

CREATING PATHWAYS

2005 National Indigenous Dance Forum

This is a report from *Creating Pathways* the National Indigenous Dance Forum held 27 to 30 October 2005 at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. *Creating Pathways* was funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Dance Board of the Australia Council and was organised by Ausdance National and managed by Wendy Morrow and Rachael Jennings.

This report includes:

Overview - Lydia Miller

***Dance Forum* Editorial – Marilyn Miller**

Keynote Speech – Raymond Blanco

Reflection – Monica D Stevens

The Creating Pathways program

The Ausdance report – Julie Dyson

Paths for action coming out of the event

The database of participants (with contact details to be personally confirmed).

The Creating Pathways program had three main aims to:

Reconnect

Re-energise

Identify what there is by profiling people through case studies and discussion.

Some of the main issues, which emerged, had three essential elements or themes:

Culture

Skills development

Professional networking.

CREATING PATHWAYS – an overview by Lydia Miller

Creating Pathways was driven by the desire of Indigenous dance practitioners to articulate a collective vision and direction for the future of Indigenous dance.

This vision has been ongoing for successive generations of Indigenous artists. The cultural renaissance in Indigenous arts and culture began in the 1980s with the emergence of a critical mass of young, vibrant Indigenous artists who took to the stages and the galleries with the electric energy that is synonymous with Indigenous artists. Dance, theatre, music and visual arts emerged onto the national arts landscape with the edginess, candour, vibrancy and challenge of these young Indigenous minds, bodies, and spirits.

This was nurtured by an older generation who envisioned a future of Indigenous dance companies, theatre companies, painters, photographers, film makers, musicians and writers that would grace the national and international arena with their presence to share the gift of the world's oldest and enduring culture. The Creating Pathways gathering of some 40 dance practitioners from across the country proved to be the most exciting, intense, inspirational event that has occurred in Indigenous contemporary dance for some decades.

Creating Pathways was funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Dance Board of the Australia Council, and managed and produced by Ausdance National. Financial contributions were also received from the NSW Ministry for the Arts, ArtsWA, ArtsSA, ArtsNT and ArtsQld. The forum was held at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra.

Since 1972 with the then Arts Council of Australia (now the Australia Council) interested in providing training for Indigenous Australians in each field of the arts, including drama, we have

witnessed the emergence of those Indigenous dancers from the Aboriginal and Islander Dance School who have been trail blazers in the arts ever since.

In 1975, 28 people attended a six-week training course initiated by the Urban Theatre Committee of the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council, held at the Black Theatre in Redfern. 'Careers In Dance' was the first project of the AISDS, an unaccredited three-year course in dance and related fields. The efforts of an older generation such as Aunty Maureen Watson, Uncle Bob Maza and Christine Donnelly enabled the course to be recognised by the Commonwealth Department of Education at the time, allowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in the course to receive full benefits under the Department's Aboriginal Study Grant Scheme. Carol Johnson's artistic directorship saw the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) evolve from the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme (AISDS), successfully delivering an accredited education course.

That earlier generation of modern dancers such as Wayne Nicholls, Lillian Crombie, Dorothea Randall, Malcolm Cole, Michael Leslie, Barwoo Lanley and Sylvia Blanco with Kim Walker and Cheryle Stone led to succeeding generations of dancers such as Raymond Blanco, Cheryl Pitt, Marilyn Miller, Bree-an Munns, Dujon Niue, Gary Lang, Lewis Lampton, Monica Stevens, Jasmine Gulash, Gail Mabo and Matthew Doyle, with cultural elders such as Uncle Philip Lanley from Mornington Island and Aunty Anima Ghee from Murray Island.

Some thirty years later, under a bright blue sky overlooking the calm waters of Lake Burley Griffin, those dance practitioners gathered with a younger generation to be welcomed onto the lands of the Kamberri by Matilda House and her family at the National Museum of Australia.

The keynote address delivered by Raymond Blanco drew attention to the use of the terms 'contemporary Indigenous dance' and 'Indigenous contemporary dance' and engaged us all by inquiring 'what does this actually mean' and 'when can a timeframe be placed on those works created by Indigenous dance practitioners?'

