

# BLACK PANTHER WOMAN

Directed and Produced by Rachel Perkins



## PRESS KIT

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Photo Credit: Alina Gozin'a



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## Production Notes

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Director	Rachel Perkins
Producer	Rachel Perkins
Production Company	Blackfella Films
Genre	Documentary
Language	English
Aspect Ratio	16:9
Duration	52 minutes 15 seconds
Sound	Stereo
Shooting Gauges	HD, Super 16mm

## One Line Synopsis

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Marlene Cummins breaks a forty year silence to tell the story of her abuse in the Australian Black protest movement, to overcome her demons of today.

## Short Synopsis

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In 1972 Marlene Cummins fell in love with the leader of the Australian Black Panther Party. With the break up of that relationship, she spiralled into a cycle of addiction that left her on the streets and vulnerable. Forty years later Marlene travels to a gathering of international Black Panthers in New York. The journey takes her back in time. Still struggling with addiction, she reveals the secrets she has held onto, to face her demons today.

## Long Synopsis

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Marlene Cummins was a poor, uneducated teenager, already carrying the scars of discrimination, when she met the leader of Australia's Black Panther Party in 1972. She fell madly in love with him and her education into Black Power began the night she moved into the Panther headquarters in Brisbane.

The little known Brisbane chapter of the Black Panther Party was directly inspired by the American Panthers. They adapted their politics, and their militant, sexy style of black leather and a defiant attitude. Like their American comrades, they also raised suspicious attentions from the Police and ASIO. Yet unlike their American comrades, who numbered in the thousands across America, the Australian chapter comprised just ten members. In one heady year, this small group of young Aboriginal people staged educational theatre shows, kept watch on the police on what they called 'pig patrols' and were at the forefront of demonstrations including the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

The ideological revolution sweeping the world coincided with the sexual revolution. Suddenly black men had status and white women wanted a part of it. The tensions around the movement and her personal life tightened around Marlene and finally led to the break up of her relationship with the party's leader. Marlene filled the vacuum with alcohol and quickly spiralled into a cycle of addiction that left her on the streets and vulnerable.



Photo credit: Alina Gozin'a

Her vulnerability and her belief in the movement made her a target for black men in power. Marlene recalls the incident of her rape, by two Indigenous leaders, after which she made the difficult decision to stay silent. Dedicated to the cause and distrustful of police, she, like other Aboriginal women facing abuse, chose to stay silent to protect the movement from criticism.

Forty years later, and still struggling with addiction, she looks back on her involvement in the Aboriginal protest movement from her housing commission flat in the community of Redfern. Marlene journeys to New York to an international gathering of Black Panthers. The journey takes her back in time, to her love affair, her time with the Panthers and the question of the place of women in the movement.

Now a grandmother and no longer afraid, she speaks out about her experiences. This film presents her attempt to heal herself and her ongoing battle with addiction, and to add her voice to those calling for a halt to the abuse of black women from within their own community.



## Director's Statement

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What began as a straightforward story, recounting the Black Panther Party in Australia, slowly revealed itself as something more. My friendship with Marlene Cummins goes back twenty years. But I never knew the stories she held within her.

The film began about five years ago when I offered to help Marlene prepare to pitch her idea for a documentary about the Black Panthers. We got together and she began to tell me her story. Over a week, the stories unravelled from deep within her. I soon realised that Marlene had a very personal and controversial story to tell if she had the courage to do so, and that I wanted to help her tell it.

It is a story that resonates with me. As a child I grew up surrounded by people in the Aboriginal rights movement. My life's work has been dedicated to telling the stories of my people through film. When I realised that this story might turn a critical eye on leadership within the movement, I had to seriously consider the repercussions and the risk that it would appear we were 'bringing down the movement'. I talked to my family and sought advice from Indigenous leaders along the way, notably Sam Watson and Jenny Munro. They both felt that the Aboriginal movement was mature enough to apply the same critical eye to itself that it applied to those it has struggled against.

