

# NATIONAL INDIGENOUS THEATRE FORUM

## CENTRE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS, CAIRNS

### DAY 1: SATURDAY AUGUST 21

**Forum Facilitator:** Wesley Enoch

**Forum Participants:** Paul Adams, Diat Alferink, Libby Antsis, Nancy Bamaga, John Baylis, Alex Ben-Mayor, Selena Brown, Lee-Ann Buckskin, Sam Cook, Nazaree Dickerson, Isaac Drandic, Vera Ding, Helene George, Fenn Gordon, Ben Graetz, Jermaine Hampton, John Harvey, Margaret Harvey, Roxanne McDonald, Suellen Maunder, Rachael Maza-Long, David Milroy, Kyle Morrison, Tim Mullooly, Paula Nazarski, David Page, Rhonda Purcell, Lily Shearer, Liza-Mare Syron, Lyn Wallis, Sam Watson & Alexis West

**Forum Guests participating in some sessions:** Warren Clements, Ernie Dingo, Avril Duck, Tony Grybowski, Simon Hapea, Debra Jefferies, Milos Miladinovic Lydia Miller, Marilyn Miller & Mark Stapleton

**Forum documentation & support:** Evelyn Golding & Fiona Winning

### WELCOME TO COUNTRY

Uncle Ken Reys welcomed the delegates to country as a representative from traditional owners the Yidinji people. He spoke of the importance of the Welcome to Country, not as an act of political correctness but as a cultural process – an act of respect ‘so we can practice and feel our culture’.

Uncle Ken spoke of theatre as a vibrant expression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures – ‘telling our stories our way and passing it on to all Australians and the world’. He noted the international desire for Indigenous work and wished the group well for the weekend of conversation and planning.

Sam Watson responded by thanking Uncle Ken and acknowledging the visiting groups’ respect for ‘your mob and your country’.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE FORUM

Wesley Enoch thanked Uncle Ken and Sam Watson. He acknowledged his grandmother’s family in this country and the other side of his family from Stradbroke Island and his Danish, Filipino, Spanish and South Sea Islander ancestors.

Wesley thanked everyone for coming, for making the time and committing personally to participate in an important national conversation about the current realities and possible futures of Indigenous Theatre in Australia. He described the Forum as being ‘an open conversation’ not about ‘what’s wrong or what’s right’ but a forum for sharing ideas and exploring possibilities.

He outlined the fact that this forum was to be driven by the participants – their issues, their ideas and priorities.

He identified that from the meeting, the aim was for the group to identify the top five issues needing action, the strategies for addressing those issues, and the people who would take responsibility for advancing action.

## GROUP INTRODUCTIONS

Participants introduced themselves and spoke briefly about what they wanted from the forum. The overwhelming response was that whilst people were delighted to be meeting, they urged that the forum be more than 'another talkfest', that it drives action and development of Indigenous Theatre nationally.

In addition, people expressed interest in:

- Getting a sense of what's happening nationally
- Exploring what Indigenous Theatre is right now
- Learning more from people who've been doing it a long time
- Moving from 'being consulted' to 'doing'
- Building relationships
- Open discussion and freedom of expression
- Breaking down the isolation of being an independent artist
- To learn about infrastructure
- To listen and learn

Wesley reiterated there were no specific agendas and that the discussion was to be driven by participants. Liza-Mare Syron suggested the group discuss the issue of the National Indigenous Theatre as a matter that had split the group in the past. Rachael Maza-Long clarified that these were different times, that the split had occurred in a pressured context where there were resources on offer and a tight timeline. It was agreed that this discussion was open and that if the National Indigenous Theatre emerged as an issue, it would be discussed.

## PROVOCATIONS

Wesley introduced the Directors of three key Indigenous organisations, inviting them to outline what they saw from their positions as the major issues.

**Kyle Morrison, Artistic Director of Yirra Yaakin (WA)** addressed issues of building grass roots and young audiences, and prioritised a national network of Indigenous theatre spaces.

He asked 'who is our audience? All Australians? And if so, how do we make work for both middle class white and Indigenous audiences?' He made a distinction between telling 'poor fella me' stories and stories that 'look at how we can fix things'.

'We've been trying to get our issues out to whitefellas but we need to push it back on us'. He expressed an urgent need to expand audiences by going to the grass roots – asking if it's possible to make mainstream work without ignoring the grass roots.

Kyle prioritised the need for building young Indigenous audiences. Having been inspired in the 90's by the work of Yirra Yaakin, he sees the importance of 'igniting the passion in young people to be involved, in theatre and all arts'. He acknowledged the hard work of the pioneers of Indigenous Theatre and wants to honour that work and build on it.

