Bloodland is part of the commitment between Queensland Theatre Company and Queensland Performing Arts Centre towards the development and presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work.

Cover image: Ursula Yovich, Kathy Balngayngu Marika & Hunter Page-Lochard
It is my great honour to welcome you to the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) to join us in experiencing a performance of great artistic and cultural significance, Bloodland.

QPAC has always been committed to presenting and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander productions, from Bangarra Dance Theatre to Brisbane’s very own Jagera Jarjum, QPAC audiences have been inspired, entertained and challenged by the highest calibre of artists and companies in the country. I am pleased to welcome back Stephen Page, Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre for the production Bloodland.

We have had the fortune of working with Stephen and Bangarra Dance Theatre for over a decade, presenting culturally rich and artistically diverse programs. In this piece of work, created by Kathy Balngayngu Marika, Stephen Page and Wayne Blair, and produced by Sydney Theatre Company and Adelaide Festival, I invite Queensland audiences to delve into the current and pressing issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The stories of our First Nations people are among the richest and often times most challenging. Through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work we are reminded and made aware of the impacts and trans-generational effects of colonisation and assimilation; we are exposed to a narrative that has been a part of this landscape for over 60,000 years, where traditional knowledge and law underpin relationships, environmental sustainability and the preservation of language. Bloodland is one such work that brings together both of these worlds, exploring a land where rich traditional lore and ritual grate against contemporary Western culture, allowing audiences to be immersed in the contemporary and traditional aspects of life on community.

I look forward to working with Queensland Theatre Company and Australia’s best arts companies in the future, and continually offer Queensland audiences the best in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre and performance.

JOHN KOTZAS
Chief Executive
Queensland Performing Arts Centre

Queensland Theatre Company is dedicated to exploring what it means to be from this place we call Queensland; to tell the stories that reflect who we are and how we fit into this Land. The cultural obligations and connections the First Australians have to this country are exciting and rich, teaching us our history and providing insight into our future.

In 2012 we have dedicated extra resources to supporting Indigenous storytelling and artists through establishing an Indigenous Program, employing an Emerging Indigenous Producer, establishing an Indigenous Reference Group, commissioning a number of new works for children and adult audiences, supporting the Australian Delegation to the Festival of Pacific Arts, entering Memorandums Of Understanding with QPAC and the ACFA (Aboriginal Centre for Performing Art) to develop the talents and works of Indigenous Australians and producing shows that reflect the Indigenous experience of our country like Bloodland and Head Full of Love.

We are proud of our commitment to supporting Indigenous artists to tell stories and proud still of our ability to bring these stories to you.

Bloodland welcomes back a number of artists who have had a long association with QTC and Queensland. It is a story that is as ageless as Romeo and Juliet yet speaks with a fresh cultural language rarely seen on our stages. Works of this scale are unique and seldom undertaken. The use of Indigenous language, cultural materials, stories and the gathering of some of the most respected Indigenous artists in the country is cause for celebration. The experience of watching this work leaves an audience feeling honoured, humbled and exhilarated for the future of Indigenous Theatre.

Bloodland is a work of extreme importance in our cultural landscape and we are excited and proud to bring this landmark production to you.

Love
WESLEY ENOCH
Artistic Director
Queensland Theatre Company

We encourage anyone who attends a performance of Bloodland to participate in our audience feedback survey. You can complete the survey online at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BloodlandQTC. Hard copies of the survey will be available at the Playhouse during the Bloodland season for you to complete while at the theatre and return via a feedback box in the foyer. Otherwise, please call Queensland Theatre Company Reception on 3010 7600 and request a hard copy survey to be mailed to you.

Background Image: Centre: Banula Marika in Sydney Theatre Company’s Bloodland © Photos by Daniela Lyonne 2011.
THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

Storytelling is one of the most powerful ways to not only explain a lived experience but to reach across cultural divides to communicate it. As Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre and one of Australia’s leading choreographers, Stephen Page tells every story with a humanity and heart. Those stories are also provocative. Dance allows an exploration through visual movement and sound where audiences can be inspired, repulsed, amused, distressed.

