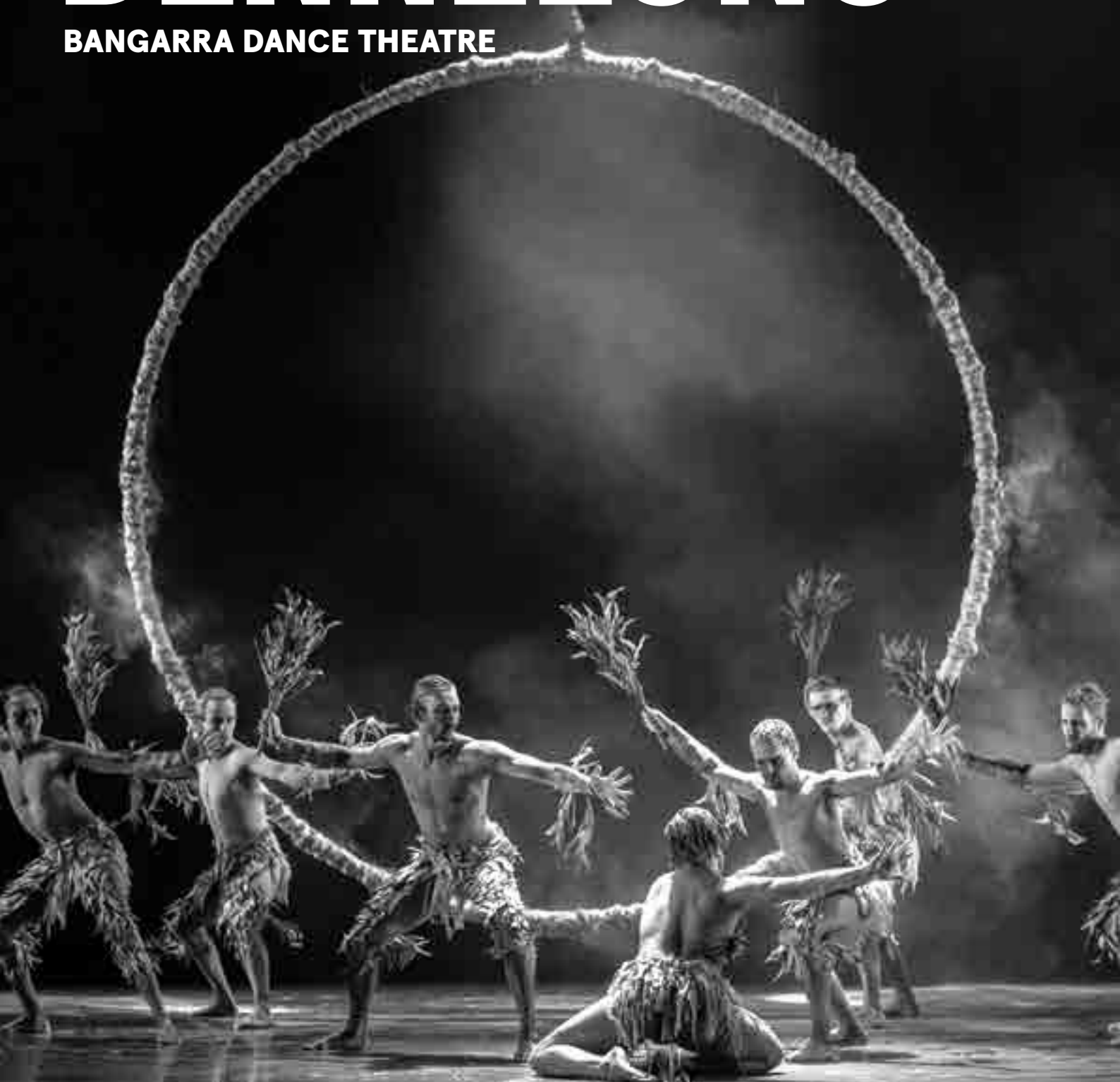


BENNELONG

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



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Perth Festival acknowledges the Noongar people who continue to practise their values, language, beliefs and knowledge on their kwobidak boodjar.

They remain the spiritual and cultural birdiyangara of this place and we honour and respect their caretakers and custodians and the vital role Noongar people play for our community and our Festival to flourish.