He cited works performed by Tambo as early as 1884 and noted the impact of western culture and its use as a tool by Indigenous people to highlight, communicate and promote to western society a greater understanding of Indigenous culture and its contribution. In emphasising that this event was agenda setting for the next 10 years to care for the cultural responsibilities that have been inherited, Raymond gave a glimpse into the past as a context for how far people had come.

He explored how the Aboriginal and Islander Dance School (AIDS) situated in Glebe, NSW brought forth generations of dancers who were privy to a range of influences, all the while emphasising the primacy of traditional heritage. These dancers were instrumental in the establishment of the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT), which was launched on 11 September 1989. The performing company toured nationally and internationally with an increasing repertoire of work that include *Gelam*, *Colours*, *Waxy*, *Sanctum*, *Drums of Mer*, *Intencity* and *Rain*. Notably, the Bangarra Dance Theatre was formed by graduates of NAISDA Dance College in 1990 and in 1991 came under the artistic directorship of Stephen Page.

Creating Pathways explored the role of dancers as custodians and repositories of culture; the layers of meaning imbued within the gesture; the lonely journey often taken in isolation; the spirit of strength to inspire national and international communities.

While days were spent in deep and thoughtful concentration, with stories unfolding of individual experiences, where loss and grief were echoed many times with shed tears, where laughter

cascaded throughout the expansiveness of the museum, the early mornings and late evenings were a joyous celebration of performing for each other, sharing dances and re-establishing old bonds.

The dancers brought forward a vision and direction that encompassed wide-ranging considerations from the personal to the collective. Each participant contributed to a broad agenda that included training, dance maintenance, cultural protocols and misappropriation, mentoring children and young people, learning and sharing, identity and place, infrastructure, choreography, responsibility and obligations, professional opportunities, networks, community social issues.

Through presentations, workshops and panel sessions the themes and priorities emerged into a comprehensive agenda that reflected the diversity of each dancer's experience, wisdom and knowledge. From panel sessions, where Dujon Niue and Djakapurra Munyarryun spoke about cultural obligations and responsibilities, to workshops where Jeanette Fabila, Bronwyn Liddle and Rita Pryce explored dance in community; from choreographic discussions by Jason Pitt, Simon Stewart and Mariaa Randall to debates about Indigenous dance by Samantha Chalmers, Fiona Doyle and Tamara Forester, the air was thick with ideas, vision and direction. So much discussion, debate and reflection that each and every participant is to be admired and celebrated. There are so many names to mention in this article that I apologise if they are not stated. For while this event came to a close, it marked the beginning of a new future for Indigenous dancers in this country.

Indigenous dance needs to be supported for other voices to be heard in the cultural landscape. As Lee Christofis remarked 'there is a need to build a public profile for the whole sector, for dance must be located in the imagination of its public'. The development, support and promotion of Indigenous dance is a conversation between dancers, critics, writers and journalists to articulate and

explore the diversity and genres of modern Indigenous dance. It is unrealistic to expect that companies such as Bangarra are globally responsible for the telling of the Indigenous stories and that that should suffice. It is that and more.

It is the responsibility of everyone who participates in the society to understand the magnificent breadth and depth of their brief moment of existence through the poetry of the language of dance and its dedicated artists.

Lydia Miller is the Executive Director of the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Islander Arts Board.

CREATING PATHWAYS

**Guest Editorial in Ausdance magazine *Dance Forum*,
Summer 2006**

Marilyn Miller

Creating Pathways at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra (27—30 October 2005) was a reminder of the diversity, commitment and passion of Indigenous Dance practitioners.

Now working the length and breadth of Australia, representatives of many Clan groups and Nations gathered to share information, inform others as to past and current practices, and devise strategies for a coordinated approach to the development of Indigenous dance.

Supported by the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Dance Board, and produced by Ausdance National, *Creating Pathways* provided the platform for discussion topics such as: industry, learning, professional issues, maintaining the network, culture, and a profession 'swot' analysis.

Like steps in choreography, participants arrived in batches,

congregating to form what was an emotional experience.

