



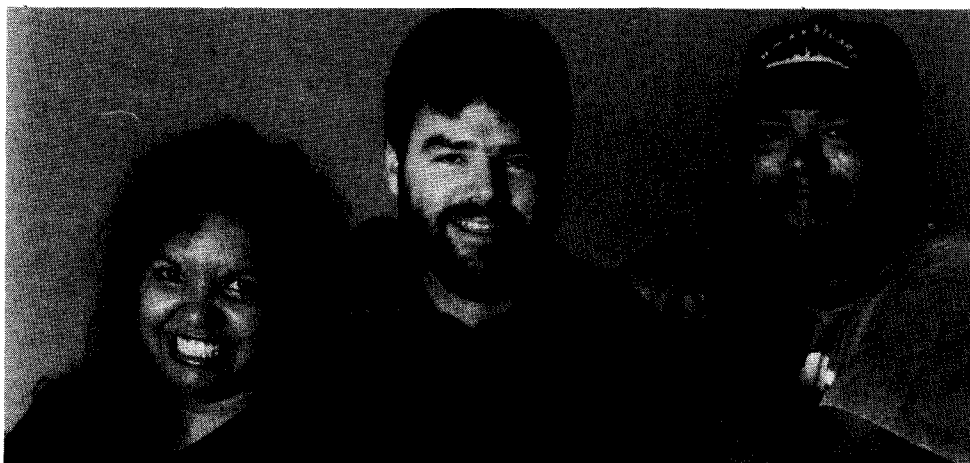
LOWDOWN

Youth Performing Arts in Australia

August 1993 Volume 15 Number 4

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN PERFORMANCE



Aboriginal Youth Theatre Project

Story: PAUL TOLTON

Above (left to right): Actor **MANDY CORUNNA**, Artistic Director **PAUL McPHAIL**, actor **WARREN COLLARD**.

Perth has a reputation for producing Aboriginal theatre. Some of it (*Bran Nue Dae*, *Wild Cat Falling* and *No Sugar*) has been great. Other works, including the recent *My Spiritual Dreaming*, have little to commend them. No matter the quality, there are a few things that all Aboriginal productions have in common. The most obvious is that they are all initiated by white artists.

Once again in the establishment of Acting Out's **Aboriginal Youth Theatre Project** (AYT) we have a very similar basis, although perhaps it's lengthy history and deliberate goals make it a unique part in the development of indigenous and independent theatre in this state.

Acting Out have always made a concerted effort to involve Aborigines in productions by commissioning Aboriginal writers, producing pieces of theatre that specifically deal with Aboriginal issues, using Aboriginal artists and encouraging Aboriginal youth to participate in residencies.

In 1990, Acting Out with the Western Australian Theatre Company produced David Britten's *Landlovers* as a youth theatre project in Balga (one of Perth's Northern suburbs) an area known to be economically disadvantaged. The cast was racially mixed although mainly Aboriginal and the subject of the play was land rights. Paul MacPhail directed this successful production which pointed to an obvious need for, as well as an immense ability of self-expression from the youth involved. One of the actors, Warren Collard, presently plays an integral part in the AYT.

In 1991, Acting Out was in residence in Kwinana, an area the media would have us believe was ruled by car thieves and glue sniffers. Again the cast was multi-racial and the attempts to get the Aboriginal community involved were slow, frustrating but finally

fruitful. The core of the production was the play *Wicked* by young Aboriginal writer Michael Smith and regular Acting Out dramaturg Ingle Knight. Once again the production was received far better than it had been supported. There were calls for a metropolitan and overseas tour. Yet the real needs of the young Aboriginal community were being ignored.

"While this one off project was fantastic it would quickly lose the momentum created and what was needed was an on-going Aboriginal youth theatre project to maintain the movement," says Grahame Gavin, the Artistic Director of Acting Out and the director of *Wicked*.

Warren Collard and Sher Williams (who had both worked on *Landlovers* and *Wicked*) expressed dissatisfaction at the end of each project. "I did speak to Grahame," says Collard. "but I didn't realize it was going to be this big."

Grahame Gavin contacted Paul MacPhail who was at the time working for 2 til 5 in Newcastle and

together two white artists initiated what would become the Aboriginal Youth Theatre Project.

The AYT received a grant from the Performing Arts Unit of the Australia Council in the form of a Key Personnel Grant to employ MacPhail on the proviso that further funding would be forthcoming. The project was then saved by Healthway with a \$40 000 grant which enabled two trainee directors to be employed.

At the moment there is a five year corporate plan... the goal of which is to see the Project becoming an incorporated company with an Aboriginal Board of Directors and Aborigines in all administrative and artistic positions.

Mandy Corunna is a graduate of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts and had worked as a Stage Manager for five year with various companies including the South Australian Theatre Company, Magpie and Black Swan. The decision to change roles and give a long term commitment to a Youth Theatre Company was easy at first.

"It was what I wanted to do. I was involved with a workshopped show in Adelaide and loved the process and wanted to do more. So when this came along...It's exactly what I wanted but a lot of people still ring me up and offer work and it's really hard knocking it back."

"It was easier for me," says Warren Collard. He has always wanted to act and has appeared in several Acting Out shows including *Black Diamonds* and last year in SWY's *Wild Cat Falling*. "I've been acting for a couple of years and I wanted a different path so I thought, 'Oh yeah, I love to act and now I'm learning to direct as well.'"

