



# David Arden

## **Kokatha/Gunditjmara Songman**

David Arden is a Prominent Australian Musician and Songwriter of Kokatha/Gunditjmara heritage. over the course of his Four-Decade career, he has collaborated with various legendary First Nation and Non-First Nation artists, leaving a significant mark on the Australian Music Scene.



**Following is an overview of his career highlights and notable achievements:**

### **Early Career:**

In 1986, David Arden was the frontman for the Koori Youth Band, which recorded its first EP live album as part of the Rock Against Racism Volume 2. This marked the beginning of his musical journey. Collaborations: David went on to work with various acclaimed First Nation artists in Australia, including the Hard Time Band, Archie Roach and the Altogether Band, and Bart Willoughby and the Mixed Relation Band.

### **Archie Roach & Ruby Hunter:**

He worked very closely with late Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter from 1990 to 1994 and again in 2006 to 2010, David served as a key guitarist and vocalist for the Archie and Ruby. He toured nationally and internationally with Archie and contributed his own song "So Young" to Archie's second album, "Jamu Dreaming." David performed So Young at the AFL's Dreamtime at The G in front of a crowd of 70,000 people in 2014.

### **Albums:**

David Arden has released several albums during his career, including "Koori Youth Band - Rock Against Racism Volume 2" "Rainbow Man" (1996), which celebrated the Kirrae Wurrung elders from the Gunditjmarra country and "Kookatha/Gunditjmarra Clan" (2007). David's Fourth album "Close My Eyes" (2016) was dedicated to family and the "Red Desert Man" album (2020) and "Meerta" EP (2023) delved into his family's journey across generations and celebrated the culture, customs, and language of the Gunditjmarra, Arrernte and Kokatha peoples.

### **Black Arm Band -Musical Director:**

In 2006, David Arden served as the Musical Director and co-founder for The Black Arm Band. The Black Arm Band performed at various key events and venues, including the Melbourne International Arts Festival, the Sydney Opera House and London's Royal Festival Hall. The Black Arm Band ensemble was made up of the most respected names in Australian music industry ; Archie Roach, Ruby Hunter, Bart Willoughby, Stephen Pigram, Carol Fraser, Peter Rotumah, Kutcha Edwards, Liz Cavanagh, Kev Carmody, Mark Atkins, Lou Bennett, Andy Albert's, Joe Geia, Robbie Bundle and David Arden. These artists were joined by non-Aboriginal musicians that have added their own voices to first nation musical history including Paul Kelly and Shane Howard.

### **Additional key artistic roles:**

David also took on the role of Musical Director for other various shows, including "Nukkan Ya Ruby" (2010) which celebrated the legacy of the late Ruby Hunter at Sydney Festival's opening night at the Domain with an impressive line-up including Archie Roach, their son Amos Roach, Renee Geyer, Paul Kelly, Emma Donovan, Uncle Jimmy Little, Tiddas, Dan Sultan, Shellie Morris, Radical Son, Kutcha Edwards, Katie Noonan, Paul Grabowsky, Shane Howard and more.

He musically directed "A Fight For Survival" (2021) a political cabaret performed at the Yirramboi Festival, which celebrated the strength of the Northlands community led by activist Gary Foley in their successful and epic fight against the Victorian State Government.



### **Song Releases:**

David Arden released singles like "Freedom Called," written in collaboration with Paul Kelly, which acknowledged the often-forgotten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander military service. He performed this song at the 2013. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dawn Ceremony Service at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

### **Ongoing Performances and Tributes:**

David Arden has remained active in the music industry and continues to perform and collaborate with various artists. He has participated in tributes to legendary musicians like Uncle Selwyn Burns and Archie Roach.

In 2022, David Arden performed at the Songlines Music Aboriginal Corporation who presented a special NAIDOC Show - Get Up, Stand Up, Show Up & Shake A Leg: Celebrating and acknowledging a special tribute to legendary Yorta Yorta Songman, guitarist and songwriter Uncle Selwyn Burns @ Fairfax Theatre at the Art Centre Melbourne. David was joined by Daniel Jauregui, Brad Brown, Chris Cameron, Jake Amy, and Deadly Choir Singers: Monica Weightman, Deniece Hudson, Monica McDonald performing David's new song: "Call It Out"

On December 15 2022 he worked closely with the Archie Roach Foundation and he performed at the State Memorial Service for Uncle Archie Roach at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne along with a prestigious line up including: Shane Howard, Goanna, Kutcha Edwards, Paul Kelly, Tiddas, Emma Donovan, Dan Sultan, Shellie Morris, Paul Grabowsky, Fred Leone, Deborah Cheetham, David Leha, Deline Briscoe, Amos Roach, The Pertame Children's Choir, Dhungala Children's Choir, Nan cy Bates, Nola Lauch and many more. Plus he has performed tributes to Uncle Archie at the Port Fairy Folk Festival, St Kilda Festivals, and at the 'A Bend in the River: A Tribute to Archie Roach - AC' VIVID Festival in Sydney.

### **Touring:**

He has performed and toured extensively locally, nationally and has performed internationally in various countries, including the UK, Ireland and Fiji.

### **Australian Music Vault Hall of Fame:**

In 2023 he was inducted into the Arts Centres Australian Music Vault Hall of Fame with an interview by Daniel James for the Long Play series. Arden reflects on his rich family heritage, experiencing racism, incarceration, and the beauty of keeping his mobs' storytelling alive in song.

