



SONGLINES MUSIC AWARDS 2021 *Ceremony*

The *Songlines Music Awards 2021* ceremony is now available to watch for free. Presented by Cerys Matthews with performances from all of this year's winners plus the announcement of the World Pioneer & Newcomer categories.



AYOM



CERYS MATTHEWS



BAB L' BLUZ



DAMIR IMAMOVIĆ



JAKE BLOUNT



KHUSUGTUN



LIRAZ



SITI MUHARAM

Watch now on the *Songlines Music Awards* website & socials

[SonglinesMusicAwards.com](https://www.SonglinesMusicAwards.com)

facebook.com/Songlines | youtube.com/Songlines





“Our island is the whole world sharing a piece of paradise... Our island is losing too much nature for concrete”

EMLYN, MAURITIUS

Visibility of the new project was paramount considering that a 36-date concert and workshop tour of American universities from Stanford in California to Miami Dade College was scuppered by the pandemic, and is rescheduled for 2022. Video footage shot by Cole and Chen on their original Small Island Big Song sojourn, supplemented by the work of drone units, underwater cinematographers and other production crew, make for a multisensory experience both live and online. *Our Island* is a project that commands attention.

With its collaborative aesthetic, sumptuous video and compelling, deftly mixed sound, lead single ‘Listwar Zanset’ (The Story of Our Ancestors) is a case in point. “Our ancestry is the seed of our life,” says Emlyn, who wrote the bones of the song after hearing stories of Maroon slaves working in the cane fields of Mauritius, their singing silenced, their songs and language banned. “We can only imagine the hardship. The memory of their struggle – and of the colonisation imposed on other cultures across the world – must be kept alive.”

Singing while playing upbeat *séga* rhythms (originating in Madagascar and heard, too, in La Réunion) on the *ravanne* (frame drum) and *kalimba* (thumb piano), Emlyn hums through the middle of the song – recalling the slaves who would hum in defiance of their captors who refused to allow them to sing. As her voice increases in intensity it is joined by the overtone chanting of Putad, the pair reclaiming identities repressed by colonisation and

slavery. Instruments add texture and nuance: the moon lute of Sauljaljui; the valiha (and vocals) of Tarika Sammy; the *warup* and *kundu* (drums) of Airileke; the electric guitar of Luc Totterwitz and a retro Korg MS20 keyboard played by Tim Cole. Towards the end, Selina Leem, whose Marshall Islands will soon be submerged under water if climate change is not urgently addressed, pleads ‘*their people displaced their land, taken my land, drowning.*’

“Everyone brings a really unique personal and cultural voice, and the sum of this collaboration is way beyond what any of us could imagine or achieve alone,” says Cole. “To hear different languages, each carrying their own sense of history and place, together with the musical voices, has real substance and depth. Personal narratives telling of relationships to the environment, together with the looming climate crisis, all give *Our Island* undeniable impact. I really believe that as much as we need air, food and shelter we have a brain that needs stories. We need to make sense of every step we take. Our musical mission is to be as honest as possible, to help inform people’s narratives and ultimately, drop a massive stone in the global cultural pond so that everyone will be like, ‘What was that?’”

On a wall inside Cole and Chen’s A-frame house is an old vinyl record given to Cole by a local vendor (“around here you just buy things through the windows of people’s front rooms”), onto which he’s attached the track list for *Our Island*. More specifically, a Side 1 and Side 2, each featuring seven tracks. The tracks are each presented by a core band member, aside from the opening track introducing the ensemble and the Side 1 closer, a group take on Marvin Gaye’s ‘Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)’. It’s a clever choice; never has the line ‘*things ain’t what they used to be*’ felt so pertinent.

“For me the concept album is a work of art. A process that brings everything together,” says Cole, a former member of seminal Australian sextet Not Drowning, Waving, which was formed in 1983 by vocalist and keyboardist David Bridie ▶



**LUC TOTTERWITZ,
TAHITI/FRANCE**