

bangarra
DANCE THEATRE



Patyegarang

A gift of Australian history in a remarkable
dance experience about first contact

STUDY GUIDE

WHAT IS IN THIS STUDY GUIDE?

This study guide provides contextual background and information about Bangarra Dance Theatre's 2014 production.

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Part 1: Background

About Bangarra

Bangarra is an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander organisation and one of Australia's leading performing arts companies, widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for its powerful dancing, distinctive theatrical voice and utterly unique soundscapes, music and design.

Bangarra was founded in 1989 by American dancer and choreographer, Carole Johnson. Since 1991, Bangarra has been led by Artistic Director and choreographer Stephen Page.

The company is based at Walsh Bay in Sydney and presents performance seasons in Australian capital cities, regional towns and remote areas. Bangarra has also taken its productions to many places around the world including Europe, Asia and USA.

Bangarra exists to create a foundation for the care and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural life. Through its performance seasons and touring of dance theatre productions, Bangarra provides the opportunity for all people of all cultural backgrounds to be able to share knowledge about and have a contemporary experience of the world's oldest living culture. Bangarra has nurtured the careers of hundreds of Indigenous professional artists, including dancers, choreographers, composers and designers. In just over two decades, Bangarra has produced over thirty original works for its repertoire. Bangarra has also collaborated on the creation of new productions with other Australian performing arts companies such as The Australian Ballet and the Sydney Theatre Company.

Bangarra's dancers and collaborating artists come from all over Australia, including the major groups in relation to location, for example: Torres Strait Islanders, Queensland (Murri), New South Wales (Koori), Victoria (Koorie), South Australia (Anangu), Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (Yolngu), Coast and Midwest Western Australia (Yamatji), Southern Western Australia (Nyoongar), Central Western Australia (Wangai) and Tasmania (Palawah). Some of the dancers are graduates of NAISDA Dance College (NSW), while others received their training at the Aboriginal College of Performing Arts (Qld), and others are graduates of dance courses delivered by universities around Australia

For more information about Bangarra and its productions go to:
www.bangarra.com.au

For specific Australian National Curriculum resources go to Bangarra Education Resources page:
www.bangarra.com.au/education-resources

Cultural inheritance and transference of knowledge

Story telling in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life is the means by which cultural systems, values and identity are preserved and transferred. Telling stories through song, music and dance, in order to connect people to land, and teach them about their culture and the traditions of their ancestors is the way knowledge is passed from generation to generation. Knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island totemic systems, the histories of peoples, clans and tribal associations, language, land, and concepts and connections of kinship, are maintained through stories.

Many of Bangarra's productions are based on or include stories of the Dreaming, which are allegorical of the contemporary existence and the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture and people. Expressing and maintaining culture through contemporary interpretations and rich theatrical realisations enables the world of Australian Indigenous culture to be shared with the full diversity of today's audiences.

The Dreaming

Indigenous spirituality exists in the concept of the Dreaming. The Dreaming connects Indigenous people to the past, creates relevance to the present and guides them for the future. Dreaming stories can illustrate the phenomena of creation, transformation, natural forces and life principles. They are specifically related to landforms, place, creatures and communities. The ancestral beings that populate the stories from the spiritual essence of the stories. Bangarra's portrayal of stories of the Dreaming through the contemporary dance theatre form requires a diligent process of connecting and building a relationship with the traditional owners of those stories so that the integrity and authenticity is respected.

Consultation and observance of protocols

For all its productions, the Bangarra creative teams research and explore the stories of Indigenous culture in close consultation and collaboration with the traditional owners of those stories, before embarking on the process of creating the production. Each year Bangarra spends time in specific Indigenous communities, meeting with elders and traditional owners and living with the people of that community - learning about the stories that connect the people, the land, the language and the creatures to the land. Everyone who works at Bangarra feels very strongly about their role in the company's work. They make sure that the stories they tell are true to the traditional owners of those stories and uphold the integrity of the stories' meanings.

