

# BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



Education Kit 2010

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## 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.

**More information on the company is also accessible through Bangarra's website**

[www.bangarra.com.au](http://www.bangarra.com.au)

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<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bangarra-Dance-Theatre/116457911727856>

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*'... 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 the Wiradjuri language of New South Wales

**Vision**

Bangarra Dance Theatre is fuelled by the spirit, energy and inspiration derived from the culture, values and traditions of Indigenous Australians.

From these roots, we create theatre that is artistically innovative, technically outstanding and truly exciting to audiences throughout Australia and the world.

## ABOUT BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

*“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 was established in 1989 as a dance company that embraces, celebrates and respects Australia’s Indigenous peoples and their culture. Under the artistic direction of Stephen Page since 1991, Bangarra has emerged as Australia’s only national premier Indigenous performing arts company.

As Artistic Director, Stephen Page has developed an extraordinary signature body of work that has secured the company’s reputation as a national and international dance phenomenon. Stephen is also committed to developing the next generation of Indigenous storytellers by mentoring emerging artists. In 2008, Stephen was named NSW Australian of the Year.

Each year, Bangarra performs to approximately 50,000 people around Australia and the world and its productions are regularly sold out.

The Sydney-based multi award-winning company, with 14 dancers, is chaired by Aden Ridgeway and led by Executive Director Catherine Baldwin.

At the heart of all of Bangarra’s productions is the musical creativity of award-winning David Page, who is one of the most successful Aboriginal contemporary composers in Australia. David’s music is the inimitable soundscape of Bangarra that lures audiences year after year.

Bangarra bases its creative spirit on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions and stories producing a powerful new language that combines the traditional and the contemporary. This potent, original and distinctive style tells the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples unifying the past and the present.

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. Since then, the company has performed in Monaco, returned to the US twice – performing in New York City and in Washington, and performed in China, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and New Zealand. In 2006, the company toured the UK, performing at London’s prestigious Sadler’s Wells Theatre. In 2008 & 2009, the company mounted successful tours to London, Paris, Canada, Hungary, Austria and Germany.

Bangarra travels the world, performs at private functions, for major arts festivals and special events such as the opening and closing of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and in regional Australia as well as capital cities annually. Underpinning all of its performances is the strong connection with the communities and people which remain its core inspiration.

In 2009, Bangarra Dance Theatre celebrated 20 years of bringing Australia and the world its original, evocative and inspirational dance theatre and eagerly anticipates the potential of the next 20 years, starting with *of earth & sky*.

## COMPANY CHRONOLOGY

- 1989      Bangarra Dance Theatre founded by Carole Johnson  
Tour to Japan and New Zealand
- 1991      Stephen Page appointed Artistic Director  
*Up Until Now* by Stephen Page (Sydney, North Coast NSW, Brisbane, Indonesia)
- 1992      ***Praying Mantis Dreaming*** by Stephen Page (Canberra, Central Western NSW, Melbourne, Brisbane)  
Bangarra tours to China and Hong Kong
- 1993      *Praying Mantis Dreaming* (Sydney, Cairns, WA, North East Arnhem Land)  
Bangarra tours to New York, Los Angeles and London
- 1994      ***Ninni*** By Stephen Page (Sydney, NT, QLD)  
*Best of Bangarra* (Adelaide Festival)  
*Ochres* presented as a 'work in progress' at the '94 Nambundah Festival at Belvoir Street Theatre
- 1995      ***Ochres*** by Stephen Page and Bernadette Walong-Sene (Sydney, Canberra, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Arnhem Land, Berlin, Tokyo, Noumea)
- 1996      *Ochres* (Berlin, Japan)  
Bangarra tours to Hong Kong, India and Indonesia  
Flag hand over ceremony, Closing Ceremony Atlanta Olympic Games
- 1997      ***Fish*** by Stephen Page (Premiers at the Edinburgh International Festival for the Arts, Edinburgh, South Korea, Festival of the Dreaming, Sydney)  
***Rites*** with The Australian Ballet (Premiers at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, Melbourne, Sydney)
- 1998      *Fish* (Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra NSW, VIC, Noumea)  
Bangarra tours to Korea, Taiwan, Italy and Germany  
*DanceClan*
- 1999      *The Dreaming* (New Zealand, USA, UK)  
*Fish* (QLD, NT, WA)  
*Womad* (Adelaide, Johannesburg, Rivermead, Seattle)  
*Rites* with The Australian Ballet (Sydney, Melbourne, New York, Washington, Toronto)  
*DanceClan 2*
- 2000      ***Skin*** by Stephen Page (Premiered at the Sydney Opera House, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane)  
*Awakenings* (Sydney 2000 Olympic Games)  
*The Dreaming* (Hawaii, Fiji)  
*DanceClan 3*
- 2001      ***Corroboree*** a triple bill (*Roo, Turtle, Brolga*) by Stephen Page (Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, USA16 City tour)  
*The Dreaming* (Noumea, NSW)
- 2002      ***Walkabout*** A double bill - *Rations* by Frances Rings and *Rush* by Stephen Page (Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane)  
*Skin* (Adelaide)