Matilda House exercised the acknowledgement to 'Land' enabling the acceptance of *Creating Pathways* by those unseen, but ever-present residing over all of us.

We were reminded of those who came before us and are now gone, those who helped make the event possible simply by once being, and simply by dancing. Acknowledgement was given to those who couldn't be present, and also to those who weren't able to attend.

The reminder that anything is possible was embodied in the remaining representatives of Australia's first Indigenous contemporary dance company (AIDT—the Company), the Artistic Director, Raymond D. Blanco, and his cofounders Dujon Nule, Gary Lang, and me, the only female. All of us have witnessed the professional paths of just about every other participant at the forum. Raymond Blanco commented, 'In enlightening others it actually drove home the importance of what we do as contemporary Indigenous artists'.

The sense of pride in the professional accomplishments of the participants to date was voiced by Monica Stevens and was a sentiment shared by all.

The Saturday night barbeque hosted by Elizabeth Cameron-Dalman erupted into a celebration of dance in its finest forms. Informally initiated by Nicky Ashby and Danny Doyle, textured by Sharman Parsons, and then closed with the ebullience of Torres Straight Islander dance, the whole evening paid tribute in a celebration song by Djakapurra Munyarryun.

The images of that night are at the forefront of my mind. The echoes of the songs and music still ring in my ears. The reminders of how things were, how things are.

As Marcus Hughes (Executive Officer, Ausdance Qld) aptly

recalls 'It reinforced my sense of place and sense of purpose'.

Now, we are all in our places of work, our homelands, our 'calling', eagerly awaiting the outcomes of the forum and hoping that we really have 'Created Pathways'.

Marilyn Miller is the Artistic Director of Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts Company.

CREATING PATHWAYS KEYNOTE SPEECH – Raymond Blanco

The current state of Indigenous contemporary dance and its future

I am a descendant of the Pajinka Wik of Cape York and the Magarem of Mer Island in the Torres Strait. I'd like to acknowledge the local mob, their elders, spirits and stories who once owned the country upon which Canberra was built and in so doing thank them for welcoming this gathering on their lands. I hope they are able to instil in us the strength, courage and unrelenting audacity of the participants of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972 to be able to make this forum as much a catalytic event for our dance as the Tent Embassy was for our peoples.

In order to give an educated assessment of the state of Indigenous contemporary dance today, in order to figure out how we got to be where we are and in some way give a vision for the future of Indigenous contemporary dance – or at least try to predict where our current actions or non-actions are taking us – we must start at the beginning.

What is contemporary Indigenous dance? When did this term become associated with our culture, our dance? Or is it Indigenous Contemporary? Have we an Historical Dance Culture or are we living a Dance Culture History? Do we make now from then or is it from then now? For some of us exposure to

contemporary Indigenous dance came from television. If we were really lucky we had a group of dancers come to our town and teach and perform at our schools, and for the unlucky our only exposure came from Bangarra.

I say that not to be derogatory of the company or its achievements. I say it because these few people who only know of contemporary Indigenous dance from Bangarra – or only acknowledge the movement of Indigenous contemporary dance since Bangarra – have been robbed or are robbing themselves of a history that is filled with the rich and exciting, edgy, raw dance of the beginnings of a movement forward of our peoples.

Contemporary Indigenous dance may have started in the mid-70s around the time of the Tent Embassy and with the dance course offered through Black Theatre, but I put it to you that it began in 1884 when Tambo and eight other Aboriginal persons were taken to perform throughout Europe. You take the dance out of its rightful place and it immediately becomes contemporised. Ever since Tambo, Indigenous Australians have been assuming the mediums of Western 'civilised' cultures in the desperate hope that it would lead to some better understanding of our cultures and the importance of our contribution to the Western way of life. This effort of our forefathers has never been returned in any substantial way or effort. We all know how to be white but no white person knows how not to be.

Back at the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme (AISDS) there was a unique opportunity for us to truly nurture the art of dance and culture. Whatever happened, however bad things seemed to be, there was an unwritten law that we all looked out for each other. This went outside the classroom and studio. We supported each other and shared and helped. It was an extension of Indigenous traditional heritage that we all instinctively respected and assumed was a part of this special magic we were being entrusted with.

