

Q4. As a documentarian, you have the rare ability to share important and often lesser-known stories with the wider public, which you've done elegantly crafting Westwind. For those of us who aren't making inspiring documentaries, how can we assist in raising awareness about these issues? What are the next steps you hope your audience take after watching your film?

If I could recommend anything as a Balanda wanting to learn more and if this film is a catalyst for anything, go up and meet Yolngu people, sit down with them on their land, don't be afraid to ask some questions and listen to what they have to say. Buy some Yolngu art and instruments, not simply to consume but because these are objects that carry a lot of the stories you will be asking about, they can help your connection and understanding. A film can't really compete with firsthand experience, particularly when you're talking about connection to land.

Q5. Now that you've finished your first documentary, do you feel the desire to direct another one? What's next for you?

Oh yes! I am already making one that I put on the backburner to finish Westwind. I love documentaries so much that this one is basically a documentary about the importance of documentation.