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# Still We Rise

**World Premiere**

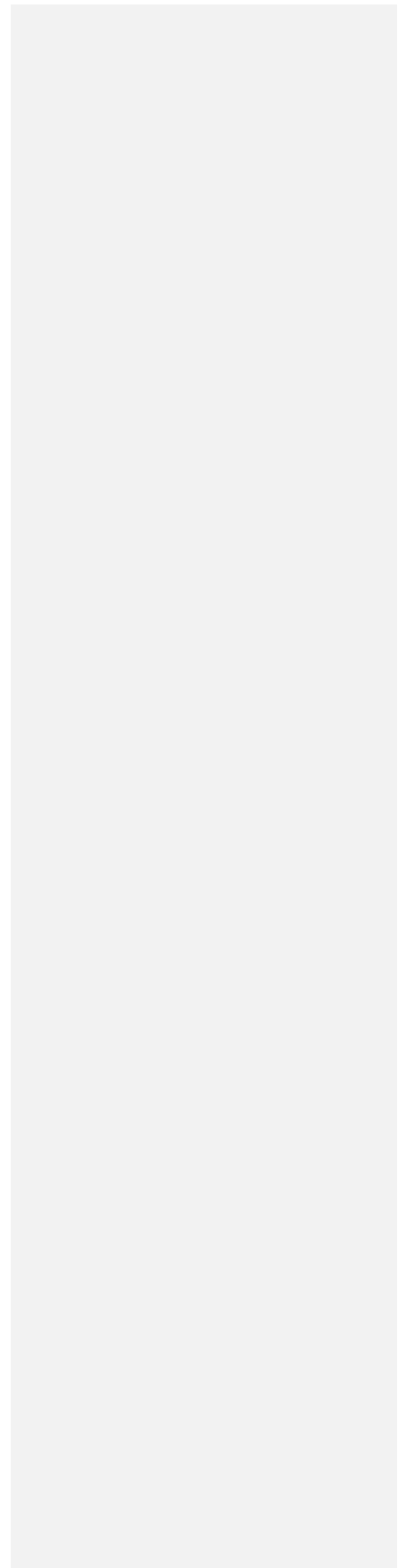
**Thursday 8 December 8.30pm, ABC TV & ABC iview**

## **PRESS KIT**

In 1972, the planting of a beach umbrella by young Aboriginal activists in the lawns opposite Parliament House sparked passion across the country. Sitting strong and proud on Ngunnawal country, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy soon became a marker for justice, uniting people across the nation in the fight for land rights.

Revisiting hours of images and footage from the archives through a First Nations lens, **Still We Rise** is a bold dive into a year of incendiary protest and revolutionary change for First Nations people. Fifty years on, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy is the oldest continuing protest occupation site in the world

and the fight for land justice continues. **Still We Rise** celebrates the young articulate feisty activists who fought so hard to inspire the generations to come.



## Synopsis

In 1972, decades of frustration and protest came to a head when Prime Minister William 'Billy' McMahon, in his long awaited speech on the 'Aboriginal question', dismissed any hope of land rights and provoked outrage.

*"What it really meant was land lease - Aboriginals could lease their own land"*

**Charles 'Chicka' Dixon**

*"Aliens in our own land, so like other aliens, we needed an embassy"*

**Gary Foley**

On January 26, Invasion Day, the nation woke up to Bertie Williams, Billy Craigie, Tony Coorey and Ghillar Michael Anderson under a beach umbrella in front of Parliament House responding to McMahon's land rights policy like with hastily written placards like; '*Which do you choose?? land rights or bloodshed*' and '*Why pay to use our own land*'.

With the Aboriginal activists refusing to move until the issue of land rights had been dealt with, the government suddenly realised it had no law to remove Natives camping on Crown Land.

*"From the first, the Aboriginal Embassy represented the people. It was an embarrassment to the government, the same as the people are"*

**Roberta 'Bobbi' Sykes**

A simple act sparked into one of the most iconic national protests in Australia's history.

**Still We Rise** is a bold dive into 1972, the year for Aboriginal justice. From the halcyon days and visits by the Leader of the Opposition Gough Whitlam to the government ordering in the troops to smash the embassy down. An all-out brawl plays out in front of the cameras, for the world to see. It's not a good look for McMahon and a Coalition that had been in power for 23 years.

Words are the weapon of choice. The fiery speech making of Chicka Dixon, Denis Walker, Bobbi Sykes, Paul Coe, Gary Foley, and John Newfong among so many others. Their words are sharp spears that cut through the passage of time offering prophetic truths. They open the hearts and minds and spirit of others to listen. The articulacy and clarity of their arguments and their ability to throw the media spotlight back on the racism in Australia as riveting as it is disarming. They force the fight for justice for Aboriginal people to national and international attention.