BENNELONG

HEATH LEDGER THEATRE | THU 6 – SUN 9 FEB | 75MINS

Hear from the artists in a Q&A session after the performance on Fri 7 Feb.



This performance contains smoke and haze effects

There is a special relationship in the performing arts between creator, performer and audience. Without any one of those elements, the ceremony of performance ceases to exist. In choosing to be here, we thank you for your act of community as we celebrate the artists on the stage and the imaginations of those who have given them environments to inhabit, words to embody and songs to sing.

Perth Festival 2020 is a celebration of us – our place and our time. It wouldn't be the same without you.

Iain Grandage,
Perth Festival Artistic Director

FANFARE

You were called to your seat tonight by *The Celestial March* composed by 19-year-old WAAPA student Hanae Wilding. Visit perthfestival.com.au for more information on the Fanfare project.

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO DO AFTER THE SHOW?

Venture down below here at the State Theatre Centre and slide into the late-night world of Perth Festival at Bar Underground. Open every night until late.



Image: Vishal Pandey

CREDITS

Choreography Stephen Page with the Bangarra Dancers

Composer Steve Francis

Lighting Designer Nick Schlieper

Costume Designer Jennifer Irwin

Set Designer Jacob Nash

Dramaturg Alana Valentine

Cultural Consultant Matthew Doyle

Bangarra Dancers Elma Kris, Tara Gower, Beau Dean, Riley Smith, Nicola Sabatino, Rikki Mason, Rika Hamaguchi, Tyrel Dulvarie, Glory Tuohy-Daniell, Baden Hitchcock, Ryan Pearson, Lillian Banks, Bradley Smith, Courtney Radford, Kassidy Waters, Kallum Goolagong, Gusta Mara, Kiarn Doyle

Bangarra Executive

Artistic Director Stephen Page

Interim Executive Director Tony Grybowski

Associate Artistic Director Frances Rings

Rehearsal Director Daniel Roberts

Production Team

Director, Technical & Production John Colvin

Production Manager Cat Studley

Company Manager Claudia Elder

Stage Manager Lillian Hannah U

Head Electrician Ryan Shuker

Head of Wardrobe Monica Smith

Head Mechanist David Tongs

AV Technician Emjay Matthews

Production Assistant & Assistant Stage Manager

Stephanie Storr

Bennelong supported by



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A WORD FROM THE CREATORS

My childhood thirst for stories has never left me; in fact, it has only intensified. I'm fortunate that I have a strong connection to culture to draw upon, a rich songline of ancestors who were extraordinary in their tenacity and survival. I'm surrounded by artists who are equally as passionate about our culture, and who use their own experiences as contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women to bring a new perspective to ancient lore.

The remarkable story of Woollarawarre Bennelong is one that resonates deeply. He was a traditional man who was, against his initial will, shown a European way of life, and became an intermediary between his clan and the colonialists. It was a duality that cost him dearly on both sides. Never quite belonging to his new tribe, and earning suspicion from the old, Bennelong paid the price of first contact by being exiled from both communities.

The question of how we move forward while still being connected to our culture and heritage has inspired much of my life's work. Bennelong is in all of us, as we navigate the ancient and the modern elements of our lives. More than two centuries after his death, telling his extraordinary story and sharing his journey is a powerful reminder that there is still a long way for us to go before we can say we're at a place of true equality.

Stephen Page, Choreographer

Writing original music for any production is always a journey of discovery and *Bennelong* is no exception. When Stephen and I had our first meeting, he told me he was interested in creating a work that not only honoured the amazing story of the man himself and those around him, but also one that spoke to the past and the present. A work that was both narrative and yet abstract; operatic one moment and intimate the next. For me it was a challenge that was exciting and equally scary.

On the anniversary of David Page's passing, we watched an interview with him where he talked about the process of writing. He spoke of sitting for days in the studio trying to create without joy and then how sometimes music just flowed through him and a new piece would come together in a matter of hours. I've always said that I don't really know where the music comes from, so hearing David's thoughts reassured me that if it wasn't coming that I should try and be patient because it could at any time. I had hoped to honour his legacy on this production and I will admit that when I was blocked I would often ask for his help and some of the resulting music that "flowed through me" I felt was a gift from him. If you have a keen ear, you will hear a couple of tributes to his music in this score.