- Corroboree (Beijing, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Monaco)  
*The Dreaming* (VIC, SA)
- 2003      ***Bush*** by Stephen Page and Frances Rings (Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane)  
*The Dreaming* (NSW, NT, QLD, ACT)
- 2004      ***Clan*** A double bill - *Unaipon* by Frances Rings and *Reflections* by Stephen Page  
*Bush* (Washington, New York, Hawaii)  
*Spirit* (QLD)
- 2005      ***Boomerang*** by Stephen Page (Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane)  
*Spirit* (QLD, VIC, TAS, NSW)  
*Bush* (Japan, New Zealand)
- 2006      ***Gathering*** with The Australian Ballet (Melbourne, Sydney)  
*Clan* (NT, WA, QLD, NSW)  
*Bush* (UK)  
*Spirit* (Hobart)
- 2007      ***True Stories*** A double bill *Emeret Lu* by Elma Kris and *X300* by Frances Rings  
(Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle, Canberra, Wollongong)  
*Clan* (SA, VIC, TAS, NSW)
- 2008      ***Mathinna*** by Stephen Page  
(Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle, Canberra, Wollongong)  
*True Stories* (SA, NT, QLD)  
*Rites with The Australian Ballet* (London, Paris)  
*Awakenings* (Washington, New York, Ottawa)
- 2009      ***Fire – A Retrospective*** by Stephen Page  
(Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle, Canberra, Wollongong)  
*True Stories* (NSW, WA)  
*True Stories* (Hungary, Austria, Germany)
- 2010      ***of earth & sky*** by Stephen Page  
(Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra, Wollongong)  
*Mathinna* (VIC, TAS)

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

## KEY ASPECTS OF ABORIGINAL SPIRITUALITY

Aboriginal people lead a spiritual existence, where land and society are seen as mutually dependent. The land is both mother and father; it nurtures and provides shelter. The land is much more than economic good. It is a mystical phenomenon that forms the heart of Aboriginal religious beliefs and practices. To travel in Aboriginal countries is a religious experience because the landscape pulsates with power left by the Dreamtime beings as they performed their wondrous deeds.

The Dreamtime is at the very core of the Aboriginal belief system. This is the time of the ancestor, the mythical period when the totemic Ancestral Beings appeared and transformed the world. The Dreamtime is transmitted through story telling, paintings and dance. They recount the ancestors' wanderings across immense territories, modifying the landscape, creating flora and fauna, and humankind and teaching people their ceremonies.

The Dreamtime came to an end when the Ancestral Beings left the earth but their departure did not mean the loss of this mystical past, for it can be periodically recovered through ritual. Thus the Dreamtime is not a static mythical period. It is once again present through the practice of rituals and customs.



*Artefact – Weaving.* Dancers: Bangarra full ensemble. Choreographer: Frances Rings. Photographer: Andy Solo.

When the rituals are performed, the performers become the Dreamtime beings and are able to tap into the power of the land and the Ancestral Beings. Song men and women praise the abundance and beauty of their countries, they chant the names of various places, the location of water holes, swamps and rich food places. They recount the journeys of their heroes and the sacred story sites. In this way young people become familiar with all aspects of their country.

By these songs and rituals, performers express their emotional connection to their land. It is their right and responsibility to sing the songs, relate the myths and perform the sacred dances. Other people may do so only if they are invited to participate.

It is in dances and special ceremonies called corroborees that much of the religious beliefs and practices about the Dreamtime are given expression. In dreams the fantastic occurs and the Dreamtime beings sing and show themselves as they really are. A dreamer who has slipped into Dreamtime sings in his sleep, but it is really the Dreamtime beings singing through the dreamer. From what the dreamer sees in his dream a dance is made up. Anyone who was at the camp when the dream occurred has a right to participate in the dance.

*David McKnight 'People, Countries, and the Rainbow Serpent' (Oxford University Press, 1999)*

## MESSAGE FROM STEPHEN PAGE, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Dancer: Perun Bonser. Photographer: Jason Capobianco.

Mentoring Indigenous artists is an important responsibility for me as Artistic Director of Bangarra. Generally new choreographers tend to be those rare artists who have been my creative muse. It's their distinctive qualities in performance that helps me recognise their potential as a story-teller.

Frances Rings was for many years one of our most treasured performers and has established herself as a remarkable choreographer. Her new work *Artefact* is her fifth for Bangarra and as always this is a special experience for the dancers and myself as we witness the high level of innovation and craft that Fran brings to her creative process.

I am delighted to be able to announce that we have appointed Frances as Resident Choreographer for Bangarra which recognises her continuing important contribution to this company. When Fran first told me the story for *Artefact* and her collaboration with Kathy Marika, I knew this would be a richly spiritual work told from a female perspective – something that is all too rare in our contemporary theatre.

Daniel approached me with the idea of making a work inspired by Michael Riley's photographs and so *Riley* became a personal journey for Daniel in connecting with his clan on his father's side. Daniel follows in the path of our founding male artists Russell Page and Djakapurra Munyarryun. I have enjoyed the process of mentoring Dan and think he has a long future as an outstanding Australian artist.

