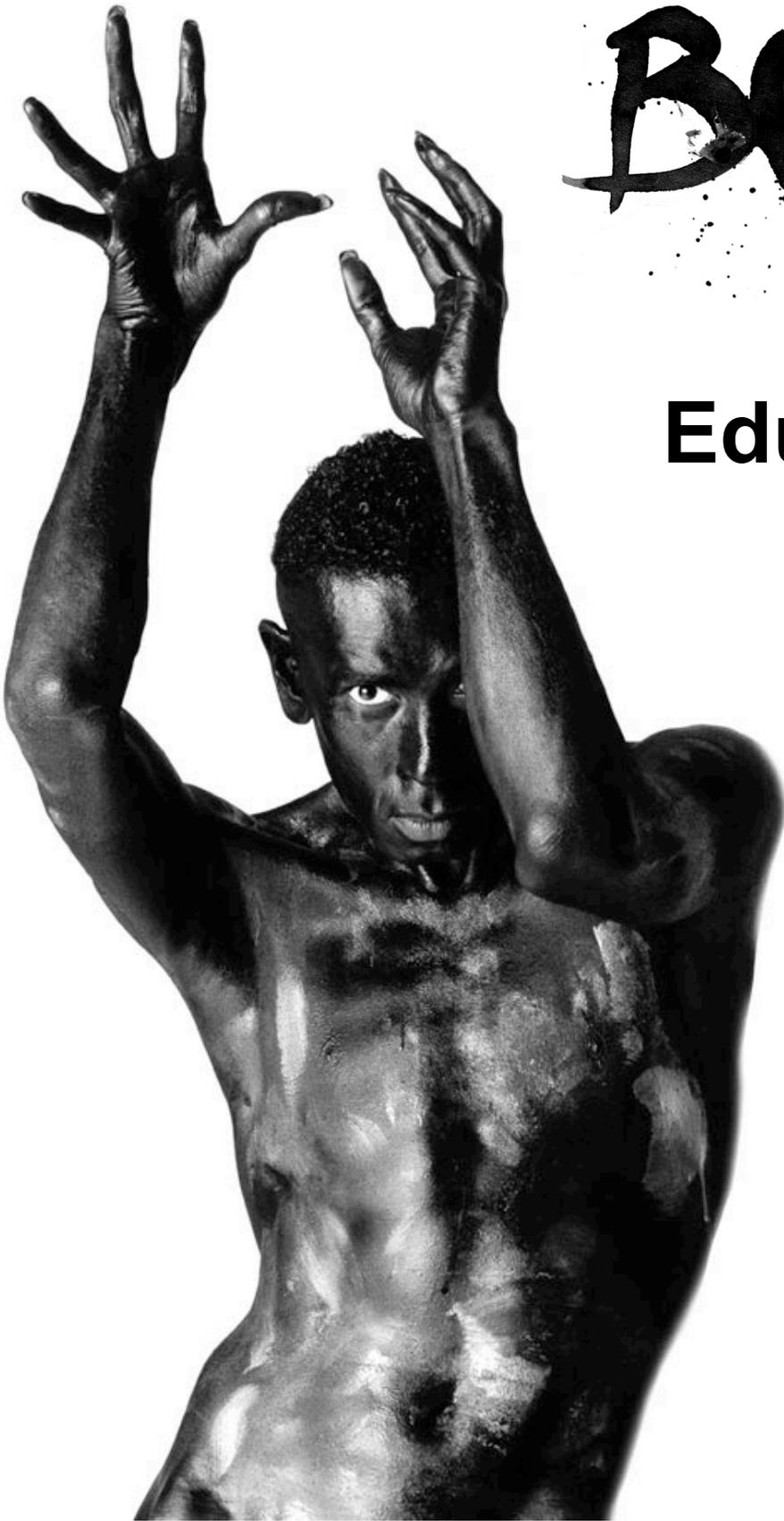


# BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

# BUSH

## Education Kit



## **How to use these notes**

These notes are designed to enhance students' knowledge about, and responses to, performance experiences. They provide information about the performance and suggest student activities.