So we began, choosing not to write a script, but to allow the film to evolve as an observational narrative, threaded with Marlene's history. Marlene had some key rules she wanted to follow. That the film should be honest about her and who she was. That it would only be told by people who were intimately involved at the time. That it would be her story and that she would not speak on behalf of anyone else. The outcome is a very personal story, of Marlene's experiences and of her survival. There are many more stories within her life that could not be told within the time constraints of a one hour film. They are extraordinary, and made more so by Marlene's positive attitude to making the best she can of her life. It will perhaps only be told in the complexity and detail it deserves when Marlene publishes her autobiography.

This film, like all the films I have worked on to date, is intended for an Aboriginal audience first. But the premise of the film is relevant for all. To have a fair and just society, we must have leadership with integrity.



Photo credit: Alina Gozin'a

# Rachel Perkins

Director & Producer

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Rachel Perkins' Australian Aboriginal heritage (Arerrernte/Kalkadoon) has informed her entire filmmaking career. She founded Australia's premier Indigenous production company Blackfella Films in 1992, and has contributed extensively to the development of Indigenous filmmakers in Australia and, more broadly, to the Australian film and television industry.

Rachel has directed three feature films: **RADIANCE**, **ONE NIGHT THE MOON** (which received 5 Australian Film Institute (AFI) Awards), and most recently the musical **BRAN NUE DAE**. It screened at the Sundance, Berlin and Toronto Film Festivals, and achieved a box office of \$7.5 million in Australia. Rachel's films have screened at over 75 film festivals worldwide.

In 2012 Rachel directed the telemovie **MABO**, which screened on the ABC to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic High Court decision. **MABO** was nominated for Most Outstanding Mini Series or Telemovie at the 2013 TV Week Logie Awards.

Rachel directed two episodes of the landmark television drama series **REDFERN NOW**, the first Australian drama series written, directed and produced by Indigenous Australians. In 2013 **REDFERN NOW** was awarded the 2013 TV Week Logie for Most Outstanding Drama Series, and Rachel also received the Australian Directors Guild Award for Best Direction in a TV Drama Series. **REDFERN NOW SERIES 2** continued the success, receiving the 2014 AACTA Award for Best Television Drama Series, the 2014 TV Week Logie Award for Most Outstanding Drama Series, and once again saw Rachel receive the 2014 Australian Directors Guild Award for Best Direction in a TV Drama Series.

Rachel also wrote, directed and co-produced the seven-hour documentary series **FIRST AUSTRALIANS** (2009), which received Australia's top honours including AFI and IF Awards, the UN Media Peace Prize, TV Week Logie, and the Writers and Directors Guild of Australia Awards. **FIRST AUSTRALIANS** has sold throughout the world and is the highest selling educational title in Australia.

Rachel's other documentary work includes the series **BLOOD BROTHERS**, on which she was one of the writers, directors and producers as well as **SPIRIT TO SPIRIT**, an international co-venture of Indigenous partners from New Zealand, Scandanavia, Canada and Australia.

With her Blackfella Films business partner, Darren Dale, Rachel Perkins co-curated the film program for the **Message Sticks Indigenous Festival** at the Sydney Opera House from 2002 until 2011, and in 2012 presented the curated program of Indigenous films **Blackfella Films Presents** in partnership with major Australian film festivals.

Rachel was honoured to receive the inaugural *Contribution to Television IF Award* at the 2011 Jameson IF Awards. In addition to her experience as an executive producer for both ABC and SBS Television, Rachel has previously served on the Council of the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS), the NSW Film and Television Office (now Screen NSW), the Australia Film Commission, Screen Australia, and was a founding member of the National Indigenous Television Service (NITV).

## Rochelle Oshlack

Editor

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Rochelle has worked in postproduction for film and television for over twenty five years. Her credits include the box office hit musical feature **BRAN NUE DAE**, the critically acclaimed documentary series **FIRST AUSTRALIANS**, the UN Peace Media award winner **LANI'S STORY** and the highly awarded telemovie **MABO** starring Deb Mailman.

In 2010, Rochelle received an AACTA documentary editing nomination for **THE TALL MAN** and in 2014 an AACTA nomination for drama editing for her collaborative work on **THE TURNING**.