Michael Riley was a peer of mine, a valued supporter of Bangarra and a great friend to myself and my brothers David and Russell. Michael loved the visual energy of our dance theatre productions, so this work honours Michael's creativity and celebrates his life.

*Artefact* and *Riley* together form a balanced program of *earth & sky*, each inspired by a different medium of visual art and by the timeless connection of our traditional culture with our contemporary world.

Once again David Page has composed extraordinarily beautiful sound scapes, and I am thrilled to have commissioned talented Indigenous set designer, Jacob Nash. It's great to be working again with the inspiring costume designer, Gabriela Tylesova and the brilliantly intuitive lighting designer, Damien Cooper.

All our dancers from last year are back with us, continuing to give an abundance of commitment and spirit to every performance. We proudly introduce Travis de Vries who is on secondment from NAISDA. My special thanks to Cathie Goss, our Rehearsal Director for her tireless energy and support of myself, the choreographers and the dancers, and to the incredible production team behind Bangarra.

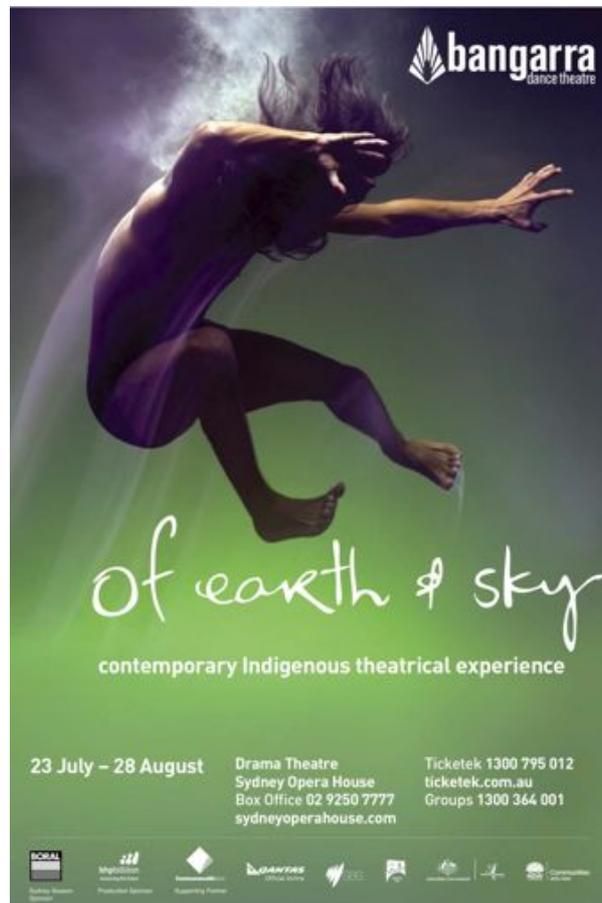
I would like to thank our management team under the brilliant leadership of Catherine Baldwin, and our board of directors for their valuable support.

The double bill of *earth & sky* is an exciting, refreshing start to Bangarra's next twenty years.



*Riley – Angel*. Dancers: Waangenga Blanco & Leonard Mickelo. Choreographer: Daniel Riley McKinley. Photographer: Andy Solo.

# of earth & sky



A new dance cycle has awakened. After celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> year in 2009, two new works have been commissioned by Stephen Page to launch Bangarra into its next two decades.

Bangarra's 2010 season, *of earth & sky* features the work of celebrated choreographer Frances Rings and Daniel Riley McKinley in his eagerly awaited choreographic debut. Visual art has always been at the core of our creative process but with these new works the choreography has been devised around the spirit of objects.

*Artefact* by Frances Rings, inspired by the dynamic between 'man and object', honours Indigenous symbols of ancient and modern rituals that hold great spiritual meaning and connection to place. The objects in this piece are of earth, a central aspect of the traditional Aboriginal way of life.

Celebrating the life of the late Michael Riley, Aboriginal photographer and filmmaker, and his internationally acclaimed *cloud* photographs, *Riley* by Daniel Riley McKinley explores the cultural resilience of Indigenous Australians. In *Riley*, the objects have been digitally juxtaposed against the sky, as symbols of Michael Riley's personal life.

At the heart of Bangarra's work is the inimitable soundscape and musical creativity of David Page, one of Australia's most successful Aboriginal contemporary composers.

# RILEY

## Choreographer's Notes

Daniel Riley McKinley



*Riley – Feather.* Dancers: Bangarra full ensemble. Choreographer: Daniel Riley McKinley. Photographer: Andy Solo. ('Feather' image by Michael Riley).

I was immediately inspired by Michael Riley's *cloud* series the first time I saw it at the National Gallery in Canberra. Seeing the images as they were originally intended imprinted them on my mind straight away. The beautiful blue backgrounds, and the symbolic, almost totemic subjects that are floating at the forefront of each image are quite ethereal. They are impossibly suspended, frozen in time, floating in a dreamlike state.