The notes will give you the ability to prepare your students for the process of reading and interpreting a performance whether that be through performance themes, form and style, or design elements. This material will help you lead students to discover information, to explore processes, and to respond in critical and creative ways.

Each school that purchases tickets to Bangarra's new production BUSH will receive a complimentary Bangarra Dance Theatre Educational CD ROM, which was developed in association with education consultants.

**Your feedback on the usefulness of the material in these notes is valued.**

**If you would like to pass on any comments, please contact**

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**More information on the company is also accessible through  
Bangarra's website  
[www.bangarra.com.au](http://www.bangarra.com.au)**

If you would like to be kept up to date with Bangarra news and performances please join our mailing list via our website.

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## **Bangarra Dance Theatre Company Profile**

Bangarra Dance Theatre is one of the youngest and oldest of Australia's dance companies. Its living traditions go back at least 40 000 years but it also reflects the lives and attitudes of Indigenous peoples today. This unique company blends traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture with international contemporary dance influences to create a truly Australian dance language.

Under the artistic direction of Stephen Page since 1991, Bangarra has stunned audiences throughout Australia and the world with electric, startling and inherently spiritual dance works of immense theatrical presence.

Already a major force in Australian contemporary dance, Bangarra first galvanised international audiences with *Rites*, choreographed to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and performed in collaboration with The Australian Ballet. The work premiered at the 1997 Melbourne Festival and then toured to overwhelming acclaim to New York's City Center. The company has also appeared in major cities such as Washington, Edinburgh, Seoul, Athens and returned to New York in 2001 for sold out performances of Corroboree at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

At the heart of Bangarra's uniqueness is Stephen Page's vision for a theatrical style that remains true to the Indigenous spirit which is at the core of the company's work. Bangarra Dance Theatre speaks with an ancient yet completely contemporary voice to people everywhere.

### **VISION**

To maintain the link between the traditional Indigenous cultures of Australia and new forms of contemporary artistic expression with respect and integrity, giving voice to social and political issues which speak to all people.

### **OBJECTIVES**

To create and produce innovative contemporary dance theatre works of excellence.

To respect, maintain and nourish 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 specific to Bangarra.

To reach the widest possible audience, and to be cultural ambassadors, nationally and internationally.

To inspire and provide role models for young people.

## **About the production *BUSH***

Bangarra Dance Theatre's new work *Bush* is a lush and contemporary celebration of beauty, ritual and music inspired by the Dreamtime creation stories of Arnhem Land. From the last breath of sunset to the first finger-light of dawn, we enter a mysterious and secret space to witness nature's sacred poetry- reptilian creatures slither from dark caves, a moth emerges from its cocoon, the land erupts pushing up mountains and carving waterholes.

### **THE PROGRAM**

#### **Creation (Wirrkul Manda)**

*"They sang the songs and danced over the land...Created all living things"*

Performers: Kathy Balngayngu Marika & female ensemble  
Choreographer: Traditional & Stephen Page  
Composer: Steve Francis

#### **Goanna (Djanda)**

*Each goanna (male totem) is given his sense of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch.*

Performers: Kathy Balngayngu Marika & male ensemble  
Choreographer: Stephen Page  
Composer: David Page

#### **Slither**

*Every one hundred years a sacred creature emerges from its journey through the Earth. The women are chosen as keepers of the knowledge.*

Performers: Sidney Saltner - Kathy Balngayngu Marika & female ensemble  
Choreographer: Frances Rings  
Composer: David Page

#### **Life Cycle**

*Metamorphosis, rejuvenation and the passing on of knowledge.*

Choreographer: Stephen Page  
Composer: Steve Francis

#### **Leaf (Man'tjarr)**

Performer: Kathy Balngayngu Marika

#### **Caterpillar (Dapal)**

Performers: Desley Roberts, Jhunoy-Boy Borja, Timothy Bishop - Female ensemble

#### **Moth (Dhumar)**

Performers: Sani Townson and Deborah Brown

#### **Stick**

*Nganuk or Mimi spirits appear as spiritual messengers – they can come as good or bad signs.*