At present the AYT is focusing on four suburbs. Kwinana and Balga are progressing smoothly due mainly to Acting Out's previous involvement. In fact, at the first Kwinana out-of-school-time workshop 13 young Aborigines turned up and this was considered a coup. "Midland and Armadale are

difficult because there is no perception of what we are trying to do and in both those areas there seems to be less of a community or social infrastructure." MacPhail as Co-ordinator of the AYT has a tough job ahead of him. The first of his problems is to find a process to achieve the AYT's aims, one of which is to make himself redundant.

At the moment there is a five year corporate plan, although Corunna is hoping to get through it in three, the goal of which is to see the Project becoming an incorporated com-

pany with an Aboriginal Board of Directors and Aborigines in all administrative and artistic positions. The current steering Committee is made up of Dean Collard (Executive Officer, Manguri), Sally Morgan (Artist), Delene Corunna (Teacher), Joselyn Nicoll (Corrective Services), Justin Kickett (Police Officer), Shane O'Keefe (Health Services), Rhonda Collard (Aboriginal Dance Development Unit) as well as the white faces of MacPhail and Gavin. This is a clear indication of the projects goals and future structure.

Warren Collard and Mandy Corunna are being trained as directors with emphasis on workshoping skills, administration and future programming with the aim of them taking the leading roles in the company. They have also been accepted into the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts as part-time students in a tailor made course created to complement their on-the-job training.

For the time being it is up to Paul MacPhail to guide the project. After the workshop groups are established he wants the AYT to focus on two main production areas. The first is the commissioning of material from young Aboriginal writers. A re-

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writing of *Wicked*, which deals with one young Aboriginial's dealings with the legal system, both Aboriginal and Westminister, has been commissioned with the sponsorship of Healthway and will be performed in mid September. Also an application is pending with the Lotteries Commission under their Community Youthlink Program to employ a trainee writer for 12 months. It is hoped that this scheme will be an on-going part of the AYT. The plays will then be performed with a mixture of professional artists and members of the AYT.

Secondly MacPhail would like the members of the AYT to determine what they want to perform. "The productions are ideally an expression of what the kids want to do. Their ideas, stories and experiences are the starting point for everything - our job is to make it a great piece of theatre." In fact *Dusk* will be the second show for the AYT and is a group devised piece that examines the night time activities of young Aborigines from a number of different communities and age groups. "Even if it means us dramatising staying home and watching Murphy Brown!"

The major philosophy of the company is to respond to what the members want to do. Even a less cumbersome name has been put on the back burner until the members of the AYT can contribute.

"We're not training people to go into the theatre industry. We're about letting them know that there's an avenue for them to have their say, to create their own work. To be able to say something they want to say in an entertaining way."

Grahame Gavin believes that at present it probably isn't possible for Aborigines to initiate a project such as The Aboriginal Youth Theatre Project. "It's hard to initiate something that you don't even realize is a possibility." But with the obvious overall aims of giving the Aboriginal Community a company that is autocratic and independent with skilled key personnel and an ability to create and express, maybe a far greater independence is a possibility. ●

PAUL TOLTON is currently actor-in-residence with *Acting Out* and the WA State Contributing Editor for *Lowdown Magazine* (see back page).

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FOR OVERSEAS RATES

Darwin, host to the 2nd World Indigenous Youth Conference, is also the breeding ground of a new work about Aboriginal women.

Story: SUZANNE SPUNNER



"Listen to the songs of your people
Listen to the heartbeat of the land"

■ IN DARWIN BY THE SEA, NEAR the wharf, in a big yellow tin shed with a concrete floor, the doors rolled up to let in the balmy Dry Season breezes, a group of young people and adults are working together. Some were born here;

P E T U M B A
RULES OK?

Heartbeat

Of The Earth

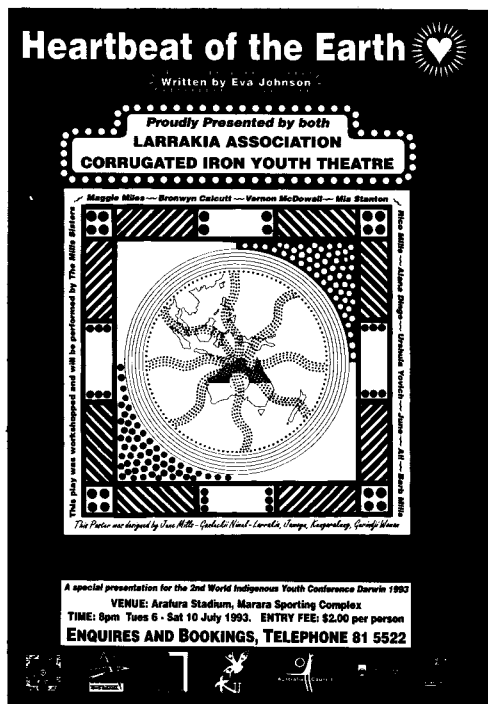
others have made their home here. Some are Black and some are White. Many are related to each other. The rest feel they soon will be. It's the middle of the long school holidays and all the adults are women and one of them is pregnant and the assorted youth range from babes in arms to rampaging toddlers and cool teenagers. I have come to watch a rehearsal and talk to them. I bring my kids - the others want to know if she's my daughter and do I know their aunty? She is

and I do... It feels more like a neighbourhood Playgroup, a Holiday program or a Drop In Centre than a rehearsal for a show that opens next week to an audience of international delegates from the 2nd World Indigenous Youth Conference. By any measure there is a conspicuous lack of tension in the air.

