

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



30 YEARS OF
SIXTY FIVE THOUSAND
STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Bangarra Dance Theatre pays respect and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, create, and perform.

We also wish to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose customs and cultures inspire our work.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (ICIP)

Bangarra acknowledges the industry standards and protocols set by the Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for Working with Indigenous Artists (2007). Those protocols have been widely adopted in the Australian arts to respect ICIP and to develop practices and processes for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultural heritage. Bangarra incorporates ICIP into the very heart of our projects, from storytelling, to dance, to set design, language and music.

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WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this Study Guide contains images, names, and writings of deceased persons.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Study Guide is to provide information and contextual background about the works presented in Bangarra Dance Theatre's 30th anniversary season, *Bangarra: 30 years of sixty five thousand*. Reading the Guide, discussing the themes, and responding to the questions proposed, will assist teachers and students in thinking critically about the works, and form personal responses.

We encourage students and teachers to engage emotionally and imaginatively with the performance and to be curious about how these works were inspired and how they impact audiences. For full details about the performance, please visit bangarra.com.au.

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USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

Bangarra: 30 years of sixty five thousand is Bangarra Dance Theatre's landmark 30th anniversary season. This diverse program of three contemporary works displays the passionate storytelling, rich artistry and deep community connections that have made Bangarra the premier Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts company in Australia.

Frances Rings' *Unaipon* is an absorbing portrait of the great Aboriginal inventor, philosopher, writer and storyteller, Ngarrindjeri man David Unaipon, who features on the Australian \$50 note. *Stamping Ground* was created by Czech choreographer Jiří Kylián as an homage to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures. Curated by Artistic Director Stephen Page, *to make fire* highlights the breadth, power and beauty of Bangarra's creations over three decades.

With roots in the world's oldest continuing culture, *Bangarra: 30 years of sixty five thousand* carries the spirit of Bangarra into its fourth decade, promising many more years of deeply moving and authentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories.

Bangarra: 30 years of sixty five thousand offers teachers and students the opportunity to explore a broad range of cross-curricula topics and themes through a live performance experience. We strongly recommend that teachers familiarise their students with the contextual background and historical relevance of the work, using the information in this Study Guide and the additional references listed throughout.

The evolution of Indigenous contemporary dance can be explored as a continuum – a

shifting and growing field of cultural exchange, art, storytelling, and shared experiences. Bearing witness to the physical expression of traditional and contemporary modes of storytelling can both challenge and unite us, but fundamentally these experiences illustrate the immutable importance of identity, belonging and connectedness in all societies and cultures. Learning by experiencing either a live performance, or a video recording of a live performance, and being free to offer personal responses, enables students to be participants in the creative process as they engage with the work through discussions that encourage both critical and creative thinking.

Students can and should feel free to explore different perspectives through artistic and emotional landscapes of movement, sound, light and shape. This freedom can inspire an appreciation of the ongoing impact of historical events, as well as the role of the Arts in shaping our understandings of the world around us.

We urge our audiences, including students and teachers, to be curious about the works they see on stage, and the creative processes that lie behind these performances. This Study Guide provides detailed background about all aspects of the production *Bangarra: 30 years of sixty five thousand*, and the artists who collaborated in its creation.

We invite everyone to feel free to express their thoughts about our work and contribute to the ongoing dialogue that continually questions who we are and where we are going.

We hope you enjoy *Bangarra: 30 years of sixty five thousand*.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Critical and creative thinking
Intercultural understanding
Ethical understanding

LEARNING AREAS

The Arts (Dance, Music, Visual Arts)
Humanities and Social Science (History, Civics and Citizenship)
Science (Physics)

TOPICS/THEMES

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES
Contemporary Dance
Design
Literature
Music
Storytelling
Australian Cultures
Australian Society
History
Human Rights
Religion
Scientific Inquiry



Tyrel Dulvarie,
photo by Daniel Boud

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS DANCE THEATRE

PERSPECTIVES, VOICES AND CULTURES

The concept of contemporary Indigenous dance theatre cannot be understood as a categorised genre or a particular form because it exists as part of a continuum that responds to a diversity of culture and developing perspectives. Any contemporary Indigenous dance production that incorporates music/sound, design and other conventions of the theatre will inevitably have a deep purpose and an essential spirit that is, and will always be, about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. While drawing on traditional stories and cultural ways of being, Indigenous dance theatre provides an important platform for Indigenous people. It gives voice to the experience of living in a modern world that experiences constant change, where the threat to cultural identity is relentlessly present.

The growth in availability of technical resources, an increasing number of performance venues, and the proliferation of new arts festivals and digital platforms, has greatly supported the development of new Indigenous dance theatre, as well as the careers of the many creative artists involved. As more new work is created, support for the infrastructure and training that underpins these forms has also grown, resulting in a critical mass of professional artists involved in producing high quality productions that increase the demand we currently see from audiences in Australia and internationally. One of the most important outcomes of these developments is the fact that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to see their cultures reflected in this unique

form, and are able to celebrate the resilience of Australia's First Nations people and their ancestors through the sharing of works that depict Indigenous stories, cultures and perspectives.

It is important to consider the language we use when talking and writing about Indigenous cultures in the context of art: when it is made, how it is made and where the source material comes from. The general application and understandings of the terms 'traditional' and 'contemporary' can be problematic when critiquing Indigenous dance theatre. By fixing the term 'contemporary' to the form, it could be argued that we are implying 'post-colonial', 'modern' or 'non-traditional'. Yet with many new works sourcing their inspiration from the Indigenous cultures that have existed since ancient times, what is 'traditional' and what is 'new' can exist simultaneously. This is often expressed by saying Indigenous Australian cultures are the oldest living, and continuous cultures in the world.

FORM, ACTIVATION AND PROCESS

One way of exploring the development of Indigenous dance theatre over the last three or four decades is to trace the journeys of some of the artists who have been significant contributors to that development. It should be noted that while many opportunities have been opened up for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to develop in their choreographic work and their leadership roles, the true force behind this development has been the commitment and determination of the individual artists themselves.

Artists and leaders like Carole Y. Johnson, Stephen Page, Frances Rings, Raymond Blanco, Vicki van Hout, Gary Lang, and Marilyn Miller, are some who have paved the way. More recently Elma Kris, Deborah Brown, Yolande Brown, Daniel Riley, Mariaa Randall, Sani Townsen, Jacob Boehme, Ghenoa Gela, Thomas E. S. Kelly, Joel Bray, and Amrita Hepi are contributing to the ever-growing critical mass of Indigenous contemporary dance in Australia.