Performers: Sidney Saltner, Patrick Thaiday, Timothy Bishop, Elma Kris  
Choreographer: Frances Rings  
Composer: David Page

**Bush Pearl**

*A celebration of female sensuality.*

Performers: Peggy Misi - Rheannon Port & Chantal Kerr

Choreographer: Stephen Page

Composer: Steve Francis

**Feather (But'tju)**

*Preparing the spirit and body for its journey into the next life cycle.*

Performer: Frances Rings

Choreographer: Stephen Page

Composer: David Page

**Ceremony**

*The cycle of rituals in the celebration of death and rebirth.*

**Passing**

Performers: Kathy Balngayngu Marika & female ensemble

Choreographer: Traditional & Frances Rings

Composer: Steve Francis

**Gift**

Performers: Male ensemble

Choreographer: Stephen Page

Composer: David Page

**Clan**

Performers: Full ensemble

Choreographer: Stephen Page & Frances Rings

Composer: Steve Francis

## **BUSH PRODUCTION CREDITS**

Artistic Director & Choreographer	Stephen Page
Choreographer & Guest performer	Frances Rings
Composers	Steve Francis & David Page
Set Designer	Peter England
Costume Designer	Jennifer Irwin
Lighting Designer	Nick Schlieper
Associate Lighting Designer	Glenn Hughes
Assistant Artistic Director	Jasmine Gulash
Rehearsal Director	Shane Carroll
Production Manager	Vanessa Hutchins
Head Mechanist	Billy Hopper
Stage Manager	Narelle Lewis
Assistant Stage Manager	Cassandra Prucha
Wardrobe	Rae Spratt
Scenery builders	John Matkovic & Traleen Ryan
Production Assistant	Vincent Watson, Tim Pack
Production Secondment	Anthony Johnson

### **Guest Performer & Cultural Consultant**

Kathy Balngayngu Marika

### **Dancers**

Timothy Bishop  
Joel Blanco  
Jhuny-Boy Borja  
Deborah Brown  
Jasmine Gulash  
Chantal Kerr  
Elma Kris  
Peggy Misi  
Rheannan Port  
Frances Rings  
Desley Roberts  
Sidney Saltner  
Patrick Thaiday  
Sani Townson

### **Musical Collaborators**

The Bangarra Ladies Choir, Sarah Blasko, Deborah Brown, Angela Johnson, Kathy Balngayngu Marika, Djakapurra Munyarryun, Peggy Misi, Ursula Yovich, Jamie Wanambe, Leon Wanambe.

## ***BUSH* Directors Notes** **commentary by Stephen Page, Artistic Director & choreographer**

"The main inspiration for *Bush* is really my relationship with Arnhem Land over the years. My traditional mothers from Arnhem Land like Kathy Marika have supported and inspired me ceremonially and spiritually for a long time now. *Bush* reflects the poetic experience and beauty I have enjoyed over my fifteen years of being linked to Arnhem Land - its magic, its sacred grounds.

The more I hear all of these creation stories and the older I get, the more I digest. It's the longest university degree you can ever have. It is a great honour to be accepted and given this gift, to put these stories in a public domain in an abstract way - there's a wonderful trust there.

In Bangarra, we bring these stories to a western context and present them with integrity. Our work is similar to the development of Indigenous visual art, from painting on rocks to painting on canvas. It is a modern way of presenting traditional stories - placing them in a live theatre experience. Bangarra has worked with these traditional stories and land inspirations for a long time now - we are celebrating our own ritual over the past 13 years. We have come through our first life cycle. I wouldn't say we are 'mastering' it but we have been initiated and respect our experiences of the journey.