This rehearsal of the show and the conference venue on the other side of town where it will be presented are on Larrakia land. Everyone in the shed today lives in the suburbs of Darwin, and still we all live on Larrakia land. The Larrakia connection is imperative to the show. It runs underneath it like a Dreaming Track, and it doesn't matter how much is built over it or laid on top of it, it's still there.

"How does it feel in the heart of the city
Under your feet lies traditional land
Buried and silenced under concrete and clay"

The Larrakia Association is hosting the Conference. June Mills is president of the association and with her sisters Barb and Ali forms almost half the artistic team who are creating this show. The rest of the team comprises the Artistic Director of Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre Maggie Miles who has pulled the show together over a long haul, Choreographer Sarah Calver, Designer Bronwyn Calcutt and the writer Eva Johnson, an Aboriginal



a child. Venetia and Bronwyn had worked together years ago in Adelaide and Bronwyn was to be the designer for *Tin Can*. Bronwyn is also a musician and she has done many Darwin gigs alongside the Mills Sisters. Or perhaps it began late last year after *Tin Can* had collapsed and Maggie Miles had been appointed Artistic Director of CIYT and she and June began talking about a Larrakia youth theatre production they might make for the Indigenous Youth Conference which had just been announced.

All the time Maggie was talking to Eva encouraging her to think about writing a piece so that all the good work and contacts with the communities would not be lost and CIYT could

fulfil its desire to make a play for and about Aboriginal youth to tour the Top End communities. The project in its various guises was well funded by the Aboriginal Arts Board, the PAB, the NT Office of the Arts and the Touring and Access fund of the CCDU via the North East Arnhem Arts Council. From every point of view it was very important it didn't get lost along the way.

In late January this year Eva came back and got together with Maggie and June and they dreamt a new play. Eva returned to her home in the Flinders Ranges, and a play later arrived, but it didn't seem to be what the mob up here were expecting. It was a new idea. So there were more phone calls and faxes and it all seemed at times like too great a distance to cover. Rethinking and rewriting followed and eventually everyone was satisfied it was what they could all make work with performers and audience here. During the past two months leading up to the Conference the Larrakia mob and Maggie have been meeting and working two nights a week trying to

pin down what they would present. There was also always the option of postponing Eva's play for another time if the group wished to present a work primarily about the Larrakia experience for the Conference on their land.

Eventually it became clear people weren't ready to do that so Eva's play would be the one presented. However, it was only two weeks before the show opened when the school holidays started and daily rehearsals could begin that June Mills threw her considerable weight whole heartedly into the project. Her commitments to the planning of the Conference had been wearing and she decided she would now prefer to focus on one thing.

For Maggie Miles "living with these uncertainties" has been a part of the process and one which she has come more and more to accept. She describes it as fitting together the pieces of a big jigsaw puzzle, and learnt that things get done in odd orders but that they do happen if you're patient and don't panic along the way.

When I arrived at the shed Maggie was back at CIYT's office in town finalising the program copy, Bronwyn was painting one of the props (a bamboo and paper Bird sculpture), June was working on the mural backdrop of Larrakia images (the crocodile/Dangalaba and the King Brown Snake/Gudbiling), Sarah had to leave and so the part that I saw run through was taken by Ali, Barb and Linda. Amongst the five young performers (including June's son Rico, his second cousin Mia and Ernie Dingo's niece, Alana, also a Mills relation) swooped and careered June's three year old Sam in a red cape being Mr Batman, while Arbi, a five year old who wanted to know all about my daughter, clambered on and off the laps of her aunties who were directing the run and beating out the heartbeat rhythms on anything that was handy. Arbi was too smart to interrupt her mum who was painting, sitting on the floor with her back to everything and the back of her Tshirt proclaiming: "Our culture is our heritage".

During the run, the soft shy voices
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playwright and poet from distant South Australia. Linda Bonson, a young dancer and trainee choreographer, from a prominent Darwin Aboriginal family has recently joined the team and is assisting Sarah.

It is hard to know when *Heartbeat Of The Earth* began. It's been a slow and often bumpy track with many turnings off and many meandering pathways in. Maybe it really began three years ago when June worked on *Mapallbah* with Venetia Gillot who was then Artistic Director of CIYT, or even before that when The Mills Sisters performed in Adelaide and met Eva and collaborated with her on *Tjinderella*. Or it could have begun eighteen months ago when Venetia brought Eva to Darwin and they spent time out in the far flung communities across the Top End researching a play that Eva was going to write for CIYT called *Tin Can*. The research took Eva home to Daly River in the west where she was born and to the North East of Arnhem Land to Croker Island and the mission station there where she was sent as

and droll delivery of the kids ebbed in and out of confidence, underscored by the strong singing and gentle prompting of Barb and Ali, seasoned performers. During one of the songs the pure notes of young Urshula Yovich, who sings like a beautiful bird, rang out in the big shed, and as I listened, I believed in the dreams of these kids - of Urshula to be the first Aboriginal woman pilot, of Rico a young Chubby Checker who wanted to outrock Michael Jackson and of the

serious and lanky streak, Vernon McDowall who wanted to become a doctor and heal his people. The lively intelligence of Alana shone - she was a natural teacher, just like Eva had written. I knew the show would be good, real and true not gammon, because it was about them - "that story, that land, that dreaming, it



CIYT "Heartbeat Of The Earth" - 2nd World Indigenous Youth Conference - July 1993.