Building a skills base has been both a challenge and a significant contributor to the development of Indigenous contemporary dance and dance theatre. The establishment of training institutions like National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College in Sydney, and Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts (ACPA) in Brisbane, have been fundamentally important to increasing technical skills to support the creation of new works. Market development initiatives, the growth of touring networks, and a range of strategic programs to address identified gaps in the infrastructure, have been and continue to be critical to the growth and sustainability of this work.

From the mid-20th Century, contemporary forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expression emerged across all art forms and began to infiltrate mainstream arts programs that largely drew on western cultures and/or western forms of presentation. By the 1960s, young black theatre makers, playwrights, writers and actors were creating works that reflected their culture in both the pre-colonial and post-settlement worlds. Writers Kevin Gilbert and Jack Davis, and actor/directors Bryan Syron and Bob Maza were among some of the black theatre makers who lay the foundation for the strong Indigenous theatre scene that exists today. Novelist Faith Bandler, and poet/artist/educator Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) were also strong voices in the new wave of Indigenous writers whose works now form part of Australia's rich and diverse literary landscape. The wave of contemporary Indigenous artists that followed in the wake of the Papunya Tula art movement in the 1970s has seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work acquired for major collections around the world, which command impressive prices in auction houses globally. Many, if not all, of these artists also

consider themselves activists, and there is no doubt that their work has had a significant impact on the way non-Indigenous people have learned about Indigenous cultures and the ongoing political struggle of First Nations people in the context of post-settlement life.

The creative processes of any artist tend to emerge through a range of influences, discovery and personal experience. Yet for Indigenous artists, these processes are more complex. Respect for cultural protocols, the need for community engagement, and a strong commitment to enforce care for traditional knowledge that is shared, and/or provided through a process of request, invitation, permission and transmission, are all things that need to be considered and upheld as new expressions are created by Indigenous artists. Navigating all these considerations is complicated and takes time. However, the ongoing development of Indigenous dance (and other contemporary art forms) is dependent on these protocols and practices being observed and implemented to ensure cultural continuity. Stories, songs, dances, and connection to Place are sacred, and are passed on through oral transmission, so there is no central knowledge source, and written information is usually second hand. Indigenous Cultural & Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights are variously enshrined both Australian and international conventions and statements, and are an important safety net that seeks to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures survive and thrive.

COUNTRY, RELATIONSHIP AND CONNECTION

'Country', as a western construct, is mostly understood as a defined place, marked by borders, (natural and/or imposed), and operating on principles of sovereignty and the governance of the nation by the state. Ethnicity, religion, environment, and histories of colonisation and conflict are signifiers that overlay the identification of a 'country'. As history shows, these factors have often been the cause of conflict between groups who claim their right to a 'land' is justified. Land

ownership and other interests in land have been closely associated with human rights, where groups can show a perpetual connection to the land in order to justify their right to occupy.

At a community level, the concept of public, private, individual, or collective ownership of property (e.g. land, a house, a business) has developed over just a few thousand years. The right to own property that has a capital value, possesses certain features and resources, can be bought and sold for profit, and the protection of these interests and capacities by law, is the enduring assurance of the western capitalist system.

The concept of Country and Land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is extremely different.

The spiritual dimension of Country cannot be detached from the physical. Country can mean a person's Land where they were born, as well as the sea, sky, rivers, sacred sites, seasons, plants and animals. It can also be a place of heritage, belonging, and spirituality that is inseparable from the land. Hence, the impact of displacement from Country, and the disruption to that sense of belonging to one's Country, can be catastrophic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural and economic wellbeing. Story, song, dance, and ancestral lineage provide the foundation for an existence on this earth, and a passage to and from the worlds beyond life on earth - and those stories and songs all link to Country as a home for Culture.

For Indigenous people, these complex relationships are like threads in a tapestry of exploration that has no beginning and no end, yet is founded on, and maintained through, specific information that is transmitted by 'walking on Country', oral transference and a range of other traditional practices.

When artists draw from the concept of Country, they are the bearers of Culture, illustrated and made meaningful in many ways to many different people. In this way, the dance theatre worlds within *Bangarra: 30 years of sixty five thousand* provide the opportunity to delve into the concept of Country and all it holds in the way of knowledge, spirituality and cultural meaning.



Rika Hamaguchi,
photo by Daniel Boud

CULTURAL INHERITANCE AND TRANSFERAL OF KNOWLEDGE

Storytelling in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life is the means by which cultural systems, values, and identity are preserved and transferred. Telling stories through song, music and dance, in order to connect people to land, and teach them about their culture and the traditions of their ancestors is the way knowledge is passed from generation to generation. Knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander totemic systems, the histories of peoples, clans and tribal associations, language, land, and concepts and connections of kinship, are maintained through these stories.

Many of Bangarra's productions are based on or include stories from the Dreaming, which are allegorical representations of contemporary existence and the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and people. Expressing and maintaining culture through contemporary interpretations and rich theatrical realisations enables the world of Australian Indigenous culture to be shared with the full diversity of today's audiences.

THE DREAMING

Indigenous spirituality exists in the concept of the 'Dreaming'. Dreaming connects Indigenous people to the past, creates relevance to the present, and guides them for the future. Dreaming stories can illustrate the phenomena of creation, transformation, natural forces, and life principles. They are specifically related to landforms, places, creatures and communities. The ancestral beings that populate the stories form the spiritual essence of the stories. Bangarra's portrayal of stories of the Dreaming through the contemporary dance theatre form requires a diligent process of connecting and building a relationship with the traditional custodians of those stories so that the integrity and authenticity is respected.

CONSULTATION AND OBSERVANCE OF PROTOCOLS

For all of its productions, the Bangarra Creative Team researches and explores the stories of Indigenous cultures in close consultation and collaboration with their traditional custodians, before embarking on the process of creating the production. Each year, Bangarra spends time in specific Indigenous communities, meeting with Elders and traditional owners and living with the people of that community - learning about the stories that connect the people, the land, the language, and the creatures of the land. Everyone who works at Bangarra feels very strongly about their role in the company's work. They make sure that the stories they tell are true to the traditional owners of those stories and uphold the integrity of the stories' meanings.

EXPERIENCING DANCE IN A THEATRICAL CONTEXT

It is important to note that dance theatre works are essentially artistic invention, and are created to express a broad range of ideas and thoughts. While some information is provided in the program notes of each production, the viewer is free to interpret the work according to their individual perspectives, emotional responses, and level of experience in the viewing of performing arts. Repeated viewing of the work, along with the cumulative process of learning about the themes, source material, cross-referencing of the range of subject matter and creative processes involved in the making of the work, contributes to personal and critical responses to the work. Bangarra invites its audiences to share, learn, and appreciate the critical importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in order to understand their own relationship with the cultures and the people of Australia's First Nations.