He also asked practical questions about touring and who we're touring to, making the point that Yirra Yaakin's last show can't tour to communities like Warburton because of the lack of equipped venues there.

Kyle outlined the difficulties of running a theatre space, but acknowledged it offers Yirra Yaakin and their audiences a home, a safe space for showing work. 'If we had a dedicated black theatre space in each city, it would offer a place to go, for audiences and for companies from other states.' Shows could be toured in and audiences would know that was the space to see Indigenous theatre – local and national.

**Rachael Maza-Long, Artistic Director of Ilbijerri (Vic)** expressed concern over how few Indigenous companies there are, how fragile the ecology is, and identified the urgent need to support new work and build a touring circuit for Indigenous theatre.

Given the pool of Indigenous artswriters nationally is small – Rachael noted that Ilbijerri works with mostly non-Indigenous production teams. She suggests education and training need to be addressed, noting that in Victoria, there's no longer any Indigenous-specific training for artswriters, since the demise of the Swinburne course.

Rachael identified that in the absence of a healthy ecology, the Indigenous companies have to do everything, which is just not possible. This in turn raises issues of burnout and succession planning for Artistic Directors and General Managers.

Consequently, the need for more apprenticeships, mentorships, and fellowships is more urgent than ever. She suggests that mainstream companies are willing to help develop Indigenous artswriters' skills so may partner on such schemes.

In terms of growing the work, Rachael noted the significant loss of the National Indigenous Playwrights Forum. This not only supported the development of strong work, it was a network that was extremely valuable.

She suggests there is a need for a commissioning fund for new work. She noted the current funding guidelines that require a presenter prior to securing funding might be siphoning out potential at the grass roots level.

In addition to script development, Rachael suggests the sector needs to stimulate other ways of making work, not be 'boxed' into theatre and play making.

Rachael raised the need for an Indigenous touring circuit and suggests an Indigenous Performing Lines would be necessary to creating that circuit as the needs of Indigenous touring are specific. She agreed with Kyle that a network of Indigenous theatre companies with their own venues in each state would be useful in building that circuit and growing audiences.

Rachael finished by suggesting that the ways in which Indigenous arts is funded needs rethinking as it doesn't take into account the protocols – the time it takes and issues such as budgeting to go back to country etc. She suggests we look to other parts of the ecology that have had successes – such as the Indigenous Film making sector.

**Sam Cook, Program Director of The Dreaming Festival (Qld)** is particularly interested in seeing strong resolved work being created so that the Festivals can program that work and support the artists by exposing them to large audiences. She noted how much work Artistic Directors of Indigenous theatre companies have to do before they get to the artmaking process and asks why Indigenous companies need to seek health and other monies in order to make art. She identifies these multi-level demands as debilitating to the creating process.

Whether it's an international Indigenous issue or an issue for all small to medium companies, Sam identified that we need to be clear about our similarities and differences so we can develop the sector.

'In order to tell our story, we need to gather our story.' Sam prioritised commissioning contemporary research as the sector still relies on Maryrose Casey's research into Indigenous theatre (that goes up to 1997). A lot has happened since then, so there is an urgent need to map the developments and the gaps.

In addition to this, research needs to be done into the methodologies of Indigenous theatre – acknowledging the points of difference in the process, protocols and relationship with community. Critical research will back up the sector's strategic case.

Initiatives are needed to support the sector – such as the new Celebrations investment in Indigenous Festivals, but research is needed to back up the case in order to get the outcomes the sector needs.

## **RESPONSES**

Three key producers were invited to respond to the provocations.

**Ben Graetz, Associate Producer at 32° Browns Mart (NT)** related his own experience of returning to his hometown Darwin after training and working in the south, to find there was only one Indigenous worker in an arts organisation in Darwin.

He went to Brown's Mart and 32° and worked with them on creating the position he's now in. He realized that as a freelance artist, he needed to take responsibility for how to create his own work. That all too often, artists rely on others in organisations to initiate and offer. 'We're not trained to deal with what happens when your agent stops calling you... but we need to take responsibility for how we can sustain our own work'

Ben urged Indigenous theatre-makers to define their own process and practice, to be clearer about 'what we do and how we can do it better'. He also prioritised the ongoing need for mentoring young artists.

**Lily Shearer, Creative Producer Moogahlin Performing Arts Inc (NSW)** clarified that the relatively new company – four years old and recently incorporated, opted not to use 'Theatre' in their name, choosing the more open and inclusive 'Performing Arts' so their activities could embrace a broader vision inclusive of different stories and styles.

Moogahlin inherited a project called 'Gathering Ground' from Pact Theatre, a project that works with community members on the Block in Redfern, emerging Indigenous artists and Indigenous and non-Indigenous professional artists/mentors.

