

**Asia Society and the Australian Consulate-General
Present**

**Black Cockatoo Dance Company:
Indigenous Aboriginal Song and Dance**



Friday, May 16, 8:00 P.M.

**Asia Society
725 Park Avenue at 70th Street
New York City**

The performance will last approximately
50 minutes with no intermission, and will
be followed by an artist Q&A



Australian Consulate - General
New York

Black Cockatoo Dance Company: Indigenous Aboriginal Song and Dance

Program

Contemporary

Ochre -

In this piece, the performers prepare for the dance by painting their body with clay (ochre), a traditional decoration. Music: *Ochres* by Kirk Page.

Blessing of the space - didgeridoo solo

Mainland Aboriginal

Jalima -

A song that welcomes the audience and also the spirits of our ancestors to the performance space.

Ugudanji -

A totem dance in which the performers imitate the movements of the kangaroo travelling across the country and finding a place to stay.

Ngampi –

A totem dance in which the performers imitate the movements of the emu as it searches for food.

Aica –

A dance depicting people hunting and gathering long cone shells in the mud amongst the mangroves in the rainforest.

Giditchma –

A totem dance in which the performers imitate the movements of the kitehawk as it hunts for food.

Injarda –

In this dance the dancers act out covering themselves with mud to protect themselves from mosquitos while looking for food in the swamp or mangroves and using leaves to swat the mosquitos away.

Gidjigum –

A dance telling the story of men looking for a bush honey tree to feed their people.

Minayakaka –

A totem dance in which the performers imitate the movements of a sea eagle searching and hunting for fish.

Warrama –

A presentational dance in which the dancers get to display their different styles of “shake-a-leg” movement.

Ginnung Munnung –

A dance to bid farewell to the audience and the spirits of our ancestors who have joined us in the performance space.

Torres Strait Islander

Keriba Ged Nor –

A sacred “blessing” song sung to clear the floor or space of bad spirits.

Welub Batayrik –

A dance depicting a feather as it turns in the wind.

Bow and Arrow –

A warrior dance depicting a warrior preparing for, and then travelling to, war.

Sesere Eyea –

A song about a celebration or gathering.

Tamani –

A song adapted from those of the Pacific Islands accompanied by a traditional South Sea Taibobo dance.

Tag Mauki –

A song imparting the lesson “Don’t touch what’s not yours.”

Gatya –

A spirit dance.

ABOUT BLACK COCKATOO DANCE COMPANY

Black Cockatoo Dance Company features some of the best dancers of mainland Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Contemporary Dance Australia has to offer. The group infuses Aboriginal song and dance with the drums of the Torres Strait Islands, creating a rhythmic and hypnotic atmosphere blending Torres Strait Island dances and the indescribable, haunting sounds of the world’s oldest instrument the Didgeridoo (Yigi-yigi). The name, Black Cockatoo, is the totem of the group’s founder, Sean Choolburra’s people, clan name Dabu.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



Sean Choolburra was the founder and leader of Sydney's first independent traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance company, the Ngaru Dance Company, which he formed in 1993. He is a graduate of NAISDA College and has danced with the internationally renowned indigenous contemporary dance troupe Bangarra Dance Theatre. One of the most popular and versatile indigenous performers in Australia today, Sean is also a didgeridoo player, singer, actor, songwriter, and comedian. After winning the NSW Raw Comedy final in 2002, Sean performed in October 2009 for the Scottish Storytelling Festival as an invited guest, the result of a stint at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2008 at the Edinburgh College of the Arts. He has also performed at the Adelaide Fringe Festival, and hosted *Deadly Funny* in Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. On 31

March 2008, Sean performed in the Melbourne International Comedy Festival Gala. He headlined the Dreaming Festival in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 and was also featured in two comedic performances on the *NRL Footy Show* in 2006. Hailing from Townsville, Sean has performed all over the world with the Bangarra Dance Theatre, and by special invitation for the Dalai Lama, Hale & Pace, and HRH The Prince of Wales.



Vivian Anderson is one of Australia's most experienced traditional Aboriginal dancers. He graduated from NAISDA College in 1994 and has toured the world extensively as a performer since 1995. As a performer with the Descendance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dance Theatre he won the first Cultural-style Olympics at The World Culture Open in Seoul, South Korea, sponsored by UNESCO in 2004. Vivian is from the Gungulu tribe in Central Queensland, as is one of the founding members of the Ngaru Dance Company, Sydney's first professional traditional Aboriginal and Islander dance company. Vivian has studied and performed ballet, hip hop/rap, modern, contemporary, tap, and traditional Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander dance. He has toured both domestically throughout Australia and internationally with acclaimed singer/songwriter Archie Roach and has performed as a backup dancer for Christine Anu and also at G'Day USA in Los Angeles. He has performed as a member of NAISDA, Ngaru Dance Company, and The Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre and The Indigenous Cultural Awareness Company, and showcases his own choreography when giving solo performances.



Albert David was born and raised in the Torres Strait Islands. He has spent time with Indigenous communities throughout Australia and, with the permission of Aboriginal elders, draws on these distinct cultures and his own Torres Strait Islands community to teach and choreograph contemporary dance. A former member of the internationally renowned Bangarra Dance Theatre, he has also appeared with the Australian Ballet as a Guest Artist, performing the role of Oenomaus in the

ballet *Spartacus*. Albert visited Sri Lanka from 24-26 June 2013 for a series of workshops and a performance. At the time, the Australian High Commissioner, HE Robyn Mudie was “delighted to bring a performer of Albert David's calibre to Sri Lanka” and to have “an opportunity to present to Sri Lankan audiences some of the rich cultural heritage” of Australia’s Indigenous community. In 2002, he performed in his own work, *Giz*, and, in 2006, he travelled to Canada to choreograph for the Canadian Indigenous dance company Red Sky Performance. In 2003 Albert was recognised by the Indigenous Australian community as the “Deadly Dancer of the Year.” The word “deadly” is a modern colloquialism used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to describe something or someone as “cool, excellent or awesome.” The Deadly Awards are an annual celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement in music, sport, entertainment and community, hosted by Vibe Australia, at the iconic Sydney Opera House. Albert has also choreographed and performed dances in the Logie Award nominated, Deadly TV production, *Move It Mob Style*.