RESOURCES



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Bangarra Dance Theatre YouTube Channel - interviews with Artistic Director Stephen Page and other Bangarra Creatives. <https://www.youtube.com/user/bangarradancetheatre>

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



Frances Rings, Djakapurra Munyarryun, and Marilyn Miller, photo by Greg Barrett



Bangarra Dancers, photo by James Morgan



Carole Y Johnson, Matthew Doyle, and Phillip Lanley, photographer unknown



Bangarra Dancers and Crew, photo by Tiffany Parker

BANGARRA'S BEGINNINGS

Bangarra Dance Theatre was founded due to the efforts of an American woman, Carole Y. Johnson, who toured to Australia in the early 1970s with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company from New York.

Johnson had experienced the full impact of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and been a part of the proliferation of new modern dance exponents across America, who were focused on freeing dance from its institutionalised bases and using dance to make commentary on the contemporary world. She studied at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York and was awarded scholarships to work with communities in Africa. Johnson knew the power of dance as a practice, and as a communication platform.

During her time in Australia in 1972, she was asked to conduct dance workshops. These were very successful and resulted in a Johnson's new dance production that depicted Australia's own civil rights actions. *The Challenge - Embassy Dance* was about the Moratorium for Black Rights initiated by workers' unions in 1972, and the challenge to uphold the presence of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

Johnson quickly realised that there was a lack of contemporary dance expression in the Australian sociocultural environment, and decided that she would do something about it. On the back of her workshops, she established the Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Scheme in 1976, which was to later become the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association - known today as NAISDA Dance College. At the same time, black theatre makers, playwrights, writers, and actors were creating works that reflected their

culture in both its pre-colonial and post-settlement states (see Form, Activation and Process, p. 5)

By the 1980s, NAISDA had developed a performance arm called the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, which showcased the development of students into professional Dancers and also gave opportunities for these Dancers to develop as Choreographers. Raymond Blanco, Marilyn Miller and Dujon Nuie were some of the artists who took on the role of Choreographer and paved the way for many more to come.

In 1989, Johnson founded a new company, Bangarra Dance Theatre. Bangarra is a Wiradjuri word meaning 'to make fire'. In 1991, the artistic directorship was handed to Stephen Page and he premiered his first work, *Up Until Now* for the company in October of the same year.

BANGARRA TODAY

Today, Bangarra is one of Australia's leading performing arts companies, widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for its powerful dancing, distinctive theatrical voice and utterly unique soundscapes, music and design. The company is recognised globally for critically-acclaimed theatre productions that combine the spirituality of traditional cultures with contemporary forms of storytelling through dance. Bangarra is supported with funding through the Australia Council for the Arts (the federal Government's arts funding and advisory body), Create NSW (NSW arts policy and funding body) and a number of private philanthropic organisations and donors. The company also derives earnings from performance seasons, special events and touring.

Based in Sydney, Bangarra presents performance seasons in Australian capital cities, regional towns and remote areas, and has also taken its productions to many places around the world including Europe, Asia and the USA.

Bangarra provides the opportunity for people of all cultural backgrounds to share knowledge about, and have a contemporary experience of, the world's oldest living cultures. Bangarra has nurtured the careers of hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional artists, including Dancers, Choreographers, Composers and Designers.

Since 1989, Bangarra has produced dozens of original works for its repertoire, collaborated on the creation of new productions with other Australian performing arts companies such as The Australian Ballet and the Sydney Theatre Company, and played an integral role in opening ceremonies of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and the 2018 Commonwealth Games. In 2016, Bangarra created its first feature film, *SPEAR*.

Bangarra's Dancers and collaborating artists come from all over Australia, including the major groups in relation to location, for example: Torres Strait Islanders, Queensland (Murri), New South Wales (Koori), Victoria (Koorie), South Australia (Anangu and Nunga), Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (Yolngu), Coast and Midwest Western Australia (Yamatji), Southern Western Australia (Nyoongar), Central Western Australia (Wangai) and Tasmania (Palawah). Some of the Dancers are graduates of NAISDA Dance College (NSW), or Aboriginal College of Performing Arts (QLD), and others are graduates of dance courses delivered by universities around Australia.

UNAIPON

FRANCES RINGS

CREATIVE TEAM

Choreographer Frances Rings

Cultural Consultants Family of David Unaipon; Harold Kym Kropinyeri, Judith Kropinyeri, Elaine Kropinyeri, Corrina Kartinyeri, Donna Smith

Additional consultancy Gina Rings, Katrina Power, Mrs Ward (deceased)

Composer David Page

Set Design Peter England

Lighting Design Nick Schlieper

Costume Design Jennifer Irwin

NGARRINDJERRI

- In the beginning
- Sister baskets
- String games

SCIENCE

- Motion
- Four winds
- Power

RELIGION

NGARRINDJERI

The first section of *Unaipon* is titled *Ngarrindjeri* and draws on the people and Country in the area of Raukkan (formerly known as Point McLeay) on the south-eastern shore of Lake Alexandrina in South Australia. *Ngarrindjeri* contains three sub-sections, *In the beginning*, *Sister baskets*, and *String games*.

The first fragment of *Ngarrindjeri* is ***In the beginning***, which explores the concept of a cultural upbringing that has no beginning or end, but is part of an eternal story of knowledge sharing and storytelling. Culture is carried by people as they come to this world and pass their knowledge forward. David Unaipon philosophises on our existence in the universe.

Sister baskets depicts the intricate and unique weaving craft of Ngarrindjeri people. Practiced by both men and women, weaving represents the lifelines or bloodlines

that connect time and generations – the threads that tie the ancestors to country. Sister baskets, a type of mat, are made from two identical halves, and have great spiritual significance for Ngarrindjeri people. The sister baskets are threaded into the choreography to illustrate their many uses – shelter, shade, fishing, or simply for sitting.

String games depicts lines of knowledge and story that travel and coexist, within and between cultures. The lines extend beyond the space – no beginning and no end. String games were used by Elders for storytelling and to pass on cultural knowledge to the young people.

The umbilical cord and its relationship with the human existence – *miwi* – is significant and sacred to Ngarrindjeri people and is incorporated into many weavings and paintings, well as *Unaipon*. The work incorporates *Nhung e Umpie* (naval cord relationship) throughout the work, in doing so telling the story about the importance of the umbilical cord and the various processes applied to practise and preserve this unique tradition.

DISCUSSION STARTER

What can be learned from knowing more about the processes and practices of Aboriginal people in using the natural environment to provide essential food and shelter requirements?