Lily outlined the issues of not having space – an office or venue. While Moogahlin is supported by Redfern Community Centre, it's a busy shared space. She identified the enormous potential for working more collaboratively if 'we had our own venues'.

Lily outlined Moogahlin's current work that 'begins with the bubbas'. Children have been involved in ongoing circus and puppetry workshops since the Gathering Ground projects and recently, the National Circus Workshop and Showcase was on at CarriageWorks in Redfern, attracting great Indigenous audiences and media attention.

**Lee-Ann Buckskin, Indigenous Program Officer at Carclew (SA)** outlined her background having trained at Adelaide Fringe and Festival events as a producer. At Carclew Youth Arts Centre she organizes arts programs, and mentoring and training schemes for young artists and artworkers.

Lee-Ann identifies the urgent need for training up and supporting Indigenous artworkers – 'especially seeing as we wear a lot of hats and are often expected to work across artforms'. She warns though, that mentoring is a skill, 'sharing the knowledge and supporting people to get through takes skill, passion and drive'.

Lee-Ann asked 'whatever happened to art for art's sake?' She urges that in this context where everything has to have a message – that we need to be clever about building in the mentoring process.

Lee-Ann acknowledged that funding levels are very low and processes of decision-making are 'heartbreaking'. She urges the need for lobbying to government for more funding. She supports the need for lobbying for a touring circuit for Indigenous work but not to the cities only, identifying remote communities as being in great need of theatre and art projects.

Finally, Lee-Ann commented on audiences and agreed with Ben that just as artists need to be responsible and pro-active, so do audiences. 'Sustainability is about educating people to buy a ticket... to value our artists and our art...'

## **ANNOUNCEMENT**

After thanking everyone for their presentations, Wesley invited people to think over the break about the one thing they want to make happen from this event.

The group had afternoon tea.

## **OPEN SPACE PROCESS**

Wesley introduced *Open Space* as a process, inviting everyone to raise an urgent question or issue and convene a discussion around it. All participants chose which discussions they joined. The nominators were responsible for a) convening the group and b) ensuring someone notates the discussion.

Wesley outlined the core principles of *Open Space* that: Whoever comes is the right people; Whenever it starts is the right time; Whatever happens is the only thing that could have; Everyone is free to move around as they like; When it's over, it's over.

He reiterated that this was the beginning of the discussion, that it would raise a lot of debate that would inform Sunday's agenda.

Each group met for 20 minutes of discussion around the following topics:

- What is Indigenous theatre?
- Sustainable professional models
- Archiving & research = Keeping Places
- Community based theatre
- Who is our priority audience?
- Cross-racial casting
- Encouraging participation from young Indigenous Australians
- Protocols & processes in creating new works from other mobs
- Collaborations & partnerships
- Funding & philanthropy
- Capital – bricks & mortar
- Blakstage as a peak body
- Leadership & succession planning
- Training arts workers
- Supporting artists to diversify skills
- Ecology
- Touring policy/strategy

(FOR NOTES ON EACH GROUP DISCUSSION SEE APPENDIX 1)

## **CLOSING DAY 1**

Wesley closed the day by thanking everyone for their contributions and by inviting anyone interested in sorting the material that had emerged from the day into three or four groupings for action planning on Sunday to meet.

People adjourned for dinner and to see Mark Sheppard's *Chasing the Lollyman* and/or Megan Sarmardin's *Blackbird*.

## **DAY 2: SUNDAY AUGUST 22**

Wesley met with delegates Paul Adams, Selena Brown, Lee-Ann Buckskin, Ben Graetz, David Milroy, Liza-Mare Syron and Sam Watson. The group endorsed that the remainder of the discussion focus on prioritizing a series of actions. The group agreed on the division of yesterday's topics into four key areas:

- **Practice:** what is Indigenous theatre; protocols & processes; partnerships & collaborations; community based theatre; cross-racial casting; commissioning & support structures
- **Presentation:** venues; touring; audience development
- **Pathways:** youth participation; training; mentoring; diversifying skills; sustainable professional models; leadership & succession
- **National Function:** lobbying; funding & philanthropy; ecology; peak body/leadership; archiving/research; commissioning support structures

The whole group reconvened and Wesley introduced the focus of the day – to create an action plan based on the democratically identified top five priorities.

Progressing through the key areas, participants were invited to pose potential actions under each of these headings. These actions were listed and groups were convened to discuss and map out short to long-term strategies and who would take responsibility for pursuing each action.