The medium of theatre adds a different dimension to Stephen’s storytelling craft with extra layering of language, ceremony and silence. Page’s creative practice, long honed through his work with Bangarra, is one that respects the traditional protocols of respect for, and careful negotiation with, the cultural custodians who hold the rights to stories and ceremony. This creative and cultural practice has been brought to the development of Bloodland and Page continues his collaborative approach to his artistic vision with cultural mentors Kathy Balngayngu Marika and Djakapurra Munyarryun.

Bloodland explores the choices made along the trajectories of different Aboriginal experience focusing on the age-old tensions that occur as people live between two worlds, with one foot in each. There are the complex relationships that are struggled with every day between tradition, culture, identity, economic development and social mobility. There is also the interweaving of the haunting legacies of the past, the hopes and ambitions for the future and the barriers, frustrations and compromises that mark life between the two worlds.

The personal is political is a concept that still resonates within the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and inevitably comes through in our storytelling. While set in Arnhem Land, these themes litter the lives of Indigenous people around Australia and they are central to Bloodland.

There are inevitably strong political themes in every authentic Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander story and in Bloodland the politics are strong currents in the tide of the story. The challenges that face contemporary Aboriginal families are laid bare. These are complex problems, difficult political polesmic to which there are no easy answers and no resolution – certainly none are suggested. That is the harsh reality that Bloodland explores.

It is impossible to be impassive to a story by Stephen Page and this production is no different. It will inspire a meditation by its audience on what they are seeing and hearing and it seeks to engage them in a difficult, ongoing but important national conversation.

LARISSA BEHRENDT
Chair of Bangarra Dance Theatre
Professor of Law and Director of Research, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology, Sydney

Writer’s Note

My association with Stephen Page began on a Queensland Theatre Company production, The Sunshine Club. It was my first experience out of drama school, and one that has stayed with me to this day. Stephen was the choreographer on that project and the next year he asked me to be a part of Skin, a show Bangarra produced in 2000. I was a novice entering a world with Men. Men who had lived and breathed and were artists for many more years than I had been. It was a humbling experience, yet via Stephen’s influence I started to blossom as a storyteller in my own right. Simply, Stephen gave me ownership and responsibility.

The genesis of Bloodland for me began at this time. For Stephen, his association with North East Arnhem Land had started years before, and by his invitation I was allowed into this story, for which I am very grateful.

Stephen, Kathy and myself have been in deep conversation about this project for the past eighteen months. Stephen had a number of visual images he shared, some of which I chose to elaborate on. In our earliest meetings we laughed a great deal and we were swept away with glaring ironies.

Being an Aboriginal person in this country is hard. I am an urban black, living in a western world. In every community, both black and white, there is social poison that affects us all everyday. Yes, we have a choice, but sometimes it is not so easy to put it down to just a choice. What about when we have two clans divided by their way of living, existing in a social structure fractured by, for the most part, circumstances outside of their control? What happens? What choice do we have then?

That is what Stephen, Kathy and myself wanted to talk about. We also wanted to use a living language. Via Kathy and Djakapurra’s permission to communicate this story from their country in North East Arnhem Land using their language, we only touch on the fact of what it is like to be an Indigenous person on our own land.

We talk about divided clans coming together in an Aboriginal community affected by social poison. It is simple. Yet this story also mirrors Aboriginal communities all over this country, and this country for the most part turns a blind eye. Only at times of self-need does this government step in.

Bloodland is a snapshot of what it is like to be a black fella in this world, today. It does not encompass every black story in this country, by no means, yet it is our version of one episode written in 2011.

WAYNE BLAIR
Director’s Note

I’ve always entered the creative process with stories and themes even when my intention is to produce abstract dance theatre. Skin was a Bangarra Dance Theatre production in 2000 on which I first worked with Wayne Blair and some of the cast of Bloodland. Skin took me into a dramatic form, working closely with Wayne to write dialogue to extend the story telling coming out of the movement and music. In my recent work ID – part of Bangarra’s Dialog project – the section titled Discriminate also uses dramatic form to portray the distaste of Aboriginal deaths in custody. No words are needed as the prevailing image and the strength of the performance speaks for itself.