SCIENCE

Science, the second section of *Unaipon*, was created in three parts – *Motion*, *Four winds*, and *Power* – which delve into David Unaipon's contributions to science. Between 1909 and 1944 he submitted applications for ten patents, including a new handpiece for shearing, a multi-radial wheel, and a centrifugal motor; he also predicted the invention of the helicopter after studying the scientific behaviours of the boomerang. Most of the patents lapsed due to lack of funds, preventing him from ever realising his projects.

Unaipon was deeply impacted by his reading and researching of Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion, and maintained a lifelong interest in discovering how perpetual motion can exist for purpose driven inventions. *Science* moves us into the world of formulas, motion, energy and power.

As a dancer, one of the things that you do is to apply the concepts of physics to generate movement through your own body. The first section of *Science* is ***Motion*** and explores velocity, physics, and bodies in space.

The ***Four winds*** section is based on the story of the four winds – *Karrami* (East), *Walkund* (North), *Kolkami* (South), and *Tolkami* (West) – that herald the changing of the seasons, the times for fishing, gathering certain foods



Dancers rehearsing *Sister baskets*, photo by Lisa Tomasetti



Patrick Thaiday in *Unaipon* (2004), photo by Danielle Lyonne

and managing the land. The natural science behind this knowledge is something that has been disrupted by colonisation and modern farming, however this is knowledge that is critical to the sustainability of resources and land care.

The final piece of *Science* is **Power**, which explores David Unaipon's fascination with the concept of perpetual motion. Bodies become turbines and generate energy – the power of movement. Science provides the answer to mysteries and is studied and explained by different cultures in different ways. Unaipon maintained that it was possible for science and myth to exist together and this is depicted in the Space of Light corridor in this section, where one balances the other in movements of counter-tension.

DISCUSSION STARTER

Science and mythology are often seen as very different ways to explain the world, both in historical and contemporary contexts. How does Unaipon offer a perspective on how science and mythology are not so different and we might lose critical knowledge by dismissing one as being less important than the other?

“In various places of the Bible I found the blackfellow playing a part in life’s programme...In this Book I learned that God made all the nations of one blood and that in Jesus Christ colour and racial distinction disappeared. This helped me many times when I was refused accommodation because of my colour and race”.

DAVID UNAIPON, *MY LIFE STORY* (1954)

RELIGION

The final section of *Unaipon* is *Religion*. David Unaipon was a religious man and a traditional man. He spent much of his life preaching the Gospel, as he researched the stories of Indigenous people. He made them available for Europeans to learn from, and in turn develop respect and awareness of the knowledge contained in Aboriginal myths and legends. He believed in a reconciliation of cultures that would learn from each other, and maintained that belief in Jesus, Muhammed, Jehovah, or Buddha was essentially the same – a common belief in a higher being – and Indigenous cultures were no different. The music in the last section of *Unaipon* is *Miserere Mei, Deus* by Gregorio Allegri, one of the most sacred pieces of Christian music. The beauty and power of this early 17th Century chant pours voice and meaning through choreography that colours and celebrates a man of many cultures, a visionary, and a most remarkable leader of his people.

The Milky Way adorns the back of the stage, providing a space for thought and imagination to consider the higher powers that are honoured in cultures across the world. The Milky Way is also the ancestral home of Ponde, the giant cod, who in Ngarrindjeri story, created aspects much of the landscape of Ngarrindjeri Country.

DISCUSSION STARTER

Religions around the world encompass belief systems, worshipping practices, sacred places, holy texts, interpretations of texts, leadership structures and vast understandings of spirituality. How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultures different or similar? Why?

DAVID UNAIPON

INVENTOR, AUTHOR,
PHILOSOPHER, VISIONARY.

Most Australians are familiar with David Unaipon's face as the man depicted on the Australian fifty-dollar note, but know little about this extraordinary man's life and work. A scientist, inventor, philosopher, writer, storyteller and Christian preacher, he was also a political activist who chose to influence society through his words, his dialogue, his literature and his scientific contributions.

David Unaipon (1872–1967) was a Ngarrindjeri man of the Warrawaldi clan, born in 1872 at Point McLeay Mission in South Australia. Unaipon is an Anglicised version of his traditional Potawolin family name, Ngnunaiton. He was the fourth of nine children born to James Unaipon and Nymbulda, a Karatinjeri clanswoman, and his early life was spent learning the traditional ways of his People. James Unaipon was one of the first Aboriginal men to embrace Christianity, becoming an active member of the laity and an influential member of the mission community. His son David spent his early life on the mission until he left at the age of thirteen to spend five years in Adelaide in the house of Charles Burney 'C.B.' Young. He was brought to the Young household as a servant, and was also provided the chance to learn about philosophy, science and music. He read the Classics, studied the great philosophers, learned to speak Latin and Ancient Greek and became skilled at playing Bach on the organ. He showed an insatiable thirst for knowledge which did not diminish until the day he died.

Unaipon put his own culture on the same platform as all the other great cultures of the world. When we consider the times he lived, when White Australia was government policy and the general belief was that Indigenous people and cultures were heading for extinction, this perspective was both courageous and unique. He argued that even though Aboriginal people live very simply and in harmony with nature, rather than in a society that exploited the environment in the name of 'progress', their cultures are just as complex and impressive as any of the other great ancient civilisations.

"... His name is Narroondarie. This mythological being, who now lives in the heavens, gave Aborigines their tribal laws and customs. Aboriginal myths, legends and stories were told to laughing open-eyed children centuries before our present-day European culture began; stories that stand today as a link between the dawn of the world and our latest civilization."

DAVID UNAIPON, C. 1925

In 1924, Unaipon published an article in *The Daily Telegraph* titled *Aboriginals: Their Traditions and Customs*. Shortly after, he signed a contract with publisher Angus & Robertson to compile a collection of stories from various Aboriginal peoples with the view to publish the manuscript as a book. Unaipon was paid £2.2s (2 pounds, 2 shillings) per thousand words, provided as the stories were submitted. Communication was challenging for Unaipon at that time

as he was constantly travelling as a preacher within communities and as an adviser to government, and the critical letter that confirmed acceptance of the final stories and the publication date was never received by Unaipon. After one year of the project stalling, a medical officer called William Ramsay Smith purchased the manuscript and published it under his own name with no reference to Unaipon's work or authorship. The book was eventually re-published under Unaipon's name in 2001, largely due to the efforts of historians Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker. More recently, Unaipon's original

manuscript *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines* was nominated by the State Library of NSW to be recorded on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register.

Unaipon studied Egyptian hieroglyphs and compared them to Aboriginal carvings. He studied astronomy and made connection to the stories about the stars and the sky that existed in his own culture. He mapped and investigated the



flight patterns of the boomerang and fed that information into his inventions and explorations of aerodynamics.