### **Practice: First Draft Actions**

- Establish an online forum
- Convene a conference on practice
- Commission a report into Practice – including an analysis of work done
- Define theatre styles (explore forms)
- Develop action-based protocols
- Establish a Creative Development Fund that supports the time it takes to do Indigenous work

### **Presentation: First Draft Actions**

- Audit of presenters interested in Indigenous theatre – city-based, regional and remote
- Collect and analyse audience data – what do people want/respond to
- Commission research into international models of presentation
- Research different models of presenting nationally (with case studies)
- Research into Marketing – what works what doesn't (local, national and international)
- 'How to' Kit for presenters and producers
- Create a 'feedback' loop between presenters and producers
- Establish a national fund for touring
- Use international Festival forums

### **Pathways: First Draft Actions**

- Measure & set targets for Indigenous content/employment in major organisations
- Develop and deliver workshop programs across all areas of making
- Establish a Mentoring Fund for Productions and Companies to resource apprenticeships & mentorships on the job (across all areas of practice)
- Commission an audit and analysis of training available– a longitudinal study

- Do an audit of cadetship/mentorship and other opportunities young Indigenous artists might access
- Establish a database of trained young Indigenous artists
- Establish a culturally specific course for Indigenous arts management and production practitioners
- Initiate a national employment dialogue about careers in the arts
- Establish a national cadetship program
- Distribute guidelines for working with Children & Young People (Ozco & CARCLEW have this)

### **National Function: First Draft Actions**

- Audit what exists in the ecology (arts & non-arts)
- Lobby for an incentive fund for small orgs to work with big orgs
- Identify Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in arts organisations & institutions to build/develop relationships with
- Establish an Indigenous national centre for dramatic arts (a place)
- Create a foundation/auspicing body for Indigenous arts
- Establish a peak body
- Broker Indigenous representation at National Theatre Forum
- Broker Indigenous Theatre presentations at APAM and other international forums

The group then split into four to prioritise actions and to map out short, medium and long term strategies and negotiate who are the people at this meeting who can make it happen – or initiate the first stages in making it happen.

Each group reported back to the whole with a series of priorities that were further refined into 10 priorities. A number of information sharing and lobbying actions were unanimously agreed to/endorsed including:

- A draft statement entitled *The Cairns Consensus* developed to preface the documented outcomes of this meeting.
- Sam Watson will initiate dialogue with AIATSIS re: archiving indigenous theatre. Once he has had initial discussion, he will circulate the response to the group in the hope that in the long term, a National Archive of Indigenous Theatre cultural property will be established by AIATSIS.
- 'Working with Children' Protocols will be distributed by Lee-Anne Buckskin, CARCLEW
- Information and link to Youth Arts QLD website about opportunities for young artists will be distributed by Milos Miladinovic, ACPA
- Theatre Board Cultural Leadership guidelines and information will be distributed by Lyn Wallis, Theatre Board, Australia Council

All prioritised actions were discussed, notated and voted on by each delegate (each delegate having 5 votes). The five top priorities were then endorsed by the whole group as *The Cairns Consensus*.

## **THE OUTCOMES - CAIRNS CONSENSUS STATEMENT**

During the National Indigenous Theatre Forum participants collectively wrote the following statement and identified the following priorities and actions as an agreed way forward.

On the 21 – 22 August 2010, a significant gathering of key individuals, representing the national interests of Australia's Indigenous theatre community, convened in Cairns, on Yidindji Gimuy Walubara Country, to coincide with the second Cairns Indigenous Art Fair.

The Cairns Consensus recognises that Indigenous theatre is integral to our cultural identity and plays an important role to the broader artistic vibrancy of Australia. The forum agreed to progress a national approach to the development of the Indigenous theatre sector. Within this, is a collective request to the State, Territory and Commonwealth governments, to work collaboratively and undertake a rigorous audit to be completed by 2011. This would be inclusive of infrastructure and a broader funding ecology to support the aspirations of the sector. The audit could inform a national framework within the context of an overarching Indigenous theatre policy.

The Cairns Consensus builds on the legacy of our storytellers, practitioners and Elders, past and present, and views this forum as a platform to secure the future of National Indigenous theatre.

The following priorities are an indication of the avenues of review for further action.

### **PRIORITY 1. AUDIT OF EXISTING & POTENTIAL PRESENTERS FOR NATIONAL INDIGENOUS TOURING CIRCUIT (39 votes)**

Market development and mentoring/training of Indigenous touring producers.

Short term:

- Invite Australia Council for the Arts Market Development Unit to partner
- Research which presenters are interested in Indigenous Theatre – in capital cities, regional and remote areas
- Develop a circuit with a Memorandum of Understanding

Medium Term:

- Build in key principles of mentoring/training as the Circuit is activated
- Do a tour and evaluate circuit

Long Term:

- Establish Blak Lines – Indigenous identified producing and touring body (national & international)

WHO: Indigenous Delegates from each state/territory co-ordinated by Rachael Maza-Long (Lily Shearer, Kyle Morrison, Ben Graetz, Roxanne McDonald, Nazaree Dickerson); Australia Council Market Development; Performing Lines – John Baylis; State & Territory Arts Funding bodies (co-ordinated by Arts Qld – Vera Ding)

### **PRIORITY 2. DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL INDIGENOUS PLAYWRIGHTS CONFERENCE / INDIGENOUS PRACTICES CONFERENCE (29 votes)**

A regular annual or bi-annual conference to deal with the issues and support development of practice is needed – with documentation from the Conference to be circulated and archived.



