

singing about their heroes, their cause, their fallen friends, the disappeared. These songs were forbidden and could cost you your life. So there's a real potency there, a real pride in what are historical documents, and signposts for the future."

Maubere Timor formed in 2014 at the behest of the Association of Combatants and Veterans of the National Liberation Struggle. Berliku's core band of brothers are singer Martinho Rodrigues Pereira, a FALINTIL fighter who was captured and imprisoned twice, and Jose Manuel Neto Faria, who was active in the clandestine resistance (which operated parallel to the diplomatic and the armed resistance), supplying cigarettes, food and medicine to the militia. Funding from Timor-Leste's Office for Veterans Affairs brought the musicians to Australia to record. Their line-up was fleshed out by Bridie on piano and organ and, crucially, several former members of Timorese-Australian reggae/ska outfit the Dili Allstars – among them drummer José Ribeiro, singer Paulo Almeida and guitarist Gil Santos (all three arrived in Australia as refugees; Almeida and Santos lost family, including both their fathers, during the struggle).

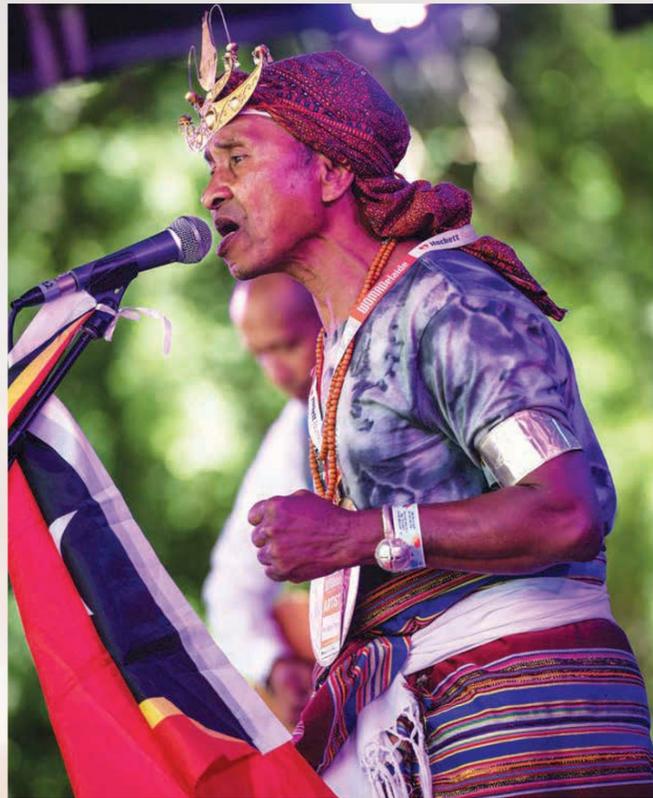
"Berliku is a remarkable person," offers Santos. "We talked a lot about his experiences hiding out in the mountains, singing everyday. I told him that I'd co-founded the Dili Allstars with [punk frontman] Paulie Stewart, whose brother was one of Balibo Five." The Balibo Five were a group of Australian TV journalists killed in October 1975 during Indonesian incursions before the invasion; the Dili Allstars performed on the award-winning soundtrack for the 2009 film *Balibo*.

"The Dili Allstars recorded many songs in Tetum and English in support of East Timor and the tapes were smuggled into the country with the help of Melbourne University students in the lead-up to the 1999 Independence Referendum. Our first song was a cover of 'We Can't Be Beaten' by [Australian rockers] Rose Tattoo, which was so popular all around the island that some army camps were playing it every hour. A fighter told a student to take it away again," Santos grins.



TIMOR-LESTE FACTS

- Timor-Leste is one half of the island of Timor in the Malay archipelago; 'Timor' means 'East' in Malay.
- The Portuguese invaded in the 16th century, chiefly interested in the abundance of sandalwood.
- Japan briefly occupied Timor between 1942-1945.
- In 1975 Timor-Leste declared its independence from Portugal. Nine days later it was invaded by Indonesian forces. More than 200,000 East Timorese were killed.
- Timor-Leste officially became an independent nation state on May 20 2002.
- In April 2021 floods and landslides caused widespread damage across the island and killed more than 40 people.



Shut Photography

Berliku at WOMADelaide in March 2020

Variously imprisoned (and tortured) since 1990 in Dili, Baucau to the east and then the remote Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Barat, where he was kept in isolation for 16 years, Berliku would not witness his country's vote for independence in 2002. Prompted by enquiries by Xanana Gusmão, the Red Cross discovered him in 2004 and Berliku returned to Timor-Leste in 2008. "I was imprisoned for a very long time, but in my mind was always hope. The thought that I would one day come back to an independent Timor-Leste kept me going. When I stepped my foot back onto my land, I cried."

In March 2020, buoyed by the critical reception to *Maubere Timor* (a second album is in the works) Maubere Timor revisited Australia to play WOMADelaide festival. Cheered on by a crowd that included Timorese-Australians in traditional dress, the band's blended mix of island sounds, Portuguese influences and modern folk-rock was given context by a backdrop of giant visuals, each one a snapshot of a vivid moment in Timor-Leste history.

And at their centre, decked out in a sacred gold *kaibauk* headdress (its design imitating buffalo horns), a silver *kelu* armband and a silver *belak* plate on a string of orange seashell morten beads (all of which are used in ceremonies), was Domingos Pinto Gabriel, aka Berliku. The traditional hand-woven *tais* cloth around his waist, his microphone draped in the Timor-Leste flag. Singing proudly, powerfully, as he's always sung, his long fought for dream realised. "The music gave us courage," he says. "Today it helps us understand the past, our sacred resistance. It helps us have faith in the future." ♦

+ **SUPPORT** Recent flooding and landslides have devastated Timor-Leste. The Melbourne Timor Relief Fund is raising money for the crisis, you can donate at: bit.ly/timorrelief

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