Bloodland brings together a nationally diverse, culturally rich group of performers, some from traditional Yolngu communities in North East Arnhem Land. My close relationships with Djakapurra Munyarryn and Kathy Balngayngu Marika sit at the heart of my creative processes with Bangarra. They honour me as an adopted member of their Yolngu families, as does the Yusupingu family. Through these connections, we are blessed to have access to the world’s oldest living culture.

Kathy Marika and I talked about this story over a long time and she enriched my experiences with her woman’s perspective. Over two decades I have spent time in Yirrkala with my adopted families, listening to their stories, learning their myths and cultural customs, experiencing their language, dance and songs. Generously she enabled me to bring these influences into my creative practice and joined the Bloodland process as performers and traditional consultants.

Bloodland is about two families living in remote communities and their frustration at being in two different worlds in the 21st century. They cling to traditional cultural heritage whilst engaging with the benefits of western society. But with the poisons of alcohol and drugs, economic disadvantage and social dysfunction, these families face many dilemmas.

It is these challenges we are trying to express as well as their efforts to protect their health, access to education, maintenance of language and a series of things they want to hang on to. Add to this situation the role of government dollars, mining deals, royalties and racism – it’s a potent mix of ideas, experiences and revelations.

I think often about the two worlds; having a foot in each. Everyone wants that sense of hope, of balance and common ground. Talking with Kathy and with my travels back to Arnhem Land, I am keenly aware of the tension between maintaining culture and embracing everything that’s modern.

The young people think culture is old fashioned because the modern media is so appealing, so seductive. Technology and consuming products represent the new poisons for the younger generation. It’s like they get the lolly snaxs of materialism, which is all great, but how do you weave the same balance of interest in the cultural side of life? It relies on leaders and communities trying to help direct them to have that balance.

Then there’s the middle generation, who’ve been burnt out by having a foot in both worlds and have become exhausted, literally. That exhaustion comes from trying to find the right balance. These challenges are universal, but for the Yolngu community what I see is the importance of language and cultural customs. They conduct ceremonies but mostly for funerals and ‘sorry business’. The ceremonial purpose isn’t a celebration of the passing of an elder’s life as it is increasingly for young men who have taken their own lives.

Bloodland portrays those frustrations using dance, music and dramatic text predominantly in Aboriginal language. Many Aboriginal people no longer have that connection with their language, so it’s an inherent challenge of Bloodland for both the performers and our audience, for a good proportion of the show to be expressed in Yolngu.

The families depicted come from two Yolngu moieties – Dhuruw and Yirrka. These clans belong to one motherland and Bloodland explores how they share the same balance of modern and traditional practices and customs. This is a modern story that helps rekindle and re-educate, and challenge all of us as artists in performance as well as learning about the thriving, continuing Aboriginal culture.

Wayne, Kathy and I put the script together based on the emotion, the atmosphere and the visual images that came from our conversations and we set up the different issues under one sky of the story. There is no conventional script but rather the actors have entered the process by learning and listening, especially during our week-long residency in Yirrkala in North East Arnhem Land.

Weaving dance, language and images – I love working in a visual way, to say very little and let it be about the physicality and the spirit of the story. Collaborating with Damien Cooper on lighting; Jennifer Iwn with costumes, Peter England on set design and Steve Francis with music is like marinating all those elements to create what is strongest about telling the story. In my creative process I search for the right balance of visuals, cultural law, ceremonial ritual and finding the right balance of English words for the audience to cryptically hold on to.

Bloodland is a myriad of forms coming together just as this is with the creation of a new Bangarra Dance Theatre work. So our audience is always able to share the birth of a new work with us!

STEPHEN PAGE
PS. It’s not all bleak, there’s a love story and there are humorous moments.