My relationship with Michael developed over time, as did my understanding of *cloud*. After looking at the images for so long I developed an intimate relationship with them. Unfortunately I never had the opportunity to meet him as he sadly passed away before I was introduced to his work and awakened to the fact that we shared the same bloodline.

What originally drew me to the possibility of using the *cloud* series to make a dance work, apart from the striking blue sky that surrounds each image and their incredible dreamlike beauty, was the modern way in which Michael developed the photographs. His use of digital manipulation inspired me to approach Stephen with the possibility of developing and choreographing a new work for the company, one that celebrated an Indigenous artist who used modern technology to develop his chosen art form.

The six images, of the original ten, which I have taken from *cloud* as my inspiration, were those that I felt a stronger connection with, both thematically and emotionally.

With the locust section I asked the dancers to embody the physicality of being in and amongst a locust swarm. What it would feel like, what it would sound like, what the experience of being a part of this natural phenomenon would be. With the help of David Page's music to excite the feeling of a locust swarm, I drew from both the side of the locust as well as the people affected by the swarms for the choreography. The pack like movement patterns of a swarm and the blocking, shielding, frustrated actions of those who find themselves surrounded.

With the image of the Bible I chose to create two sections as a way of showing different perspectives of a relationship with religion and faith. As a young boy Michael was sent to Sunday school by his parents, but never really connected with the experience. What he neither connected with, nor agreed with was the way the missionaries denounced Dreaming stories and beliefs as primitive and evil. For one section I drew from Michael's experiences of how he found the religious experience "creepy". In the second, the men represent the other side of the relationship as an exaggerated religious presence.

I wanted Michael's work to be represented properly and wanted them to come alive on stage as an extra energy and added presence to the work. Through a development process with Jacob Nash we came up with a simple and raw stage setting allowing the images to be the hero of the design. Having the images as the main focal point makes me feel like Michael is there, and everyone is onstage together.

*"A feather left behind is often evidence of such a spiritual visit"*

In Wiradjuri culture, a feather can represent the marking of a journey had, and the embryological cord connecting mother to child. After creating this, my first choreographic work, I feel as though *Riley* is my feather. It has connected me to Michael, and given me a greater understanding and connection to my Indigenous heritage and marks the start of my choreographic journey with Bangarra.

*"Dreams of floating, of release".*

## BIOGRAPHY: MICHAEL RILEY



The late Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist Michael Riley is one of the most important Indigenous artists of the past two decades. He was a photographer and filmmaker with a rare sensibility. Over his career Michael Riley created an impressive body of work ranging from black & white portraiture to film, video and large-scale digital photograph. After leaving his hometown of Dubbo, NSW, Riley enrolled in a photographic course at the University of Sydney's Tin Sheds, and was soon employed as a darkroom technician at Sydney College of the Arts.

Riley's works, including *Maria* 1985, were included in the significant exhibition *Contemporary Aboriginal and Islander photography* held in 1986 at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery, Sydney. In 1987 he was one of the founding members of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, set up to promote the work of urban Aboriginal artists.

His first film, *Boomalli: five Koori artists* 1987 was made during his time at Film Australia. Throughout his career, his concern was to celebrate the spirit of his people while also bearing witness to their struggles. He had a deep commitment to the process of reconciliation.

Following his success in Australia, Riley was included in the significant international exhibitions, *Photographica Australis* at ARCO in Spain, the Istanbul Biennale 2003 and in 2004 he was awarded one of three grand prizes at the 11th Asian Art Biennale, Bangladesh. Riley is one of eight artists featured in the Australian Indigenous Art Commission for the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, in 2006. Also in 2006 the National Gallery of Australia opened the retrospective of Riley's work, *Michael Riley: sights unseen*.

### SOURCES

Boomalli Art Gallery of NSW Online Catalogue

[http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/page/10704/Boomalli\\_cat\\_72dpi.pdf](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/_data/page/10704/Boomalli_cat_72dpi.pdf)

Stills Gallery – Michael Riley

[http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/riley/index.php?obj\\_id=about&nav=0](http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/riley/index.php?obj_id=about&nav=0)

## cloud (2000)

Riley's last and most significant series *cloud* (2000) continued his investigation of Indigenous spirituality and attachment to country. The ten large-scale colour photographs depict objects such as a feather, a cow and a boomerang suspended against brilliant blue skies. Stills Gallery writes that 'a sense of loss pervades this work.'

In 2004, Riley was awarded one of three Grand Prizes at the *11th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh* for the *cloud* series, a significant achievement for the Australian artist whose work was selected from more than 300 artists from 44 countries.

