



BANGARRA
dance theatre

"... a mature, distinctive, contemporary dance ensemble with a sophisticated sense of theatricality and a unique repertoire" THE AGE

Bangarra's logo represents:

- a flame
- the headdress of a Torres Strait Island warrior
- the point of a spear used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island hunters

'BANGARRA' MEANS 'TO MAKE FIRE' IN WIRADJERI LANGUAGE OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Vision

Bangarra's aims to maintain a link between the traditional Indigenous cultures of Australia and new forms of contemporary artistic expression with respect and integrity, and giving voice to social and political issues that affect us all.

Objectives

- To create and produce innovative contemporary dance theatre works of excellence.
- To respect, maintain and nurture artistic and cultural links with Australia's Indigenous peoples.
- To provide an environment which supports artists in the creation of innovative forms of artistic expression.
- To continue to develop a dance technique unique to Bangarra Dance Theatre.
- To reach the widest possible audience and to act as cultural ambassadors, nationally and internationally.
- To inspire Australian youth.

www.myspace.com/bangarra

www.bangarra.com.au

BACKGROUND

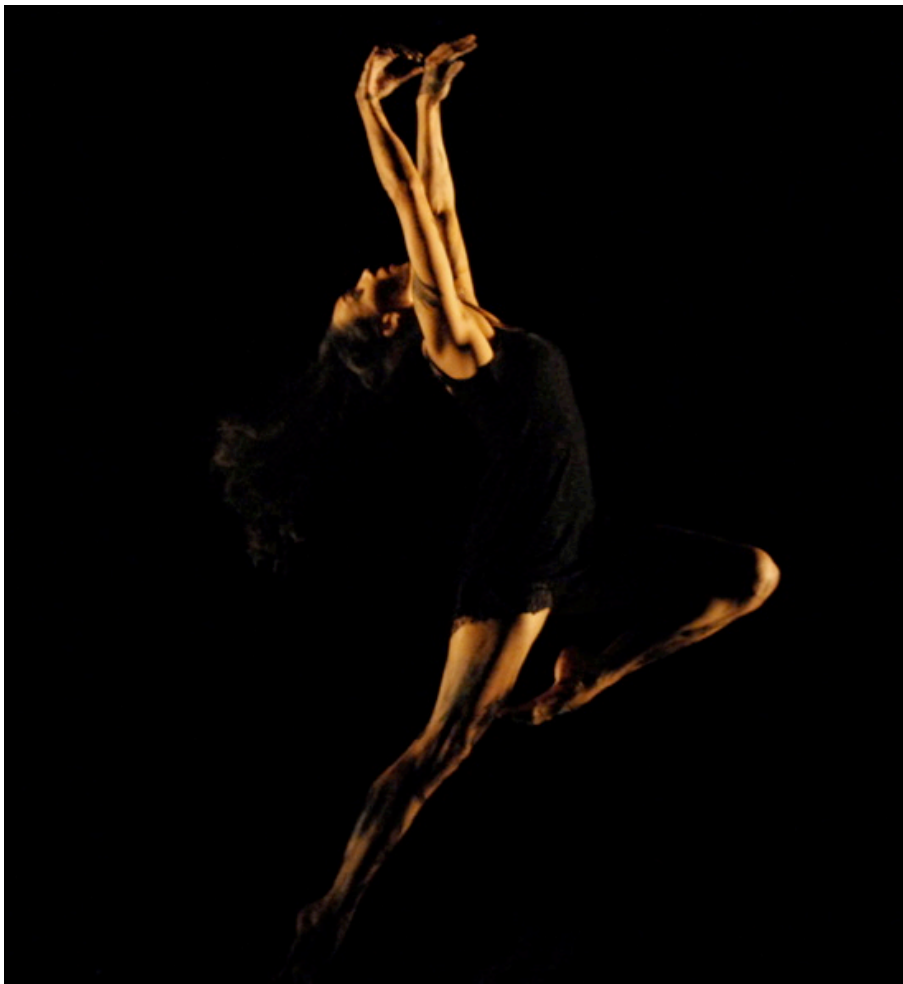
"There's a wonderful trust and exchange with the audience at a Bangarra performance. We guide you on a journey. It is a meeting of the urban, the traditional and pure abstract dance – we speak to all people. Passion, emotion and respect – this is what we need to survive" **Stephen Page, Artistic Director**

Bangarra Dance Theatre is one of Australia's most unique and innovative dance companies. In addition to celebrating living traditions at least 40,000 years old, Bangarra continues to explore the lives and attitudes of Indigenous Australians today. Bangarra blends traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture with international contemporary dance to create a uniquely Australian dance language.

