



AIM: To hear more about Scott Rankin's process

Q: Nyuntu Ngali is the result of a cross-cultural exchange between the people of Mimili and the creative team. Can you explain how that cross-cultural exchange took place and how it informed the development of the work?

Nyuntu Ngali has been a cross-cultural exchange which began in Mimili and then moved on to include Ernabella, Adelaide and Alice Springs communities. The exchange was in the gathering of information, images and songs and then re-imagining them into a new world a few hundred years in the future, where everyone lives in a post-climate change Pitjantjatjara way... This imagined world means that the colour of your skin no longer has any bearing on whether you are Pitjanjatjara or not. The old ways, the city ways are all but forgotten and there is sadness about this. This structural idea behind the show allowed us to listen and explore Pitjantjatjara skills such as gathering dew, or baking bread from grass seeds etc in a new and contemporary way. The whole process was like putting cultural norms and idioms into a blender and switching it to high. Songs were translated... music, dance and movement were re-shaped... contemporary lyrics from 2009/10 - when projected a few hundred years into the future - become like old folk songs... sand drawing was over-laid with video projection etc. So in this fertile atmosphere, an informal exchange of ideas took place everyday of the workshops. Nyuntu Ngali is a product of that process, and for the audience, because of the sense of otherness the show creates, it would be easy to see it as an indigenous piece... but is it? I think it sits between cultures, and asks us to examine our preconceptions.

Q: Big hArt is committed to making sustained changes within communities. What has this project meant for the people of Mimili?

This project had a broader base than just Mimili. Windmill has a strong relationship with Mimili. Big hART has worked more in Ernabella and across the lands and in Alice through a series of projects including Ngapartji Ngapartji. Art and culture is so strong in these communities, much stronger than the impoverished compartmentalized creative life of most people in the city. However most of this creative life is private in a cultural sense. With a piece like Nyuntu Ngali, which crosses between cultures, there is a two way exchange in learning... for instance there has been a lot of sustained learning and change in Big hART. Our main focus for the community with this project is through increasing the skills and capacity of younger artists like Jennifer Wells and Derek Lynch and creating bridges between communities.

Q: Petrol emphasises throughout the play that Nyuntu Ngali is his Tjurkupa. Can you explain what you have learnt about the Pitjantjatjara concept of Tjurkupa through your time with the Mimili community?

Tjukurpa is a very broad concept, with many important meanings. In this context it is another way of saying "this is my story." The conceit in this show is that the main characters are both caught within Petrol's circular kind of magical tjukurpa and at the same time in their own reality. In this sense the piece is layered with meaning both pessimistic and optimistic. I'm not in the position to talk more broadly about this far reaching notion of tjukurpa other than to say that after fifteen years of working with stories from indigenous communities I'm just at the beginning. There is a great generosity and a love for art and story in these communities that allows a piece like Nyuntu Ngali -that crosses between cultures and traditions - to be embraced and celebrated.

Q: You have described the show as a “narrative woven together by different strands of media – dance, theatre, music, video, shadow boxes and sand drawing”. Can you describe the processes the creative team used to weave these strands together into Nyuntu Ngali?

Nyuntu Ngali was brought to fruition through a series of creative developments in Mimili, Ernabella, Alice Springs and Adelaide. The piece was scripted from a process of listening and reading and projecting into a future beyond climate change, where everyone lived in a way that the land and sustainability dictated. This future way of living is posited as being close to Pitjantjatjara lifestyle, and this gave us the chance to reverse stereotypes - for instance "lamenting the passing of the old ways in the city... and young people forgetting the city dreaming. From this point of view it became easy to imagine new cross-cultural movement, and to mix up languages. The freedom of this newly imagined world could then be expressed on stage through new materials and approaches, which is what has given the piece its unique other-worldly feel.

As is the case with many indigenous people, art is the whole of life, not just an add on. So performers like Derek and Trevor sing, move, act and adapt to creative expression in whatever form is placed before them. I've been working with Trevor for ten years so we know each other's approach to things and there is a high level of trust. This creative team put new-comers like designer/inventor Elliot, performers Ann, Derek and Jennifer with experienced creators like Gina, myself, Beth and Trevor. Having the creative developments in Pitjantjatjara communities like Ernabella and Mimili meant we were influenced by every moment of every day and could easily check things with the senior women who were guiding us.