Short Term:

- David Milroy talks to the Playwriting Australia about piggybacking a national Indigenous playwrights workshop on the back of the conference
- Draw up a statement of recommendations for the new government

Medium Term: Focus a series of national forums on a topic (Vera Ding suggests Arts Queensland support a forum at Cairns Indigenous Art Fair every two years)

Long Term: A National Theatre Conference bringing together the industry and playwrights

Who: Mooghalin Theatre (NSW)

### **PRIORITY 3. INVESTIGATE AND NETWORK NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PHILANTHROPY OPPORTUNITIES (25 votes)**

Build more capacity by developing a new stream of income to the sector.

Short Term: Resurrect the conversation about philanthropy

Medium Term: Create the opportunity

Long Term: Secure new income stream to the sector

Who: Sam Cook

### **PRIORITY 4. DOCUMENTATION & DISTRIBUTION OF PROTOCOLS (21 votes)**

Revise and update protocols for working with Indigenous communities.

Short Term:

- Audit of current Funding guidelines/structures to do with working with Indigenous communities
- Develop a document on Cultural Practices/Protocols/Principles

Medium Term: Develop and deliver cultural training on practice/collaboration with Indigenous communities for non-indigenous companies and funding bodies

WHO: Kyle Morrison & Tony Grybowski

### **PRIORITY 5. SCOPING STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITMENT OF YOUNG ARTISTS (18 votes)**

Partner with FOGS (Former Origin Greats) to create a program to inspire and recruit young Indigenous artists.

Short Term: Negotiate partnership between ACPA, DET and Arts Qld to pilot the program in regional Queensland (North and South East)

Medium Term: Roll out strategy in schools across Queensland

Long Term: Review effectiveness, redesign program and roll it out nationally

Who: Milos Miladinovic & Paula Nazarski

The remaining five actions were:

- **INITIATE DIALOGUE WITH NATIONAL THEATRE FORUM** (16 votes)

Who: Sam Watson and Sam Cook

Short Term: Gather information on 2011 National Theatre Forum & explore opportunities for Indigenous Theatre content/representation

Medium Term: Secure representation in decision-making

Long Term: Stronger influence and representation at National Theatre Forum

- **AUDIT OF MENTORSHIPS/INTERNSHIPS/CADETSHIPS** (14 votes)

Who: Diat Alferink, Alexis West & Lee-Ann Buckskin

Short Term: Research what exists for other sectors and develop a plan for how this might be resourced and who (which organisation) might take it on

- **ONLINE FORUM** (10 votes)

Who: Liza-Mare Syron

Short Term:

- Set up a working party (Liza-Mare Syron, Margaret Harvey & group)
- Research existing active online forums for framework/hosts etc
- Establish online forum
- Encourage our communities to participate

Medium Term: Monitor its success & adapt where necessary

- **PROMOTING ROLE MODELS & CAREERS** (6 votes)

Who: Lee-Ann Buckskin

Short Term:

- Tap into current databases such as Black Book to see if we can update and make accessible online – Lee-Ann Buckskin
- Use existing printed resources/publications such as Yarn Up to promote leadership –

Long Term: Mount a national campaign on Indigenous careers in the arts

- **AN ONLINE PORTAL** (3 votes)

Who: Milos Miladinovic, Paula Nazarski, Alexis West & Lyn Wallis

Short Term: Scope potential for online portal that centralizes key information for Indigenous Theatre sector

Medium Term: Develop and upload resources for supporting people's practice as artists, artswomen and mentors

## CONCLUSIONS

Wesley concluded by thanking everyone for their contributions, and for their clarity in identifying the top five strategic areas. He reiterated that this event is only meaningful when we take action on the agreed priorities and suggested we have an email group so participants can continue to have dialogue and support each other. He invited a number of people to respond to the experience of the forum.

Paula Nazarski said she came to the forum because 'I want to do great work and keep working. What I didn't expect was the education I got. Thankyou all,' She said when she goes home, she'll be more informed about the process behind 'what we do and what it means to be an Indigenous actor.'

Nazaree Dickerson said she introduced herself at the beginning of the meeting saying she wanted to learn. 'And I have learnt so much. I feel validated as an emerging artist and as a young company. Hats off to everybody.'