Under the Artistic Direction of Stephen Page since 1991, Bangarra has thrilled audiences across Australia and beyond with electric, startling and inherently spiritual dance works of immense theatrical presence.

Bangarra's influence continues to resonate throughout the world, with the company earning a prominent place on the international touring circuit. A 16-city sell-out tour of the USA in 2001 established the company as a global dance phenomenon. In 2002 Bangarra appeared at the prestigious Monaco Dance Forum, in 2004 the company completed a return tour of the US, performing in New York and in Washington by special invitation and in 2005 Bangarra travelled to Japan and New Zealand. In 2006 Bangarra toured the UK, performing at London's prestigious Sadler's Wells theatre.

At the heart of Bangarra's uniqueness is the company's vision and commitment to a theatrical style that remains true to the Indigenous spirit.



KEY EVENTS

1989 – Founded in Sydney by Carole Johnson, the first director of NAISDA, Australia's National Indigenous Dance School, along with NAISDA graduates.

1991 – Stephen Page appointed Bangarra's Artistic Director.

1992 – *Praying Mantis Dreaming*, Bangarra Dance Theatre's first full-length work.

1995 – *Ochres*, a breakthrough Bangarra work which developed a truly Australian language of dance, bringing together Indigenous traditions and international contemporary dance styles.

1997 – *Fish* premiered at the 1997 Edinburgh Festival ahead of a sell-out season at the Festival of the Dreaming, the first of four Olympic arts festivals leading to the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

2000 – Bangarra Dance Theatre was involved in both the opening ceremony, *Awakenings*, and the closing ceremonies of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, reaching over 3 billion viewers worldwide.

2000 – Stephen Page choreographed *Skin* for Bangarra Dance Theatre which premiered at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival, and won the prestigious Helpmate Award for Best New Australian Work plus Best Ballet or Dance Work for 2000.

2001 – New triple-bill work, *Corroboree*, created by Stephen Page completed sell out tours of Australia and USA.

2002 – *Walkabout*, double bill choreographed by Frances Rings and Stephen Page. Frances Rings received overwhelming critical acclaim as a new choreographic talent.

2003 – World premiere of *Bush*, choreographed by Stephen Page and Frances Rings, completed sell-out Australian tour.

2004 – World premiere of *Unaipon* – part of a Bangarra Dance Theatre's triple-bill at the 2004 Adelaide Bank Festival of the Arts. Choreographed by Frances Rings.

2004 - *CLAN* premiers in Brisbane, followed by sell-out seasons in Melbourne and Sydney

2004 - Bangarra wins Best Dance Work for *BUSH* at the Helpmann Awards.

2004 - Bangarra's US tour is a major success, performing in seven cities including New York for the prestigious *Next Wave Festival*.

2004 - Success for Bangarra at the Australian Dance Awards with Frances Rings named as Best Choreographer and Patrick Thaiday named as Best Male Dancer.

2005 – *Boomerang* has its world premiere in Melbourne followed by seasons in Brisbane and Sydney

2006 – Collaboration with The Australian Ballet *Gathering*, tours *Clan* to the UK

2007 – World premiere of *True Stories* (May - Sept) and regional tour of *Clan* (Sept – Nov)



"This is compelling, enriching dance that takes us all to a deeper place and a stronger connection" Herald Sun

MESSAGE FROM STEPHEN PAGE, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

"True Stories, for me, is about nurturing the exchange of stories; the sharing of tradition, culture and of song and dance.

What inspires me about Bangarra is that each dancer brings their own unique cultural perspective, their own story, to work each day. I like to encourage the dancers to connect with their traditions and their unique history. I want to provide for them an environment in which they are able to rekindle the spirit of their unique connections and share these with others.

Bangarra has always nurtured choreographers within the company. We are very proud of Fran's recent successes and excited to present Elma's choreographic debut work. In developing *True Stories*, I saw it as my role to support Frances and Elma in bringing their stories to main stage theatre whilst maintaining the integrity of the traditions by which they were inspired.

