

Ringtone

Duration: 30 minutes

Languages: English and Yolgnu matha

Filmed on location in Gapuwiyak, northeast Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, Australia

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<http://miyarrkamedia.com>

Synopses: EPG, one line, mid-length

225 character synopsis for EPG (210 characters)

A personalised ringtone on a mobile phone says a lot about you. In a once-remote Aboriginal community in northern Australia, ringtones reveal surprisingly rich and amusing insights into lives and relationships.

One liner (21 words)

In a once-remote Aboriginal community in northern Australia, personalised ringtones on mobile phones reveal surprisingly rich insights into lives and relationships.

Mid-length (157 words)

In a world where everyone has a mobile phone, a personalised ringtone says a lot about you.

Welcome to a once-remote Aboriginal community in northern Australia, where individual ringtones reveal rich insights into lives and relationships.

From animal calls and birdsong to 80s hip hop artists and gospel tunes, a Yolngu ringtone always comes with a great story. It might be the music a young woman dances to in a city nightclub, or a clan song invoking memories of ancestors and country.

Yolngu people are renowned as first-rate storytellers with a keen sense of humour. In this collaboratively-made film, various individuals talk directly to camera as they reveal the perils of their new connectivity.

It's all too familiar as they explain how easily mobiles get lost or broken and how they bring benefits as well as intrusions and demands.

A beautiful, funny and surprising film about the place of mobile phones in a contemporary Australian indigenous community.

Alternative (academic version, 90 words)

Yolngu Aboriginal families offer glimpses into their lives and relationships through their choice of ringtones. From ancestral clan songs to 80s hip hop artists and local gospel tunes, these songs connect individuals into a world of deep and enduring connection. And yet, simultaneously the phone opens Yolngu to new vectors of vulnerability and demand. Made collaboratively by a new media arts collective of indigenous and non-indigenous filmmakers, the film offers a beautiful

and surprisingly moving meditation on the connections and intrusions brought by mobile phones to a once-remote Aboriginal community.

About Miyarrka Media

Miyarrka Media is a media arts collective of Yolgnu (Aboriginal) and balanda (non-Aboriginal) creatives. It is based in the community of Gapuwiyak in northeast Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory.

Founded in 2009 to enable Yolngu to creatively use new media technologies at a community level, it is dedicated to opening new professional and creative opportunities for digital artists and filmmakers. Whenever possible, it films ceremonies for family members, as well as making installations and documentaries for wider audiences. Members collaborate at all points during production, from concept through to editing and at the final stages of each project.

Miyarrka Media operates under the auspices of Gapuwiyak Culture and Arts Aboriginal Corporation.

Ringtone directors

Ringtone directors, Jennifer Deger and Paul Gurrumuwuy, were among the co-founders of Miyarrka Media.

Dr Jennifer Deger is an anthropologist and filmmaker based at the Cairns Institute of James Cook University. Originally trained a radio and television producer, she has worked for more than 20 years with the Yolngu community in Gapuwiyak on experimental media and art projects. The recipient of a number of research fellowships, Jennifer has published widely on indigenous aesthetics, film, art and photography, including her book *Shimmering Screens: Making Media in an Aboriginal Community* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

Paul Gurrumuwuy is a senior member the Dhalwangu clan from northeast Arnhem Land. During the past 30 years, he has travelled extensively: initially as a performer, then as creative director of the Yalakun Dancers, on tours to Europe and Asia. He has also worked as an actor in a number of Hollywood and Australian films.

Directors' statements:

Paul Gurrumuruwuy Wunungmurra

We know how to use new technologies like phones, websites and computers, to gather new things together. Yet, there's still identity and strong Yolgnu law.

Long ago the old people used lettersticks to deliver stories and messages, about ceremonies; sending messengers by foot. Then the bush radio arrived. We started talking on it: "hello", "over"... like that.

Then the technology changed to the phone. The phone made things easy. It was easy for anyone to learn how to use it: old people, kids, but especially the young people.

It's not just good things like the dancing and videos happening through the phones. The phones are bringing other, foreign problems. This is a problem for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Bad things come through the phone too. But with this project we want to show how smart our young people are; how they have shown us old people how to use this new technology to connect to family and the land, and to the spirits that always call us home.

Jennifer Deger

As soon as mobile phones with cameras arrived in Arnhem Land, Yolngu started filming themselves. The mobile phone brought a whole revolution in indigenous media production. All of a sudden people were making their own little films, sharing files, making fantastic, decorated digital content using their phones.

After many years of studying indigenous media and working collaboratively with people on projects, suddenly people were doing it for themselves and didn't need the anthropologists anymore. So I talked to my Yolngu colleagues and they suggested that maybe we could do an exhibition of this phone-made media. We were in the process of doing that when it occurred to me that it might be good to do something on the poetics of the ringtone.

So the idea, the name, just came to me and, with it, the whole idea of how the film could look.

And at that time my nephew Oliver (Lanzenberg), from New York, who's a cinematographer, was coming to visit Gapuwiyak for the first time because he had heard about the place for his whole life, but never had a chance to visit. He was coming on the basis that maybe we'd find something to do and maybe we'd film something or maybe we wouldn't. We'd just have to play it by ear. And the

night before we flew out (of Cairns, to Gapuwiyak), we were walking down the road to a friend's house for dinner and that's when it came to me: Ringtone. I told Oliver and he said "I can see it", suggesting we keep it nice and domestic, filming in people's houses.

