

Ruby Hunter

Musician and Aboriginal Rights Activist

Aboriginal singer-song writer Ruby Hunter passed away on February 17 at her home in south west Victoria. Her music dealt with her personal history, Indigenous struggles, and social and women's issues. Hunter was the first indigenous woman to be signed to a major record label.

Ruby Hunter was born in 1955 by a billabong in the Riverland region of South Australia. At the age of eight she was forcibly removed at night from her extended family and told that she was being taken to the circus. For years afterward Hunter was placed in various foster homes and institutions and suffered the many traumas associated with being separated from her Aboriginal family. In her late teens she met Archie Roach at the Salvation Army drop-in centre in Adelaide. At that stage Roach had not begun his music career but played the guitar and sang. Hunter was inspired by his music, learnt to play the guitar and began to write her own songs. The couple began a family together and later married.

In 1990 Archie Roach recorded his first album, *Charcoal Lane*, produced by Paul Kelly and Steve Connolly. One of the highlights of the album was the track *Down City Streets*, written by Ruby Hunter. In 1992 and 1993 Hunter toured with Roach in America, London and Berlin. In 1994 she released her debut album, *Thoughts Within*. Produced by Jen Anderson, the album featured Archie Roach, Tiddas, David Bridie, Andrew Pendlebury and Helen Mountfort and was nominated for a number of awards. The album launched her career as a performer and songwriter in her own right. Hunter continued to tour with Roach both nationally and internationally in the next decades and released her second album, *Feeling Good*, in May, 2000.

Hunter's songs and music reflect her personal history, women's issues, social issues and indigenous issues. In 2000 she appeared with Roach in *The Land of Little Kings*, a feature length documentary about the experiences of indigenous Australians who were removed from their families as part of the "stolen generation". In 2001 Hunter made her acting debut as the tracker's wife in the Australian film *One Night the Moon*.

Hunter was awarded the Australian Centenary Medal in the 2001 Queen's New Years Honours List for her services to the Indigenous community, particularly through music and film.

Hunter was a founding member of the Black Arm Band, a band dedicated to the spirit of reconciliation. In 2004 she collaborated with Paul Grabowsky, Archie Roach and the Australian Art Orchestra to Produce *Ruby's Story*, a musical documenting Hunter's own life and search for identity. *Ruby's Story* won the 2004 Deadly Award for Excellence in Film and Theatrical Score.

In an interview with the ABC's Talking Heads in 2008, she revealed her proudest moment was when she released her first album, *Thoughts Within*, in 1994.

"I asked one of my brothers to name this album. He came back, I said: 'So what do you think, brother?' He said: 'Oh, you know what sister? I never knew you had those thoughts within'," she said.

In her lifetime, Hunter was nominated for two ARIA Awards - best Indigenous release and best blues and roots album.

<http://www.musicaustralia.org/apps/MA?function=showDetail¤tMapsRecord=ANL:MA~991472&itemSeq=1&total=29&returnFunction=viewTheme&>