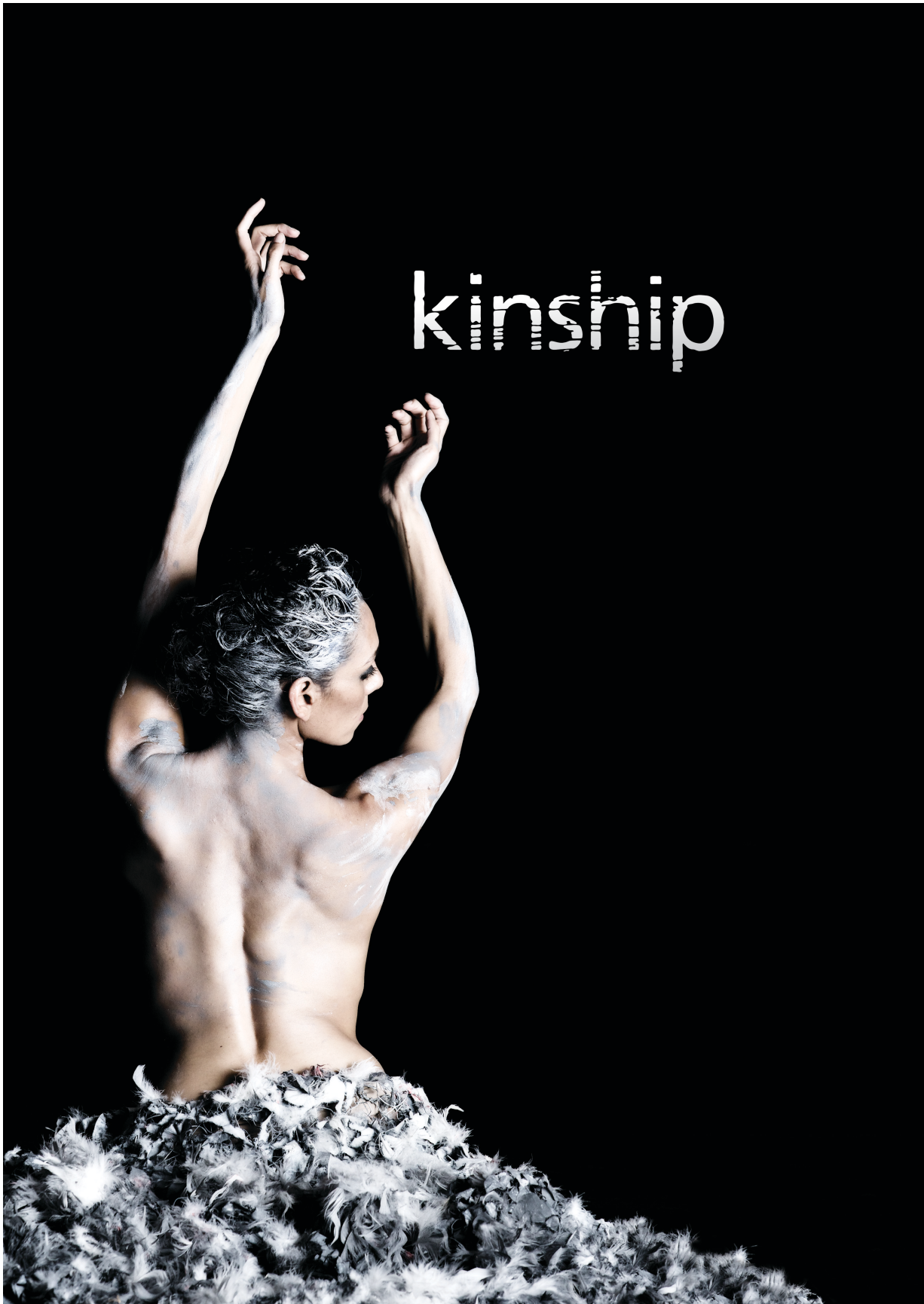


# *Kinship* Teachers Resource



## About BANGARRA

Bangarra is an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander organisation and 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.

Led by Artistic Director Stephen Page, we celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014 and achieved our highest box office results since the company's inception.

Our dance technique is forged from over 40,000 years of culture, infused with contemporary movement. The company's 16 dancers are professionally trained, dynamic artists who represent the pinnacle of Australian dance. Each has a proud Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage, from various places across the country.

Our relationships with Indigenous communities are the heart of Bangarra, with our repertoire created on country and stories gathered from respected community Elders. It's this inherent connection to our land and people that makes us unique and enjoyed by audiences from remote Australian regional centres to New York.

Bangarra's annual program includes a national tour of a world premiere work, performed in Australia's most iconic venues; a regional tour allowing audiences outside of capital cities the opportunity to experience Bangarra, and an international tour to maintain our global reputation for excellence.

