

Radical change is coming



The Radical Son band gets ready to fly by charter plane to the remote NT community of Wadeye for the recent Yidiyi Festival – located about an hour's flight, west of Darwin.

By LIINA FLYNN



JUST to be clear, Radical Son (aka David Lehu) is not an entertainer. With a voice as deep as the ocean and as soulful as a church choir, he's out to see some "proppa change".

"What makes me unique as an artist is that I'm not out there to make people feel good," he told the *Koori Mail*.

"I'm out for some proppa change and I don't see it coming.

Old ways

"Let's talk about going back to our old ways.

"Our songs were about teaching people the next lesson – and it's all been monetised now.

"I see music as a deeply cultural thing, but to be an artist, you have to apply for funding to arts funding bodies – and the people who decide who gets funded decide on which voices they think need to be heard."

Who is Radical Son?

The big man, with a big voice, has also had a big life.

He's been in prison, found strength in music and already has two albums under his belt.

He's worked with some big names like the late Uncle Archie Roach and Emma Donovan.

When it comes to words to describe the seasoned performer, he's keen to not be categorised.

"I have a Tongan dad and a Kamillaroi mum who I was raised with," he said.

"She was the eldest of seven and was raised off Country. She was sent away from Country and taken out of school at an early age.

"When people write about me, they write that I'm part this and part that, or that my music is this genre – but I am so much more than that.

"I'm thinking about removing

the Aboriginal and the Tongan and I'd like them to introduce me without saying I'm an artist, because I'm so much more than these labels.

"Labels are like teams and people support some and some want nothing to do with it.

"I'd like my songs to be for everyone – what's wrong with that?"

Until you call my name

His latest song *Until you call my name* is described as a song that delves into gratitude and the power of love.

As he sings in the song's music video clip, the raw power that emanates from his face shows many emotions.

It's a deeply moving song, not outwardly political – and full of metaphors.

He insists it will be interpreted differently by different people, but it's definitely not for entertaining.

"I sing from the heart and I hope that comes across when I sing," he said.

The song includes lyrics 'I hear you call my name / Wanting to engage / We're all finding our way / We're coping with the struggle'.

The song is the second single from his new album *Bilambiyal – The Learning*, which will be released next year.

It's been described as a 'soul record' – an album about personal survival; that touches on a troubled past and shares 'lessons learnt and an act of guidance for those who follow.'

Wadeye

Radical Son and his band performed recently in the remote NT community Wadeye at the Yidiyi concert.

It's a community where locals are again embracing traditional culture and ceremony – despite the problems that the modern world has brought to their way of life.

"Many years ago I came here with the Jimmy Little Foundation



Pictured top left: Radical Son band meets Wadeye TO Margaret Perdjert on Country at Wadeye. Bottom left: Radical Son meets Wadeye TO Steven Bundock. Above: Radical Son on stage at the Yidiyi Festival concert in Wadeye.

and they were pushing the healthy eating campaign.

"Wadeye back then only had one shop. Now, as far as infrastructure, things haven't changed much.

Traditional culture

"Coming to communities like Wadeye, we think we have something to teach, but we bring so much shit from the cities," Radical Son said.

"I have a fantasy that we can live by laws that our people used to live by and prevent a lot of the problems we see.

"Having men's and women's business is a fundamental part of many cultures – when a boy was of age, they would remove them from the women.

"People bag out Aboriginal

people saying we have been here for thousands of years and have not progressed. But to me if it's not broken, don't fix it."

"All our Dreamtime stories talk about creatures, animals and people and how we were doing the wrong things and punished for it.

"We need to strive to not do those things always... but it's harder to do right things, because there's so much material wealth to fight over.

The struggle

"We are all divided – even Aboriginal people are against each other so much, it's no wonder the government can get away with so much.

"We are too busy fighting each other.

"To go back to our own laws –

think that was the best thing we have to offer the rest of the world, but for some reason we are ignoring it."

"I heard a spiritual teaching story about how it's the aggressor, not the victim, who needs to be helped the most.

"Most of us think it's the victim that needs the most help but in this system, we isolate the perpetrator and send them into a prison – and that turns into other problems."

The future

With a message of hope and to keep working toward change, Radical Son said he is grateful and still striving.

"I'll keep going," he said. "I keep releasing good product and being invited to play shows like at Wadeye is a privilege."