With *Bush* it is a wonderful thing for us, the Bangarra creative clan, to rejoice in the cycle. There is my traditional family on the one hand and my creative professional family on the other - Peter England, Jennifer Irwin, David Page, Steve Francis who have all worked with me now for ten years. And of course Frances Rings, who has collaborated with me on pieces within this work. An integral part of the Bangarra life cycle is Fran's emergence as a choreographer. She has such a powerful presence she is impossible to ignore! Fran has been the sister muse through a long journey - from being a student, then dancer and now choreographer. She brings a different spirit to the work but at the same time she has a beautiful intuitive understanding of what it is to create that unique Bangarra theatrical experience. She also brings an incredible feminine energy to this work as Kathy Marika does as well obviously. *Bush* is very much about respecting the role of women in our tradition - they are the nurturers and the keepers.

This work is a bush galaxy of poetic imagery and stories that make up our history - ranging from the comic mimicry of stick spirits, to the power of rocks and land formations, to the ritual and medicine of fresh water, the transformation of a caterpillar into a moth. *Bush* embraces all those diversities and inspirations that come from living from the land.

I do consciously try to nurture an optimistic spirit. Even when I get angry at the world and the way society is going, and I do quite social frustration works as a result, I always try to inject a sense of optimism and hope out of those experiences. I think with *Bush* its purely about letting the audience into the spiritual glory box of what is sacred, communicating how special this land is to us through certain specific inspirations such as Arnhem Land, my traditional family's stories and my relationship to them. It is a personal endeavour. It is also about maintaining an honest respect for land creations and peoples."

## ***BUSH* Co-choreographer Notes**

### **Commentary by Frances Rings**

“To me *Bush* feels like coming home. It’s a cleansing and it is the rituals you go through in the process. There is something old and ancient about it or like when you have been doing things throughout the day and reflections of a dream keep coming back to you. We are tapping into a spiritual dimension that is comforting and nurturing. *Bush* in some ways is similar to *Ochres* – each piece had its own songline but ultimately it is all for the one purpose.

Working with Kathy Marika is wonderful, especially for me as a choreographer to have a traditional woman who is caretaker of the stories passing on all this knowledge. It is almost like a female version of the creative relationship Stephen Page had with Djakapurra Munyarryun. Being a black woman myself I can tap into that energy and that gut knowing – it is what I always try to rely on as my source of inspiration and drive. Kathy carries all of that wealth with her. It is an honour for all of us at Bangarra to be working with her.

Creating Bangarra works is always a collaborative process. Stephen teaches me so much because I still feel quite young in terms of choreography. He gives me the freedom to express ideas and appreciates another point of view. And this is the first time I have worked with David Page in terms of the music and I have really been enjoying the process, he is such a great storyteller. Then of course working with the new young dancers, passing on some of the things that I have learnt as a Bangarra dancer, those key things that make us unique among the dance world. I am really interested in sharing that knowledge and pushing it to another level. I believe it can still grow, especially with this fresh bunch. They are so excited and full of energy – they are passionate about learning and that is so inspiring.”

## **BUSH THE MUSIC**

### **Commentary by David Page and Steve Francis (composers)**

“When Stephen started to create *Bush* it became apparent his vision for this work was a distinct shift away from Bangarra’s recent works. *Bush* didn’t seem to focus so much on the issues or the struggles of its protagonists but rather celebrated them as they went about their respective journeys. Whether it was the life cycle of the humble moth, the feeding goannas or the Two Sisters creation of the landscape, there seemed to be a thread of hope and beauty that was common to them all. This became the starting point for the creation of our score. Our choice of themes and instrumentation hopefully reflect this beauty.

As we have done in the past we wanted to combine our contemporary ideas with the more traditional Indigenous elements. Kathy Marika is the cultural presence in the show, so it was natural for us to incorporate her language and stories into the soundtrack. Jamie Wanambe, her nephew, is a song man from Yirrkala, and he along with his brother Leon travelled to Sydney to record a number of traditional songs, which we have also used respectfully throughout the score. This is the first time Kathy’s family have collaborated with Bangarra and their presence has helped create a unique accompaniment to Stephen Page and Frances Ring’s choreography.