In *Riley*, Daniel Riley McKinley uses a selection of images from the *cloud* series as inspiration for his choreography:



Untitled (Boomerang), 2000  
From *cloud*  
*Chromogenic pigment print*



Untitled (Locust), 2000  
From *cloud*  
*Chromogenic pigment print*



Untitled (Bible), 2000  
From *cloud*  
*Chromogenic pigment print*



Untitled (Angel), 2000  
From *cloud*  
*Chromogenic pigment print*



Untitled (Broken Wing), 2000  
From *cloud*  
*Chromogenic pigment print*



Untitled (Feather), 2000  
From *cloud*  
*Chromogenic pigment print*

See the complete *cloud* series at the Stills Gallery website, here:

[http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/riley/index.php?obj\\_id=main&nav=1](http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/riley/index.php?obj_id=main&nav=1)

Many of Michael Riley's photographs were included in a retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Canberra called *Sights Unseen*. You can see the online catalogue here:

<http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/RILEY/Default.cfm?MnuID=2>

## I WANTED TO TELL STORIES

Michael Riley, unpublished interview with David Burnett on his inclusion in the *Asia–Pacific triennial of contemporary art 2002*, Queensland Art Gallery. Courtesy of the Queensland Art Gallery

I first started to do photography at Sydney College of the Arts. I was actually doing a traineeship there as a technician in the darkrooms. I'd also taken a class in image-making. I worked in photography for a few years as a freelance photographer, independent freelance photographer, and then I decided to do a traineeship at ABC, a two-year traineeship in producing and directing documentaries. I was thinking what I might've wanted to do was to be a cinematographer or something like that, but I found that I wanted to tell stories and get stories from Aboriginal people.

My mother comes from a place called Moree in New South Wales, northern New South Wales. She's from the Kamilaroi group of people. My father's Wiradjuri from the Dubbo area. I grew up in Dubbo and also taking trips back and forwards to Moree. I sort of like had contact with my mother's people and that country as well. The land around there is like quite barren and flat and almost sort of semi-arid desert, you could say.

What I was trying to do was show in those images how farmers or graziers or whatever, people have changed the surface of the land, country, but to try and give an idea that Aboriginal spirits – *ramadi* – is still there within that land, even though the surface has changed. You know, there's still a sense of beauty and a spiritual feeling there. The images from *Empire*, they're all shot in and around the Moree area and Narrabri, near Narrabri, Mount Kaputar. There's a sadness within the film itself and that sadness is that sense of loss of country, of culture, of peoples. One of the images is a sign called Slaughterhouse Creek and it's not far from Myall Creek, where the Myall Creek massacres happened. It's just one simple sign that sort of conveys one of the incidents that happened around that area, you know, that great loss and sadness.

The *Sacrifice* series, really what I was exploring there was how Aboriginal people were put on to reserves and missions like in the 1940s and earlier and regimented and told not to speak language, not to act as culture and you would have different tribal groups thrown in together. Some of the images in *Sacrifice*, like with the spoons, that's symbolic of addiction, like heroin addiction. The row of sardine, the fish, it's like how on reserves people were lined up and regimented and everyone have their place and everything. The image of flour, sugar and tea, that was like the staple you'd get every week on the reserve, the mission, and that's sort of all you got. Yes. I suppose, yes, just reflecting on that period of time when people did sort of start to lose culture, lose language, lose things, you know, because of the assimilation process and people trying, the government trying to put people on reserves to be good Christian Aboriginal people.

*Empire*, the way that I wanted to make the film was I wanted the film to almost hypnotise people, you know, and ... they didn't really have to think about these things until afterwards maybe, you know. They look at the images and then they can think about what those images meant.

In the *cloud* series there are clouds in every shot. I just find a very sort of serene beauty in clouds, in the movements of clouds, how they change, and people take them for granted, you know. I mean, they're just there, you know. But once you isolate them and look at them there's this incredible changing sort of beauty in them.

Like with the *Sacrifice* series and the film and *cloud* I don't try to put down the Christian religion or the Catholic religion at all. I just try to reflect on it, you know. Yes. What I don't like

about religion, I suppose, those types of religion, is the hypocrisy. Not so much the religion itself, the way people use it in hypocritical ways. You know, there's a piece at the end of the film and it's a sermon from a Lutheran missionary from Hermannsburg. It's from an ABC radio program in the 1940s and what it does is it just conjures up the attitude of the people, like government of the day and the missionaries of the day and the fact that Aboriginal people were quite patronised, almost treated as children, to be assimilated.

## FURTHER READING

- A short documentary on Daniel Riley McKinley's work was featured on the ABCTV program *Art Nation*. You can see it online here: <http://www.abc.net.au/arts>
- You can read more essays on Michael Riley's work on the *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen* website, which can be found here: <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/RILEY/Default.cfm>
- ABCTV's *Message Sticks* Program featured a short, two-part documentary on Michael Riley's photographs to accompany the *Sights Unseen* exhibition. You can see it here: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/messagestick/stories/s2316047.htm>

# ARTEFACT

Choreographer's Notes

Frances Rings



*Artefact – Weaving.* Dancers: Bangarra women's ensemble. Choreographer: Frances Rings. Photographer: Andy Solo.

*Artefact* is a work that has been sitting with me for a while. As Indigenous people we have such a vast wealth of inspiration from our culture and you look for ways to understand the past and how your family lived, generations back.

