About the Choreographers...

RITA PRYCE
Artistic Director, Choreographer
Country: Australia - Torres Strait Islands

Rita Pryce was born and raised in the Torres Strait Islands. Her family is the Kulkalgal people of the Central region. She is currently based in Cairns and always looks forward to visiting her people back home in the Islands, where she is well respected. Rita is also accepted by Aboriginal families in communities around Australia such as Ramingining (NT) where she was adopted. She has been doing Traditional Torres Strait Island Dance from as far back as she can remember and has grown to learn and respect other dance styles, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous. Rita has been invited to hold master classes at the World Dance Alliance (WDA) Global Summit in Brisbane 2008 and Dance Your Heart Out at Dance Massive in Melbourne 2011. She formed Baiwa Dance Company after realising the potential in Far North Queensland and made her formal choreographic debut in 2010 when she presented part of her first full-length work Warupaw Uu at the Dreaming Festival and Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair in 2010. Rita endeavours to share her experiences through non-verbal storytelling and describes her style of choreography as ‘lyrical’.

BLAKDANCE 2012

Warupaw Uu - Echo of Drums is a celebration of Torres Strait Island culture and lifestyle. Seasons in the Torres Strait are dictated by the winds - Naigai, Zei, Sager, and Kuki. The dances are performed in segments according to the winds, illustrating important rituals and cycles of the seasons. The performance itself is divided up into eight segments that are placed in an order emphasizing the uniqueness of a single period – each of these seasons either expresses how important nature is to Torres Strait Islander people and/or tells of a particular traditional practice that happens within that season.

Throughout the performance, artworks produced by a world re-known Torres Strait Islander artist (Billy Missi) are projected onto the screen which complement and further emphasis the story being told through movement. The combination in Warupaw Wu of Art, Music and Dance is at the heart of Torres Strait conception of culture. Culture is not just one of these aspects, but all of these put together. Warupaw Uu is not simply a dance but a performance piece, which takes different mediums and combines them into one dramaturgically coherent whole, enabling audiences to be taken on a journey from beginning to end.
TAMMI GISSELL

Independent Performer, Performance Theorist
Country: Muruwari Nation, North-West NSW

Tammi Gissell descends from the Muruwari nation of North-Western NSW. She is a dancer, performance artist and choreographer as well as being a published poetess and performance theorist. Since 1996 she has toured nationally and internationally in a range of performance genres. She holds a Bachelor of Performance: Theory and Practice from the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and completed her Honours Degree research into the role of gesture and posture in the formation of body identity, graduating deans medallist.

From 2007-2011 she was course coordinator at the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association. In 2009 she was nominated for an Australian Dance Award (Outstanding Performance by a Female) for Eleo Pomares’ Gin.Woman.Distress. She was also awarded an Inaugural Guillermo Keys-Arenas Scholarship to create ‘A Velikovsky Affair’ which premiered at NIDA Parade Theatre in 2011.

BLAKDANCE 2012

BlakDance Australia Limited in conjunction with Figures of Speech proudly present the newest choreography from Tammi Gissell. Feather & Tar was originally conceived in response to the disastrous 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, while Tammi was in residence at the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts (ACPA) in 2011. Since then the work has been redeveloped and extended for BLAKDANCE 2012, a showcase of Australian and International first-nation choreographers to be presented June 4 - 9 2012 at the Queensland Theatre Company in Brisbane.

In Feather & Tar: a cabaret of sorrows Tammi draws upon her roots in the nightspot genre to deal with more recent corporate-industrial disasters such as the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Meltdown and Orrico leaks here in Australia. It is the unrelenting assault upon life on Earth which drives the punch of her physical and poetic repartee into an extravagant and surreal lament. The work will be performed by graduates of the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts (ACPA) in Brisbane, QLD and the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA Dance College) in Karijini, NSW.
OJEYA CRUZ BANKS

Performer, Choreographer and Researcher
Country: Guahan / Guam

Ojeya Cruz Banks is of Guåhan/Guam and African American heritage; she was born in the United States. She has been working as a lecturer and choreographer for the Dance Studies program in the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago in Aotearoa/New Zealand since 2008. Ojeya received a PhD from the University of Arizona in 2007. Her research includes dance anthropology, pedagogy, choreography, postcolonial studies, and indigenous perspectives of dance; and she specializes in sabar and djembe dance traditions from West Africa, contemporary dance, and recently started an exploring dance that engages issues of the Guåhan/ Pacific diaspora. She was selected for the esteemed 2008 Professional Choreographer’s Lab at the Jacob’s Pillow School of Dance (United States) and 2011 Pacific Dance Choreographic Laboratory (Aotearoa). Her current project examines the philosophies that guide the work of the award-winning Atamira Dance Company in Aotearoa and also dance practices in Guåhan/Guam, Senegal, and Guinea (West Africa) as a framework for understanding indigenous knowledge and creativity. In addition, she has studied dance in Cuba, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mali and several other countries. In 2010 she was invited to perform and teach in Bali.