The wonderful thing about working with Bangarra is the energy that is released throughout the whole creative process and production period. *Bush* comes from this energy. It comes from within us in ways we cannot articulate in words. It comes from our musical collaborators who have touched us with their spirit during this process but above all it comes from the beauty of Indigenous culture, the quiet manner of the people, the modern dreaming of keepers who continue to evolve these stories through dance and song. These stories are passed down to us from a place unknown to our modern day consciousness. We do our best to nurture them.”

## **BUSH THE SET**

### **- Commentary by Peter England (set designer)**

“Visually *Bush* begins in an empty space, a ‘black box’, and then progresses into a series of stylized images revealed as ‘windows’ or ‘cave openings’ to imagined places. Symbolically the entire space represents the mother spirit as embodied by Kathy Marika, the various images within are responses to her particular stories being expressed during *Bush*. These visuals are not intended as biographical representations, but rather emotional and sensual recollections, as abstracted glimpses of key elements within a story. As a stage for the expression of life stories, its cycles, metamorphosis, and renewals, the set seeks beyond all to provide a stimulating and supportive story telling environment.

The first section of the piece looks at *Women’s Creation*, the set reveals a subterranean world of what might appear to be the earth lifted up to expose tree roots or stalactites in a cave. It is from this depth of the land that stories emanate. The ensuing sections of the work continues this theme of caves or crevices from which, or in which, memories and stories are born and stored. Through each of these openings we see different abstractions of primary elements, traditions or totems – as outlined in the titles of the segments. The idea of abstracting or symbolising in this way is not to confuse the audience but rather stimulate the imagination and allow the massive metaphorical nature of the work to move fluidly without any restrictions of ‘literal place’.

I have always been inspired by Bangarra’s fusion of the traditional culture with western/contemporary styles. It is a dialogue of energies I am constantly investigating when designing for the company, be it in the forms or icons used or the mixing of materials and finishes – and “*Bush*” is no exception. The chaotic set piece featured in *Stick* is made from woven lengths of extruded square steel pipe. The piece featured in *Feather* is plastic acrylic paint applied to PVC plastic then scratched into with massive energy. To me it is about mixing styles and materials together to create a piece that speaks of an alive and evolving culture, a culture with ancient origins and a vitality for all times.”

## SUGGESTED STUDY TOPICS

The following suggested topics are designed for adaptation to individual teaching styles and learner needs.

### Dance

#### Senior students

##### Your initial response to dance works

- What are your initial impressions of the work?
- What does the dance remind you of?
- What do you like/dislike about the dance? Why?
- What aspects of the dance impact on you first?

##### Describing the work

- What do you think is the intent of each of the pieces?
- How does the work use space (levels, direction, shape, dimensions and floor patterns)?
- How the body parts of the dancers are articulated within both locomotor and non-locomotor?
- How speed and duration of movement is manipulated in each section- include the use of beat and rhythm. Provide examples of how this impacts on the mood/atmosphere of the work?
- How is sound, music and silence is used throughout the work? Eg the type of music used, the relationship of the dance to the music.
- Describe the dynamics of the movements in each of the pieces. (ie degree of energy and control of movements, eg- strong & light, sustained, bound/ free, percussive)
- How has each of the above elements of dance and composition been linked to the intent of each of the pieces?
- Is the work optimistic? Give reasons behind your answers, citing dance language to support.
- What are the features of *Bush* that qualify the work as 'dance theatre'? How is the work balanced between the elements of theatre and dance?
- Describe what is unique to the style of Bangarra Dance Theatre. Is the style mostly traditional or contemporary/ modern? Use examples from the work to support your argument.

#### Junior students

- What is your favourite native animal or bird? What is its Aboriginal name? Create a short dance based on this animal's movements.
- Develop a dance or song from a vivid dream you have had.
- What is unique about Bangarra Dance Theatre?

### Music

- Identify both traditional and contemporary sounds and instruments in the score for *Bush*.
- Identify the various moods evoked by the music and how the composers have achieved this.
- How does the music employ tempo, timbre and time signature to create the sounds for *Bush*?