Diat Alferink spoke of being inspired by being around so many people with so much experience. 'I'm inspired by everyone. Keep it up.'

Liza-Mare Syron said this was the first Indigenous theatre-specific conference she'd been to. 'I hope it continues and I hope the people who are here will continue to support us.'

David Milroy formally thanked everyone describing the meeting as 'a wonderful meeting of minds... of people who've been around a long time and people who've come to an event like this for the first time. It's been an archeological moment... a watershed moment.' He expressed the opinion that things have 'slid back a bit over the last few years, but this has been an opportunity to regroup.' He thanked Arts Queensland, the Australia Council, the event support staff, and 'one of the stalwarts of Indigenous theatre' Wesley Enoch. He finished by saying 'We've posed a whole lot of questions... we've had an open process and we've taken responsibility for our practice, our industry. The ideas and generosity has been humbling. Let's keep it up.'

The meeting closed.

## **APPENDIX 1: NOTES FROM OPEN SPACE SESSIONS**

### **WHAT IS INDIGENOUS THEATRE**

Chair: John Harvey

With: Paula Nazarski, Rachael Maza-Long, Lily Shearer, Paul Adams, Kyle Morrison, John Baylis, Suellen Maunder, Tim Mullooly, Ben Graetz, Libby Anstis, Diat Alferink, Margaret Harvey, David Page, Lyn Wallis, Alex-Ben Mayor, Jermaine Hampton, Alexis West, Nazaree Dickerson

#### **Discussion**

- Key creative roles/driving force are held by Indigenous people
- Defining what are Indigenous stories & what are people watching us thinking
- Teaching our younger generations
- Our stories to us, from us, by us
- 'Wrong Skin' right or wrong?
- Authentic Indigenous Theatre dipping into black money
- Traditional and urban culture 'evolving culture'
- Indigenous theatre based on Western styles and beliefs
- Honouring our unique process
- Deadlines don't service Indigenous Theatre
- Time=Funding
- Our process represents funding
- Indigenous people driving the process.

### **COMMUNITY BASED THEATRE**

Chair: Sam Watson

With: Sam Cook, David Milroy, Lily Shearer, Liza-Mare Syron, Rachael Maza-Long

#### **Discussion**

- In communities certain people are custodians of particular knowledges
- We need to respect those lines of communication
- What is community? Geographical or administrative?
- Companies that sit on different peoples' land and who engage with artists from different areas
- Community theatre is an integral part of Indigenous theatre. It connects us to who we are.
- Mainstage productions come from community experiences and their stories
- We have a responsibility to our communities to tell these stories
- Our capital is from community contexts
- Funding for community development
- Funding Bodies separation of Arts and Culture is problematic
- We are accountable to community, we need to empower communities
- Communities define us

#### **Actions**

- Each State & Territory needs a theatre/performance company with a Community Development worker
- We need a peak body to lobby for our needs and concerns regarding our connection to community and cultural heritage

## **SUSTAINABLE PROFESSIONAL MODELS**

Chair: Helene George

With: Sam Watson, Lee-Ann Buckskin, Nancy Bamaga

### **Discussion**

- Need to increase professional opportunity – sustaining
- What made Bangarra successful?
- Quality work creates professional context
- Nexus of creative, management and governance strength
- Compete in general market, need to access wider audience
- Market & brand beyond Indigenous
- Timing
- This is the second stage of reconciliation phase & is an opportunity to market our work
- Headhunt best skills to management and corporate and philanthropic links.
- Strengthen funding sources from corporate and philanthropists.
- We have a cultural economy
- Need quality corporate management for our organisations.
- Look at existing and new models.
- Need an Indigenous Theatre Fund
- Funding support for Mentoring

### **Actions**

Nexus/partnership of creative, management and governance strength.

Stand-alone Indigenous Theatre Fund

Need funding for positions, invest in careers

Equity in salaries between creative & management staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff

Broaden concept of market – reach beyond Indigenous

## **ARCHIVING & RESEARCH = KEEPING PLACES**

Chair: David Milroy

With: Sam Cook, Roxanne McDonald, Rhonda Purcell, Liza-Mare Syron

### **Discussion**

#### WHY?

- Lost culture, lost heritage
- Access for future generations
- Evidence
- Map cultural landscape & influence
- By our people, for our people
- What are we doing to secure our future?
- Compiling knowledge
- ATSI Ritual & Performance Collection
- Acknowledgement of its existence
- Representing ourselves in particular forums
- The right of Indigenous people to own our knowledge and research on our practices and processes
- Value of practice based material research approaches
- Custodians of our own material
- Capturing history

#### HOW?

- Virtual site
- AIATSIS
- Research Council Australia
- How do you support us to do it? If you really want to help, help us do it.
- Schomburg Institute in NYC model

