

## FRANCES RINGS APPOINTED ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



Bangarra Dance Theatre is proud to announce the appointment of Kokatha woman, Frances Rings as the company's incoming Artistic Director. Rings will take on the role as Stephen Page announces that he will step down as Bangarra Artistic Director in early 2023.

Announcing the appointment, Bangarra Dance Theatre Chair Phillipa McDermott said, "Whilst this marks the end of an era, Frances Rings is an incredible artist and the perfect choice to carry the extraordinary legacy of Stephen Page into Bangarra's next cycle. We are thrilled to welcome such a major talent with a deep connection to Bangarra. Stephen is a national treasure and his legacy cannot be underestimated, he has done so much for this nation. On behalf of the board I thank him for his unfailing dedication to his people and his work in bringing cultures together through art, which will be honoured forever more."

Page's resignation marks the end of an incredible 32-year tenure as Bangarra's Artistic Director. A descendant of the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh Nation from SE Queensland, Page was appointed Artistic Director in 1991. Over this time, he has developed an unsurpassed signature body of works that have become milestones in Australian performing arts history, setting a benchmark for storytelling not only across Australia, but internationally, and firmly establishing Bangarra as a critical part of the Australian cultural ecosystem.

Said Page "Frances Rings is an exceptional dancer and a gifted and visionary choreographer. Her works for Bangarra, among them the acclaimed *Unaipon*, *Terrain* and *Sandsong* stand as precious works of profound artistic and cultural truth.

I am delighted to now entrust the future of Bangarra to this deeply committed and community-connected cultural leader not only because of her sensational artistry but because her lived experience is that Bangarra is so much more than an arts organisation. Ceremonially I pass her this precious coolamon filled with all our truly unique First Nations dancers and administrators as well as our many valuable non-Indigenous supporters”.

Internationally celebrated Dancer, Choreographer and arts leader, Frances Rings originally performed as a Dancer with Bangarra, before making her choreographic debut with Bangarra in 2002 with the critically acclaimed *Rations* as part of *Walkabout*. Rings has since choreographed eight major works for the company, firmly cementing herself as one of Australia’s leading choreographers.

Said Rings, “When I joined Bangarra as an aspiring young artist I became a part of a family, a clan of Indigenous artists who all shared the same vision: to tell the stories of Indigenous Australia in our distinctive languages, to shift societal perspectives, and affirm our position as an integral part of the National cultural identity. My journey would begin as a dancer for 12 years transitioning into Resident Choreographer, Associate Artistic Director and now into this role as Artistic Director of Bangarra. I didn’t arrive here without the mentorship and guidance from our current artistic director, Stephen Page.

Stephen is an icon of our industry, a cultural leader and esteemed visionary. He is our National treasure. What I inherit is due to his incredible hard work, sacrifice and indomitable belief in the power of our artform and its ability to create lasting change. His profound impact on our industry is a lasting legacy that will resonate for generations to come”.

In 2022, audiences will have the special opportunity to experience Page’s largest major stage work as Bangarra’s Artistic Director, with the world premiere of *Wudjang: Not the Past*, as well as one of Rings’ most lauded works, *Terrain*, as the company embarks on a special 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary tour of the landmark production.

-ENDS-

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**For further information and interview requests:**

**KABUKU PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**Belinda Dyer | [Belinda@kabukupr.com.au](mailto:Belinda@kabukupr.com.au) | 0415 686 014**

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Stephen Page**

Stephen Page directed the Indigenous sections for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies, choreographed for the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, and has choreographed over 25 works for Bangarra. In recent years his work has included Helpmann Award-winning works *Bennelong* and *Dark Emu*, which went on to become one of the most successful productions in the history of Bangarra.

Page's first full-length film *SPEAR* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. He also directed the chapter *Sand* in the feature film *The Turning* (2013) and choreographed the hit feature films *Bran Nue Dae* (2009) and *The Sapphires* (2011).

In 2015, Page was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Creative Arts by the University of Technology Sydney. In 2016, he received both the NAIDOC Lifetime Achievement Award and JC Williamson Award. In 2017, Page was honoured with the Australia Council Dance Award for significant contributions to the cultural and artistic fabric of the nation, and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO).

Behind the scenes, Page has provided mentorship and opportunities for numerous young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and young people, as well as championing social justice for Indigenous people.

### **Frances Rings**

In 2004, Bulletin Magazine named Rings in their Smart 100, following the world premiere of her work *Unaipon*. She was also awarded an Australian Dance Award for *Unaipon*, as well as several Helpmann Awards (for *Walkabout*, *Terrain* and *Sheoak*). Her most recent work, *SandSong: Stories from the Great Sandy Desert*, co-choreographed with Stephen Page, toured Australia in 2021, and will return to stages across the country in 2022.

Rings has choreographed for many of Australia's leading dance companies including West Australian Ballet and Tasdance, and has danced for Australia's leading choreographers and companies including Meryl Tankard, Leigh Warren and Legs on the Wall.

Internationally, Rings has established important intercultural relationships with both Kahawi Dance Theatre in Six Nations, Turtle Island (Canada) and Atamira Dance Company in Auckland, Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Rings was appointed Head of Creative Studies at NAISDA Dance College from 2016-2019, and directed five end-of-year productions between 2014-2018: *Your Skin, My Skin* (2014), *Kamu* (2015), *From Sand to Stage* (2016), *Restoration* (2017), and *Storyplace* (2018). In 2019, she was appointed Associate Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre.