

Ngapartji Ngapartji - by Trevor Jamieson

Saturday, 16 June 2007

Trevor describes his journey to creating Ngapartji Ngapartji.

by Trevor Jamieson
Arts Hub
Wednesday, October 11, 2006

'Ngapartji Ngapartji' is a project that explores the delicate process of communication between different cultures. Where language can at times be a barrier, in here language instead becomes a bridge. It is a project that attempts to breakdown the voyeuristic &otherness” that naturally arises when an audience experiences a work from another culture. Trevor Jamieson is a Spinifex man from the western desert of Australia. A talented performer, Jamieson has appeared in many productions including 'Bran Nue Dae', 'Rabbit Proof Fence' and Big hART’s 'kNOT@Home'. As the central performer and co-creator of Ngapartji Ngapartji Trevor becomes at once a storyteller and a cross cultural broker.

An uncle of mine walked out of the desert and saw white people for the first time only 20 years ago in 1986. I was a kid at the time, but it made an impression on me. My family lived all over the place in WA, Esperance, Kalgoorlie, Perth, Cundalee, Coonana. There were a lot of stories told where ever we lived about our country and how we had to move off it because of the Maralinga tests and how many in my family passed away. My uncle had been hiding in the desert all that time.

So when I became an actor, I started thinking more and more about those stories and how it could be a great piece of theatre.

Over the last six years we've worked at getting it right. Ngapartji Ngapartji has been developed by Scott Rankin, Alex Kelly and myself. Scott and I began talking in 1999 about this, it has taken this long to research and write a piece of theatre that captured the complexities of my family - the Spinifex people – and their journey through the last century. It's been a complex and very interesting process and I have re-engaged with my community, gone back to my language and had the chance to listen, share and learn.

I have been blessed to work with some inspiring and very talented people throughout this process. Ngapartji Ngapartji tells my story and then goes further.

Using Pitjantjatjara, English, Japanese and Hasari, Ngapartji Ngapartji weaves a global narrative spanning Afghanistan, Japan, Great Britain and the US and the desert sands of central Australia. It links my family to that of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. It sheds light on the reason that Australian scientists stole 21,830 body parts from dead children, from 1957 to 1978. It touches on why there are more than 600,000 camels roaming the Australian desert, it tells of the role of the Japanese Navy as our allies at Gallipoli.

The telling of this story is also laced with beautiful Pitjantjatjara versions of songs from Talking Heads, David Bowie and Burt Bacharach sung by members of the Pitjantjatjara choir.

Instead of maintaining a distance between the audience and the stage, and between cultures, we are attempting to create an exchange; and a process of Ngapartji Ngapartji; “you give me something and I’ll give you something.”

We came up with the idea of the telling of this story in Pitjantjatjara and encouraging the audience to give time to learning the language and therefore to be given back a deeper experience of the work - Ngapartji Ngapartji.

We have over 180 people enrolled in the course nationally and of course we want to see more people enrol and become part of this process. It's important not only for the show but to help in the preservation of Pitjantjatjara.

People can join the course at any time and are welcome to attend the Trades Hall Group in Melbourne or start their own group either through work or informally. The online course provides a window into Pitjantjatjra language and culture. This is an easy, fun and accessible way to understand and learn Pitjantjatjara.

Ngapartji Ngapartji combines community development in Alice Springs and Ernabella, where elders and young people prepare film and sound material for the online course, providing audiences with the opportunity to build long term relationships with the Pitjantjatjara community, support the maintenance of this beautiful language and enjoy an amazing theatrical experience.

Members of the Pitjantjatjara community teach audiences their language, which is one of the world’s oldest, through online stories, songs, animations and short films.

Pitjantjatjara is a central desert language spoken by around 2,500 people across the north-western parts of South Australia and adjacent areas of Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

I perform with Lex Marinos, Yumi Umiumare, Saira Luther and Najeeba Azimi, with songs and language teaching by Pantijiti McKenzie, Jennifer Mitchell, Lorna Wilson, Iris Ajax and young Pitjantjatjara people from Alice Springs and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands.

The world premiere will open at the Fairfax Studio, Victorian Arts Centre this Thursday 12 October 2006.