Experiencing dance in a theatrical context

It is important to note that dance theatre works are essentially the creation of artistic invention to express a broad range of ideas and thoughts. While some information is provided in the program notes of each production, the viewer is free to interpret the work according to their individual perspectives, emotional responses and level of experience in the viewing of performing arts. Repeated viewing of the work, along with the cumulative process of learning about the themes, source material, cross referencing of the range of subject matter and creative processes involved in the making of the work, contributes to personal and critical responses. Bangarra invites its audiences to share, learn and appreciate the critical importance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in order to understand their own relationship with the culture and the people of Australia's first nation.

Part 2: Patyegarang

Background to the story and the people

Bangarra's imagining of the relationship between Patyegarang and Dawes is about a personal first contact encounter, and offers an alternative perspective about the early times of colonisation in Australia.

The story is framed against the backdrop of British settlement in the Sydney region between 1788 and 1791, and explores the relationship between a young Eora woman called Patyegarang, and Lieutenant William Dawes, a British military officer who was part of the 1788 First Fleet.

William Dawes was exceptional amongst his peers, not only because of his talent as a scientist and as a highly capable officer, but also for his intellect, curiosity and insight regarding cultural and philosophical thinking.

As a naval officer, an astronomer, engineer and mapmaker he travelled to Sydney with the First Fleet for the primary mission to observe an expected sighting of a comet. Once afforded shore leave he immediately began to build an observatory on the site we now call Dawes Point. Despite the comet never arriving, Dawes spent many nights observing and recording the stars of the southern skies, as well as immersing himself in other projects he was commissioned to initiate; exploring and mapping the mountains around Sydney and across the Nepean River, as well as creating maps of the local areas as the settlement began to open up land for agriculture and grazing.

There was another area of study that Dawes pursued – that of linguistics and this has become a focus of interest for story-tellers and historians since 1972 with the discovery in London of two slim volumes of notes that Dawes produced over a relatively short period of time within his 3-year stay in the colony. These notebooks reveal a meticulously written record of his study of the local language and dialects, which he pursued with the assistance of local aboriginal people, in particular the young woman called Patyegarang. Through this relationship, Dawes developed a very personal approach to the volatility of the cultural interface that was unfolding in the new colony.

Patyegarang was clearly one of Dawes' main teachers in the study of the so-called 'Sydney language', and there is speculation as to whether this relationship was intimate as well as pedagogical. There are also suggestions that she may have acted as a spy and/or an informant as the levels of suspicion and acrimony between colonists and Aboriginal people developed after it became clear that the new arrivals were here to stay. We really don't know for sure.

It is speculated that Patyegarang was about 15 years old. Dawes himself was only in his late 20s, yet he had already seen conflict in the American War of Independence. Nowadays, Patyegarang and Dawes would be considered very young, yet in the late 1700s, when life expectancy was about 50 years of age, they would have been considered relatively mature.

Through the writings in Dawes' notebooks, it is clear that this relationship was exceptional, and quite possibly, in Dawes' case epiphanous. The fact that such a relationship occurred at all is in itself quite fascinating. Dawes was a military officer and a respected scientist who operated as part of a British empire building system that promoted specific cultural and social standards. At this time in history, scientific exploration and discovery were flourishing. In contrast, Patyegarang was a young women living in a 'hunter gather' society that functioned as a complex and sophisticated fabric of spiritual and community connection to land and kin. They were literally worlds apart.

We could regard Patyegarang and Dawes as two extraordinary people who met in extraordinary times and therein would lie a fascinating story – but we can also examine this relationship as a unique and close interaction between two people coming from two vastly different worlds and meeting and learning about each other in a spirit of respect, trust and empathy.

The 'notebooks'.

Australian librarian Phyllis Mander Jones discovered Dawes' language notebooks during the time she was working at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). While the original notebooks are still held by SOAS, a digital copy has been created and is available through the Mitchell Library in Sydney. <http://www.williamdawes.org>

Dawes' notebooks lists words and phrases of what is referred to as 'The Sydney Language', (a term attributed to Dr Jakelin Troy – AIATSIS, 1994) which was a collection of dialects of the *Dharug* (also *Dharuk*, *Darug*) language. Many of the phrases recorded by Dawes refer to actual events of the day, such as the level of fear experienced by the Eora of the soldiers' guns, and more personal references.

