Press Release
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BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE BECOMES FIRST AUSTRALIANS TO RECEIVE THE GOLDEN LION FOR DANCE

20 February 2026: Bangarra Dance Theatre has been recognised with the prestigious **Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Dance** by the Biennale Danza 2026, the dance division of La Biennale di Venezia, becoming the first Australians to receive the esteemed award since its inception.

The Golden Lion acknowledges a lifetime body of work and artists who have transformed, evolved and brought new urgency to the language of dance, infusing it with the vital force of their cultures. Historically awarded to choreographers and dancers, Bangarra will become the first company to receive this prestigious honour.

The Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement will be awarded alongside the Silver Lion, for young/emerging artist during the 20th International Festival of Contemporary Dance. The festival will take place in Venice from 17 July – 1 August, 2026, where Bangarra will also present the European premiere of Frances Rings' seminal work, *Terrain.* Both awards have been approved by the Board of Directors of La Biennale di Venezia at the recommendation of Artistic Director of the Dance Department of the La Biennale di Venezia, Sir Wayne McGregor, CBE.

Wayne McGregor says of this year's award, "Since the start of my directorship, I have aimed to profile and advocate for the outstanding artists and companies whose influence and impact extend beyond their remarkable work alone. Highlighting and honouring the artists selected for this year's Golden and Silver Lions exemplifies this ambition – not least because they are individuals and collectives who have caused a seismic shift in our understanding of dance and the cultural context in which it is performed. Their integrity, passion, commitment and power have often driven radical change, frequently overcoming great challenge and resistance".

On learning about this prestigious award, **Mirning woman Frances Rings**, Artistic Director and Co-CEO of Bangarra Dance Theatre said, "I am truly honoured to receive the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Dance on behalf of Bangarra Dance Theatre. This prestigious award also recognises all those who have come before me at Bangarra; our dancers, Uncle Rob Bryant, Cheryl Stone and Carole Y. Johnson who founded the company, our premiere First Nations training institution NAISDA - the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association, and Stephen Page who led Bangarra for thirty years, working alongside his brothers Russell and David Page".

Bangarra's previous Artistic Director (1991 to 2022), Munaldjali and Nunukul man **Stephen Page,** said "We are deeply humbled and profoundly grateful for this recognition of our distinctive Dance Theatre language, both contemporary and traditional, that has survived in the mainstream nationally and globally for almost 35 years. First Peoples' Artistic kinship system is at the core of our knowledge systems, and we are honoured to be the caretakers of our dance legacy and our continual creative dance future."

The significance of this award has also been acknowledged by **Minister for the Arts, Tony Burke** who said, “For the arts, no award is greater and for Australian dance there is no greater company than Bangarra. This isn't simply Bangarra appearing on the world stage, this is them owning it”.

These sentiments have also been shared by Bangarra Patron, Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, **Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia** who said, “This Award is a powerful moment for Australian culture on the world stage, celebrating Bangarra's artistic excellence and the unique strength of the company's storytelling, grounded in the world’s oldest continuing culture. I am so proud of this acknowledgement of Bangarra's extraordinary contribution to global cultural representation, it is an important reminder of the deep creativity and leadership of First Nations artists who share that with audiences everywhere.”

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EDITORS NOTES

The Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in **Dance**
The Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in Dance has been awarded to Merce Cunningham (1995), Carolyn Carlson (2006), Pina Bausch (2007), Jirí Kylián (2008), William Forsythe (2010), Sylvie Guillem (2012), Steve Paxton (2014), Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (2015); Maguy Marin (2016); Lucinda Childs (2017); Meg Stuart (2018), Alessandro Sciarroni (2019), La Ribot (2020), Germaine Acogny (2021), Saburo Teshigawara (2022), Simone Forti (2023), and Cristina Caprioli (2024), Tywla Tharp (2025).

Sir Wayne McGregor, CBE
Artistic Director of the Dance Department of the La Biennale di Venezia since 2021, Sir Wayne McGregor, CBE is a British choreographer and director. Since 2006, Wayne McGregor has been Resident Choreographer at the Royal Ballet, the first choreographer from a contemporary dance background to be invited into the role. McGregor is regularly commissioned by, and has works in the repertories of, the most important dance companies in the world, including Paris Opera Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, La Scala Ballet, New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theater, Royal Danish Ballet, National Ballet of Canada, and Australian Ballet. He is Artistic Director of Studio Wayne McGregor, a creative network that expands the frontiers of the intelligence of the body through dance, design and technology.

Bangarra Dance Theatre
Bangarra Dance Theatre is a company of professional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers. One of Australia’s leading performing arts companies, Bangarra shares its culture with communities and audiences across Australia and the world.

Drawing on 65,000 years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture, Bangarra creates powerful works of contemporary dance theatre, integrating music, poetry and design. Each Bangarra dancer, is a professionally trained, dynamic artist with a proud Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background. Ignited by an

obligation to Country and Community, Bangarra nurtures the transmission of First Peoples' Story, knowledges, history and experiences to effect change and create lasting impact.

Bangarra was founded in 1989 by Uncle Rob Bryant, Cheryl Stone and Carole Y. Johnson, born from the energy of NAISDA, the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association. Between 1991 - 2022, Bangarra was led by Artistic Director Stephen Page. A creative icon, Stephen's vision and tenacity have made Bangarra one of the most successful First Nations performing arts companies in the world. Long-standing Bangarra company member and award-winning choreographer, Frances Rings, became Artistic Director and co-CEO of Bangarra in 2023, leading the company with Executive Director and co-CEO Louise Ingram. Today, Frances and Louise lead the company in Bangarra's mission to promote awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Bangarra tours major performances across Australia from capital cities to regional towns, delivers its Rekindling youth program to nurture the next generation of storytellers, offers career and development pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and regularly tours internationally.