Most recently Rochelle edited **MISS NIKKI AND THE TIGER GIRLS**, a feature length musical documentary set in Burma during the change of the regime. **MISS NIKKI AND THE TIGER GIRLS** was selected for the prestigious IDFA festival and selected in competition for both Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals in 2013.

## Kim Batterham ACS

Director of Photography

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Kim is one of Australia's most talented and respected cinematographers, who has easily moved between documentary, television drama and feature film projects. A graduate of AFTRS. Kim began his career as a DOP in the mid 1980's.

From the late 1980's to early 1990's Kim worked on 8 biographical films about some of Australia's major artists (Brett Whiteley, Graeme Murphy, Meryl Tankard, Peter Corris, Paul Mercurio) and sporting personalities (Annette Kellerman, Les Darcy and Wayne Gardiner). Interwoven with this was a number of features and mini-series including **SHOTGUN WEDDING**, **RAW NERVE**, **KANGAROO PALACE** and **THE POTATO FACTORY** which earned Kim the Cinematographer of the Year award at the 2000 Australian Cinematographers Society Awards.

His work on a number of handmade one-hour shorts (**BLACK RIVER**, **FLOODHOUSE**, **THE WIDOWER**) culminating in his most successful film **ONE NIGHT THE MOON**, Winner of Best Cinematography in a Non- Feature Film at the AFI Awards 2001. This film was the beginning of his working relationship with Rachel Perkins and ultimately led to his involvement on the landmark documentary series **FIRST AUSTRALIANS**.

In 2000, Kim was awarded Cinematographer of the Year. He is currently Head of Cinematography at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS).

## Andrew Commis ACS

Director of Photography (US Shoot)

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Andrew's most recent feature film **THE ROCKET** won three awards at the 2013 Berlin Film Festival including the Crystal Bear, and multiple other international awards including Best Cinematography prizes at the Mumbai and Kosovo Film Festivals. **THE ROCKET** was nominated for an AACTA Award for Best Cinematography.

Andrew's first feature **BEAUTIFUL KATE** was nominated for 10 AFI Awards, including Best Film and Best Cinematography, and officially selected at Toronto 2009. Andrew received the prestigious Milli Award from the ACS as the 2010 Australian Cinematographer of the Year for his work on the film, along with the 2009 IF award for Best Cinematography. Andrew shot David Wenham's directing debut **COMMISSION** starring Hugo Weaving, along with Justin Kurzel's **BONER McPHARLIN'S MOLL**, both of which form part of the screen adaptation of Tim Winton's book of short stories **THE TURNING**.

Andrew's television credits include the Rachel Perkins directed telemovie **MABO** for Blackfella Films and the ABC, which premiered at the 2012 Sydney Film Festival. He also shot the BAFTA nominated series **THE SLAP** for the ABC, which premiered at the 2011 Melbourne International Film Festival. Andrew also shot the telemovie **UNDERGROUND** for Channel 10 and the mini series **THE DEVILS PLAYGROUND** which will air in 2014 on Foxtel.

His documentary credits include the feature length **A NORTHERN TOWN**, winner of the 2008 AFI Award for Best Cinematography in Documentary, and **NAKED ON THE INSIDE** in 2007. Andrew's short films include the Cannes selected **MEATHEAD**, **NATURE'S WAY** and **BLUE TONGUE**.

## Antony Partos

Composer

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Antony Partos is one of Australia's most awarded film composers. His passion lies in creating innovative scores that morph acoustic with an eclectic mix of bespoke elements. His feature film credits include the Sundance Festival winning film **ANIMAL KINGDOM** (starring Guy Pearce and Oscar nominee Jacki Weaver), **THE HOME SONG STORIES** (starring AFI winner Joan Chen), **DISGRACE** (starring Oscar nominee John Malkovich), **UNFINISHED SKY**, **ACCIDENTS HAPPEN** (starring Oscar Winner Geena Davis) and David's Michod's upcoming **THE ROVER** (starring Robert Patterson and Guy Pearce).

**ANIMAL KINGDOM**, **THE HOME SONG STORIES** and **UNFINISHED SKY** have all won Best Original Score at Australia's coveted AFI awards.