Complementing these tours are education programs, workshops and special performances and projects, planting the seeds for the next generation of performers and storytellers.

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

**Bangarra's vision** is to:

*Respect and rekindle the links between traditional Indigenous cultures of Australia and new forms of contemporary artistic expressions;  
Create inspiring dance theatre productions of integrity and excellence that resonate with people throughout Australia and the world.*

This vision is inspired by the spirit, culture, values and traditions of Indigenous Australians. From these roots, Bangarra creates theatre that is artistically innovative, technically outstanding and truly exciting.

**Bangarra exists to create a foundation** for the care and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural life. Through its performances, Bangarra provides the opportunity for people of all cultural backgrounds to share knowledge and have a contemporary experience of the world's oldest living culture. Bangarra has nurtured the careers of hundreds of Indigenous artists, including dancers, choreographers, composers and designers. Over its 26 year history, Bangarra has produced over thirty original works for its repertoire. Bangarra has regularly

collaborated on creating new productions with other Australian performing arts companies including The Australian Ballet and the Sydney Theatre Company.

**Bangarra's dancers and collaborating artists** come from all over Australia, representing many Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander nations. This includes the major groups in relation to location, for example: Torres Strait Islanders, Queensland (Murri), New South Wales (Koori), Victoria (Koorie), South Australia (Anangu), 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), while others received their training at the Aboriginal College of Performing Arts (QLD), and others are graduates of dance courses delivered by universities around Australia.

## Using these TEACHER'S NOTES

### Introduction

These teachers' notes have been designed to assist you with classroom preparation in relation to Bangarra Dance Theatre's production *Kinship*. We hope that this resource will assist your students to further develop their understanding and enhance their experience when attending a Bangarra performance.

### Classroom Context and Curriculum

*Kinship* consists of two works from the Bangarra repertoire – *Brolga* and *ID*. These notes provide information on the themes, the creative processes involved in the making of the works, and the creative team who bring the works' to the stage. You can adapt the activities to suit your students' ages/year class, and relevant KLAs and curriculum topics.

Further links to related topics are suggested at the end of this resource. It is recommended that you first visit the sites and assess the suitability of the content for your particular school environment before including in your lesson plans.

This information will assist in preparing students prior to attending the performance and provides suggestions for activities, follow-up research to enrich and extend the experience beyond the performance into relevant areas of cross curricula study.

### About *Kinship*

*Kinship (Brolga and ID)* celebrates and explores Indigenous culture and perspectives. The works show the contrast between traditional culture's rich embrace and the issues that manifest through the sense of cultural difference and the threat of cultural loss.

*Kinship* opens with *Brolga (Gudurrku)*, a creation story inspired by the totemic systems in the Australian Aboriginal culture where every individual is assigned a creature totem related to their clan. The brolga is just one of many animal, plant or natural element totems that are landed down from generation to generation.

The second work in the *Kinship* program is *ID*. This work investigates being Aboriginal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, asking important questions about identity. In a series of dramatic and sometimes humorous observations, this dance contemplates human nature in modern society where skin colour can drive perceptions and impact behaviours. The work also celebrates the resilience of Australian Aboriginal culture as it is expressed in both traditional and contemporary forms.

## ***Brolga***

*Brolga* was originally premiered in 2001 as the first part of a three-part production titled Corroboree. *Brolga* is a story of learning, eldership and transformation along life's pathway.

Set in North East Arnhem Land, a young girl ventures out before sunset and finds herself on a brolga feeding ground. She senses the sacredness of the place, the sensual and magical nature of the environment. A flock of brolgas joins her to protect her on the journey of learning as she prepares to become a woman.

She would like to become one of them, as she develops a strong sense of belonging to her own Dreaming, and would like to enter into an alliance of understanding. The Girl walks between the brolgas, mimicking their actions and discovering things about them as they teach her the secret brolga knowledge.

The male brolgas enter the feeding ground and she surrenders herself to one of them. This action angers the elder brolgas and they try to bring her behaviour in check as well as protect her. She finally understands how she is meant to live. She comes to respect the wisdom of her elders and she transforms into a brolga.

### **Dance elements**

A solo female dancer and the full Bangarra ensemble perform *Brolga*. The dance involves movements that emulate the elongated body of the large bird, the way it delicately places each long limb as it walks with its wings folded neatly out of sight, and the dipping and lengthening of the neck. The brolga's natural movements are often referred to as 'dancing'. The dancers hold their arms behind their bodies, with elbows bent and wrists touching their lower backs.