Arriving in Gapuwiyak, we met with the rest of Miyarrka Media and I proposed Ringtone. And people got it straight away. They said "yes, that's great, we can go here, here and here" and seriously, within a few hours, we were filming.

The whole device of ringing someone and their phone ringing and them answering was developed between us all. People would say "let's go and film that person, because they've got a great ringtone". We'd pull up at their house and the team would go and talk with them and ask if they wanted to be a part of this film and mostly they'd say yes. Some said no, being a bit shy. The people who offered to be part of it were explained the project in Yolngu matha, the local language. We would ask Oliver where he wanted to seat people in the context of their house and then when we were ready to roll, usually Enid (Gurunulmiwuy), who was the producer, would call that person on her phone and off we'd go. Mostly we did the whole thing in one or two takes.

People were having fun and the people whose stories we recorded were relaxed - in the main - and there was a great diversity in the stories that people told.

During the editing process, the more we got into the "fine grain" translations, the more I realised just how beautiful this material was and how this very simple style of filmmaking actually allowed people to tell very particular stories; just gently filling out some aspects of their lives. I was thrilled how easily it worked. It's the easiest film project I've ever been involved with.

This is a film made by a particular family and everyone in it is within their close family networks. That's how people get things done within Yolngu society - whether it's organising a ritual or in everyday life: people work very closely with family networks. So while everyone is related at some level, there are closer networks that people rely on all the time, so when people were deciding who we should go to, it wasn't just "oh yeah, Joe Bloggs down the road who I call auntie or uncle". The people featured are close relatives who felt comfortable with participating in a family project.

This film conveys a degree of complexity and emotional richness that I could never achieve in my writing and among the reasons I went into indigenous media in the first place was with the idea that new media technologies would enable Aboriginal people to speak for themselves. And they do - in all kinds of ways. In this film, the fact that Yolngu are so comfortable looking down the lens of a camera, anticipating locking eyes with someone else. It's really powerful and moving and quite simple at one level and inordinately complicated at another.

Yolngu certainly recognised the phone as a creative multimedia device much quicker than I did, and probably quicker than any media academics did. While scholars were writing about new forms of linguistic connection, Yolngu were already making the connection between images and sounds with their phones. I bought my mobile when Yolngu first got their mobile phones so I could keep in contact with them. I'd resisted for a couple of years.

As soon as I went to Gapuwiyak, my phone was set up with a dedicated ring tone from Bangana my Yolngu brother who adopted me, singing the song of the ancestral lightning snake who, on tasting the first surge of fresh water of the wet season, rises up and spits lightning into the air and calls to the other lightning snakes.

This poetic of call and response was directly put into my phone, so that when it rang, I would listen and already be connected and responsive to what it was that my Yolngu family needed of me in that phone call.

I've been standing in the queue at the bank in Darwin when (co-director) Paul's (Paul Gurrumuwuy) phone has rung and I've seen him stop and listen and I've watched his face change as he connects to that song. It doesn't happen every time, but I've seen it. And his mind goes back to that land - as he describes - and then he'll answer. So it really is about a desire to tune oneself in to these relationships that are full of memory and love and meaning and longing - through the phone.

And then, as Paul says, if you get sick of that one, you put in another one.

Credits

Participants

(in order of appearance, with their ringtones)

Paul Gurrumuruwuy Wunungmurra

“Ngarra ga marttji djiwarrlil”

[I’m going to heaven]

Mike Yamitjawuy Wunungmurra

“This Ain’t Livin” Tupac

Margaret Dhamany Marrkula

“Limurr Godkal Galikthirr”

[We’re getting closer to God]

Samantha Yawulwuy Wunungmurra

“Bapinyga Manikay”

[Sarratoga fish song]

Rowena Lay’pu Wunungmurra

“Wurray Mokuy”

Joyce Walikurr Wunungmurra

“Guku” [Honey Manikay]

Lindsay Lupurru Wunungmurra

“Garrkman” [Green Frog]

George Lulparr Wanambi

Enid Gurunulmiwuy Wunungmurra

“Garrkuluk Gapu” [Water]

Warren Balpatji Gurruwiwi

David Wapit Munungurr

“Wagilak manikay”

Joseph Yampulpura Wunungmurra

Stevie B “4U”

Georgina Warritja Wunungmurra

Life, R2BEES

Xena Garratjawuy Wanambi

Curtis Dhambali Gaykamungu

"Yirritja Guku" [Honey]

Ruth Garrgnirr Wanambi

"Wak-wak" [Black Crow]

Credits:

Directors	Jennifer Deger Paul Gurrumuruwuy
Cinematographer	Oliver Lanzenberg
Sound	Warren Balpatji
Editors	Jennifer Deger Elliott Magen
Producers	Warren Balpatji Jennifer Deger Enid Gurunulmiwuy
Translations	Meredith Balanydjarrk James Bangaliwuy Jennifer Deger Enid Gurugulmi Paul Gurrumuruwuy
Colourist	Tighe Kellner

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