...as I listened, I believed in the dreams of these kids - of Urshula who wanted to be the first Aboriginal woman pilot, of Rico, a young Chubby Checker who wanted to outrock Michael Jackson, and of the serious and lanky streak, Vernon McDowall who wanted to become a doctor and heal his people.

never does go..." As Barb Mills told me "We've got relations right through here to Western Australia" - Darwin / Larrakia, Katherine/Jawoyn, Finnis River/Kungarakung, and Wave Hill/Gurindji. Besides none of the cast would dare let down their very formidable Aunties - Black and White. We are talking about some very strong, very determined women here, near and distant; the heartbeat of the earth.

Outside, above the shed in the enormous cloudless blue sky, a White-breasted Sea Eagle swung and dipped in the hot thermals coming off the harbour. Later when we were sitting outside we watched him return and the excited cry of Petumba went up from young Rico Mills and someone ran in to tell mum "that Petumba - our dreaming", was back again as he had been every day since rehearsals began. Being close to your Dreaming was auspicious. A discussion followed about whether Bronwyn's bird could be Petumba. Eventually it was agreed that although it didn't look anything like Petumba, clearly it was meant to be him.

After the premiere at the Conference, *Heartbeat Of The Earth* begins a three week tour at the end of July, travelling to Daly River, Gunbalunya, Pularumpi, Milikapiti, Yirrkalá, Alayangula, Angurugu and Umbakumba. Right across the Top End, Aboriginal youth will see for the first time a show performed by their peers and countrymen.

SUZANNE SPUNNER is a Darwin playwright and mother of two. She has written two plays for CIYT - *Spilt Milk* and *Radio For Help*. She also writes plays for bigger people who think they know more.

CORRUGATED IRON YOUTH THEATRE

PRESENTS

RADIO FOR HELP

ON RADIO...

RETURNING THE PLAY TO THOSE
WHO HELPED TO CREATE IT

BY SUZANNE SPUNNER
AVAILABLE LATE '93

In 1989 Michael and Ludmila Doneman set up CONTACT Youth Theatre in Brisbane, Queensland. From the very beginning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives were supported, influencing much of the company's work today. 1993 marks the incorporation of *Kooemba Jdarra* (Sweet Land), the Aboriginal and Torres Islander Program of CONTACT is...

MovIN'ON

Story: **WESLEY ENOCH**

Photos: **courtesy CONTACT YOUTH THEATRE**



The Inird Place (1991) creative development project.

What I want to say is that everything is running smoothly, that *Kooemba Jdarra* is a strong and thriving endeavour, but it isn't at all (not yet).

Kooemba Jdarra is the first incorporated all-Aboriginal professional theatre company in Queensland and not unlike all fledgling performing arts companies, is embroiled in heated discussions and in-depth debates about its role, vision and program. The local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community remains the backbone of the company, its needs, stories and artists drive the content, form and management structures of the work. But where's all this coming from? What has lead to the establishment of a company dedicated solely to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues? Why is this important? Who is it? What is it doing?

1989 - CONTACT set up with Murri representation on the Management Committee, Lafe Charlton employed as Theatre Administration Trainee, workshops begin for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, Pilot Project on Stradbroke Island exploring working methods for the Hopevale Project in 1990.

Four years ago when CONTACT Youth Theatre was established, Michael and Ludmila Doneman, as co-founders, recognised the needs within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or more appropriately heard the outcry for a greater means to express a sense of cultural identity within the city. Michael and Ludmila's response to this need was not to assume that they should do it themselves, that they knew what the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and young people wanted, but instead created an ATSI "space" within the company. Lafe Charlton was employed as the first of three Aboriginal Theatre Administration Trainees. CONTACT is built on the principles of representation and access to decision making, hence Murri representation in the management committee, staff, membership and artists employed has been an on-going consideration affecting the work and ways of working throughout the company's short four year history.

CONTACT has been dedicated to providing training and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. In 1991 CONTACT followed through a policy of employing an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artist for each project. For example, Aboriginal

visual artist Marshall Bell was employed as the designer on *Famaleez* and was coupled with the experience of theatre designer Gavan Fenelon. Choreographers, writers and directors were engaged in a similar way. These unions gave both artists the chance to discuss issues, art and develop skill in a cross-cultural process. Training has been paramount. Three trainee-ships in four years, the employment of dozens of artists, the involvement of hundreds of young people and the recognition by the Murri community of the role of the arts in assisting social change has created the confidence which sees the establishment of *Kooemba Jdarra*.

1990 - Lafe Charlton becomes Co-ordinator of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program. Well, Well, Well, a small scale performance project dealing with health issues. ATSI workshop involved in the Rainforest Project, a creative development project involving Corrugated Iron (NT), 2 Til 5 (NSW), CONTACT (QLD) Youth Theatre and Magpie (SA) Theatre for Young People. ATSI sessions at YAPA Maroochydore. Words Hurt More Than Hands, a community show based on discipline and punishment. The Hopevale Project involving a trip to the isolated

Aboriginal community of Hopevale (outside Cooktown) to explore issues of identity between urban and rural Aboriginal young people which becomes Dreamhome: reaching black which did a Brisbane season and toured back to the Far North, involved in Water Wings CONTACT's end of year pool show.