For *X300*, Fran has shown blind courage in exploring her own traditions and the sensitive history of Maralinga. She has created a stunning interpretation of her connections with a really fresh physical vocabulary.

For *Emeret Lu* Elma travelled to Murray Island to explore Torres Strait Island traditional culture. She returned with a multi-layered and somewhat overwhelming challenge of re-telling a story passed to her from Elders of the island. Elma has touched on ancient traditional stories that are not talked about within their own community. In giving her permission to re-tell these stories, there was a lot of trust instilled in Elma and Bangarra's reputation within the community was drawn upon. As the majority of Bangarra dancers are not from Torres Strait, all of us have embarked on a journey. It's been a pleasure to watch the exchange of knowledge and creativity within the group."

THE CHOREOGRAPHY



True Stories “offers an invigorating blend of voices bringing new moves and attitudes to this vibrant company” *Sydney Morning Herald*

ELMA KRIS – EMERET LU

“I came across a book by Lindsay Wilson and I remember the name sounding very familiar to me. The book, titled *Thathilgaw Emeret Lu*, was a handbook of traditional Torres Strait Islander material culture. It wasn’t long after browsing the pages of text and pictures I realised why I had recognised the author’s name. Lindsay Wilson was my art teacher when I was studying Arts in Cairns at TAFE. I became fascinated with the Torres Strait Islander traditional way of life and wanted to explore it further.

Last year I travelled to Murray Island to ask permission from the Elders to use these material objects and through their acceptance I was able to re-tell the stories of traditional Murray Island culture. Murray Island is a lush, densely vegetated land edged with black sanded beaches – an island that abounds with enchanting ancient myths and legend. Set prominently in the flat face of the island is a mouth-like cave that from a distance vaguely resembles a magical Dugong.

I’m very excited to have created a contemporary dance piece involving traditional elements of Torres Strait Islander dance. The sacred material objects I’ve selected show how Torres Strait Islanders identify themselves through a unique language of song and dance. My inspiration comes from how these material objects were used in ritual and in every day life.”



FRANCES RINGS – X300

“The central focus of **X300** is the land and the complex relationship held between it and the Aboriginal people. This relationship is not always dependent on physical presence on the land, but represents a much deeper connection. At Maralinga, it was mistakenly assumed that the land in the area was vacant. It was far from it. The Aboriginal experience of this historical event has been one of total devastation, but on the other hand, it has demonstrated a true resilience in the Aboriginal people and proves an enduring connection to the land that is unbroken, even by atomic testing.

Being so closely related to the Maralinga area I felt compelled to respond to an event that continues to affect people today. Going to Ceduna and Yalata certainly changed the direction of the piece. Learning about those in my family who were affected by events at Maralinga and who suffered the consequences added a personal angle and brought the experience much closer to home. My piece became more about looking at the bigger picture and what was going to be left for future generations. The direction of the piece became less about history and more about the future survival of a culture.

In the studio it was a challenge to find the right physical dialogue with which to tell the story. We workshopped a lot with movement and gestures relating to themes and as it is quite a contemporary, abstract piece, the work became more about energy, elements and the senses and how these were affected by the atomic testing. The vignettes that came out of the workshops are a creative response to the various stories that inspired **X300**.

The land, and the ability to access it, means everything to the Aboriginal people. Land is the source of life, kinship and spirituality. Along with language, the land is part of the fabric that holds the Aboriginal culture together. To be denied the land is to die a slow death. Indigenous people from all over the world have proven that with time they are adaptive to change and are still able to maintain the integrity of their unique cultures. As the wider community comes to respect and learn from its Indigenous people, there will be a greater understanding of the delicate balance needed in order to ensure our future.”

THE SET

Genevieve Dugard - Set Designer

"The set design for *Emeret Lu* and *X300* are visual responses to the stories told to me by each of the choreographers. My first conversations with Frances and Elma evoked powerful images that I have carried with me throughout the design process. Both sets were designed to flow and shift with the cycles of storytelling; to be ever-changing like the cultures by which they were inspired."

Emeret Lu

"There is a deep and dreamlike sense about the traditional Murray Island charms and rituals and the design seeks not to present these literally, but to place them in the environment; in water, land or sky.