For Aboriginal people who were removed from their communities and brought up away from traditional culture, artefacts allow us the opportunity to go back in history. We have a most incredible, aesthetically beautiful, finely crafted technologically advanced implements and items that give us insight into another time. These items were collected, bought, traded, sold, preserved and housed in museums and private collections all around the world.

Traditionally, Aboriginal people had very few items but what objects they did have were highly valued and held great spiritual meaning and a connection to their ancestors. I wanted to honor them by bringing those items to the stage and presenting them in a different way to how you might usually see them. I want the audience to understand that there's value in these objects and we should try to understand the stories that they hold. A lot of Aboriginal people are reconnecting with their heritage by looking at the crafting of these artefacts and re-learning those skills. Re-establishing links with old practices informs your identity and gives you a greater understanding of how your grandmother or your great grandfather lived.

We are incredibly fortunate to have Kathy Marika as cultural consultant for Bangarra. Kathy taught us to make pandanas mats from North East Arnhem Land and this informed the weaving section of the work. She shared with us the processes of gathering the pandanas, stripping it back, finding and preparing the natural dyes– we placed ourselves in that process to try and understand it at every stage. I was inspired by the meditative state weaving produces, the calm, the timelessness that women feel when they are silent together, weaving. It transports you to another place. Because weaving is still a living practice in Arnhem Land, we placed it near the end of *Artefact* to represent the continuum of practice that dates back thousands of years. It's been a priceless experience to have Kathy share the knowledge of her traditions with us and I hope we do her proud when she sees how it translates to a dance work.

*Artefact* opens with a piece called 'Museum', which features a possum-skin coat. It once it kept a family warm, and was an essential part of their lives and now its packed away behind glass in a museum. 'String bag' is a women's piece. Made by rolling and weaving string, these bags once held food, fruit, yams and babies – they were once full, and now they're empty. 'Grinding Stone' is a male piece about the stone tools that were used throughout Australia. David Page and I were inspired not only by the friction of the grinding stone as they are being used, but by the rhythms they created – and the power and energy that builds from the labor.

'Body' is a piece that explores the study of Aboriginal people as specimens. There was a time in Australia's history when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were thought as being the missing link to the Stone Age and this lead to scientific and medical study of our people. When you take measurements and dimensions, the body becomes emotionless and the respect is gone. In our history the pursuit of science has sometimes been responsible for the unethical and degrading treatment of our Indigenous peoples. By acknowledging these dark moments of our history we reclaim our dignity to heal through our art. This is important for all generations that we understand and respect the challenges of our ancestors.

Reconnecting with these artefacts we appreciate the highly complex craftsmanship, innovation and technology of how they were made. Significantly they are important because they give us a window back to another time. *Artefact* is about breathing life back into object.



*Artefact - Coolamon.* Dancer: Deborah Brown. Choreographer: Frances Rings. Photographer: Andy Solo.



*Artefact - Weaving.* Dancers: Bangarra full ensemble. Choreographer: Frances Rings. Photo: Andy Solo.

## MUSIC NOTES

### DAVID PAGE

Dancer: Deborah Brown. Photographer: Jason Capobianco.



I've worked on a number of productions for Bangarra Dance Theatre before and I saw *of earth & sky* as an opportunity to compose a score that is boldly different but extends Bangarra's established musical style, the fusion of traditional and contemporary.

#### Riley

*Riley* is based around a story of images that I found, like working with Dan, fresh and exciting. Michael's stunning *cloud* series are digitally manipulated and I responded to that by composing a more experimental, electronic soundscape.

It's quite light and airy, fused with a groundedness. I used sounds drawn from nature as well as choral elements, experimenting with samples to evoke the floating world of Riley's photographs. In the last section, 'Feather' I respectfully incorporated a recording of Michael Riley speaking about Aboriginal identity in his *Sacrifice* series (1992). The use of this recording allows us to continue sending the message

about who we are as people and Michael's voice certainly adds magic to enhance this composition. Even though this score is not as melodic as previous Bangarra scores, the sounds featured in *Riley* resonate with the narrative of the piece.

#### Artefact

Frances is very emotionally connected to her stories and conducts intensive research around her work, but importantly allowing it to breathe and evolve throughout the creative process. *Artefact* is a storytelling piece, so the use of traditional language in both the men's and women's pieces represents a continuum signature with previous Bangarra works. I believe that every spoken language has its own melody, which you can't manipulate or disrespect. Kathy "Umala" Marika speaking in Duwa language in the dance piece called 'Weaving' is instructing the women on the process and labour of their weaving. In the section called 'Grinding Stone' Derek Lynch has translated a poem I wrote into his Ptjantjara language:

*Grinding stone is our way of life;  
It is part of us  
Man woman and child  
This is how we make our tools, our weapons  
Stone axe, spear head*

*We grind our food;  
How we make our Ochre for ceremony  
Song and Dance  
Grinding Stone is our way of life.*

Some Bangarra dancers have also leant their voices to various recordings. To evoke the rhythm of grinding stones I've used electronic sounds with men's breathing patterns to communicate the labour of that artefact.