Queensland Theatre Company and Queensland Performing Arts Centre present

BLOODLAND

CONCEPT BY Stephen Page
STORY BY Kathy Balngayngu Marika, Stephen Page and Wayne Blair
WRITTEN BY Wayne Blair

A Sydney Theatre Company and Adelaide Festival production in association with Bangarra Dance Theatre

Cast

Lalkal
Wak Wak
Galkiku
Bonba
Gapu
Djurrpun
Donkey/Bapi
Rumu
Billy
Bathala
Gulami
Cherish

Elaine Crombie
Rarrirwey Hick
Milika Marika
Kathy Balngayngu Marika
Noelene Marika
Banula Marika
David Page
Hunter Page Lochard
Kelin Pelt
Tessa Rose
Meyne Wyatt
Ursula Yovich

Creatives

Director
Stephen Page

Cultural Consultants
Kathy Balngayngu Marika
Djakapurra Munyarryn

Set Designer
Peter England

Costume Designer
Jennifer Irwin

Lighting Designer
Damien Cooper

Composer/Sound Designer
Steve Francis

Assistant Director
Kirk Page

Voice and Text Coach
Charman Gradwell

Production Manager
John Colvin

Stage Manager
Rebecca Allen

Assistant Stage Manager
Louana Sainsbury

Project Company Manager
Amy Hammond

Sound Operator
Ben Lightowlers

Rehearsal Photographer
Grant Sparkes-Carroll

Production Photographer
Danielle Lynne

Queensland Theatre Company and Queensland Performing Arts Centre present Bloodland” © Photo by Danielle Lynne 2011.

Hunter Page Lochard is Sydney Theatre Company’s “Bloodland” © Photo by Danielle Lynne 2011.
Born in Brisbane, Stephen is a descendant of the Numakul people and the Mundari clan of the Yugambeh tribe from southeast Queensland.

Stephen studied at NASAID and after graduating in 1983 he began his professional dancing career with Sydney Dance Company. During 1988 he toured internationally with Aboriginal and islander Dance Theatre (AIDT) and in 1989 was artistic director of NASAID’s production Kayu Walu. After returning to Sydney Dance Company for two years, Stephen was appointed Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre in 1991 and has since created 12 new dance theatre works for the company.

Stephen has developed Bangarra’s distinctive performance style drawing on over 40,000 years of Aboriginal culture and transplanting the traditional stories, music and dance into a contemporary theatrical experience. Under his leadership, Bangarra has built a strong reputation touring throughout Australia and the world, including New York, Washington, Paris, London and Germany. Memorable works include Skin (Best New Australian Work and Best Dance Work), 2001 Helpmann Awards), Bush (Best Dance Work, 2000 Helpmann Awards), and Mathinna (Best Dance Work and Best Choreography, 2009 Helpmann Awards) have become milestones in the company’s history.

In 2010, Stephen was also awarded the Australian Dance Awards for his Services to Dance and accepted Bangarra Dance Theatre’s award for Outstanding Performance by a Company for Fire: A Retrospective. Continuing his commitment to the next generation of Indigenous storytellers, Stephen commissioned and mentored Frances Rings and Daniel Riley McKinley in their new works for Bangarra’s season of Fire & Sky.


**ELOISE CROMBIE LALKAL**

**ELAINE CROMBIE LALKAL**

KELTON KEN BILLY

MEYNE WATT GULAMI
For Sydney Theatre Company: debut. Other theatre: For Griffin Theatre: The Brothers Size. For: Belvoir: This is a Non-Smoking Zone. Training: NIDA. Certificate IV in Aboriginal Theatre from WAAPA. Sydney Theatre Award: Best Newcomer, 2011.

WAYNE BLAIR WRITER

URSULA YOVICH CHERISH

DIAPURRA MUNYARRAD CULTURAL CONSULTANT

PEYTON ENGLAND SET DESIGNER

DAMIEN COOPER LIGHTING DESIGNER

KIRK PAGE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

CHARMIE GRADWELL

STEVE FRANCES SOUND DESIGNER
For this Production:
Lydia Fairhall: Associate Producer
Nick Tomlin: Events Manager
Cathy de Silva: Campaigns Manager
Liz Wilson: Graphic Designer
Judy Worshold: Senior Advertising Coordinator
Lisa Munks: Digital Marketing Manager
Cindy Ullrich: Publicity Manager
Inga Tracey: Publicity Coordinator

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Deputy Director-General, Arts Queensland: Shane Rowlands

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Paul Cave AM with special thanks to Michael McGu

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