Smilar Sinak is a Kaurareg Meriam Ulingun man, which is his Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Papua New Guinean cultural heritage. Since childhood, Smilar has learnt to promote and maintain his cultural heritage through his Murray Island (Mer) cultural group. As a student of NAISDA College, Smilar learnt to continue to promote his culture through a new Indigenous Contemporary style of performance. His depth of knowledge has been an inspiration to other indigenous contemporary artists and is often a consultant on various productions at a local, national and international level. A

versatile performer Smilar uses dance, song, music and storytelling to educate the new generation including international visitors through NAISDA where he is often engaged as a “Traditional Tutor” for a cultural exchange with students from around the world and other Indigenous ‘countries’ within Australia. He has appeared in the *Warup Era Kodomer* production by AIDT (Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre), the Bangarra Dance Theatre production, ‘*Bipotim*’, directed by Albert David and later assisted in Albert’s next production of ‘*Giz*’. He was a recording artist for Bangarra’s production ‘*Fish*’, and was choreographer on the Cherbourg Youth Theatre Project.

About Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are complex and diverse. The Indigenous cultures of Australia are the oldest living cultural history in the world - they go back at least 50,000 years and new evidence suggests is closer to 75,000 years.

Each language group represents a distinct and separate “country.” When Indigenous Australians talk about their “country,” they are referring to the land where their language group is from.

Ceremonial performances are seen as the core of cultural life. Ceremony is the underlying basis of indigenous song, music, dance and visual arts. Ceremony contains many significant elements, some of which are specifically related to depicting Dreaming Stories.

The Dreamtime is considered a specific time of creation on the earth when all animals, plants and people came into being. The Dreaming is a way of life that includes hunting, gathering, song, dance, art, law, ceremonies and rituals. Many of the pieces you are seeing tonight are within the largest context of this culture.

In the Aboriginal context, these stories are part of a complex narrative of the whole world, and ceremonial dances play an important role in maintaining these stories and traditions of the ancestors.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is maintained through learning the customs, dances, art and language from the elders.

The Torres Strait Islands

The Torres Strait Islands are a group of islands between the tip of Cape York Peninsula in Queensland, Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Torres Strait Islander culture is influenced by the sea. Dugong, turtle, crayfish, crabs, shellfish, reef fish are all traditionally hunted and collected and remain an important part of their way of life.

There are five main language groups: Eastern Islands, Central Islands, Top Western Islands, Western Islands and Inner Islands make up the five regions of the Torres Strait Islands group. The Eastern Torres Strait Island language group is call the Meriam Mir/Meriam Le, Central Island language group is Kulkalgal, Western Island language group Kala Lagau Ya, Top Western Island language group is call Kala Kauwau Ya and the Inner Island language group is called Kaurareg nation (Port Kennedy/NPA).

The Aboriginal Flag



The Aboriginal flag was designed by Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from Central Australia. It was created as a symbol of unity and national identity for Aboriginal people during the land rights movement of the early 1970s.

The flag was taken to the East Coast where it was promoted and eventually recognized as the official flag of the Australian Aboriginal people. The flag was first flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide on National Aborigines Day, July 12, 1971. The flag was chosen as the official flag for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and was first flown there in 1972. In 1995, the Australian Government proclaimed the flag as an official 'Flag of Australia' under section 5 of the Flags Act 1953.

Symbolic Meaning

The symbolic meaning of the flag colors (as stated by Mr Harold Thomas) are:

Black: Represents the Aboriginal people of Australia

Red: Represents red earth, red ochre and a spiritual relation to the land

Yellow: Represents the Sun, the giver of life and protector



The Torres Strait Islands Flag

The Torres Strait Islander Flag was created as a symbol of unity and identity for Torres Strait Islander peoples, designed by the late Bernard Namok from Thursday Island. It was the winning entry from a design competition held as part of a Cultural Revival Workshop, organized by The Islands Co-ordinating Council in January 1992. The flag was recognized by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in June 1992 and given equal prominence with the

Aboriginal flag. In July 1995, it was recognized by the Australian Government as an official 'Flag of Australia' under the Flags Act 1953.

Symbolic Meaning

Each part of the flag is designed to represent something about Torres Strait Island culture.

Green: Represents the land

Blue: Represents the sea

White: Represents peace

Black: Represents the Indigenous peoples

The dhari (headdress) represents Torres Strait Island people and the five pointed star represents the 5 major Island groups. The star also represents navigation, as a symbol of the seafaring culture of the Torres Strait.

About Asia Society

Asia Society is the leading global and pan-Asian organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders and institutions of the United States and Asia. The Society seeks to increase knowledge and enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas across the fields of policy, business, education, arts and culture. Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller III, Asia Society is a nonprofit educational institution with offices in Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai and Washington, D.C. On the web at www.asiasociety.org.

The Asia Society Performing Arts program has been a pioneer in the presentation of traditional and contemporary Asian performing arts in the United States since 1957, when it presented the American debut of Ravi Shankar. We see the arts as a catalyst for bringing people together, creating understanding, and igniting creativity.

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