The personal quest of Matthew Doyle to rekindle his culture has been instrumental in so much of the creation of *Bennelong*. He has shared with me not only his stories and language but also his beautiful voice and original songs that have elevated the music to new heights.

I have tried to create an eclectic score, so alongside the more expected Bangarra music, don't be surprised when you hear some strains of 'Rule Britannia', a touch of 'Waltzing Matilda', some Haydn and a rekindling of a salty old sea shanty.

Steve Francis, Composer

In approaching the story of Woollarawarre Bennelong, we began by acknowledging that Bennelong is a contested figure, disputed about by historians and countrymen, a revered ancestor and a person who lived and walked and fished and had a sacred, custodial relationship to the land. But Bennelong's life and his name have also become a symbol, a shorthand for a kind of interlocutory conflict, an idea onto which otherness and difference, prejudice and racism has been, and can still be, projected. There is a plethora of writing, images and opinion about this Wangal man who was snatched from the water while fishing in 1789, kept in chains in the early settlement and later travelled to England with Governor Phillip in 1792.

Stephen's genius as a theatre maker is to understand and acknowledge and draw from the historical record, but as with so many Bangarra productions, to use it as a point of departure from which to take off into his own experience and that of his remarkable dancers. To ask questions about the frustrations, joys, compromises, griefs and survival dimensions of contemporary life for First Nations people. In this way the living dance of flesh and movement and voice and music that has become *Bennelong* gestures to the facts of the man Bennelong's history but has no intention to be a historical recreation and only loosely a chronology of the events of his life. Instead *Bennelong* is both a particular individual and a bold abstraction, a burden, a role model, a victor, a tragedy, a signpost to the future and an opportunity for contemporary ritual and ceremony.

Alana Valentine, Dramaturg

Q&A WITH STEPHEN PAGE

How did this project come about?

I had always been intrigued by Woollarawarre Bennelong. For all the years I've been at Bangarra there's always been some part of his story featured in an exhibition, a lecture or on TV. He's probably one of the most observed and written about Aboriginal men in our colonial history. One of the important things about *Bennelong* is that it starts off pre-1788. We all know the significance of 1788 as a date, but there is very little reflection on what 'Australia' would have been like only 26 years earlier in 1762, which is roughly around the time Bennelong was born. I thought it was time for us to reclaim his story, a story from here, from the Eora Nation where our company resides.

The story of Bennelong is the first archetype of first contact, but most of what we know about him has been channelled through historical accounts written from the white perspective. It was important to take this historical piece and run it through the lens of the black perspective. Like most Australians, many of our dancers have learnt only highly edited and distorted versions of our history when they were growing up. I was conscious that creating *Bennelong* would add to both the cultural knowledge of the company and our wider collective societal knowledge. The very way that Bangarra works are created means that we are always learning new knowledge, reframing stories and embodying culture throughout the creative process.

What messages does Bennelong's story have for contemporary Australia?

Bennelong speaks to the core issues around contemporary Australian identity and how we deal with, and narrativise our recent past. It speaks to the ongoing legacies of colonialism that we are still dealing with now. Bangarra's work always reflects on the resilience and strength of people and land and story, but *Bennelong* in particular looks at the value of what was culturally here and the ongoing impacts of assimilation and dispossession. It's a reminder of the importance of the resilience of the spirit and what could have been if there had been exchange and reconciliation at that time, and if respect for culture and language had been developed back then to protect and preserve different cultural customs and ways of being.

Bennelong is presented in a contemporary form and so doesn't seek to provide a literal representation of that era. Instead, it is an attempt to understand the sensibilities and emotional psychology of the people from that time. There is so much we don't know about Bennelong the man. Why did he have five names and what was the significance of each of those names? What was his kinship system and his cultural status? What gave him the wonderful confidence to build that relationship with Governor Phillip? How did he envision the relationship developing? Then of course, there are the questions about his agency as an individual within the colonial system. Did he think he could easily navigate the two worlds? Was there a point where he recognised that he was being used by the system, but was trapped? Or was he completely taken in by the myth-making power of western colonial culture?

