



Shining the spotlight on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories: a resilient Bangarra releases 2016 annual report

Strong philanthropic growth, steady box office income, highly praised new Australian dance works, and one of the arts' fastest growing social media communities were the highlights for Bangarra Dance Theatre in 2016 amongst a year of significant adversity.

The company were extremely saddened by the loss of Music Director David Page, who passed away in April 2016. Bangarra displayed its strength and resilience by presenting a national tour of *OUR land people stories* from June to September, with all 59 performances dedicated to his memory. Almost 34,000 people nationally attended shows in Sydney, Canberra, Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne to see three incredible works: *Nyapanyapa* by Stephen Page, *Miyagan* by dancers and cousins Daniel Riley and Beau Dean Riley Smith, and *Macq* by dancer Jasmin Sheppard.

In a year where Artistic Director Stephen Page celebrated his 25th anniversary in the role, as well as picking up the JC Williamson Award at the Helpmanns and a Lifetime Achievement Award at the NAIDOC Awards, the success was bittersweet.

"We all miss David and feel his absence every day. His iconic soundscapes were the musical heartbeat to so many of our works, and he was such a pioneer in how he wove traditional language and instrumentation into new, contemporary electronic compositions," says Page.

"Stepping into the studio and immersing myself in the world of the incredible visual artist Nyapanyapa Yunupingu was healing. Seeing our dancers and staff support each other was medicinal. Going back to Country, and being welcomed on the Arabunna peoples' land when we went on regional tour with Frances Rings' soul-soothing *Terrain*, was cathartic. Art is, and always will be, a medicine."

The company released its 2016 annual report after holding their Annual General Meeting in Sydney yesterday. A moderate surplus of \$57,000 was achieved – but even more impressive was a 20% increase in philanthropic income, helping to reduce reliance on core Government funding to 38% and offset the increasing costs of delivering core activity.

The Executive Director of Bangarra, Philippe Magid, says the positive result was due to a number of factors.

"An appetite for exciting and original programming showcasing Aboriginal stories led to robust box office income, and increasingly our marketing has become more focused and effective with an emphasis on digital and data-driven campaigns," says Magid. "We've also seen our longer-term investment to grow philanthropy continue to pay dividends - it's part of our strategy to make our business model more sustainable."

"However, I'm most proud of the company's integrity and values. It was a very difficult year for everyone in the company on a personal level, and to see the Board, dancers and staff support each other was an affirming experience."

In addition to the national tour, Bangarra performed in China, New York and Paris, fulfilling its role as Australian cultural ambassadors on the world stage. Just as important were the company's Return to Country visits to North East Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands, providing an opportunity for the dancers to learn from Elders and hold workshops for local youth. Bangarra also returned to Western Sydney for a four-show engagement at Riverside Parramatta and embarked on a nine-show regional tour to Western and South Australia. In total, Bangarra performed 79 times to over 43,000 people throughout the year.

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Demonstrating their indomitable artistry, the 17-member dance ensemble took home two Helpmann Awards and two Australian Dance Awards for their efforts, with *The Australian* describing the collective as “entrancing, revelling in fluid, full-bodied movement and animating every moment with shining sincerity”.

Off stage, Bangarra’s Youth Program Team travelled more than 78,000 kilometres around the country to visit regional communities as part of the *Rekindling* program. They visited four new communities in Broome (WA), Yarrabah/Djarragun (QLD), Heywood and Horsham (VIC) with 154 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth taking part in this life-changing program, as well as revisiting four previously visited communities in Brisbane, Dubbo, Mackay and Adelaide.

Audiences in 2017 can see Bangarra perform in *Bennelong* from June to September in Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane and Melbourne. A new full-length narrative work from Stephen Page, it tells the story of Woollarawarre Bennelong, a senior man of the Eora from the Port Jackson area in Sydney. With extraordinary curiosity and diplomacy, Bennelong led his community to survive a clash of cultures, and left a legacy that reverberates through contemporary life.

For information and tickets visit:
<https://www.bangarra.com.au/whatson/productions/bennelong-2017>

Download the 2016 annual report [here](#).

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