#### WHAT?

- Scripts
- Videos
- Posters
- Handbills/Programs
- Photos
- Merchandise
- Music Scores
- Some props/Cossies
- Oral history

## **WHO IS OUR PRIORITY AUDIENCE?**

Chair: Kyle Morrison

With: Ben Graetz, Alex Ben-Mayor, Alexis West, Nazaree Dickerson, John Baylis, Fenn Gordon, Vera Ding, Diat Alferink, Tim Mullooly, Suellen Maunder, Helene George

### **Discussion**

- Shows that don't alienate people
- Relevant to existing audiences & engaging new audiences
- Critics, who has been trained to come to audience
- Tough theatre is more resilient
- Everyone needs to be inspired to come to our shows
- Artists creating work that comes from a place of artist integrity
- Educating audience to come to the theatre
- Accessible space to engage community audience
- Networking with communities
- Building through community what you are doing whilst the show is being created
- Theatre engaging with audience
- Marketing
- Why do we want audiences to see the shows?
- Need to consider target audiences
- Do we need to be targeting shows to younger audiences – accessible for other members?
- Craftsmanship of theatre

### **Actions**

- Create good stories
- Accessible to all
- Pitched to Indigenous and non-Indigenous
- Do we need to prioritise?
- We do need to identify who we are targeting.

## **COLLABORATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS**

Chair: Alex Ben-Mayor

With: Vera Ding, Suellen Maunder, Libby Antsis, Paul Adams, Paula Nazarski, John Baylis

### **Discussion**

- Problem of infrastructure
- Everyone wants cultural product (Indigenous cultural product)
- Relates back to space – if we have presentation spaces, there is partnership potential
- Theatrical Literacy is schools needs development
- Perhaps Indigenous Theatres and Independent Theatre entities need to collaborate for space requisition
- Accessibility for work
- Collaboration is not about companies/organisations but about theatre and audiences

### **Actions**

- Create 'safe' spaces for audiences

## **CROSS RACIAL CASTING**

Chair: Margaret Harvey

With: Paula Nazarski, Paul Adams, John Harvey, Libby Anstis, David Page, Lyn Wallis, Jermaine Hampton, Isaac Drandic

### **Discussion**

- Across Margaret's career, she has been cast cross-racially only 3 times (by a US Director) one example of which was when she was cast as a character from a lower socio-economic class.
- 'Excuses' used for not casting cross racially is that audiences won't understand it, that there aren't enough highly
- Is it a form of institutionalized racism?
- Degree of 'blackness' is an issue
- Do we need a policy?
- Make sure we raise awareness and at least consider Indigenous and culturally diverse casts
- Australia Council is doing some research on this at the moment
- Mindfulness of tokenism
- How do we implement it? 'kick up the bum?' or different approach.
- Could use policy to drive/measure indigenous/culturally diverse casting?

## **ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION FROM YOUNG INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS**

Chair: Selena Brown

With: Lee-Ann Buckskin, Rhonda Purcell, Roxanne McDonald, Nancy Bamaga

### **Discussion**

- Mentoring schemes address low self-esteem and build confidence
- Mentoring assists in developing persistence and drive

### **Actions**

- More mentoring schemes
- Plan B – get another job to sustain yourself



## **PROTOCOLS & PROCESSES IN CREATING WORKS FROM OTHER MOBS**

Chair: Kyle Morrison

With: Alexis West, Fenn Gordon, Tim Mullooly, Rhonda Purcell, Lee-Ann Buckskin, David Page, Selena Brown, Nancy Bamaga, Roxanne McDonald

### **Discussion**

- Seeking permission
- Respect to family
- Motivation
- Conversation & consultation
- Encouraging other companies
- Or give family and community the options
- Having a set of protocols
- Negotiations, recruiting & creating community development
- Launch/Premiere possibly elsewhere and then taken back to community
- Is it stepping on toes having another company producing stories when there is a company closer to home?
- Co-productions & consultations
- Process needs to be correct
- Consultations must be made
- Permissions to tell stories
- Needs to go through funding
- Put cultural protocols in place – a condition of funding
- Research & Development put into funding
- Royalties for telling other people's stories
- KPI – business plans that are submitted
- Requirement for consultation

### **Actions**

Creating a protocol

## **FUNDING & PHILANTHROPY**

Chair: Sam Cook

With: Suellen Maunder, Lily Shearer, Nancy Baraga, Vera Ding, Lee-Ann Buckskin, David Milroy, Nazarene Dickerson, Selena Brown, John Harvey