Then came competition and out the door went culture. First years felt inadequate, fourth years were in competition with fifth years, third years thought they were better than some fourth years and then second years were overlooked 'cos they were nowhere really. This was the beginning of the end for the organisation.

Luckily, at the time, Australia was keen to hear stories from an urban point of view and creativity flowed into the repertoire of the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre – 'the Company'. Although I was appointed the first ever Indigenous Artistic Director of the first ever Indigenous Contemporary Dance Company, the company was never mine alone.

The Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT) was always and will always be known as a company that allowed and afforded the dancers a chance to explore avenues of expression for their own stories. So we staged the first ever adaptation of a Torres Strait Island legend in Dujon Niue's *Gelam* and the first contemporary interpretation of Indigenous use of colour in *Colours*, a concept from dancer Gary Lang, choreographed by Marilyn Miller, Dujon Niue and myself, and the repertoire continued to grow throughout the company's history, the first company to become known as the most toured company in Australia. There were times when we'd simply come back to Sydney, unpack do the laundry, re-pack and head back to the airport or get in the bus and head out on the road.

So you may think that Indigenous contemporary dance began with the training institute that bore the renaissance of Indigenous dance in Glebe. Or with the six students who were the first ever in AISDS, Wayne Nicol, Lillian Crombie, Michael Leslie, Darrell Phillips and Dorothea Randall, with Kim Walker and Cheryl Stone, who we know weren't Indigenous but were integral parts of the development of the organisation. Well, that began with the start of Black Theatre in Cope St, Redfern, when the Black Theatre decided to include dance as part of its research studies. And part of that were Maureen Watson, Christine Donnelly, Uncle Bob Maza and a host of other leaders in the Indigenous struggle

toward acceptance in mainstream society of Indigenous people as serious contributors to the myth of the Australian national identity.

And why did it all start? Because, according to some, there were no blackfellas anywhere in the performing arts unless you played the noble savage. Well, I put forward that Indigenous people took up the mantle of contemporary performance way back in the 40s as another attempt to try to be taken seriously. Attempts at trying to re-educate the non-Indigenous populace about the value and relevance of Indigenous cultures have been ongoing and will continue beyond you and me. We can only hope that what we do allows those coming after us to take the struggle further. We can no longer put up with patronising attempts to make our stories palatable to the non-Indigenous masses. I believe the site is significant, not only for Indigenous Australians but for Australia as a nation.

The action of setting up the Tent Embassy was the first step to white Australia moving away from childhood and the deeply entrenched colonialist view that, in many ways, still exists today.

In order for Australia to fully assume its place in world matters, it is of extreme importance for our 'leaders' to lead the way in dealing with the very wrong decisions of the past. In stating this, I must also state that the efforts up to now have in many ways been a 'band-aid' approach to dealing with the real problems.

In order to treat the illness, we as a 'nation' must first deal with the cause. Although in many areas of Australia, individuals and communities are dealing with their immediate issues, this is a move that can only be spearheaded by the Federal Government.

We can no longer put up with patronising attempts to make our stories palatable to the non-Indigenous masses. The Australian nation is a myth until Indigenous culture and prior sovereignty are embraced and acknowledged as a culture that has a valued contribution to our futures.

Raymond Blanco is the General Manager of Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts Company.

CREATING PATHWAYS REFLECTION – Monica D Stevens

Creating Pathways was a National Indigenous Dance Forum funded by the Australia Council, with contributions from State/Territory arts ministries, including the NSW Ministry for the Arts. It was managed and produced by Ausdance National at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra in October.

The project brought together a group of invited Indigenous dance artists from around the country to discuss issues associated with their dance practice including isolation, professional development opportunities and access to existing or new resources.

The Creating Pathways Forum was held in Canberra at the National Museum of Australia and the location was absolutely beautiful. The forum targeted Indigenous people who are mid-career dance practitioners who came from all states representing contemporary dance and culture. It was overwhelming to listen, speak to and with some people I had not seen since they were students of dance. To meet them as a fellow practitioner addressing pathways for Indigenous dance artists was fantastic.