Inhabiting the space between the oppositional demands of western and Indigenous cultures, Unaipon pursued his endless love of learning and discovery but remained firmly based in his culture. The way he negotiated these two worlds was to learn everything he could about western culture and claimed that the two greatest books he ever read were Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687) and the Bible. Science and religion were not oppositional for Unaipon. He was able to engage with both in a spiritual context, holding his cultural identity at the centre. This was not an easy road for a man who was often maligned and discriminated against for his racial heritage. Whenever Unaipon felt the hurt of discrimination, he would reach for the Bible, where he found there was a place for him – a place for all people regardless of their colour, race or religion. He held the view that despite greater spiritual powers having different names – Jesus, or Allah, or Narroondarie, or Jehovah – it was all the same. The lifeline from the moment our spirit is conceived in the womb, continues with us throughout our life and beyond.

This was a man who at that time, was not considered a citizen under the Australian Constitution, and yet his scientific achievements earned him the reputation as the 'Leonardo da Vinci of Australia'.

White society would say at the time that Unaipon and his contemporary Albert Namatjira were exceptions. But Unaipon argued they were not exceptions, they were examples of what could be learnt if people opened their minds and fed their curiosity about Indigenous cultures – perhaps they would then respect those cultures and wish to know more.

Unaipon worked endlessly for the rights of his people to be heard at the highest levels of government. In the early 1900s he travelled widely, combining his Christian preaching activities with meetings with the representatives of the Aborigines' Friends Association, consulting on Aboriginal policy, working towards bettering the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across the country. He also promoted the idea for a separate Aboriginal state in central and northern Australia. As a spokesperson for Aboriginal people, his advice was well received and effective in influencing policy. He was a strong advocate for education for Aboriginal people – something that was supported by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, however this was not always received positively by certain members of the Aboriginal community who preferred affirmative action and public protest. Unaipon's view was that change should be gradual and would be achieved through education and collaboration.

Images of David Unaipon, AA676/5/19/28, AA676/5/19/29, AA676/5/19/30, AA676/5/19/31, AA676/5/19/32, M Angus Collection, courtesy of the South Australian Museum Archives.

COMMEMORATION

In 1953, Unaipon was awarded a prestigious Coronation Medal, and his portrait was commissioned numerous times. In 1988, the David Unaipon Award for Aboriginal writers was initiated, and the Annual Unaipon Lecture was established at University of South Australia. An additional David Unaipon Address was initiated in 2018 at the Kings College in London.

In 1995, the Reserve Bank of Australia issued a new design for the fifty-dollar note, replacing the images of scientists Howard Florey and Ian Clunies Ross with David Unaipon and Edith Cowan, the first female member of an Australian Parliament. In 2018, the Bank re-issued the note with some updated design and security features. The side of the new fifty-dollar note depicting David Unaipon includes shields from Unaipon's Ngarrindjeri nation and the practices of *miwi*, traditional navel cord exchange that Unaipon wrote about in his *Legendary Tales*. It also features the Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*), Unaipon's *ngaitji* or totem.

CULTURAL CONSULTATION

Frances Rings at the State Library of New South Wales, photo by Joy Lai.



“Visiting his family and the land of Unaipon’s traditional community in Raukkan was critical in the development of this dance work. Community consultation is imperative when making works that draw on the stories of traditional communities. It’s about respect for the people and land who inspire the story, and ensures the voice of the Ngarrindjeri community is appropriately depicted in the work. The Raukkan community who welcomed me and taught me so much about this man, as well as the land where he came from, were an incredible inspiration. It is a very powerful part of the world - you can feel it. Where the fresh water comes to meet the salt water - it has always been sacred. The Murray River spills into two massive freshwater lakes - Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert/Yarli,

and they’re teeming with birds and wildlife. To the south is the Great Australian Bight. Huge mussel shells gather on the shores and make the land extremely fertile. It is one of the most amazing and beautiful communities I’ve ever encountered. The Ngarrindjeri culture is quite distinctive. Nobody in Australia or the world weaves like the Ngarrindjeri weavers. Tragically, the community was decimated by small pox, which travelled down the Murray system as European settlements developed and the river systems were contaminated. Communities all along the river started dying before they even saw white man. All these stories seemed to me like a midden, uncovering each layer, the history is still alive, and layers are still being set down.”

Frances Rings, 2004



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David Unaipon (1872-1967), Reserve Bank of Australia

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STAMPING GROUND

JIŘÍ KYLIÁN

CREATIVE TEAM

Choreographer Jiří Kylián

Composer Carlos Chávez

Set Design Jiří Kylián

Lighting Design Jiří Kylián (concept), Joop Caboot (realisation)

Lighting Re-Design Kees Tjebbes

Costume Design Heidi de Raad

Remount Director Roslyn Anderson

As a dance work, Jiří Kylián's *Stamping Ground* (1983) has had an extremely unique life, and the presentation of this work by Bangarra Dance Theatre is a chapter in the life of this piece of choreography that 37 years ago would have been completely unpredictable. Bangarra did not exist in 1983 when *Stamping Ground* was created.

Stamping Ground was created out of deeply considered impressions and emotional responses to a very special experience of Indigenous culture. The work was shaped in the hands of one of the world's greatest choreographers along with six extraordinary dancers. *Stamping Ground* premiered in 1983 and then lived a contemporary existence in the canon of western dance theatre. In 2019, it returns to its cultural roots. This is something to be celebrated.

Created for the Nederlands Dans Theater, where Kylián was the Artistic Director from 1975 to 1999, the work is inspired by Kylián's long interest in Aboriginal dance and its centrality, along with story, song, music, and painting in the life of Australia's Indigenous peoples. In 1972, while engaged as a dancer in the Stuttgart Ballet he saw a television documentary that showed two Aboriginal men performing a dance. Kylián said, 'The dance itself was actually quite simple but the philosophical depth which this work contained was completely overwhelming. This was one of the most powerful dances I ever saw'. Kylián spoke about this impression often to his colleagues and friends until one day the opportunity for Kylián to go to Australia to

experience first-hand the culture of Indigenous people came about in 1980.

It was in many respects a series of chance encounters between individuals, who happened to be connected to other individuals who had the scope to make things possible. The names of these people are many but it is worth noting that much of the work was done by a Swedish ex-dancer, film maker, and arts administrator, Veit Bethke (1922-1988). With a handy introduction from his sister-in-law the actress Bibi Andersson, Bethke was introduced to two Australian film makers who had recently completed a television series, *The Dreaming* which featured the now legendary actor David Gulpullil. Bethke worked to lay down the scope and platform for the project where Kylián would create a production that would involve the making of three works to commissioned scores from renowned composers Toru Takemitsu (Japan), Luciano Berio (Italy) and Arne Nordheim (Norway). There would be a documentary film and an abstract impression film. Financial and practical support was sourced from the Dutch and Australian government and the full production was looking at pre-sales to Austria, UK, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Germany and of course Holland.