*Brolga* is structured in 8 scenes that tell the story:

- i. Birth/Journey - the human girl is born and her journey begins.
- ii. Dream/Arrival - arriving at the Brolga ground, sensing that it is sacred and that the spirit is a stronger force than herself.
- iii. Female Brolgas - the girl tries to interact, intrigued by the birds beauty and their spiritual nature, as she invokes her own Dreaming.
- iv. Feeding - the girl mimics the brolgas, wanting to connect with them, learn from them and seek their acceptance.
- v. Lust - the male brolgas arrive and one of them seduces the girl, she capitulates and as a result is acting in breach of traditional protocol.
- vi. Elders - the elder brolgas are disturbed by the girl's behaviour and they educate her to be respectful.

- vii. Traditional Brolga - a traditional dance from North East Arnhem Land
- viii. Brolga - the girl has transformed and reached her spiritual destination

**The music** for *Brolga*, draws its inspiration from the land, the air, the spirit of the sacred brolga ground and the creature itself. The language heard in the music is Yolngu Matha.

**The costumes** worn by the dancers, illustrate the grey and white colouring of the brolga and the slender shape of its body. The performers paint a red patch along the crown of their heads to represent the distinctive markings of the bird.

**The set and lighting design** for *Brolga* creates the sense of an open and quiet space, where spirits, humans and their Dreaming overlap and merge.

## *ID*

The work *ID* is an observation about the socio-political situation for Aboriginal people over recent decades where western culture has initiated and inculcated certain perceptions about Aboriginal identity. These perceptions raise many questions and generate opinions and expressions *within* 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?

For instance, the *Totem* section in *ID* is inspired by traditional social customs, language and culture that are still being practised in communities today. Even with 21<sup>st</sup> century distractions, communities respect and retain these cultural foundations. *Totem* pays respect to this aspect of Aboriginal community life through abstract and symbolic dance theatre expression.

*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.

*ID* is structured in 5 sections (with 2 sections being structured into sub-sections), which explore the themes of initiation, cultural perception and discrimination, as well as the spiritual significance of totemic systems and kinship.

The sections are: ***Initiate, Caste (Fraction/Class 7B), Totem, Discriminate, Kinship.***

## **The creative process**

Creating dance theatre works like *Brolga* and *ID* involve a great deal of time, commitment and collaboration. The choreographer will firstly be inspired to tell a story, to bring something to the stage that will awaken people's awareness and bring certain knowledge into a conversation about culture. Storytelling is one of the most powerful means to communicate cultural, social and

political issues and dance is a very visceral and effective way to give a story life. Storytelling is the mainframe of cultural life for Indigenous Australians.

The choreographer and the creative collaborators will enter into the research period with ideas, thoughts about what they wish to communicate to the audience, and a certain amount of hunger to explore the dimensions of the subject matter. They will gather the information and reference points from other stories in order to be inspired. They will consult closely with each other in order to galvanise the ideas as they progress in the making of the work.

Once the initial period of research and discussion is well developed, the choreographer will start to work with the dancers and together they will explore the movement language that will tell the story in a way that is evocative and captivating.

As the choreography starts to take shape and order, the choreographer works with the rehearsal director and dancers to refine the more nuanced elements of the choreography. Getting the right dynamic into a movement, perfecting the technical elements, building the relationships between the performers – all of these aspects need to be worked on and consolidated.

### **The *Kinship* creative team**

#### **Cultural Advisors for *Brolga* and *ID* - Kathy Balngayngu Marika and Djakapurra Munyarryun**

**Kathy Balngayngu Marika** was born in Yirrkala in Northern Territory, and is a senior woman of her clan, the Rirratjingu, which is the first clan and language group in that area. Kathy has worked as a tutor in Aboriginal Dance Culture including teaching traditional art sand craft, weaving and carving. Her appearance in Bangarra's work *Bush* (2003) marked her performance debut in contemporary dance theatre. Kathy has continued to perform with Bangarra for *Clan* (2004) and *Spirit* (2006).

**Djakapurra Munyarryun** is a founding member of Bangarra and one of the companies on-going cultural consultants. His connection to the company has allowed Bangarra to gather inspiration from and share stories with him and his family. In early 2015 he was involved in Stephen Page's dance feature film *Spear* (which recently had its world premiere at the Toronto Film Festival), recreating his vital role in the production *Skin* (2000) for the film.

#### ***Brolga* and *ID* Choreographer - Stephen Page**

Born in Brisbane, Stephen Page is a descendant of the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh nation from SE Queensland. Under Stephen's direction, Bangarra has earned a strong reputation throughout Australia and internationally, with memorable works such as *Ochres*, 1995; *Skin*, 2000; *Corroboree*, 2001; *Bush* 2003; *Mathinna*, 2008; *ID* in *Belong*, 2011; *Blak*, 2013 and *Patyegarang* (2014)) receiving critical acclaim and prestigious awards. Stephen has also created works for the Australian Ballet in collaboration with Bangarra including - *Alchemy*, 1996; *Rites*, 1997; and *Warumuk – In the dark of the night*, 2012.