I love strings, so stringed instruments including cello and guitar are emotionally but simply featured throughout. I love to experiment with electronic, acoustic and traditional sound elements and in *of earth & sky* I did lean towards old school Bangarra music arrangements, but it's hard to go wrong if you stay true to the story.

# COSTUME DESIGN NOTES

## GABRIELA TYLESOVA



Costume sketches by Gabriela Tylesova. Photographer: Andy Solo.

The costumes I've designed for *Riley* and *Artefact* echo the different styles of the two pieces. Daniel McKinley's piece is inspired by Michael Riley's images, which are striking and powerful in their own right. Thus I decided not to rival the images by literally copying them, but instead designed costumes that evoked the essence of those photographs.

For instance, one of the images in *Riley*, 'Angel', involve an angel's wings, but rather than taking those images literally, we used bodypaint that looks like cracked plaster to suggest the statue of the angel. I've used clean modern lines to create a contemporary feel to Daniel's costumes.

The costumes for *Artefact* are more involved. The piece revolves around artifacts used by Indigenous people, so I've tried to bring that into what the dancers will wear. The costumes undergo a progression throughout the piece – the first costume is a possum skin coat with the heavy, dusty feel of a museum piece. This style evolves as the work progresses, culminating with the dresses used in the weaving section, which have a modern feel.

The dresses for the weaving section were made by stitching ribbons together to mirror the weaving of the pandanus mats in that section of the piece. I've used natural tones throughout the piece.

As the choreography progresses, I have been reworking the costumes in line with Frances and Daniel's visions. Both of them have been involved in the costumes, experimenting with colours and fabrics. We're using silk organza, very sheer and light fabrics, but we're also using leather in the 'Bible' section of *Riley* – the material is heavy, binding the dancers as it does the book.

As the dancers begin to wear the costumes during run-throughs, we adjust them to fit their movements and the feel of the piece. It's an ongoing process. The dancers' bodies give the costumes life.

## SET DESIGN NOTES

### JACOB NASH



*Weaving set, designed by Jacob Nash. Photographer: Andy Solo.*

At the beginning of the design process for *Artefact*, Frances and I visited the Adelaide Museum's indigenous section and for a day examined the objects they have on display. It was beautiful, featuring artefacts from all over the country, in different styles, made using different techniques and fibres – we broke them down into the categories of fibrecraft, carved wooden objects, stoneware and weaving and later met with cultural consultant Kathy Marika to discuss how we could use them as inspiration in the work. *Artefact's* major set piece is a beautiful sculpted piece of bark. It was intended to represent a vessel, an artefact in its raw form. Unlike *Riley*, *Artefact* features a grounded set that evokes earth rather than sky.

*Riley* features projected images by Michael Riley. Because they are standalone images and stunning artworks in their own right, we didn't want to manipulate them – instead, we wanted to present them on stage very honestly. Dan wanted to emphasise the cleanness and sparseness of the space, so we stripped back all the masking from around the stage, creating an open, floating space like the world in Riley's images.

As a designer, it's exciting to work without a script, relying instead entirely on images. The more images you give to the choreographers, the more they respond to those images, guiding you along a visual path to the end product.

## LIGHTING DESIGN NOTES

### DAMIEN COOPER

*of earth & sky* opens up great images for a lighting designer. How to make the colours jump in Gabriela's costumes, where to highlight the shadow and texture in Jake's set, which rhythm to follow in David's score and most importantly the movement and shapes that Frances and Daniel have created in the rehearsal room. I try to find a way for a lighting design to support the choreography, this means finding shapes that amplify the movement, like the diagonal corridors in *Riley* or the rectangular lights in *Artefact*. On the other hand the opposite can convey more of a sense of space/story, such as the lonely backlight in 'Broken Wing'.



*Riley – Broken Wing*. Dancer: Jasmine Sheppard. Choreographer: Daniel Riley McKinley. Photographer: Andy Solo.

With light we can control the extreme close up, the wide shot, the acceleration and deceleration of the piece. We use light to punctuate the transitions, create the atmosphere and focus the audience. I like to think it makes the pulse race.

# of earth & sky

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Artistic Director:	Stephen Page
Choreographers:	Frances Rings Daniel Riley McKinley
Cultural Advisors:	Kathy Marika Michael Riley Foundation
Rehearsal Director:	Catherine Goss
Composer:	David Page
Set Designer:	Jacob Nash
Costume Designer:	Gabriela Tylesova
Lighting Designer:	Damien Cooper
Associate Lighting Designer:	Matt Cox
Artefact AV Designer:	Declan McMonagle

### Dancers:

Waangenga Blanco, Perun Bonser, Jhuny-Boy Borja, Deborah Brown, Yolande Brown, Tara Gower, Ella Havelka, Elma Kris, Leonard Mickelo, Daniel Riley McKinley, Katina Olsen, Sidney Saltner, Jasmin Sheppard, Patrick Thaiday, Travis De Vries (secondment).