BLAKDANCE 2012

Espritu Tasi/ The Ocean Within/ I respect water is a solo dance based on a somatic and ecological exploration of waters of Guåhan/Guam. Using movement qualities of the Pacific water that surrounds my home island, this choreography explores ocean characteristics such as waves drawing in and breaking, the strength of particular currents and the converging of different flow forms, subtle and peaceful motion, the changing tides, the abyss, and liquid gravity. These features of oceanic water are used as metaphors to explore narratives of the Chamorro Diaspora identity. This work was developed at the Pacific Dance Choreographic Laboratory and premiered at Mangere Theater in Auckland in 2011.
**JACK GRAY**

**Independent Artist / Artistic Director**
Country: Ngati Porou (Toka-a-Namu), Ngapuhi and Te Rarwa (Mitimiti), New Zealand.

Jack Gray is a choreographer, dancer, teacher, writer, reviewer and designer in the field of Maori Contemporary Dance. He is the Director of Jack Gray Dance and a Professional Dance Artist with Atamira Dance Company.

Born in 1977 in Auckland, Jack has tribal affiliations to Ngati Porou (Toka-a-Namu) on the East Coast of the North Island as well as Ngapuhi and Te Rarwa (Mitimiti) on the West Coast of the Far North.

Jack was a scholarship recipient to Dance WEB (2001 Impulstanz Festival, Vienna), Atelier Du Monde (2002 Montpellier Dance Festival, France), and The Asia Pacific Young Choreography project 2005 in Taiwan. Jack is currently a National finalist for an AMP Scholarship towards intercultural dance collaborations in Australia and California. He has been working on a 2013 premiere of a full-length work called Mitimiti based on tribal stories and lost traditions of his ancestral home in the Hokianga.

**BLAKDANCE 2012**

This year I have taken steps towards developing a major body of work stemming from research around the genealogies of my mothers whakapapa to a small Maori coastal village called Mitimiti in the North Hokianga. I have been able to immerse myself in its traditional knowledge and have enjoyed investigating the politics of retaining these ancestral pathways within a modern context. Otherwise, I will be enabling myself to grow in an international way - through residencies I will undertake in places like the University of California and the Santa Fe Arts Institute.
CATHY LIVERMORE

Independent Artist

Country: Aotearoa, New Zealand and Australia.

Cathy Livermore is of Kai Tahu descent from the east and southern coast of the South Island of Aotearoa. Beginning dance training at Lismore Conservatorium, NSW, Cathy graduated from Unitec School of Performing Arts in 2003. As a dancer Cathy has had the good fortune of performing with a range of NZ artists including Body Cartography, Vacuum Pact, Vospertron, Ivy Granite Productions, Oceania Dance Theatre, and Atamira Dance Collective as well as with independent artists and with her own choreographic works.

As a freelance contemporary choreographer Cathy’s first full-length work, Stitching Sandcastles was performed at Pataka Cultural Centre and Museum. Cathy’s creations have also been seen at the World Dance Alliance Asia/Pacific Conference, Oceania Dance Festival in Fiji, Tempo Dance Festival in Auckland, and the Oceania Dance Project in Samoa and was included in the premiere programme at the first Kowhiti Maori Contemporary Dance Festival in 2010.

BLAKDANCE 2012

MANAWHENUA: MANAMOANA is the concept for a new work by established Maori choreographers, Jack Gray (Ngati Porou, Ngapuhi, Te Rarawa) and Cathy Livermore (Kai Tahu, Waitaha, Kati Mamoe).

Land and Water, sit at the heart of most indigenous cultures; as elements we rely on in day-to-day living, as symbols in our worldview or representations of our identity. Land and Water have nurtured Maori from the beginning of our time, sustaining our body and being in life and death. Drawing inspiration from indigenous relationships and cultural identification to ecological and environmental issues, Mana Whenua: Mana Moana will unite stories of tribal dislocation and contemplate aspects of a dissonant past while also recognising the importance of re-establishing a physical presence and spiritual reconnection to land and sea.