Mid-1992, following the collapse of Goolwarr (the Brisbane Aboriginal Artists Community Group) under suspicion of misappropriation of funds and with the hasty departure of the Aboriginal Community Arts Officer, the community saw the need to take more responsibility for the management of organisations receiving funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Projects. CONTACT, at which time was employing three full-time Murri staff and administering a sizeable amount of monies allocated to cross-cultural projects and the successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program, came under close scrutiny which eventuated in the establishment of a five-person Murri Sub-committee. This Sub-committee of the Management Committee acted as a reference point for cultural issues, opinions and to act as the financial overseer of ATSI funds in the company. CONTACT had always supported the notion of the ATSI program evolving into an independent body and in mid-October the sub-committee and Murri staff thought that the time was right, 1993 The International Year of the Worlds' Indigenous Peoples.

1991 - Wesley Enoch employed as Theatre Administration Trainee, the ATSI workshop and artists involved in The Third Place creative development project exploring cross cultural ways of working which was to influence all the performance projects that year. Wirkinowt a cross cultural Romeo and Juliet type story between a Murri and Non-Murri family.



Moovinon (1992).

Tour of Wirkinowt to Barcaldine. Wirkinowt is performed at the Brisbane Fringe Festival. ATSI staff at Come Out and ATSI session at YAPA in Adelaide. Nikki Rayment employed as CONTACT's 3rd successive Aboriginal Theatre Administration Trainee. Famaleez, a cross-cultural exploration of drug and alcohol abuse. Famaleez tours to Cherbourg, Woorabinda and Townsville for the Qld Youth Arts Festival. Written in Water, a cross-cultural exploration of a local Murri story through CONTACT's end of year pool show.

Late 1992 - early 1993 saw the growing autonomy of the ATSI Program, independence of decision making, isolated financial statements, appropriation of a computer, office furniture and

equipment and the incorporation of Kooemba Jdarra (Sweet Land). CONTACT agreed to remain as the sponsoring body for the new company, still managing the accounts and umbrellaing projects with a view to being totally independent in 1994. At the moment Lefe Charlton is staying on as Co-ordinator and is busy applying for funding to service the new company's 1994 program, which includes a Theatre For Young People show called *The Race Against Racism* and a professional production of Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers*. Unfortunately, at this time the program sees a lapse in Youth Theatre activities. Though Young People are viewed as an important part of the company, their direct involvement in workshopping, creating and performing works has been put on the back burner.

1992 - Now with three full-time ATSI staff, added ATSI representation on the Management Committee of CONTACT and the continuation of the ATSI workshop, Moovinon an all ATSI performance project about the lives of two residents of Woorabinda, CONTACT and ATSI staff represented at the International Drama and Education Association (IDEA) Congress in Portugal, ATSI staff involved at the Maleny Folk Festival, plans for the incorporation of a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Company are underway. Wesley Enoch and Nikki Rayment do not renew their contracts. Murri and Torres Strait Islander Management Sub-Committee set up from community interest.

So what's the problem? Four years of preparing, strong and reliable funding sources, community interest and support, a well developed niche...



Above and left: Linda Johnson and Paul Sofronoff in Wirkinowt (1991).





Above: *Moovinon* (1992)

Below: group shot from *Famaleez* (1991).



So what **is** the problem?

Kooemba Jdarra is caught in a bind created by history. Limited access to education and training in the "performing arts" makes setting up a "theatre" company staffed entirely by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders difficult. The need to import ATSI actors, directors and so on, from Sydney or Melbourne (who most probably originally came from Queensland) is indicative of the limited pool of practising "theatre workers" in Queensland. The pressure on many skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to join the struggle through housing, health, education, prisons, and so on, has created a situation where those interested and skilled in the company's activities already are employed in other sectors of the community. Which brings up issues like employing skilled non-ATSI workers. In some ways this issue has been dealt with, the committee deciding that as long as the decision making is primarily Murri, specifically skilled personnel could be employed. But many other

Kooemba Jdarra but for whom. Who will be the audience? Will the company find itself performing primarily for white audiences? How does it tackle the dual role of celebrating Murri culture and educating Non-Murri audiences? How great is the need to produce a high glossy product? Community involvement? How to marry a company structure with a strong community feel? In these days of limited funding and government guidelines, any new company in Queensland finds itself also needing to address questions of regional participation, women, ATSI (well that's lucky), NESB, sound administrative structures, three-year plans and mission statements. Gone are the days of "I just want to do some shows. I'll get some funding". In some ways these expectations that make success too necessary may be the thing which limits the success of the company. Being too many things to too many people. So it is important to have a strong, consistent vision (Artistic, Cultural, Administrative and

questions remain unanswered. What is the company's role in training and grass roots development? Should the company focus on traditional forms or opt to tell our stories through a "white" form? The experimentation with form and content is at the heart of

Community) and it is at this level that *Kooemba Jdarra* is found lacking. Caught up in departmental support which blows the company out too fast and beyond sustainable levels. Or, simply, too well supported because it's sexy not because it's ready. In some ways the company has felt the sting of these expectations already in 1993. The cancellation of several projects and the scaling down of the 1993 program has been due mainly to inexperience in the area of management and personnel and the too fast removal of the stop gaps CONTACT previously provided.