In addition to dance works, Stephen has also collaborated with many artists and companies for drama and film productions including *Black River* (2004), *Page 8* (2004) (with his brother David), *Bloodland* (2011), *Bran Nue Dae* (2000, 2009–film) and *The Sapphires*, 2011.

... Stephen Page on *Brolga*:

*"I wanted to explore the transformation of the human spirit, the relationship between Indigenous people, creatures and the land – and what it is that unifies us as one - (its) about challenging, awakening and cleansing the spirit".*

... Stephen Page on ID:

*"Our people are entitled to find out where, and what, we are supposed to be. I believe this country really struggles with what the Australian identity is. We still struggle with who we are but we all want to belong and to feel proud of our identity".*

### **ID Composer – David Page**

David Page is a descendant of the Nunkul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh nation from SE Queensland. David was born in Brisbane and studied saxophone, voice, composition and song at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) at Adelaide University. David has composed music for Bangarra's major works: *Praying Mantis Dreaming* (1992), *Ochres* (1995), *Ninni* (1996), *Fish* (1997), *Skin* (2000), *Corroboree* (2001), *Bush* (2003), *Unaipon / Clan* (2004), *Boomerang* (2005), *X300* (2007) and *Mathinna* (2008), *of earth and sky* (2010), *Belong* (2011), *Warumuk - in the dark night* (2012) and *Terrain* (2012), *Blak* (2013) and *Patyegarang* (2014). David is also an actor and the recipient of many awards including 4 Deadly Awards and the inaugural Sidney Myer Indigenous Artist award in 2000.

### **Brolga Composers – David Page and Steve Francis**

Steve Francis has composed music for several Bangarra productions; *Fire, True Stories, Walkabout, Bush, Boomerang, Skin* and *Corroboree*. Steve has also collaborated with David Page for the Sydney Olympics (2000), and the Rugby World Cup (2003) opening ceremonies. He has worked extensively in theatre and film, was awarded the Helpmann award for Best Original Score and Best New Australian Work in 2003 for the Bangarra production of *Walkabout*.

### **Brolga Original set designers – John Matkovic and Stephen Page**

John Matkovic worked extensively with Bangarra from 1993 to 2002, as co set designer, set construction, head mechanist as well as various other capacities.

### **ID Set designer – Jacob Nash**

Jacob is murri man who grew up in Brisbane. A graduate of the NIDA Design Course, Jacob first worked with Bangarra for the production of *earth & sky* in 2010, winning a Greenroom award for Best Design in Dance. Jacob was appointed as an Artist-in-Residence at Bangarra Dance Theatre in 2011. Jacob has also designed sets for the Bangarra productions; *Belong*, 2011; *Warramuk: In the Dark Night*, 2012; *Terrain*, 2012; *Blak*, 2013; *Patyegarang* (2014).

### **Brolga Costume designer - Jennifer Irwin**

Costume designer Jennifer Irwin's career spans 30 years constructing & designing costumes for drama, opera, film and in particular for dance & ballet. Jennifer designs regularly for many major Australian companies and has also designed some of the largest scale spectacular productions ever staged in Australia including *Awakening*, the Indigenous segment of Sydney 2000 Olympic Opening Ceremony.

### **ID Costume Designer – Emma Howell**

Emma graduated from NIDA in 2004 and has since worked in film, theatre and television, including as costume supervisor and assistant stage manager for Bangarra's productions – *Spirit, of earth & sky, Fire - Retrospective, True Stories, Clan* and *Mathinna*. *ID* (as part of *Belong*) was Emma's first production with Bangarra as Costume Designer.

### **Brolga Original Lighting designer – Joseph Mercurio**

Joseph Mercurio designed the lighting for the Bangarra productions; *Praying Mantis Dreaming, Ochres, Fish* and *Corroboree*. He also worked with Stephen Page on the Australian Ballet/Bangarra collaborative production *Alchemy*. Joseph has also worked with other well-known choreographers, including Sue Healey, Philip Adams, Jason Pitt, and Albert David. Joseph is currently a lecturer in Performance Technology at the Victorian College of the Arts.

### **ID Lighting designer – Matt Cox**

Matt Cox has a broad range of experience and credits in the field of lighting design including for Bell Shakespeare, Griffin Theatre, Legs on the Wall and Sydney Theatre Company education program. Matt was the Associate Lighting Designer for Bangarra's *on earth & sky*, and has since been the designer for *Belong*, 2011 (*about* and *ID*) and *Blak*, 2013.