- Discuss the differences and similarities between each of the sections of *Bush*, identifying instrumentation and style.
- Analyse and respond to how contemporary expression of traditional Indigenous culture is reflected in the music and lyrics of *Bush*.

This song is featured in the first section of *Bush* called 'Creation'.

### **Wirrkul Manda (Two Sisters)**

(in whisper)

Marryuwanan dhupal, benuru dhupal ngarrunganam Burrall Kungurur, bokmanan dhupal ngarrungan, Wata dharpa gapu, ngayi ga yolnguny.

The two sisters came in from heaven, the east.

They created the wind, the east wind and gave it a name (dhimurru).

On their way they created the land, like the sand dunes, rock formations and mountains.

(voice)

Gunganan ngarrungan yakun, Dhimurru (east wind),  
Gadayka (stringy bark tree) Barwula (water), nuku ga madayin ga bulu ngamapiliny  
dhupal bakman ga gungam bapurru ga gurrudu.

They sang the songs and danced over the land.

They struck the ground with their walking sticks and created fresh water.

They moved west following the sun (walu), creating different land marks.

Creating animals sacred sites, giving birth to the different clans and language.

Creating all living things.

(in whisper)

Bala dhupal Wanganan ngalapalminhan, dhangu ngali bokmanam nhumaliyngu ga  
djaka manymak gungdjinaaku ngangiwum.

After they finished they said to the leader of each clan, "You have to take care of what we created, look after the land."

*Translation by Bangarra Cultural Consultant Kathy Balngayngu Marika.*

### **Visual arts**

- Compare elements of traditional and contemporary art reflected in *Bush*.
- Interpret images and objects from a variety of cultural and historical perspectives.
- Research and evaluate images and objects of Australian artists/designers/craftspeople from a variety of historical and contemporary contexts.
- Make images and objects to interpret chosen social and cultural issues evident in *Bush*
- The ochre used in *Bush* comes from the community in Bremer Island, near Nhulunbuy/Gove Peninsula. Students may explore the use of ochre, clay or mud by diverse cultures as a material for visual arts.
- Discuss symbolism with relation to the set for *Bush* and how the stage and spacing are used to illustrate this?
- Identify the main visual elements in *Bush* and whether they are constructed from organic or man-made materials.

## **Society and Culture and Modern History**

- Investigate other events in Australia's history that have raised public awareness of the need to recognise the value of Indigenous/Aboriginal dance and culture.
- How does *Bush* offer insight into understanding past ideas, events and actions to explain the causes and effects of changes in culture?
- How does *Bush* offer insight into the importance of valuing the contribution of people and the importance of diverse Heritages?
- How does *Bush* offer insight into understanding social, natural and built environments to evaluate human–environment relationships?
- How does *Bush* value and promote the significance of place?
- Frances Rings talks about songlines in her Choreographer Notes. Research the definition/s of a songline?
- What issues can you identify that are addressed in *Bush*?
- Research Aboriginal organisations in your local area and present your findings to the class. Find out how the organisations began and what their aims and objectives are.
- How does Page's choreography present the notion of gender? Do you think this view differs from what feature films or pop stars say about it? If so, how?
- In Indigenous culture, what role does the elder take? Is there a difference between male and female elders? What does Page say about his traditional mothers? Can you find examples of this role in other cultures (either Indigenous or non-Indigenous?)

## **Junior Students**

- What are the main Aboriginal language groups in your area?
- Research Aboriginal names for natural features in your area. Take a tour of these areas.
- What is some local 'bush tucker' ?
- How did Aboriginal people live in your area before white settlers arrived?
- Why is the land so important to Aboriginal people?

## **Geography**

- Research the history and current information about Arnhem Land. Where is it? What are the main industries there? How is the national park maintained? Who owns the national park? How many square kilometres of the Northern Territory is National Park?
- Stephen Page cites rock formations and land formations as part of the inspiration behind *Bush* -what power are they said to possess?