Some examples are:

Patyegarang: <i>Tyérun kamarigál</i>	<i>The kamarigals are afraid</i>
Dawes: <i>Mínyin tyérun kamarigals?</i>	<i>Why are the kamarigals afraid?</i>
Patyegarang: <i>Gunin</i>	<i>Because of the guns</i>
Dawes. <i>Murrá Bídyl?</i>	<i>Is your finger better?</i>
Patyegarang: <i>Bíal, Karunjum.</i>	<i>No, (I suppose) worse.</i>

Patyegarang - a production by Bangarra Dance Theatre

Bangarra's *Patyegarang* tells a story from an Aboriginal perspective. Drawing on the material in Dawes' notebooks and informed by knowledge about the local Aboriginal people of the Sydney area, (provided by cultural consultants Richard Green and Matthew Doyle), the work is crafted through Bangarra's unique story-telling practice.

This story telling practice rests on a deep respect for cultural essence and traditional inheritance, which guide and inspire imagined interpretations of how the story may have played out. The emotional and environmental scenarios, the human actions and responses that were personal, are crafted to give the audience a new lens by which to examine the events of 1788 and the people who were at the centre of those events.

Patyegarang tells a story that is both intimate and universal. It illustrates very small moments in time, where a young woman from an ancient culture tells a young man, from a modern Imperialist society, about her life. Both the story-tellers and the audience are involved in stepping through the development of a very quiet and special friendship, against the disruption of colonisation and the extraordinary collisions of culture that ensued at that time.

Patyegarang consists of 13 scenes interconnected by their relation to the themes within the story.

The scenes:

1. Eora

The spirit of Patyegarang awakens in a celebration of People and land.

2. Dawes

A new arrival, a new connection to country.

3. Time

A dedicated tracing of a universal law.

4. 'Maugari' (fishing canoe)

Honouring the integral role of women and the beauty in living off the land and sea.

5. 2 Breaths

An observation of this special first contact through language.

6. Dungara (to dance)

A sacred ritual, refuelling for the hunt.

7. Proclamation

The resolution to resist assimilation. The absence of honour for sacrifice.

8. Night Sky

A gift of cultural knowledge.

9. Intimacy

A conscious connection.

10. Sacred

Territorial tension.

11. Departure

A decision honouring friendship and spirit.

12. Resilience

Always was, always will be, our land.

Part 3: Creating *Patyegarang*

Research, collaboration and consultation

Bangarra's process for creating a work like *Patyegarang* is a journey of purpose, imagination and reflection, and involves a great deal of research, collaboration and consultation before the actual creation of the choreography, music, and design begins.

With the discovery of the notebooks at the SOAS in 1972, and the existence of various diaries from people who knew and worked with William Dawes, both during his time in Sydney and further into his career and life, historians have created an interesting portrait of the man. He was clearly a man set apart from his peers. He seems to have had little regard for engaging with political maneuvering for influence and power or pursuing efforts towards personal material gain, yet he was extremely dedicated to his pursuits in scientific exploration and cultural learning. His actions often demonstrated a high moral regard for human rights, putting him at odds with many of his peers and other settlers.

While there is very little material about *Patyegarang* outside of Dawes' notebooks, there is quite a good deal of knowledge of other Aboriginal people and groups at that time, and so the nature of her life and her experience of first contact can be sketched to the extent of knowing that she must have been both courageous and strong in her conviction to engage with the white man. Not only was her sharing of language with Dawes a means to service his pursuit of linguistics, it provided him with insight into a world that regarded and valued its spiritual connection to land (country) and the cultural inheritance of ancestors above all else.

As with all Bangarra works, the creative team for *Patyegarang* consulted the local Indigenous community, engaging the special assistance of Richard Green, a descendent of the Dharug and Matthew Doyle, a descendant of the Muruwari and knowledge holder for the Dharawal. Richard and Matthew provided detailed knowledge of the Dharug language and people, and were consultants to Bangarra for cultural and language knowledge in regard to the creation of the music/soundscape.