*"Land rights is not a word, it's a living, it's people, to black people it's a living. To white people it's money and they're gonna kill black people one way or another to get that money.*

*That's what land rights means. It means a lot of money. And it means a lot of people that are getting rich off your blood and guts."*

**Denis Walker**

The music of Worimi Composer Leon Rodgers is alongside celebrated artists like King Stingray, Dan Sultan, Mieesha, Electric Fields, Fred Leone and Dhapanbal Yunupingu form the soundtrack to **Still We Rise**. And poems by Oodgeroo Noonuccal are woven through the story. The poems are read by Kaleenah Edwards, great granddaughter of Oodgeroo in Jandai language and Ari Maza Long, grandson of Bob Maza.

This rich soundtrack draws in the context for this incendiary year. The ongoing land rights battles against the might of government, mining, and cattle industries. The forced removal of the people of Mapoon, the claim by the Yirrkala Yolngu people against Nabalco in Arnhem Land and the walk-off of Gurindji at Daguragu-Wattie Creek resisting the control of beef baron, Lord Vestey. A new generation of activists take the fight to the capital cities - 'Smash the Act' campaign in Brisbane, Black Moratoriums in Darwin, Adelaide, Canberra, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, Tent embassies and consulates in Adelaide and Perth. 1972 is a year of collective and national action for land rights and the Tent Embassy in Canberra is at the centre.

Featuring spoken word and song, powerful speeches and poems, bold graphics that cut through with humour, **Still We Rise** captures the urgency, visceral anger, and defiance of those seeking change and the urgency of their activism resonates across 50 years to our own contemporary reality.

**Credits: Writer/ Director John Harvey, Producer Anna Grieve, Editor Patrick McCabe, Composer Leon Rodgers, ABC Executive Producer & Head of Indigenous Kelrick Martin.**

**A Tamarind Tree Pictures Production in association with VicScreen, financed with the assistance of Screen Australia's First Nations Department. Developed and produced in association with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.**

Anna Grieve 7/12/2022 4:25 AM

Comment [1]: Need logos

## JOHN HARVEY WRITER/ DIRECTOR STATEMENT

One of the things that first struck me about the story of the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy was how this was not a story of one, but of many - of First Nations people who lived in cities, rural towns, missions and remote communities across the country. In approaching the film, I was particularly interested in the idea that this is a story that would be told from a first hand account of those who were there at the time. First Nations people have been viewed, studied, photographed and filmed from a colonial gaze for a very long time. The first film shot in Australia was in the Torres Strait in the late 1800s. The first colour film was *Jedda*. I wanted to see how I could explore the archive to bring an Indigenous perspective.

As a filmmaker I'm indebted to those young activists who in the early 1970s not only fought hard for land justice, but also discovered the power of the screen and stage to tell our stories, our way and in doing so advocate for our communities. In making **Still We Rise**, I wanted to be true to that energy of the time as we dived deep into the archive to review, reimagine and reclaim these documented accounts of history to bring a First Nations lens to the material. Being mainly sourced from the ABC news archive I kept in mind Werner Herzog's words of "*facts do not constitute the truth*".

I was inspired by First Nation books on history such as *Power and the Passion: Our Ancestors Returned Home* (Faulkhead, Berg et al) and *The Aboriginal Tent Embassy* (Foley, Schaap, Howell). These books contained chapters from writers, interviews, or works of art. They expressed an idea that truth lies beyond a single narrative, veering away from the western notion of the authoritative voice and leaning into First Nation oral story traditions. Raoul Peck's *I Am Not Your Negro* inspired a poetic approach to the archival material.

With a licence to tell this story in a poetic way, we could find a deeper truth to resonate from the archive beyond its original purpose as news footage. There are of course inherent issues within the archive such as: cultural bias; who gets to have voice; who doesn't; and the portrayal of First Nation women whose voices were often not included. By finding the right form, we could begin to address some of these issues within the film.

Through *Oodgeroo Noonuccal's* poetry and the comedy of Black Theatre's *Basically Black* we embrace art and story as an act of resistance. There are many funny moments in the film embracing joy as an act of resistance and resilience. By approaching the archival material with a contemporary First Nations lens we brought an Indigenous composition across the work that creates a musical foundation for pieces from some of our most celebrated contemporary artists. And in doing so, I think we bring a contemporary First Nations voice that honors the spirit and energy of 1972 and the remarkable achievement for those who fought for land justice.

It was amazing that the actors who recite Oodgeroo's poems are Kaleenah Edwards, the great granddaughter of Oodgeroo and Ari Maza Long, the grandson of Bob Maza. There's music from Dan Sultan, a descendent of Vincent Lingiari and music from Dhapanbal Yunupingu, daughter of famous lead singer of Yothu Yindi, Dr Yunpingu.

**Still We Rise** is not the first or only film of this story - there are many. And I acknowledge films such as: Allesandro Cavadini's *Ningla A-Na*; a landmark independent film made in 1972, Ivan Sen's *Embassy Days* and David Sandy and Frances Peters-Little's *Tent Embassy* both made for the ABC. We're fortunate to have Dr Gary Foley as a Consultant, who participated in the 1972 Aboriginal Embassy demonstrations and has a Doctorate in History. The Aboriginal Embassy still stands today, and is the longest continuous protest in the world. We acknowledge all those who have stood up for land justice and the rights of First Nations people. We hope that **Still We Rise** contributes to this narrative and helps to inspire the next generation within our communities to continue to stand up and rise for land justice.