Mr Dennis Newie and I held a morning dance workshop session. I am Kuku Yalanji (Cape York) and based in Sydney. I taught a community dance and reiterated that simplicity is the best option when working with young people who had differing dance capabilities and age differences. Mr Newie is from an island called Moa. He taught a Torres Strait Island cultural dance and song that had informal structuring with the understanding of left and right leg, arm and head coordinated movements. This was an extraordinarily beautiful dance.

The next morning's dance session was held by Mr Simon Stewart (Broome) who taught his contemporary style that had strong elongated movements with impressive extensions through the legs. This was followed by a fun coordination warm-up held by Ms. Rita Pryce (Cairns) and she turned over the session to Mr Sermsah Bimsaad (Port Hedland) and Ms. Nikki Ashby (Melbourne) for some serious Hip Hop movements with joints, bones and muscles articulating extremely athletically.

The forum sessions started with a talk by Ms Lydia Miller on the future direction of Indigenous dance and issues that may arise and how to address these particular issues.

People spoke passionately of serious recognition and acknowledgment of Indigenous professionals who have and continue to share qualitative goodwill in the Australian dance industry. This recognition then transcends to committed increase in employment opportunities to qualified Indigenous professionals in mainstream arenas.

The Federal, State and Local governments recognised, and unrecognised, funding needs to have appropriate controls established to service the people. And commitment to Indigenous practitioners of dance so remuneration and entitlements be awarded to Indigenous Cultural and Contemporary Dance practitioners from employment sectors of society.

There were hard core issues talked about such as:
Increase number of touring opportunities for Indigenous dancers which create realistic employment and career opportunities.

Constant network building to resource Indigenous people in professional fields that has foundations to an establishment of an alumina with people who had graduated but also those who had studied.

Community structures that employ people returning to homelands after graduating that assists in creating opportunities for the youth

that than enables the youth to assist and support local community growth.

Performance opportunities at festivals to assist the continuum of dance education culture and contemporary dance appreciation and attitudes in the broader community.

Reinforce the need to have active Indigenous Dance Programs within the Education system that lead to accessible avenues to engage Indigenous professionals teaching dance classes.

The success stories like the Community Perspective in Day 1, the Tennant Creek School Children's program and the Employment Examples of Ms. Dalisa Pigram (Broome) on Day 2, were brilliant outcomes because the ingenuity and perseverance of a group of dedicated people or the driving force of a few. Ingenuity and perseverance are words that had resonated at the forum of Indigenous commitment to the dance industry in Australia.

With all that serious talk and discussions the participants were invited to spend some time at Mirramu Arts Centre at Bungendore on the edge of Lake George for a BBQ. The bus ride was great because songs were sung accompanied by Mr Newie on guitar.

The final session of the Creating Pathways Forum spotlighted some areas for the mid-career artists to explore in accessing to funds and creative links.

The session featured Dion Hastie who is a dancer with the Leigh Warren and Dancers in Adelaide. There were a number of opportunities identified. The Dance House in Melbourne was calling for expressions of interest from all independent artists. Artists can take advantage of two performance spaces. There are opportunities of short residencies and Dance House can provide some assistance. The NSW Ministry of the Arts offers a program that has a Cultural and Arts Expression Strategy. The Australian Choreographic Centre offers a Fellowship Program, a major residency for collaborative works to be established and there is a Youth Ensemble. Arts ACT has an

Indigenous Partnership Strategy with the aim of assisting individuals achieve their goals; a dance component in the future and will be addressing dual careers and what's involved.

I would like to thank Ausdance National and Ms Wendy Morrow for their work on organising Creating Pathways. I believe the Forum was well received and highly successful.

First published in Ausdance NSW magazine Dance NSW, January/February 2006.