His passion for creating evocative scores for television drama include the highly awarded series **THE SLAP** (Winner APRA-AGSC 2012 Screen Music Awards Best Television Theme and Best Soundtrack Album), **MABO** (Winner APRA-AGSC 2012 Screen Music Award Best Music for a Mini-Series or Telemovie), **RAKE** (Winner 2013 APRA Screen Music Award and 2011 AGSC Award for Best Music for a Television Series) and the Blackfella Films production **REDFERN NOW** Series 1 and 2 for the ABC which received the 2014 AACTA Award for Best Original Music Score in Television and the 2013 APRA Screen Award for Best Original Song Composed for Screen. His most recent project is Channel Nine's hit TV drama series **LOVE CHILD**.

# Marlene Cummins

## Biography

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Photo credit: Mark Rogers

Born in the southwest town of Cunnamulla, Marlene's traditional people on her Father's side are Guguyelandji, and Woppaburra on her Mother's side. Growing up amidst the Aboriginal Protection Act of the 1950s, Marlene was raised with a very political 'grassroots' upbringing.

By the time she met the leader of the Black Panther Party, Marlene, still a teenager, already bore the scars of discrimination and institutionalised racism. Drawn to the party's potent mix of militant, sexy black power, Marlene became a member of the first and only Australian Black Panther Party. However, as an Aboriginal woman, Marlene continued to endure hardship, discrimination and abuse, even from within her own community.

Marlene has maintained an outspoken stance on political issues affecting Aboriginal people but she prefers to maintain this struggle through her artistic expression in music and art.

Marlene Cummins is Australia's foremost Indigenous female blues writer and performer. Marlene knows the blues from an Aboriginal woman's perspective in this country and her story is one of vulnerability, strength and survival.

Marlene refined her skills as a blues saxophonist and songwriter at the Berklee College of Music in Boston in the mid-90s. She continues to busk a few times a week as she finds this helps her to maintain and develop her feel as a musician.

In addition to her musical talent, Marlene has been a regular broadcaster on Koori Radio for years with her renowned blues show, 'Marloo's Blues', for which she won Broadcaster of the Year at the Deadly Awards in 2009.

Marlene is releasing her first full-length album, **Koori Woman Blues** through GoSet Music in June 2014 to coincide with the premiere of her film **BLACK PANTHER WOMAN**.



## SBS Documentary Content Questionnaire

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**Q: What was the inspiration behind this documentary? And/or how did it come about?**

I was always fascinated by the Black Panthers, as many people are, but did not know much about the small chapter in Brisbane. When I learned that my friend Marlene fell in love with their leader and wanted to make a film about it, I was convinced that the strands of politics and love might make for an interesting entry point into a social history film about my people. When I began to talk to Marlene, I realised the story had another layer, the experience of Aboriginal women in the Black protest movement. This added dimension gave it greater weight and relevance for an audience today, particularly an Indigenous audience. What is the quality of leadership? Is it acceptable for leadership to be fundamentally flawed? Should we protect our leadership for the greater good of the people? These were fascinating questions for me that resonated with my own experience, being a daughter of an Indigenous leader and a woman.

**Q: What do you like about making documentaries?**

I find that documentaries are much more difficult than making drama, as history and reality are far more complex. However, the opportunity documentary provides is the intimate and intense engagement with everyday people, who mostly generously open their homes, history and often extraordinary lives to you. This is the privilege of being a filmmaker, to get to know people and to tell their story. My focus on telling Indigenous stories gives even greater depth to the experience. At a young age, I was provided with the training to be a conduit for Indigenous stories. For a people whose history has been so repressed and misrepresented, documentary has been a crucial tool in redefining the Australian national narrative, and contributing to a more inclusive view of our national identity. This larger rationale has been a powerful motivator for Indigenous filmmakers like myself. The feedback we get back from our people and other Australians, that they are changed by having their story told, or by finding out about the Indigenous experience, is the hugely rewarding aspect of documentary filmmaking.