I'm always fascinated with the question of how we would have evolved if we hadn't been colonised by the British. What would the relationship be between our many diverse nations? How would its peoples and diversity of cultures be preserved and respected today? Would Sydney be called Eora or Perth Noongar? What would be different in language and values, name and place? What sort of people would we be?

This has been one of Bangarra's most celebrated productions – why do you think that is?

I think it's a combination of factors – the significance of Bennelong himself as a man and the fact that it's an archetypal first contact story. Our historical works are always popular, perhaps because they drive a narrative, and this is a narrative told from a black perspective which has continuing relevance. People feel they're learning something, they're reclaiming history, reclaiming knowledge.

Bennelong's story is wrapped up with the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Bangarra is so proud of our responsibility as cultural caretakers, to be entrusted to carry these stories and to share them with audiences across the world. But still we are conscious of how our values, kinship systems and cultures are framed within the western cultural hegemony. There are Bennelongs amongst us still today. I'm Bennelong – I've got a foot in each world and I'm responding to the system, but I won't give up trying to reconnect and re-cleanse a culture of mine that's been totally displaced.

BIOGRAPHIES

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

Bangarra is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and one of Australia's leading performing arts companies. The company is widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for its powerful dancing, distinctive theatrical voice and utterly unique soundscapes, music and design.

Led by Artistic Director Stephen Page and Associate Artistic Director Frances Rings, Bangarra is currently in its 31st year but its dance technique is forged from over 65,000 years of culture, embodied with contemporary movement. The company's 17 dancers are professionally trained, dynamic artists who represent the pinnacle of Australian dance. Each has a proud Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander background, from various locations across the country.

Authentic storytelling, outstanding technique and deeply moving performances are Bangarra's unique signature.



STEPHEN PAGE Artistic Director & Choreographer

Stephen Page is a descendant of the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambah Nation from South East Queensland. In 1991 he was appointed Artistic Director of Bangarra and has developed a

signature body of works that have become milestones in Australian performing arts.

Page continues to reinvent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander storytelling within Bangarra and through collaborations with other performing arts companies. He notably directed the Indigenous sections for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies and created a new dance work for the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony.

He has choreographed over 25 works for Bangarra, including *Patyegarang* for Bangarra's 25th anniversary in 2014, and *Nyapanyapa*, as part of the *OUR land people stories* triple bill in 2016. In 2018, together with former Bangarra dancers Daniel Riley, Yolande Brown and the Bangarra ensemble, Stephen choreographed the critically acclaimed work *Dark Emu*. Inspired by Bruce Pascoe's book of the same name, it became the most successful production in the history of Bangarra, building on the success of his Helpmann Award-winning work *Bennelong* in 2017.

Page also directed the chapter *Sand* in the feature film *The Turning* (2013) and was also Artistic Associate for Sydney Theatre Company's production of *The Secret River*, which had its world premiere as part of Sydney Festival in 2013 and toured to Edinburgh International Festival and the National Theatre of Great Britain in 2019. He also choreographed the feature films *Bran Nue Dae* (2009) and *The Sapphires* (2011). His first full-length film *SPEAR* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival before screening at various arts festivals around Australia in early 2016.



FRANCES RINGS Associate Artistic Director

Frances Rings is of Kokatha heritage and also of German descent. In 2002 she made her mainstage choreographic debut for Bangarra to outstanding critical acclaim with *Rations* from *Walkabout*. She has followed this by creating six works for

the company; *Bush* (co-choreography), *Unaipon*, *X300*, *Artefact*, *Terrain* and *Sheoak*.

Rings has choreographed and danced in works for many of Australia's leading dance companies and choreographers including West Australian Ballet, Tasdance, Leigh Warren & Dancers, Meryl Tankard and Legs on the Wall. Internationally Frances has established important intercultural, creative relationships with First Nations artists most notably, Kahawi Dance Theatre (Canada) and Atamira Dance Company (NZ). Recently her work *Terrain* has been selected on the Higher School Certificate Dance Syllabus. In 2019 she returned to Bangarra in the position of Associate Artistic Director.

Rings has been the recipient of many awards, the most recent include Helpmann Awards for Best New Australian Dance Work and Best Regional Show, for *Terrain*; and for *Sheoak*, Best New Dance Work and Best Choreography in a Dance Work at the 2016 Helpmann Awards.



this energy is live

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