Kooemba Jdarra represents the fruits of three Traineeships, four years of projects, workshops and working with artists, representation on the management committee, community and funding body support and a lot of coffee and late nights. The aims of *Kooemba Jdarra* are many and varied, including identity enhancement, cultural expression, consciousness raising, exploration of form, retelling of stories and offering some kind of analysis of Australian society through an Aboriginal perspective. In fact, the company has a double-edged brief in servicing the needs of our own community yet acknowledging the role indigenous cultures have to play in the development of the Australian cultural heritage and future. It is early days. And in any new venture there will be problems but it is the overcoming of these challenges that will provide the models for future developments.

1993 - Autonomy of decision making of ATSI Committee. Holiday Workshops by traditionally based artists set up. The Food Project (in process), an all ATSI show concerning nutrition and traditional lifestyles, Incorporation of *Kooemba Jdarra*.... ●

WESLEY ENOCH is a youth arts worker, until recently with Contact Youth Theatre and now freelancing as an actor/tutor/choreographer. He was cast in QTC's *One Woman's Song* and is currently working at St Martin's Youth Theatre in Melbourne. A feature article on Wesley appeared in the April 1993 issue of Lowdown.

TIME AND TIDE

Art Works on Paper

The International Visual Arts Project focusing on issues of relevance to indigenous youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty five.

Project Concept and Co-Ordination, **CARMEL DUNDON**
Curator, **DANIE MELLOR**
Trainee Project Officer, **WILLIAM TROTT**

AFTER PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION WITH Aboriginal organisations in South Australia and the United Nations nationally, Carclew Youth Arts Centre extended an invitation to indigenous youth world-wide to participate in an exhibition of works of art on paper. The idea was to provide an opportunity for young people to express their ideas about issues which they considered relevant to their own communities. These issues might be social, cultural or political. Invitations were sent to secondary schools, tertiary institutions, government and non-government organisations in countries which had been strongly affected by colonisation. Each community was invited to address a theme of their choice. It was not expected that participants would be experienced artists.

Over eighty works were submitted for selection. Some of these works came from communities not identified as indigenous by the UN General Assembly. As these works spoke strongly of culture and identity, they were accepted for exhibition and formed a complement to the indigenous works.

The project provided a valuable professional development opportunity for two young people from the Aboriginal community. William Trott worked on the project for four months receiving training and experience in arts project management. Danie Mellor, who is currently studying art in Canberra, selected the work to be exhibited and wrote the catalogue essay.

A selection of the works submitted toured country regions of South Australia as part of *Come Out on Tour*.

From the catalogue.

All photographs by **MICHAEL KLUVANEK**

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Akha women and girls. Chiang Mai, THAILAND. Kentung-Akha embroidery using ecological symbolism. 77 x 51 cm. A densely embroidered piece, full of ecological symbolism and made by Akha women near Kentung, Burma, where the villagers have escaped from higher areas as refugees from the incursions of the Burmese armies in the area.

"By creating a single showpiece of culture through a project such as this, it is possible to draw a future of racial tolerance and unity into the present. While acknowledging and respecting the differences between each culture in our world, it is essential that a climate of protective nurturing be established to allow indigenous wisdom to flourish. In this exhibition it is evident that such a space has been created..."

Danie Mellor, April, 1993

From the *Time and Tide* Exhibition catalogue.



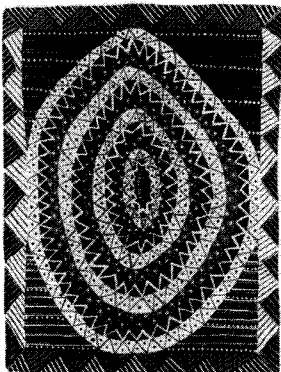
Fiona Puruntatameri. *Kulama & Pamajini.* Tiwi, Warriyuu, AUSTRALIA.. 50 x 70 cm. Gouache. Kulama is the annual Tiwi ceremony of Life. Pamajini are armbands woven from Pandanas and worn during the ceremony.



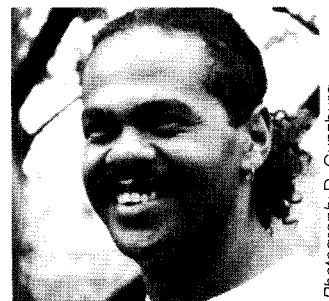
I. MD Berata. *Sita Kidnapped.* Balinese, Denpasar, BALI (born 1969). Taken from Ramayana, this episode symbolises female resistance. Watercolour and ink.



Above: **Chinita Sunizawa.** Ainu, Hokkaido, JAPAN (born 1962). Detail from a poster celebrating the Ainu Culture Festival. 46 x 46 cm.
Below: Trainee Project Officer **William Trott**



Colleen Freddy Puruntatameri. *Parlini Jilamara.* Tiwi Melville Island, AUSTRALIA (born 1970) 57 x 76 cm. Natural ochres on Lanaquerelle paper. From a traditional Pukamari (mortuary) design.



Photograph: D. Gunzburg

Jumbuck is a youth theatre company based in the northern suburbs of Adelaide (from Paralowie/Salisbury to Elizabeth/ Munno Para), suburbs which are some of the hardest hit by the recession.

Jumbuck Mob (Aboriginal Youth Theatre) has grown out of the Jumbuck Theatre Company.

In a little over twelve months Jumbuck Mob has made quite an impact on the Aboriginal community, the Youth Arts community and the wider community in Adelaide, recently performing a major musical, "The Escape of the Chrysalids" as part of the Come Out '93 Festival .