Kylián along with his friends and colleagues, and in consultation with the Aboriginal communities of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory worked to arrange the largest corroboree ever organised in Australia in recorded history.



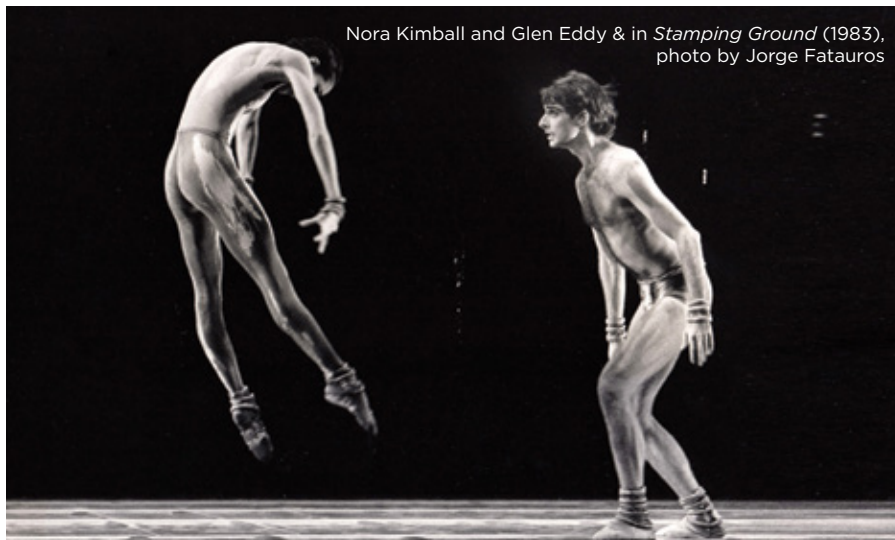
Glen Eddy, Marly Knobon, and Nacho Duato in *Stamping Ground* (1983), photo by Hans Gerritsen

The logistics of getting this international group to Groote Eylandt after the rainy season, and facilitating nearly a 1000 Aboriginal men, women and children from all over the country - Kimberley to Cape York to the Central Desert - was an extraordinary achievement.

Following the week-long event on Groote Eylandt, Kylián reflected on the project and determined that it was far too ambitious, and it was clear that it would not be appropriate for the planned works to continue to production. The project was cancelled. However, the deep impact of the experience did not leave Kylián, and in 1981 he created a small work called *Nomaden*, which explored a choreographic shape to his response of having witnessed Aboriginal culture in this unique traditional setting. Angular and staccato movement stood in contrast to the broad sweeping powerfully emotional and poignant works like *Psalm Symphony*, *Sinfonietta*, *Overgrown Path* and *Soldatenmis*. In 1983, the Nederlands Dans Theater premiered Kylián's *Stamping Ground*. The work was created very closely with the cast of six dancers, Marly Knobon, Nora Kimball, Hélène Perback, James Vincent, Nacho Duato and Glen Eddy, taking this new movement language into a choreographic conversation of individual spirit. Kylián has remarked that this work allowed the dancers 'to discover the animal in themselves'. The work is simultaneously playful, provocative, delicate and highly charged with energy that draws on the strength and fragility of our emotional selves.



Jiří Kylián, photo by Anton Corbijn



Nora Kimball and Glen Eddy & in *Stamping Ground* (1983), photo by Jorge Fatauros

JIRÍ KYLIÁN

Jiří Kylián (Czech Republic, 1947) started his dance career at the age of nine at the School of the National Ballet in Prague. In 1962, he was accepted as a student at the Prague Conservatory. He left Prague when he received a scholarship for the Royal Ballet School in London in 1967. After completing his scholarship, he went to the Stuttgart Ballet led by John Cranko where he made his debut as a choreographer with *Paradox* for the Noverre Gesellschaft. After making three ballets for Nederlands Dans Theater (*Viewers*, *Stoolgame* and *La Cathédrale Engloutie*), he became Artistic Director of the company in 1975. In 1978, he put Nederlands Dans Theater on the international map with *Sinfonietta*. That same year, together with Carel Birnie, he founded Nederlands Dans Theater II, which gave – and still gives – young dancers the opportunity to develop their skills and talents, and which functions as a breeding ground for young talent. He also created Nederlands Dans Theater III, a company for “older” dancers, in 1991. After an extraordinary record of service, he handed over artistic leadership of Nederlands Dans Theater in 1999, but remained associated the company as house choreographer. He has created more than 100 ballets, 72 of which were for Nederlands Dans Theater. His work has been performed all over the world by more than 80 companies and schools. He has not only made works for Nederlands Dans Theater but also for the Stuttgart Ballet, the Paris Opéra, Swedish television and

the Tokyo Ballet. He has worked with many creative personalities of international stature, among them:

- Composers
 - Arne Nordheim (*Ariadne*, 1997)
 - Tōru Takemitsu (*Dream Time*, 1983), and
- Designers
 - Walter Nobbe (*Sinfonietta*, 1978)
 - Bill Katz (*Symphony of Psalms*, 1978)
 - John Macfarlane (*Forgotten Land*, 1980)
 - Michael Simon (*Stepping Stones*, 1998)
 - Atsushi Kitagawara (*One Of A Kind*, 1998)
 - Susumu Shingu (*Toss of a Dice*, 2005).

In the summer of 2006, he created a film entitled *Car Men* with the director Boris Paval Conen and in 2013 another film *Between Entrance and Exit* with the same director. This film was choreographed on location in open brown coal mines in the Czech Republic.

In the course of his career, Kylián received many international awards including:

- Officer of the Orange Order (Netherlands)
- Honorary Doctorate from Juilliard School in New York
- Nijinsky Awards for Best Choreographer, Company, and Work
- Benoit de la Dance - Moscow and Berlin
- Honorary Medal of the President of the Czech Republic
- Légion d'honneur (France), and

- In 2008 he was distinguished with one of the highest royal honours, the Medal of the Order for Arts and Science of the House of Orange, given to him by Her Majesty the Queen Beatrix from the Netherlands.
- Kylián received the Lifetime Achievement Award in the field of dance and theatre by the Czech Ministry of Culture in Prague and,
- In this same year, the documentary *Forgotten Memories* received the Czech Television Award.
- In 2017, Kylián received the prestigious gold penning as honorary citizen of The Hague, the Netherlands.
- In April 2018, Kylián was nominated to become a member of the Académie des Beaux Arts in Paris. This highly prestigious recognition was complemented with the Academy's decision to change its statutes, and add a special seat for Choreography. Jiří Kylián's inauguration officially took place in Paris on March 13, 2019.