CREATING PATHWAYS AUSDANCE REPORT – by Julie Dyson

1. Project Aims

The *Creating Pathways* brief was to invite a group of about 40 contemporary Indigenous dance artists from around the country to discuss issues associated with their dance practice, including isolation, professional development opportunities and access to existing or new resources, etc. The project manager thoroughly scanned the Indigenous dance community, by telephone and questionnaire, and the Ausdance network through the Ausdance Executive Officers. There was some difficulty in identifying the most appropriate participants, and recognition that there must be both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, a matter resolved through the scanning process. The program began to emerge with three main aims:

To reconnect individual artists

To re-energise the communication between the artists

To identify what was in existence through profiling people, case studies and discussion.

The three main issues which emerged as essential elements of the program were:

Culture

Skills development

Professional networking.

The issue of Elders' participation had also emerged early, and the need for their presence became an essential element of the program. Djakkapurra Munyarryun, cultural adviser to Bangarra Dance Theatre, was a valued participant, as was Dennis Newie from Thursday Island.

Questions such as *what is contemporary Indigenous dance?* and *what is it to be Indigenous?* were also important, and the program was designed to reflect these issues.

2. The Forum

The participating artists came from major cities and regional communities from across Australia. Their collective experience spanned many fields of Indigenous dance, from professional choreographers and dancers to directors of Indigenous dance groups and teachers in rural and remote communities. The forum therefore –

Gathered national representation from regional, rural and metropolitan mid-career Indigenous dance artists

Heard from Indigenous artists about issues and concerns within their various fields of activity

Introduced existing or potential resources and relevant mentoring, training and development opportunities to support further professional skills development

Encouraged participants to establish at least one new relationship or partnership

Provided participants with a resource tool kit and 'show bag' of materials.

The Welcome to Country was given by Kamberri Elder Matilda House, with a performance by the Canberra-based Ngambri dancers.

The program is included in this document. It reflects all the issues raised by participants in the research phase of the project. There were keynote addresses by Raymond Blanco and Lee Christofis, with extensive discussion and debate following. There were group discussions, special interest groups, and the occasional departure from the program such as the lunch-time forum convened to further discuss 'What is contemporary Indigenous dance?'. Case studies were profiled, and skills development workshops were held, such as the invaluable law and copyright session conducted by Robynne Quiggin and Sally Hanson. ATSIAB Executive Director Lydia Miller summed up each day and provided a major focus for further discussion and action, facilitated by Anne Dunn.

The Creating Pathways forum was a living demonstration of the shared commitment Indigenous artists have to their culture and the responsibility to carry that on for the next generations. Throughout the program the artists, teachers and leaders spoke with respect and understanding of the principles of life long learning.

The forum also clearly identified the enormous value for artists when they can gather with their peers and the need for future programs to be centred around affirming the individual through communicating and strengthening their communities of practice.

As well as the Indigenous artists attending, the program included talks from non-Indigenous participants such as Lee Christofis (dance critic for *The Australian*), Leigh Warren, artistic director of Leigh Warren and Dancers, the Director of the Australian Choreographic Centre, Mark Gordon and the Artistic Director of Dancehouse, Dianne Reid. Elizabeth Cameron Dalman hosted an evening social gathering at her Mirramu Dance Centre on the shores of Lake George. The Australian Institute of Sport/Ausdance National and NAISDA/Ausdance NSW partnerships were profiled, as were Patrick McClosky's Tennant Creek project and the Ausdance Victoria program providing

Certificate IV in the workplace.

A final summing up resulted in a range of issues being identified for future action, and it was agreed that these should be summarised and circulated to participants. The Ausdance network is keen to offer State/Territory forums to enable these issues to be prioritised, and for a follow-up strategy meeting to be convened by the Australia Council.

3. Background

Creating Pathways was a national Indigenous dance forum held at the National Museum of Australia from 27-30 October 2005. It was an initiative and a partnership between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Dance Board of the Australia Council, and it was managed and produced by Ausdance National. The other partners were the NSW Ministry for the Arts, ArtsWA, ArtsQld, Arts Victoria, ArtsNT, ArtsSA and the National Museum of Australia.

We understand that the *Creating Pathways* initiative grew out of roundtable discussions and individual conversations with various Sydney-based Indigenous dancers. It was determined that mid-career Indigenous dancers and choreographers were lacking support and access to current knowledge and career opportunities afforded to emerging artists, and often more easily available to those already established.