Elma told me a story of the creation of a hidden cave on Murray Island and of how the cave entrance came to be shaped like a dugong's mouth. The space created for Emeret Lu takes inspiration from the bamboo forests of Murray Island, where spirits can be felt but not seen. Elma's story, and images of spinning tops, inspired the curved nature of the bamboo tunnel."



X300

"The X300 story presents a confronting fusion of traditional culture and modern science; of the organic and the man-made. Frances and I were interested in these contrasts and the very moment of the explosions that somehow brought them together. Such moments as when the heat of the explosion became so intense that the sand crystallized into fractured glass; or moments of blinding light, causing x-ray vision. An image of one's bones and veins begins to represent a complex map of the waterways and waterholes that became contaminated; maps that transform into a method of tracing land and become a way of finding a way home."

THE MUSIC

***"[True Stories] is a masterly collage of sounds, eclectic in nature but tightly and tensely constructed"* The Australian**

Steve Francis, Music and Sound Design, *Emeret Lu*

"As difficult as it is to articulate why, whenever I've worked on music for Torres Strait-inspired dance works, either in collaboration with David Page as I did in *Corroboree* or solo as I did in *Bush Pearl*, I am truly inspired by the process.

I believe that the melding of a culture very rich in song and dance with contemporary sounds and instruments is a very delicate balancing act. My quest is to embellish the stories without overpowering them and I hope I have achieved that in *Emeret Lu*. It was important for Elma that the very old traditional songs live in the soundtrack in their raw forms - but she also wanted to surround them with very modern pieces that would also help convey these very old stories. Elma encouraged me to feel free in my choice of instruments and grooves and I believe the result is a fusion of hard core, orchestral and organic sounds that in some strange way still portray the look, the sound, the smell and mostly the feel of the Island and it's history that is at the core of Elma's vision for *Emeret Lu*.

As always I feel honoured to be a part of the creation of a new work for Bangarra, and I find that it's not until the work is performed by the wonderful dancers in front you, the audience, that I feel my part is complete and my heart is filled."

David Page, Music and Sound Design, *X300*

"When Frances asked me to write the music for **X300** I was excited and ready.

Frances knows her dreaming and this story is a major part of her people's history. Atomic Bomb testing at Maralinga in the 1950's cannot go on being ignored. The after affects still linger, and it has left a traumatic scar on the land and the people. As a descendant of those people, Frances is in a unique position to tell her version of how the people and land have survived such a horrific experience. This has given me the license to represent such a version through music for dance theatre; to express the ignorance, trauma, adaptation and survival of such a catastrophic event in our nation's history.

After working with fellow composer Elena Kats Chernan on *Amalgamate* for The Australian Ballet in 2006, I was musically inspired by orchestral instruments, especially the piano. For **X300** I began writing melodies and phrases on the piano and would then arrange around them leaving the original piano melody in the arrangement. I love to resource sounds that represent the language of the land. I love working with strings, oboe, trumpet, earthy sounds, grooves and especially voice and traditional Aboriginal language. I was again fortunate that Bangarra dancer Yolande Brown was available to work with her incredible vocal style, Phil Slater allowed me to experience the beauty of the trumpet and Auntie Veronica Bradley and Sita-Marie Peel Dodd gave the permission to include their beautiful stories.

After investing in a new computer and new sound cards, I just let my creative energies flow - making sure that I stayed close to the stories Frances and I constantly talked about. I hope you enjoy the music of **X300** as much as I enjoyed creating it."

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Artistic Director

Stephen Page

Choreographers

Elma Kris (***Emeret Lu***) and Frances Rings (***X300***)

Music and Sound Designers

Steve Francis (***Emeret Lu***) & David Page (***X300***)

Set Designer

Geneveive Dugard

Costume Designer

Jennifer Irwin

Lighting Designer

Glenn Hughes

Company Manager

Jasmine Gulash

Rehearsal Director

Bill Pengelly

Production Manager

Aaron Beach

Stage Manager

Bec Allen

Assistant Stage Manager/Wardrobe

Emma Howell

Head Mechanist

Terron Titus

Head Electrician

Neil Fisher

Set Construction

Planet Engineering

Scenic Artists

Scenographic Studios

Anthony Babicci

Props Maker

Tristian FitzGerald

Sandra Lawry

Costume Makers

Nikki Harrington

Traditional Murray Island costumes (*Emeret Lu***)**

John Barsa

Aicey Day

Electronic Control

Congo Blue Design

Student Secondments

Sarita Fisher

Kathleen Downer

Guest Performer

Smilar Sinak (***Emeret Lu***)