### **Discussion**

- Philanthropy: Mining Companies are eager to invest but they want recognition
- DGM? A company who receive money and then split it up
- Having a National Fund, philanthropists want to know more about the projects, Blakstage could be useful there
- Being able to offer anonymity for the people who donate to the 'National Fund'
- Why are Governments spending so much on everything else, when in comparison such a small amount is being spent on the arts
- More investment would make theatre more accessible to everyone
- Need Patrons: rich/famous people who are attached to a company

### **Actions**

- Need to develop a new model for a National Indigenous Theatre Fund

## **CAPITAL – BRICKS & MORTAR**

Chair: Liza-Mare Syron

With: Rachael Maza-Long, Kyle Morrison, Helene George, Sam Cook, Fenn Gordon, Alexis West

### **Discussion**

- Establishing Indigenous Theatre venues in all capital cities
- To make people feel comfortable
- For an identity
- The style of the venue
- Long-term financially viable?
- We would make it more than a theatre space
- Long-term future of programming
- Opens opportunities – for renting out, for training programs, for other companies to come, a hub where people can come
- Access to space to perform
- Ownership of space

### **Actions**

- Cultural Investment
- Align with peak body
- IBS – invest in capital
- ILC – invest in capital

## **BLAKSTAGE AS A PEAK BODY**

Chair: Sam Cook

With: David Milroy, Ben Graetz, Rachael Maza-Long, Isaac Drandic, Jermaine Hampton, Helene George, Nazaree Dickerson, Sam Watson, Diat Alferink, Liza-Mare Syron, John Harvey, Margaret Harvey

### **Discussion**

- National Perspectives
- Majors to support the small to medium via a % of box office residual to support the development of Blakstage peak body
- Investigate/research AMPAG model ie. 3 key drivers in each company attend
- Identify the place for Independents

## **LEADERSHIP & SUCCESSION PLANNING**

Chair: Lyn Wallis

With: Alex Ben-Mayor, John Baylis, Diat Alferink, Tim Mullooly, Paul Adams

### **Discussion**

- Works best for Indigenous sector when cultural leadership is combined with artistic leadership (when the leadership of an organisation is not just based on traditional white AD/GM model but works with community – is also a cultural leader)
- Hard for sector to model and develop when it's still working out who it is?

## **TRAINING ARTS WORKERS**

Chair: Paul Adams

With: Ben Graetz, Selena Brown, Jermaine Hampton, Nancy Bamaga, Lee-Ann Buckskin, Liza-Marie Syron, Alexis West, Diat Alferink, Libby Antsis

### **Discussion**

- 10 Artswokers trainees @CARCLEW Youth Arts
- National need for Indigenous artswokers
- Training regionally for 'Social Safety'
- QTC Apprentice Carpenter & Trainee Costume & secondment from Universities
- How to expose as career options
- Models already out there
- Being in environment at professional level
- Young people take a while to get their head around what they're doing
- Short introductory courses
- Need for discipline

## **SUPPORTING ARTISTS TO DIVERSIFY SKILLS**

Chair: Margaret Harvey

With: Ben Graetz, Libby Antsis, Roxanne McDonald, David Page, Isaac Drandic, Sam Watson, Paula Nazarski, Rhonda Purcell

### **Discussion**

- Expanding skills base leads to expanding income
- Building skills base in different disciplines that are related helps people to move into key positions
- What role do Theatre Companies play in supporting independent artists to diversify their skills?
- Getting chucked in the deep end and learning as you go along is good but mentoring would help.
- Burning out. Too many roles to play. People in key positions.
- Keeping yourself available (for when that phone rings)
- A link with training.
- Actors Companies – permanent employment.

## **ECOLOGY**

Chair: Sam Cook

With: David Page, Sam Watson, Margaret Harvey, Roxanne McDonald, Rhonda Purcell, Nazaree Dickerson, Paula Nazarski, Alex Ben-Mayor

### **Discussion**

- Supply/Demand
- Overall healthy
- Funding restructure
- Where are our artists? – recruitment & training
- Industry – development of work. commissions, touring

## **TOURING POLICY/STRATEGY**

Chair: Lily Shearer

With: John Baylis, Fenn Gordon, Helene George, Suellen Maunder, David Milroy, John Harvey, Kyle Morrison, Isaac Drandic

### **Discussion**

- Australia Council is publishing a 'guide to touring'
- A lot of Indigenous works don't suit mainstream touring circuit
- Do we need an Indigenous circuit or can Ilbjerri and Yirra Yaakin collaborate to tour work
- North Queensland/Northern Territory model innovative because it created relationships between companies. Model is dependent on partners having venues
- Venues are an issue
- Roadwork Consortium of regional venues is another model – with Performing Lines presenting edgier works – co-funding a niche circuit
- Do we need to tour? Have to answer what's in it for a company to tour?

### **Actions**

- Build relationships between Indigenous Theatre companies and presenters
- Find out which presenters are interested in Indigenous works