**Story and
photographs:
GREG ELLIOTT**



Jumbuck Mob

AT THE BEGINNING OF 1992 Pilawuk, an Aboriginal drama teacher at Kaurna Plains School and co-director of Jumbuck Mob, contacted a number of primary and secondary schools in the region. She was looking for students who had shown some aptitude for, or interest in, drama and performance and who were reasonably confident in order to create an Aboriginal Youth Theatre Company. She and I organised a bus-run to collect the children (ages ranging from three to fourteen years) for regular workshops on a Friday in the Kaurna Plains Aboriginal School gym. And so Jumbuck Mob was formed. The initial workshops were taken by Pilawuk (traditional dancing and songs, drama games, and story-telling), myself, Greg Elliott (drama games and theatre skills) and Lisa Phillip-Harbutt

(artwork and design). The wide range of ages in the group meant older students worked particularly well with younger ones in making sure that everyone joined in and understood what was going on.

The aim of Jumbuck Mob was to provide opportunities for young Aboriginal students living in the northern suburbs of Adelaide to be involved in regular workshops with professional theatre workers that include drama, dance (traditional dances and contemporary), story-telling and aspects of Aboriginal culture. A major goal was to encourage the children to be proud of being Aboriginal, to provide them with skills and an increased confidence and positive self-esteem, as well as lessons in Aboriginal culture which is rarely included in the usual school non-Aboriginal curriculum.



Mob kids thinking of themselves in a very positive light. They have also become a very supportive group of performers, each one able to take on any of the roles from the show and any of the dancing roles.

Two of our students successfully performed in a Yunga Nunga Festival at Salisbury

second of our two contemporary dances: *As Yet Untitled* by Terence Trent D'Arby (a particularly apt song and title and dance in the light of the Mabo High Court decision). Words such as "*this land is still my home*" bring home significant truths.

In addition to story-telling we are involving the Jumbuck Mob kids in more and more drama and dramatisations of their stories. I remember what a fantastic day we had when we first introduced a

Jumbuck Mob is a very family-oriented company, with brothers, sisters and cousins in the group. Over the last year the importance of the family has grown. Mums and Dads come to watch, sometimes joining in, sometimes helping out with the bus-driving. A strong bond exists between the children and we have tried to model the way we work along traditional Aboriginal values. For example, each member is valued equally and at company meetings both parents and kids have their chance to express their opinions, thus enabling the group to reach a consensus about accepted modes of behaviour.

It was evident from early rehearsals that just about all of the group were interested in learning traditional dances and songs and modern dancing (they particularly like "techno-rap"). We asked Kerry Elliott to come in to do some movement classes with us. Kerry then choreographed our first Jumbuck Mob contemporary dance to Yothu Yindi's *Djapana*. This piece of choreography united our group; it gave them confidence and started focusing our different workshop activities into a performance.

The students began performing two or three dances (a traditional welcome dance from Mornington Island, *Djapana* and some rap dancing) in local primary schools at school assemblies. These short performances gave our students heart and helped break down barriers between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. School children came up to our kids and made comments such as: "You're all really great dancers". It was comments such as these, from their peers and from children of a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, that was the start of the Jumbuck

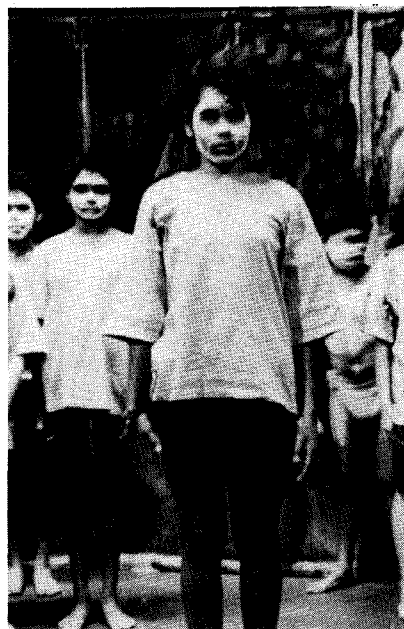


and won first prize, and four of our students took out second prize. And it was from this moment on that the Aboriginal community started to talk about Jumbuck Mob. Later in the week the whole group took out first prize in another talent competition, this time held at the Port Adelaide Aboriginal Community College.

Students were also invited to appear on the television programme *Couch Potato* and once one student had been on, it was infectious. Only a short time before, many of the group had felt acute embarrassment at being photographed by a Polaroid camera.

Jumbuck Mob have also developed a professional approach to the rehearsal process. They know the importance of going over and over dance routines, dialogue and action, showing themselves to be very adaptable and capable in their approach. A parent who joined in our production said: "These kids have given me so much energy, I wanted to be in it with them".

Kerry Elliott choreographed the



Top: Aron Rankine from the Adnyamathna people, sister Nicole in the background; Centre: Aron Randall and Tjutgingi Randall ("TJ") back to camera, demonstrating to non-Aboriginal audience the use of clapsticks; Bottom: Angela Bates (foreground) from the Paakinj people of the Darling River, NSW, Kamele Warrior from the Narrunga-Kukutha people behind her, and "TJ", from the Pitjantjatjara people, at back.

variety of crazy costumes to the group. They had great fun dressing up and their performances were animated and very, very funny. It has been a great advantage having a group of only Aboriginal children because they are willing to let themselves go in a way that they wouldn't in front of others.

