

Quick trip 'an honour'

Aboriginal man plays at London bushfire memorial

FOR a lot of people, embarking on an international trip with less than two weeks' planning is an exhausting enough exercise.

But perhaps we mere mortals should spare a thought for artist and performer David Williams who also managed, during a recent ten-day trip to England, to play didgeridoo inside a famous London icon, take part in a commemoration of one of Australia's worst natural disasters, shake hands with royalty and a prime minister, and catch up with his mum.

Brisbane-based Mr Williams, 26, got back last Wednesday and told *The Koori Mail* that he regarded the whirlwind trip as 'an honour' and 'fantastic and surreal'.

A Wakka Wakka man from Qld's South Burnett region, Mr Williams was asked by the Australian High Commission in London – where his big sister Emma works – to perform during a memorial service and benefit for the victims and survivors of Victoria's recent bushfires.

One of Mr Williams' contact points for the trip was High Commission staffer Jessica Rudd, the daughter of Australian PM Kevin Rudd who also attended the memorial service at Westminster Abbey along with about 2500 other people.

Mr Williams said he played the didgeridoo for about 35 minutes as people entered the abbey and before the official party arrived. "I was painted up and sitting right at the top of the stairs in the centre of the abbey," he said. "I was mic'ed up and the sound went throughout the abbey."

The classically-trained trombonist played a subtle didgeridoo piece he composed especially for the memorial.

Official party

"After playing, I washed the paint off my face and threw on my suit to be seated in the front row as the official party, including Prince Charles and his wife Camilla, Mr Rudd and his wife Therese, came in," he said.

Mr Rudd had taken time out from the G20 economic summit to attend the memorial and thank the British people for their support in the aftermath of the fires in which 173 people died.

"For Australians, the world suddenly became silent and still," the PM said of what has become known as 'Black Saturday'. "We were left speechless in its wake."

Mr Williams said the religious memorial service, attended by some survivors of the tragedy, was very moving.

"It was a special event to be part of," he said. "A lot of people were there, just to say 'Hey, I'm



Aboriginal performer David Williams next to the Thames River in front of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament in London during his trip.



Aboriginal performer David Williams (centre) after meeting Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, following a memorial service at London's Westminster Abbey for the victims of the recent Victorian bushfires. Standing beside David is Australian expatriate author Kathy Lette, who helped to instigate the memorial and benefit.

an Aussie living in London and I'm here to show my support'.

"You got a real sense of what the fires were about – that it was pretty awful.

"There was a woman who carried the flowers in, her house was gone and she lost a couple of neighbours."

After the service, Mr Williams joined the memorial's instigator, expat author Kathy Lette, and others to meet the official party.

"It was a bit surreal at the end," Mr Williams admitted.

"I walked away thinking 'I just met Prince Charles'. You see someone in magazines all your life and then you meet them. Yes, that was definitely bizarre."

However, it's always possible

Mr Williams will run into the Prince again, because he has quite a few London connections. His aunty Tracey was a diplomat there for about ten years, his mum Jan works there as a teacher and then there's sister Emma at the High Commission.

His complicated life throws him all kinds of opportunities. When he's not jetting around the world, Mr Williams is the Creative Director of Indigenous communication agency Gilimbaa.

Last year, he performed at the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. This week, he'll be in Sydney for the launch of a new publication his company designed for Australian Law Reform Commission.



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