Alana Valentine was engaged as dramaturge to support the choreographer in weaving the known aspects of the story with the imagined and reflective elements, in order to uphold the responsibility to tell *Patyegarang*'s story with care and respect.

Choreography

Patyegarang was created by the choreographer in collaboration with the dancers, the composer of the music and the costume, set and lighting designers who form the creative team. This collaborative process enables the dance to reflect the overall focus of the choreographer's ideas and directions.

The choreographer, the rehearsal director and the dancers work together in the dance studio for many hours each day over several weeks to create the choreographic elements for the dance, ensuring that their interpretation of the story follows the original motivations for telling the story. Together they explore, invent and shape movements that speak to the artistic interpretation of the cultural and emotional layers of the story.

As with the creation of any new work, the dancers and choreographer experiment with each movement, practicing them over and over again. They slowly build the movements into phrases and arrange these phrases into sequences that eventually form separate sections, or scenes of the work. The scenes link together through a directorial and dramaturgical process that involves the whole creative team including the dancers.

Dance technique and performance skills

Using their dance technique skills, the dancers work collaboratively to blend and refine the movements to provide clarity, texture and consistency in execution before settling on a final version of the choreography.

The rehearsal director is present throughout this process in order to be able to guide the dancers in the rehearsal process, so that the key qualities and details of the choreography, as set by the choreographer, are retained and remembered as they progress from section to section. When the production moves closer to its premiere date, the rehearsal director will work with the dancers to make sure the dancers will perform

the work to the highest standard possible. Also during this stage, the technical elements of the costume, set and lighting design start to be incorporated.

Production processes

In the week of the premiere, the dancers, rehearsal director, creative team and production crew move from Bangarra's studios to the theatre where they spend a day or two rigging the set, positioning and programming the lighting, checking the sound levels and making necessary adjustments to the choreography to fit the space of the stage. This is called the 'bump-in' and the production crew is largely responsible for coordinating this stage of the process.

Until the night of premiere no one has actually seen the finished production. This can be quite stressful but is also extremely exciting.

Extending the life of a dance theatre work

During the lengthy process of creating a new Bangarra production, ideas will change and surprising shifts in the original plans will occur. This is not unusual and probably one of the most exciting things about making a new work. Importantly, the things that do not change are the traditional elements – cultural information must always remain respected and intact. As the dance is performed over time, these stories are passed down from one dancer to another as different dancers are taught the choreography and perform the roles.

The Creative Team

Choreographer..... Stephen Page

Stephen Page is a descendant of the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh Nation from SE Queensland. Stephen was appointed Artistic Director of Bangarra in 1991 and he continues to lead the company, now in its 25th year, and create new works for its repertoire.

"I believe Patyegarang was a young woman of fierce and endearing audacity, and a 'chosen one', so to speak, within her clan and community. Her tremendous display of trust in Dawes resulted in a gift of cultural knowledge back to her people almost 200 years later and I feel her presence around us, with us, as we create this new work". Stephen Page, 2014.

Composer..... David Page

David Page is a descendant of the Nunkul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambeh tribe from SE Queensland. Over the last 25 years, as resident composer with Bangarra, David has created the music for many works within the company's repertoire.

Every work I've done for Bangarra features traditional language from the area where the story is based or from. In this case it is the Darug language of the Eora nation. My brothers Richard Green and Matthew Doyle are the gatekeepers in accessing the language and translation from English to language sentences, phrases and song lyrics. I am instantly inspired as soon as I hear the melody of spoken traditional language. It opens my creative world and allows me to dream and hear the songs, which make choosing the instrumentation easier. David Page, 2014.

Dramaturge.....Alana Valentine

Alana Valentine is a writer, academic and dramaturge and has previously worked as a dramaturge with Stephen Page in 2011 for the creation of *ID* (from *Belong*).

"As significant as the notebooks were as an insight into the humour, tension, intimacy and depth of the friendship between Patyegarang and Dawes, of infinitely greater potency to the process of imagining the story of Patyegarang was Stephen's long legacy of cultural knowledge gifted to him over the entire history of Bangarra from the many elders and countrymen and artists and ancestors with whom he has worked". Alana Valentine, 2014.