### **MEERTA**

David Arden was commissioned to produce "MEETRA – Rise Up! The Ballad of James Arden" which premiered at the Yirramboi Festival along with a release of the MEERTA EP (2023). The MEETRA Show was presented at The Pavilion, Arts Centre Melbourne, supported by the Wilin Centre, on the 11th and 12th May with an orchestra of students from the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. The show powerfully tells the story of his great-grandfather, who was the keeper of tribal knowledge of the Gunditjmarra peoples. The MEETRA show is planned to tour around Australia, providing an in-depth look into the five generations of David Arden's family journey from tribal to urban life.

### **Summary:**

David Arden's long and significant career is marked by his dedication to celebrating and preserving First Nation culture and history through music. His collaborations with other artists and his ongoing performances have made a significant impact on the Australian music scene, and he continues to be a vital figure in promoting and sharing First Nation stories and traditions through his music.



## **David Arden – Past and Previous Performances / Show Cases and Touring Experience:**

- In 1985 to 1987, David Arden was the front Man for the Band - Koori Youth Band which toured nationally.
- In 1988, Performed in the band - Mixed Relation Band with Bart Willoughby at the Building Bridges at the Bondi Pavilion in 'N.S.W' and RMIT University Storey Hall.
- In 1989, Performed in the band with Archie Roach and Altogether Band at the Building Bridges) in 'N.S.W, Bondi Pavilion.
- In 1990 to 1994, Archie Roach, Ruby Hunter and David Arden toured both Nationally and Internationally.
- In 1996 to 1997, David toured internationally to West Belfast and the UK.
- In 2006, David Arden was a founding member and Musical Director & Performer for The Black Arm Band, premiering as part of the Melbourne International Arts Festival. Murundak (alive"- Woirurrung\*).
- In 2007, Archie Roach, Shane Howard and Dave Arden toured Nationally and Internationally for the Liyam Ngarn Showcase.
- In 2007 to 2010, David Arden performed with Black Arm Band, Hidden Republic, premiered at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, it charts the unique journey of since its inception in 2009 from the Sydney Opera House and London's Royal Festival Hall to remote communities in the Northern Territory.
- In 2010, David Arden was a Musical Director & Performed for Nukkan Ya Ruby (See Ya Later Ruby) it was a tribute to the late Ruby Hunter at Sydney Festival's opening night at the Domain.
- In 2013, Performed his single release of Freedom Called written in conjunction with leading Australian singer/songwriter Paul Kelly, which acknowledges the often-forgotten military service over the past 100 years. David was invited to the Dawn Ceremony Service at the Australian War Memorial Canberra.
- In 2014, Performed his song So Young at the AFL, Dreamtime at The G in front of a crowd of 70,000 people at the 'MCG'
- In 2015, Performed at The Cobargo Folk Festival, NSW.
- In 2016, Performed at the Port Fairy Festival, VIC.
- In 2017, Performed at The Ruby Hunter Festival, SA.
- In 2018, Performed at The Murray Bridge Town Hall, SA.
- In 2020, Performed at Belgrave Survival Day, VIC.
- In 2021, Performed at Share The Spirit Festival at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.
- In 2021, David Arden Musical Directed & Performed A Fight For Survival the Northlands Collective Production at the Meat Market - North Melbourne, premiering as part of the Yirramboi Festival.
- In 2021, Performed at the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council Aboriginal Victoria Department of Premier and Cabinet.
- In 2021, Performed at the Victorian Seniors Festival, VIC.
- In 2022, Performed at the Belgrave Survival Day, VIC.
- In 2022, Performed at the Smith Street Dreaming Festival, VIC.
- In 2023, Performed at The Port Fairy Folk Festival, VIC.
- In 2023, Premiered The MEERTA – The Ballad of James Arden Show, The Showcase was commissioned by Yirramboi Festival on the 11th and 12th May, at The Pavilion, Arts Centre Melbourne, with the Wilin Centre, and the Students Orchestra from the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music.
- In 2023, The Long Walk Foundation Concert – at the Alexandra Garden, Melbourne
- In 2023, Performing at the 'A Bend in the River: A Tribute to Archie Roach - AC' VIVID Festival, Sydney.
- In 2024, Performed at Share The Spirit Festival at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.
- In 2024, Food and Wine Festival.
- In 2025, Performed at The Port Fairy Folk Festival, VIC.
- In 2025, Regional Victorian tour: Healesville, Bairnsdale, Yea, Shepparton, Warrnambool, Colac, Portland, Bendgio & Traralgon.



# LINK

**DAVID ARDEN - MEERTA SHOW**



**LIGHTHOUSE THEATRE - WANRRAMBOOL 2025**

**DAVID ARDEN PERFORMED AT SHARE THE SPIRIT  
FESTIVAL AT THE SIDNEY MYER MUSIC BOWL.**



**DAVID ARDEN INDUCTED IN THE  
AUSTRALIAN MUSIC VAULT 2023**



**MEERTA INTERVIEW 2023**



**YOU' RE GOT TAGGED - 2022 Mini Documentary  
Series Presented by Dardi Munwurro**



**SO YOUNG - 2014**

**DREAMTIME AT THE MCG**



**FREEDOM CALLED (Official Video)**

**Feat: PAUL KELLY - 2013**



**LIVE IN TWO WORLDS**

**Documentary - 2011**



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