Dancers

Sidney Saltner

Elma Kris

Patrick Thaiday

Deborah Brown

Yolande Brown

Jhuny-Boy Borja

Tara Gower

Leonard Mickelo

Katina Olsen

Daniel Riley McKinley

Jasmin Sheppard

Waangenga Blanco

Music credits*Emeret Lu*

Special thanks to Godai Kabere and Irene Salee for 'Harvesting' voice in *Emeret Lu*; Grace Barsa and Wilfred Tapau for 'Babanem Song' voice in *Emeret Lu*; and linguistic artists Priscilla Wailu and Leelah Noah for translation in *Emeret Lu*.

X300

Special thanks to Yolande Brown, Phil Slater, Sony Publishing, Matt Jones from Sounds Easy, researcher Betty Sumner, Becky Lleweyen, Robert Laurie and Simon Drake.

Elma Kris would like to give special thanks to:

Elders Dave Passi, The late George Kudub, Meb Salee, Steve Tapim and James Rice; The Chairman of Murray Island, Ron Day; and Murray Island Tutors Dalina (Aipo) Barsa, George Ghee and Thomas Barsa.

Frances Rings would like to give special thanks to:

Aunty Veronica Bradley and family; the Yalata Aboriginal Community; Lauren Peel Dodd and family; Ceduna Area School; and Darren Dale.

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

For Primary Students

Activities

1. What shapes and sizes do the dancers make with their bodies and hands?
2. Develop a dance or song from a dream you have had or about the environment around you eg. trees, leaves, rivers, the sea, birds etc.
3. What is your favourite native animal or bird? What is its Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island name (teachers to investigate)? Create a short dance based on this animal's movements using rhythm instruments.

Research Activities

1. What does '*Emeret Lu*' mean?
2. What is the traditional language spoken on Mer (Murray) Island?
3. How many inhabited islands are there in the Torres Strait?
4. Where is Maralinga? What happened there?
5. Name some of the props used in the performance of '*True Stories*'. How are they used?
6. Discuss how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people lived before white settlers arrived?
7. Why is the land so important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people?
8. Oral history: ask someone from an older generation to relate a story from his or her time, share it with the class.
9. What is unique about Bangarra Dance Theatre?



SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

For Secondary Students

1. Research the primary uses of fish scoops/traps in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture. Explain the scientific principles upon which it is based.
2. Research 3 different types of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island ceremonies and explain their purpose and origins.
3. What are totems? And what do they represent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture? Further, find out about other indigenous people from other countries, and whether totems are significant to their culture, and how?
4. Research what happened at Maralinga? What was the secret code word used by the Australian and British governments to describe this incident?
5. What was the effect of the atomic testing on the land and people?
6. Research the traditional languages that are spoken throughout South Australia and the Torres Strait Islands.

Other Questions about Bangarra

1. What is unique about this Bangarra production?
2. Discuss the set design and lighting design in '*True Stories*' and how the staging combines with the choreography, and the stories within the show.
3. Do you think that the set and lighting designs are effective in conveying the mood of the performance? Why?
4. What do you like/dislike about dance? Why?
5. How does the work use space (levels, direction, shape, dimensions and floor patterns)?
6. How are speed and duration of movement manipulated in each section of the work – include the use of beat, tempo and rhythm? Provide examples of how this affects the mood/atmosphere of the work.
7. Describe the dynamics of the movements in each section of the work (i.e. the degree of energy and control of movements; e.g. strong, light, sustained, bound, free, percussive).
8. Describe in your own words what is unique about the style of Bangarra Dance Theatre.
9. Is the style mostly traditional or contemporary/modern? Use examples from the work to support your argument.
10. Are there any recurring choreographic themes/issues? For example, does it address cultural, social, political, gender-based or environmental issues?
11. What experiences may have contributed to the choreographers' philosophy and methodology?

12. Find a press review of the production and write about whether you agree with the review.
13. Do you feel that Bangarra Dance Theatre, in presenting Indigenous perspectives, is an important part of Australian dance culture? Why?
14. How does a Bangarra Dance Theatre performance differ from other dance in terms of choreography, emotional response from the audience, spatial issues, music and theatricality?

