

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6630

Cummins, Marlene

Occupation Aboriginal rights activist, Activist, Musician, Radio presenter

Summary

Marlene Cummins is one of Australia's foremost blues musicians, a lifelong Aboriginal rights activist and the subject of Rachel Perkin's 2014 documentary *Black Panther Woman*.

Details

Marlene Cummins was born in the Queensland town of Cunnamulla, to Guguyelandji heritage on her father's side and Woppaburra on her Mother's.

At 17 Cummins had made her way to Brisbane and joined the Australian Black Panther Party, the first chapter in the country. The party's 'Ten-Point Platform Program' led to the establishment of the Aboriginal Medical and Legal Services, a childcare program and a free breakfast program for schoolchildren. Cummins notes that the latter two programs were largely run by women.

Rachel Perkin's 2014 documentary, *Black Panther Woman*, depicts Cummins' reflections on her time as a Panther, her career as a musician and radio show host, as well as her attendance at the New York International Black Panther Conference. Additionally, Cummins reveals the abusive intra-party attitudes that prevailed towards female Panthers at the time, and the pressure felt to stay silent in order to protect the Aboriginal rights movement. She has remained vocal about violence perpetrated against Indigenous women in Australia, and the double minority burden that precludes justice for these crimes.

Cummins incorporates these themes and personal experiences into her first album, *Koori Woman Blues*, the culmination of her long career as a songwriter, saxophone player and blues musician. Cummins additionally has worked as an actor, appearing in a short film *Hush* for the 2007 Indigenous Film Festival, and recently in *Black Drop Effect* at the 2020 Sydney Festival.

For more than twenty years Cummins has hosted her show *Marloo's Blues* on Koori Radio. In 2009 she won the Broadcaster of the Year award for her work at the Deadly Awards.

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
[CUMMINS, Marlene](#)

[The Black Panther Party of Australia Volume 2](#)

[CHILLY, Iris Suzanne Colleen \(aka CHILLY aka CHILE, Sue \) Volume 1](#)

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)
[Aboriginal Biographical Index Entry, Personal Subject: Cummins, Marlene.](#)

Author Details

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