In September 1992 four of the students performed three dances and one play for the NADIE (National Drama In Education) Teachers Conference. It was a nerve-wracking experience for them, being in a roomful of non-Aboriginal adult school-teachers and to their credit they received what was virtually a standing ovation. It was one of the first of many occasions when our children became the teachers and instructed non-Aboriginal adults about Aboriginal culture.

We have had many sessions when the kids swapped stories about things that happened to them in their homelands. Although our students are (mostly) currently enrolled in schools in the northern suburbs, many of them come from other parts of Australia. Students are from the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges, the Kurna people of the Adelaide plains, the Ngarrindjeri people of the lower River Murray and the Coorong, the Paakinji people of the Darling River in NSW, Narrunga people and Kokata people, Kitja and Arrente people from Central Australia, and one boy from Queensland. It was from this rich source of entertaining and informative stories that we decided to create our first show called *My Country*. Bob Randall, a well respected Aboriginal Elder, who has played a significant role in the development and education of young Aboriginals in this state, and two young dancers, came over from Canberra to work with our kids and they taught us several traditional dances from the Arnhem land area. Towards the end of 1992 *My Country* was ready to perform in its 50-minute version.

Lisa Phillip-Harbutt, our designer, worked with Holly Macnamee, an art teacher from Smithfield Plains High School and two Aboriginal artists, Jenny Baker and Muriel Van der Byl, to create a sturdy, portable,

semi-circular set that represented different country areas of South Australia. Jumbuck Mob toured to local primary schools, performing in activity rooms. We were also asked to be the opening performance at the very important ceremony of the launching of the "Year of Indigenous People" held at the Port Adelaide Aboriginal Community College which saw the raising of the Aboriginal flag. We performed in the open air that day and at the end of the week at Tandanya in the art gallery, filled with eager parents, general public and theatre-goers.

In "*My Country*" the performers introduce themselves and their background and at the end of the show shout out with great pride and powerful impact "Adnyamathana", "Kukutha", "Narrunga", "Ngarrindjeri", "My Country". Many audiences have never heard of these Aboriginal language groups and many non-Aboriginals assume that all Aboriginal people are from the one group and speak the one language.

Jumbuck Mob has encouraged the students involved to take great pride in their Aboriginal ancestry and heritage (some of our students were not aware before they came to us to which Aboriginal language group they belonged) and we have worked hard at overcoming feelings of shame that are so often and easily felt in Aboriginal children, replacing it with pride and confidence.

1993 began with a series of invitations. In fact it is impossible for Jumbuck Mob to keep up with the demand. We were invited to be the opening ceremony for the Multi-Cultural Arts Festival held in Elder Park and on the same day we performed at the Lion Arts Centre for a special benefit for prominent South Australian Aboriginal, Ruby Hammond. We were also invited to be the opening performance for the Nunga Festival held at Port Adelaide as part of the 1993 *Come Out* Festival. The following day we performed our entire show. Not only did we open the Nunga festival we were also invited to walk at the front of the *Come Out* parade through Adelaide's main streets. After this series of short performances we spent one week performing in the theatre at Tandanya. This was

another fantastic experience for the group because they had the opportunity to work in a theatre with an Aboriginal theatre technician, Michelle.

During this week our students performed to a range of students, playing to near capacity houses. They met non-English speaking tourists from Russia, Germany and Holland and on one very special occasion our kids performed to cerebral palsy kids in wheelchairs.

Currently... we are negotiating for a tour to Port Lincoln and Port Augusta and I will be applying for funding to take our students interstate to Canberra. We aim to create an excellent adaptation of Sally Morgan's novel *My Place* and will involve as many Aboriginal children as we can (our group varies from between 15 to 20 - we have only nunga kids in our Jumbuck Mob productions), including those who have already been involved with Jumbuck, and others in the many schools in the Elizabeth/ Munno Para / Paralowie / Salisbury areas of Adelaide's northern suburbs. Our Jumbuck Mob children come from homes where there is unemployment, poverty and social immobility. Before their experiences with Jumbuck they were totally lacking in confidence; now they hold their heads high and confidently perform to any audience.

It is Jumbuck's philosophy that our children have the opportunity to work alongside professional theatre workers and we have also been successful in having Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists working together. I expect to continue my working relationship with Pilawuk, who is not only a superb teacher and a prominent identity in the Adelaide Aboriginal community but also has a background in drama. With Pilawuk as director, this partnership allows the children to have a role model of an Aboriginal woman in a position of leadership and also to see Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working in harmony for the common goal of an increased understanding in the wider community of Aboriginal life and culture and increased pride within Aboriginal people of themselves and their culture. This is why Sally Morgan's novel is so

relevant to us all because we see both her shame within her family at being Aboriginal and also the richness of her discovery in her teens of her true identity.

We are working towards a first stage of the production to be performed in our local community (northern suburbs of Adelaide) and for it to be performed later in a larger theatre venue such as Tandanya's theatre or, if possible a more major and more flexible venue such as The Space, Festival Centre. We believe that after our year of theatre experience that we can create theatre that is unique to Aboriginal youth theatre just as Aboriginal artists have found that their visual art is unique and much sought after. Our second production is to be more adventurous and more theatrical and for that to be achieved we need the help of as many Aboriginal artists as possible (visual, music, dance and acting) to give our young kids the role models and guidance they need and deserve. ●

My Country was reviewed in the June issue of *Lowdown*.



Pauline Weetra of the Narrunga people, holding kangaroo eyes.

Jumbuck Mob

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