Production Coordinator:	Phoebe Collier
Stage Manager:	Kate Williams
Head Mechanist:	Kayne Johnson
Head Electrician:	Padraig O Suilleabhain
ASM/Costume Supervisor:	Emma Howell
Production Assistant:	Rhimi Johnson Page
Set Construction:	Planet Engineering
Scenic Artists:	Scenographic Studio
Props Makers:	Meg Ashforth, Lauren Trivet

## Suggestions for Study

Bangarra encourages teachers to read through all the notes, particularly Choreographer's Notes, to assist with the creation of suitable questions and activities. High School students should also be encouraged to read the background material contained within this study kit.

Bangarra Dance Theatre advises that local Indigenous communities (especially elders and Indigenous dance practitioners) should be consulted to advise and assist with the study of Indigenous dance and culture. Local Land Councils and Aboriginal Liaison Officers within schools are often good contact points.

Any cultural material within this Study Kit can be used for study purposes only and should not be used in a performance, recording or any other context.

## Suggested Questions About Dance

What are your initial impressions of the work?

What aspects of the dance stay with you after you see the performance?

What do you like/dislike about watching dance onstage?

How does the work use space (levels, direction, shape, dynamics, dimensions and floor patterns)?

How are the body parts of the dancers articulated during the dance?

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.

Describe in your own words what is unique about the style of Bangarra Dance Theatre.

What do you think are the main inspirations in the creation of the work?

What messages are the choreographers trying to communicate?

Within the choreography are there any recurring themes/issues?

Write your own dance review of the work (as you would see in a newspaper).

Do you feel that a company such as Bangarra Dance Theatre is an important part of Australian culture? Why?

How does Bangarra Dance Theatre performance differ from other theatre experiences?

## Suggestions for Primary Students

What shapes and sizes do the dancers make with their bodies and hands?

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.

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.

Discuss how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people lived before white settlers arrived.

Why is the land so important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people?

Oral history: ask someone from an older generation to relate a story from his or her time, share it with the class.

What are the main Aboriginal language groups in your area?

(Help: [http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/aboriginal\\_studies\\_press/aboriginal\\_wall\\_map/map\\_page](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/aboriginal_studies_press/aboriginal_wall_map/map_page))

How did Aboriginal people live in your area before white settlers arrived?

What is your favourite native animal or bird? What is its Aboriginal name? Create a short dance based on this animal's movements.

Ask the students to collect photographs/images they find striking and ask them to create a dance movement responding to their chosen photo.

## Suggestions for High School Students

Compare examples of traditional and contemporary Indigenous art, such as Michael Riley's photographs.

What issues is Michael Riley trying to explore in the *cloud* series?

Michael Riley's photographs explore the impact of Christian religion on Indigenous people. Discuss the impact western Christianity had on traditional Aboriginal culture.

Identify both traditional and contemporary sounds and instruments in the score. Notice the use of traditional language in both scores.

Compare examples of traditional and contemporary Indigenous art.

Find out more about Michael Riley and the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative.

Research and evaluate images and objects of Australian artists/designers/craftspeople from a variety of historical and contemporary contexts.

Find a press review of the production and write about whether you agree with the review or write your own review.

Research 3 different types of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island ceremonies and explain their purpose and origins.

Find out what these objects are and how they were used by Indigenous people:

- Possum-skin coat
- String Bags
- Grinding Stone
- Coolamun
- Pandanas Mats

How does Frances Rings' choreography bring those objects to life? How is experiencing these objects through dance different to seeing them in a museum?

The 'Bodies' section of Frances' work suggests that when you take measurements and dimensions, the body becomes an emotionless specimen. Discuss the representation of Indigenous people in anthropological studies.

To create *Artefact*, choreographer Frances Rings consulted with Kathy Marika, an elder from Arnhem Land. In Indigenous culture, what role does the elder take? Is there any difference between male and female elders? Can you find examples of this role in other cultures (either Indigenous or non-Indigenous?)

Jacob Nash designed the sets for *of earth & sky*. He is Bangarra's first Indigenous set designer. Why is it important for Indigenous people to represent their own stories?

Cultural Consultants such as Kathy Marika and the Michael Riley Foundation help ensure that Bangarra doesn't misrepresent the stories the company is trusted with to tell through dance. Why do you think that process is important?

# MULTIMEDIA SOURCES

## Video Links

### **Bangarra's New Choreographer**

Art Nation, ABC TV

Short documentary on 24 year old choreographer Daniel Riley McKinley and how Bangarra brought *Riley* to the stage. Features interviews with dancers, rehearsal footage and snippets of *Riley*'s world premier performance in Brisbane.

<http://www.abc.net.au/arts/> and search 'Bangarra'

### **Bangarra Dance Theatre in the News**

ABC TV News

A sneak preview of the season, featuring interviews with the choreographers and footage of both *Riley* and *Artefact*.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2010/06/22/2934126.htm>

## Reviews

Reviews can be found online on Bangarra's website.

<http://www.bangarra.com.au/Other-Pages/Reviews--of-earth---sky-.aspx>

To find out more about Bangarra and *of earth & sky*, become a fan on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bangarra-Dance-Theatre/116457911727856>