

MUSICIANS IN DETENTION



my fingers. I loved playing flamenco, and punk. Art and music make me not go crazy.”

In Iran, the Kurds are an oppressed minority. Bandesh collaborated with other Kurdish musicians and artists, fighting against injustice so publicly that he earned the nickname “The Lion.” In 2013, his life under threat, Bandesh fled Iran to Indonesia then took a boat to Australia, seeking refuge. Instead he ended up in offshore detention on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, Australia’s own, notoriously brutal Guantanamo Bay. For six years he experienced the sort of inhumane treatment described in *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*, the award-winning book by his former fellow detainee, Kurdish Iranian writer and *Guardian* journalist Behrouz Boochani (now in New Zealand).

Bandesh took art classes hosted by the Salvation Army but wasn’t allowed to keep brushes and paints. For a while he played a guitar that was subsequently taken away. In 2016 he

met the Melbourne-based musician and composer David Bridie, whose Wantok Musik label releases music from indigenous artists from Australia, Melanesia and Oceania, and who was on Manus to work with islander John Faunt, a singer-songwriter and *garamut* (slit log) drummer.

“There was so much bad press about Manus Island because of the detention centre that we wanted to highlight the island’s culture and music,” says Bridie. “When I was there a human rights worker told me about a Kurdish musician named Farhad, said that he needed a guitar and a basic Zoom audio recorder. I sourced these then spent time with Farhad, introducing him to local musicians I knew from a Not Drowning, Waving trip in 1988 [Bridie’s former band collaborated on the album *Tabaran*

with Rabaul township artists including singer George Telek]. When I was working on the soundtrack of [2018 comedy drama] *The Merger*, about a struggling football team that was recruiting refugees, I got Farhad to write a traditionally inspired tune for one of the characters [‘Sayyid’s Silo Lament’] then record it into his phone on an acoustic guitar.”

“We released two further tracks, a Kurdish punk song [‘Flee from War’] and ‘The Big Exhale’ individually as singles, with film clip accompaniment.”

‘Hunted like a bird, languish in a cage, eyes full of tears, holes in humanity...’ are the opening lyrics of ‘The Big Exhale’, an ▶

Left: Farhad Bandesh, Behrouz Boochani and David Bridie pictured at Manus Prison in PNG in 2016
Above: Bandesh in detention