Set designer Jacob Nash

Jacob is a Murri man who grew up in Brisbane. He graduated from the NIDA Design Course in 2005. Jake was appointed as a Bangarra artist-in-residence in 2011, and to date has created the design for the Bangarra's productions of *earth & sky*, *Belong*, *Warumuk - in the dark night*, *Terrain*, *Blak* and *Dance Clan 3*.

"... the colour palette I have explored and the textures I am using are a collection from around the Harbour. They are in my life every day and being able to find a contemporary way to explore and create with them has been a rich and unexpected experience. Hopefully I have been able to capture an essence of the world Patyegarang knew and the design holds the essential qualities needed for her story to be told today".

Jacob Nash, 2014.

Costume designer Jennifer Irwin

Jennifer Irwin's career spans 30 years designing and constructing costumes for drama, opera, film, and in particular for dance & ballet. Her designs for Bangarra include *Ochres*, *Fish*, *Corroboree*, *Mathinna*, *Walkabout*, *X300*, *Uniapon*, *Bush*, *Skin*, *True Stories*, *Fire: A Retrospective*, *Terrain* and *Dance Clan 3*.

"Even though Patyegarang is a narrative work, I always approach the subject matter for costume design in an abstract way. I want to steer clear of being too literal and obvious. Stephen's story-telling is beautifully sculptural, so it's possible to design in an abstract, suggestive way while drawing from tradition". Jennifer Irwin, 2014.

Lighting designer..... Nick Schlieper

Nick Schlieper has created the lighting design for most of the major performing arts companies in Australia, and also works regularly in Europe and USA. Nick designed the lighting for Bangarra's 2003 work *Bush*.

"The thing that has most struck and fascinated me while working on this piece is the story itself. It's not only a wonderful tale, but an amazing piece of history, that resonates way beyond its immediate Australian context". Nick Schlieper, 2104.

PART 4: Additional references

Online

Series of 'behind the scenes' and the 'making of' Patyegarang film clips.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0MiSus1Wvk&list=PLg_qOpVFpWT5CWh1MZtiivO50vdT-n3yG

The Notebooks of William Dawes on the Aboriginal Language of Sydney

<http://www.williamdawes.org>

Dharug Dalang

http://dharug.dalang.com.au/Dharug/plugin_wiki

Australian Dictionary of Biography

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dawes-william-1968>

Books. (non-fiction and fiction)

Gibson, Ross. *26 Views of the Starburst World: William Dawes at Sydney Cove 1788-91*. UWA Publishing, University of Western Australia, 2012.

Troy, Jakelin. *The Sydney Language*, Australian Dictionary Projects, AIATSIS, Canberra, 1994.

Bennelong: The Coming In of the Eora: Sydney Cove 1788-1792, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 2001.

McAfee, R. J. 1981. 'Dawes' Meteorological Journal'. *Historical Note No 2*, Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Grenville, Kate. *The Lieutenant*, Canongate Books, 2009.

Rogers, Jane. *Promised Lands*, The Overlook Press, NY, 2005.

Film/DVD

First Australians: Episode 1: 'They Have Come to Stay', Blackfella Films, Sydney for SBS, Australia 2008.

Additional Bangarra Education Resources

Bangarra has a suite of online Education Resources suitable for Years 3 to 10 (Stages 2 to 5), aligned with the Australian Curriculum - The Arts. This online library of free resources can be accessed from the Bangarra website, and includes filmed excerpts, background information and class activities based on selected Bangarra repertoire. The resources aim to provide teachers and students with rich content for the teaching of the Arts curriculum well as cross curricula learning areas related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. These resources have been available since August 2013, with many teachers in primary and secondary schools around Australia accessing the material and building into their lesson plans resulting in some wonderful learning outcomes.

DVDs

Also available through the Bangarra website on DVD, *Mathinna* (2008) and *Terrain* (2012). DVDs include extended interviews with the choreographers. Study Guides for these works are downloadable from Bangarra website.