IMPRESSIONS RETURNING

The idea for Bangarra Dance Theatre to present Jiří Kylián's *Stamping Ground* is a story of powerful impressions, exchanges of knowledge, and the omnipresence of connection between individuals regardless of their background and personal story. Given breath from the deeply etched impressions that

Tyrel Dulvarie rehearsing *Stamping Ground*, photo by Lisa Tomasetti



Glen Eddy, Marly Knob, and Nacho Duato in *Stamping Ground* (1983), photo by Jorge Fatauros



Kylián absorbed from his experience of the 1980 Groote Eylandt gathering, *Stamping Ground* travelled into the choreographic process in 1983, and the result was a contemporary dance theatre work that translates to the stage as a work acknowledging dance as an essence for cultures to coexist.

The first time Stephen Page saw Kylián's choreography was in the mid-1980s when he was a student at NAISDA Dance College. One of the teachers gathered a few students together to watch the work of a choreographer by the name of Jiří Kylián who was based in the Netherlands, and had made a work called *Stamping Ground*. Page immediately recognised a spirit within the work that spoke to him through a cultural connection. Page kept that experience and impression alive over the next three decades as he went on to become a Dancer, Choreographer and Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre.

Page had considered *Stamping Ground* for Bangarra's repertoire on a few occasions. After 30 years of building Bangarra's creative foundations, creating rich and diverse repertoire, and growing a reputation of renown throughout Australia as well as internationally, the time was right. Kylián was supportive of the idea of Bangarra presenting *Stamping Ground*, and sent through more stories and thoughts about the work to support the process of the work circling back to the cultures and people that gave it breath.

The fact that this is the first time Bangarra has presented the work of a non-Indigenous artist and that the creator is one of the most

influential choreographers of our time is significant. But perhaps more significant is the fact that this very unique work, *Stamping Ground*, will have the opportunity to complete its own unique life cycle of culture and creativity.



It might sound strangely conceited, but I was actually the initiator of this gathering (on Groote Eylandt). With the help of my friends we were able to convince many institutions to contribute to this quite momentous event.... But the leaders of the different Aboriginal cultural groups wanted to know who I was, before giving their approval. One day some of them gathered in Groote Eylandt to watch a video of my work. After the viewing they left without saying a single word. The next day they came back with the verdict: "He is a good dreamer".

Needless to say - this was one of the highest awards I have ever received in my entire career.

It is interesting to know that I was not the only stranger at that gathering, but the different Aboriginal groups were strangers to themselves. Their cultural backgrounds, rituals and languages were different. But what truly united them, was dance.

This experience taught me essential things about the immense diversity and endless possibilities of human physical, mental and spiritual expression.

Jiří Kylián, 2019



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TO MAKE FIRE

STEPHEN PAGE

CREATIVE TEAM

Choreographers Stephen Page, Elma Kris

Composer David Page, Steve Francis

Set Design Jacob Nash Peter England

Lighting Design Nick Schlieper

Costume Design Jennifer Irwin

MATHINNA

Mutton bird

People

Exile

Adoption

ABOUT

Story Teller

Zey – south wind

Kuki – northwest wind

Naygay – north wind

Sager – southeast wind

CLAN

Wiradjuri (*Initiate, ID, 2011*)

Young Man (*Kinship, ID 2011*)

Promise (*Kinship, ID, 2011*)

Dots (*Rush, Walkabout, 2002*)

Hope (*Rush, Walkabout, 2002*)

Making fire is to ignite the landscape in order to bring on new growth, sustenance and renewal. Fire is essentially a chemical reaction that results in combustion, and its application causes complete change to anything that comes in contact with it. Fire generates smoke, which communicates information about what is coming. Fire is a powerful agent of change.

Over the last 30 years, Bangarra has been igniting the stage with stories told from Indigenous perspectives, challenging perceptions, and giving people the freedom to engage emotionally with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. This is the fire that Bangarra generates. The works are provocative, educational, and inspiring.

Bangarra's storytelling through dance theatre has evolved and diversified over the last 30 years, to the point where it is recognised as one of Australia's most important cultural agents. The selection of works in *to make fire* illustrates a songline of Bangarra's evolving creative process, and the stories it has brought to the stage. The stories are many, and encompass tragedy, conflict, joy, hope, history, contemporary issues and more. These stories point to the past and the future and the two worlds that all Indigenous people negotiate throughout their lives.

Mathinna tells the story of a young girl who was born in 1835 on the Aboriginal mission settlement on Flinders Island (Tasmania) called Wybalenna. In 1839, Mathinna was removed from her family by the Governor of the colony Sir John Franklin and his wife Lady Jane, and brought to Government House to be raised in a European setting. Four years later, the Franklins returned to England and placed Mathinna in an orphanage. The rest of Mathinna's life was spent between her community on Flinders Island, the orphanage, and a small group of Aboriginal people living at Oyster Cove.

Mutton Birds were an essential food source for the Aboriginal people of Tasmania and the birds' feathers were used to make cape-like coverings for warmth. The spiritual significance of the mutton bird was as a totem for clan members. The image of the mutton birds hanging from the tree also points to the proclamations that were posted to warn Aboriginal people of the consequences of resistance. **People** illustrates the connection between

the original human inhabitants of the land and the animals who provide them with sustenance. In **Exile**, the fear and sadness that builds from a clash of cultural differences and a lack of empathy is depicted through the very distinct choreographic scenes that happen simultaneously. **Adoption** reflects on the practices in which Indigenous children are removed from their families to be 'instructed' in European ways, and assimilated into western society, a practice unfortunately prevalent in Australia since the first settlement.

Mathinna was created in 2008.

For more information about Mathinna, please go to Mathinna e-resource, and/or request Mathinna Study Guide.

Elma Kris' **About** expresses her curiosity about the four *Gub* (winds) of the Torres Strait. The winds are a daily consideration in Islander life; they move and shape themselves in magical and mysterious ways; they paint colour into the day, the night, the sky and the seas. **Zey** is the cool breeze, feminine in nature, and moving with fluidity. **Kuki** is the wind of the storm season; Kris sees Kuki as having a strong energy – it blows at the time of tropical storms and rough seas. Kris gave this wind a charcoal black colour to represent the cloud changes. Coming from the north, **Naygay** (Naigai) is the calm and gentlest wind. In the silver tones of a calm sea, the dancers layer their movements and form patterns that shoot out like sunrays. **Sager** is the dominant wind gusting from the southeast bringing white dust across the islands.