**Q: Did you encounter any challenges in making this documentary and, if so, how did you overcome them?**

All films have their distinct challenges. This story was challenging because of the trauma Marlene Cummins went through and still deals with. Reliving her experiences brought this trauma to the surface. I hope the film will be part of her healing process when she receives recognition for her courage from the audiences who see the film. It was also challenging as it turns a critical eye onto the community which I am from and on particular living individuals. This had legal implications as well as the fear of retribution. The tradition of documentary filmmaking is to explore and push boundaries. This must apply to Indigenous filmmaking and we must be courageous in our interrogation of our world as well as the forces stacked against us. Whilst we know this film is critical, we hope it ultimately serves our community, in beginning conversations that lead to change.

Q: How does the documentary relate to your past work, if at all? Was this film a natural next step or a radical departure from your previous work in film, TV etc?

This film continues the documentary filmmaking our company, Blackfella Films, has been involved in for two decades. In more recent times, we have examined difficult subjects through our films such as *The Tall Man*, based on the events and aftermath of the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee on Palm Island, as well as the sexual violence and subsequent case led by Lani Brennan in the film *Lani's Story*. The visceral nature of these stories have compelled us to try and capture them and communicate them in film. The story is always the motivation for our team, rather than simply doing a job or filling a broadcast time slot.

Q: Any other production anecdotes/stories?

None that I feel comfortable revealing!

Q: Apart from "it's a masterpiece" what would your ideal viewer response to the doco be!?

We want our audience to understand the very complex position of Aboriginal women in that progressive but turbulent period of the seventies, and the contradiction they found themselves dealing with; fighting oppression externally but being oppressed from within.

Q: What is your next project or what are you working on now?

I am about to shoot the final instalment of *Redfern Now*, a movie length version for television.

Q: Who was the target audience you had in mind when making this documentary?

My audience primarily is Indigenous men and women. It was important for us to present a film that resonates with them but also challenges their thinking.

# CREDITS

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Appearing in the film

MARLENE CUMMINS  
KATHLEEN CLEAVER  
SAM WATSON  
LIONEL FOGARTY  
LYNELDA TIPPO  
ZAINAB ABBAS

Special thanks to

MARLENE CUMMINS  
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ZAINAB ABBAS  
PEGGY-SUE CUMMINS  
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BRONWYN PENRITH  
LYNELDA TIPPO

DENNIS WALKER  
ERICA GLYNN  
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KATHY LOTHIAN  
SUE MILLIKEN  
MICHELE BLAKENEY  
LILY SHEARER  
TOM ZUBRYCKI

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Directed by  
RACHEL PERKINS

Produced by RACHEL PERKINS  
Associate Producer CAITLIN MURPHY

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Director of Photography (US Shoot)	ANDREW COMMIS ACS
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Archival Researcher	NAOMI HALL
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Post Production Facility Head of Post Production Post Production Producer Colourist Online	DDP STUDIOS MARCUS BOLTON STEWART DEAN DWAINE HYDE WILLIAM O'CONNELL
Blackfella Films Legals Insurance Film Stock Camera & Lighting Equipment  Laboratory Transcription Post Production Script	RAENA LEA-SHANNON MOONEYS INSURANCE BROKERS KODAK LEMAC FILM AND DIGITAL PCE, ATLANTA HAND HELD FILMS, NY DELUXE, SYDNEY & NY THE LAST DRAFT REEZY MILLER

**'BRISBANE BLACKS'**  
Written by Dennis Conlon  
Performed by Mop & The Drop Outs  
© Dennis Conlon

**'PENSION DAY BLUES'**  
Written by Marlene Cummins  
Performed by Marlene Cummins, Craig Calhoun,  
Murray Cook, Rex Goh, Sarina Jennings,  
Heather King and Calvin Welch  
© Marlene Cummins 2013

**'SHE CRIED'**  
Written by Frank Yamma  
Performed by Frank Yamma & David Bridie  
Produced by David Bridie  
Courtesy of Wantok Musik  
© Frank Yamma

**'THE BLUES IT KNOWS YOUR NAME'**  
Written By Murray Cook  
Performed By Marlene Cummins  
Produced By Richard Fields  
Taken From The Album Recording Koori Woman Blues  
© Goset Music 2009

Archival Footage and Stills supplied courtesy of

HOWARD BINGHAM  
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MARLENE CUMMINS  
NEIL KENLOCK  
STEPHEN SHAMES

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JOHN MILLER

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