## **ANNA GRIEVE PRODUCER STATEMENT**

We knew this was a challenge, to bring this story to the screen from a First Nations first person perspective with national context. There are many fierce words, speeches, films and books written about the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. This film, focusing on the pivotal first year in the struggle, offers an immersive storytelling experience.

What an opportunity - with the incredible support of ABC Archives Producer John Williams and Head of Indigenous Kelrick Martin we were able to take a deep dive into the ABC archives. We could embrace the free style filming and political energy of those times. Creating a story like this is only possible with access from multiple perspectives. We sought out the support of many - our Consultant Dr Gary Foley, the families of the activists and the many others who willingly offered their knowledge, permission and encouragement.

We were a small team but collectively we leapt tall buildings to do justice to the story of the embassy and the ongoing struggle for land rights. **Still We Rise** is, as we all hope and intended - a provocative, incendiary visual poem to inspire the next chapter in the ongoing struggle.

The film demonstrates how important it is that the archive, our collective memory, sees the sunlight and that there are more opportunities for the new generation of 21st century filmmakers to interpret and interrogate the record of their history over the last century. Producing this film has convinced us of the need for an archive access overhaul across all the national institutions that hold our collective memories.

Understandably there is a responsibility for the archive to be seen only with permissions. We applaud the ABC initiative to repatriate archives to the community so that the footage can be seen with their approval. There must be more opportunity so all of us can share and learn and be enriched by our history.

It has been a joy and privilege to work on this film, in such a fulfilling creative partnership with John Harvey. Working with the archives has been a constant reminder of the struggle for justice for First Nations people and a sobering experience. But it was a revelation to see how many of these activists, still in their 20s, were so articulate, outspoken, standing up for their rights without fear. We knew our responsibility was to honour their deeds and what they stood for, especially now in an increasingly divided world.

BIOS

**Writer/Director - JOHN HARVEY**

John is a director, writer and producer across screen and stage. In film, he co-directed the feature documentary and series OFF COUNTRY (NITV). He directed and co-produced the series KUTCHA'S KOORIOKE (NITV). He has written and directed short dramas: KATELE (Mudskipper); OUT OF RANGE; and WATER. He produced SPEAR; was a producer on THE WARRIORS (ABC) series; produced SAND for omnibus feature film THE TURNING. In theatre, John has written THE RETURN; HEART IS A WASTELAND; and co-wrote BLACK TIES. He directed A LITTLE PIECE OF HEAVEN. Commissioned by ACMI, he created CANOPY, a multi-channel video installation. John is the Creative Director of Brown Cabs.

**Producer- ANNA GRIEVE**

Anna produces documentaries with a particular focus on history. As Film Australia Executive Producer she was responsible for a production slate including DHAKIYARR VS THE KING ( Sundance World Cinema) MABO – THE NATIVE TITLE REVOLUTION winner of the UN Peace Prize for online and Logie winner WHO KILLED DR BOGLE & MRS CHANDLER? She produced Feature Documentary THE FAMILY and THE CULT OF THE FAMILY SERIES (ABC). As one of the partners of Tamarind Tree Pictures (along with Danielle MacLean and Steven McGregor) Anna has co-produced CROKER ISLAND EXODUS, CARRY THE FLAG, LOOKY LOOKY HERE COMES COOKY and then series, KUTCHA'S KOORIOKE.

*Composer - LEON RODGERS*

Worimi composer, Leon grew up playing bass in bands around the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane areas developing a love for creating music and exploring unique sounds. After moving to Melbourne and collaborating with local film makers, he also studied sound production at RMIT. He went on to score a number of Australian short films including WATER (directed by frequent collaborator John Harvey) which played at film festivals around the world. Leon is the 2021/2022 recipient of the David Page fellowship at Bangarra Dance Theatre and currently composing for a 2023 production YULDEA

**Editor - PATRICK McCABE**

Patrick has over 15 years of industry experience, editing scripted and unscripted screen projects in the cutting rooms of Melbourne. Selected feature film credits include BECAUSE WE HAVE EACH OTHER (MIFF premiere 2022) and GREEN LIGHT (Stan. 2019). He was the editor of both seasons of KUTCHA'S KOORIOKE (NITV) His work has resonated with Australian and International audiences via theatrical release, top-tier film festivals, ABC TV, Network Ten, SBS, Stan and many Vimeo Staff Picks. In 2014 Patrick was nominated for Best Editing in a Short Film at the Australian Screen Editors Guild Awards. Other industry recognition includes two AACTA award winning online series for ABC TV - STRONG WOMEN (2021) and DEADLOCK (2018).



The Aboriginal Tent Embassy protest, Canberra 30 July 1972 SMH Picture

*Woman 3rd from left - Pat Eatock, Woman 4th from left - Cheryl Buchanan, Woman 5th from left - Bobbi Sykes, Man 6th from left - Gilliar Michael Anderson*