Bangarra dancers rehearsing *to make fire*, photo by Lisa Tomasetti

While the conventional western calendar of seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter) are broadly determined by western calendar dates, the rise and fall of temperature, and the noticeable changes to the landscape, it is the winds of the Torres Strait that are the seasonal forecasters for the people who live in this region. The behaviours of these winds guide the people in their daily lives and the spirits of these winds inform the essential elements of their cultural life.

About was created in 2013 as part of the program titled *Belong*.

For more information about *About*, please go to [About e-resource](#) and/or request [Belong Study Guide](#).

Clan is a curation of excerpts from the *Initiate* and *Kinship* sections of *ID (Belong, 2011)* and *Dots and Hope* sections of *Rush (Walkabout, 2002)*. Both works are created by Stephen Page.

Rush captures the energy and resilience of youth – the struggle to reconcile the old ways with the new and cleanse the pain of the past. Fresh songlines are being drawn in the ancient soil – the rush of survival.

ID is an observation about the ways western culture has initiated and inculcated certain perceptions about Aboriginal identity. These perceptions raise many questions for the Aboriginal community. How do we ‘belong’ in our own land? How do we negotiate the knowing of traditional culture and the reality

of contemporary living? How do we process what has happened in the past, how we should approach the future? Where do our reference points collide? Where do we position ourselves within the polity?

ID questions incidences where a ‘degree’ of Aboriginality is determined based on the assessment of skin colour. This is more of a psychological exploration, of how western culture questions something and looks for answers. Aboriginal people are all Aboriginal people – but they are all different skin colours. It is important in our work at Bangarra to disrupt common perceptions, question the evolution of certain stereotypes and work to guide generation change toward a deeper respect and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures.

For more information about *ID*, please request the [Kinship Study Guide](#).



‘What leads us to walk away from what we know best? Sometimes there is no choice. The hardest journey can often be to rediscover the steps of the original walkabout – to tread as our ancestors did in a continuous cycle of reverence to the land’.

STEPHEN PAGE



I didn’t want to make a ‘best of’ as part of this program, but I did want to find a way to celebrate how Bangarra responds to historical works, biographical works and what that means in our repertoire, and also to celebrate and pay respect to Torres Strait Islander cultures. So that’s why we’ve created three worlds that are held together by the cloth from *Patyegarang* (2014), which represents the spirit of our creative stories and cultural knowledge coming together.

Stephen Page, Artistic Director

As a contemporary song man, I am a messenger of our old people’s stories through music, always seeking to expand my musical knowledge and taking a fresh approach to bringing to life our history on stage.

Bangarra has given me so much... It has helped me learn more about my culture and myself than any university could have.

David Page (1961-2016), Composer

My most exciting job is to work on a Bangarra production. For a composer, there’s a lot of pressure. But it’s so liberating because you’re a part of the core creation process in writing the music. When you do a piece with Bangarra, from the get-go you are a part of telling that story through the music – they’re my proudest moments.

Steve Francis, Composer

For *to make fire*, we’re telling stories from the past, in the present, and the future, from all over the country. But country is Country and for me, Bangarra is here in Sydney and this is where we create work and this is the landscape where we dream everything up.

Jacob Nash, Set Designer

I can do things for this company that I can never do for other performing arts companies – because with Bangarra, it’s always collaborative. I provide a skin, by using texture and fabric and dyeing and painting, and they turn it into something else: a work of art.

Jennifer Irwin, Costume Designer

I almost always focus first and foremost on the story. I always start by doing my homework. Because dance is such an abstract medium, it’s as much the job of the lighting design to help tell the story as it is of any other element. It’s so easy to light dance and just make pretty pictures, but that’s the easy way out. You actually need to be subtly telling the audience where they are in a story the whole time – that spine is much more important to me.

Nick Schlieper, Lighting Designer

PRE- AND POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Below are some guiding questions/discussion points that teachers can explore either before or after the performance. As well as discussions and with responses, students can explore creative responses – a visual art piece, a written review, or a creative writing response.



Bangarra dancers at curtain call for *Bennelong*, photo by Tiffany Parker

UNAIPON

1. Explore the discussion starters and conduct discussions either as a class or in small focus groups, incorporating contemporary sociocultural perspectives that might emerge as conversations develop.
2. Discuss how the story of David Unaipon incorporates a number of cross-cultural stories that illustrate the way societies and cultures can co-exist.
3. Identify aspects of Unaipon's life where he is simultaneously celebrated and discriminated against. What does this suggest in terms of social conventions and perspectives in the first century after settlement?
4. Are there continuing tensions between western capitalist society and respect for First Nations communities and cultures (economically, culturally, socially, and or politically)? If so, how to these tensions manifest? Build the discussion to incorporate a range of perspectives, including the 'stories within the stories'.
5. How can we investigate and re-investigate our history from multiple perspectives?

STAMPING GROUND

1. Kylián is one of the most prolific and influential choreographers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Have a look at some of his works created before 1983 and compare them to works created after 1983. Excerpts are available on the Jiří Kylián website.
2. How was the process for the creation of *Stamping Ground* different to the way Kylián created other works?
3. How does the making and performing of *Stamping Ground* respect the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
4. *Stamping Ground* is the first work of a non-Indigenous choreographer to be re-mounted and programmed by Bangarra Dance Theatre. Why is this significant and why do you think *Stamping Ground* was the work chosen?
5. What do you notice about the choreography and how would you describe it in terms of its spirit? Can you identify certain motifs that repeat or vary?

TO MAKE FIRE

1. Consider the themes and stories of the various works represented in *To Make Fire*. Think about how they are similar and how they are different; how the culture of the Torres Strait Islands is different to Aboriginal cultures and how the stories are communicated through dance.
2. How can Indigenous dance theatre serve as a powerful form of storytelling? Why? What are the strengths (or weaknesses) around human movement as 'language' when compared to written or spoken text?
3. How do the dance, design and sound/music elements complement each other?
4. Were there any specific works or sections of works that made a particular impact on how you felt about something, stimulating a response that you weren't expecting?
5. Looking at the design features (set, costume, lighting) of the production as a whole, were there any specific designs that you found particularly interesting, surprising and/or effective? How do these design/s amplify the strength of the section/work and how do they add to the story being told, or the atmosphere being heightened?
6. How does the technical skill of a Dancer support the choreography? What are some of the physical skills and attributes that Dancers need to cultivate to bring the choreography to a high level of performance?
7. How do the creative and interpretative skills of the Dancer support the choreography? Do you notice anything about the Dancers' focus, their capacity for adding texture to movement, or their emotional input to the performance?





bangarra

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