In response to these concerns, the Dance Board and the ATSIAB contributed funds totalling \$90,000 to a national dance forum with the objective of assessing the opportunities and possible obstacles in the way of sustaining a career as an Indigenous dancer or choreographer. The Australia Council hoped the forum would identify possible pathways and options to provide Indigenous dancers with the knowledge and tools to stabilise and extend their careers as contemporary dance practitioners.

The Australia Council invited Ausdance National to manage and produce the forum in 2005. Late October at the National Museum of Australia was identified as the most suitable time and place to hold *Creating Pathways*. All State and Territory funding agencies were approached for financial assistance, and five responded positively.

Ausdance employed a practising dance artist and current Dance Board Fellow, Wendy Morrow, as the project manager and program designer, and provided her with Ausdance National staff and office support for six months leading to the forum. Anne Dunn was employed to facilitate the forum itself.

In choosing the National Museum of Australia as the site for *Creating Pathways*, the organisers acknowledged the major role played by the NMA in the Indigenous and cultural affairs of Australia. The NMA offered extensive support for this project, including access to its many spaces, technical assistance and the advice and support of staff.

4. Follow Up and Future Actions

There has been an extremely positive response to the forum by participants, and agreement that it had the potential to influence future resources and the political landscape of Indigenous dance in Australia. Ausdance executive officers met the next day to consider the outcomes and to talk through future action. The generosity, sophistication of ideas and the goodwill of participants was particularly noted by Ausdance.

The following issues were identified as particular outcomes which Ausdance hopes to be able to facilitate at State/Territory levels:

Keep up human links and avoid resorting to yet another strategy of producing more papers. Facilitate gatherings and networking of

people at local level to enable links to continue. On a smaller scale, this could happen more frequently.

Keep an open and generous agenda – pick up on ideas and identify them as important to continue.

Help to develop cultural leadership models through people who attended *Creating Pathways*, and encourage feedback and debate in their wider communities. There were large sectors of communities who were not represented at the forum, and participant lists should be utilised to identify a broader constituency.

5. Ausdance Recommendations

Any funding remaining from *Creating Pathways* should be directed to forums in each State and Territory. *Creating Pathways* participants would be invited to prioritise actions emerging from the October event

Each State/Territory forum to select one person to represent them (to become part of a national reference group). The Australia Council to convene a further national meeting of these representatives to develop list of priorities and strategies for further action and resourcing

If a strategy such as the establishment of Indigenous dance officers in each State/Territory became a priority, identification of other funding sources – Regional and Country Arts, Australia Council Community Partnerships, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), philanthropy etc. – should be identified

Provide Ausdance memberships to each participant for one year to help with communication and advocacy

Develop special mentorship programs with eight to ten

established Indigenous dance artists, providing for emerging artists to develop leadership skills in communities. Identify the same number of younger emerging artists to work with a mentor of their choice. Identify existing models, e.g. in SA.

Begin a pilot study on regional artists' development by establishing a joint NT/SA regional dance development officer in Alice Springs to work with Ausdance SA and Ausdance NT to further the needs identified by *Creating Pathways*. Look at existing models and role descriptions, e.g. Access Arts.

These recommendations have been sent to the Australia Council and the Ausdance networks hopes to follow up with local forums in 2006.

We take this opportunity to thank all States and Territories that contributed to this landmark Indigenous dance forum, and look forward to your further participation in any follow-up activities.

Julie Dyson is the National Executive Officer of Ausdance

PATHS FOR ACTION – notes and recommendations

PLENARY SESSION REPORT BACK FROM GROUPS

Individual Artist Group

This group reported several points including:

Skills Development

Dance training doesn't prepare students to post tertiary pathways.

For example:

Joining professional companies and if you can't do that, how to survive

By secondments, working with performance groups, by coming to a laboratory environment

Business development skills, submission writing etc.

Maintaining body and mind

Building an alumni (a group of all former students) and a cyclic relationship with the people in that alumni.

Current funding models do not (a) provide holistic frameworks for development of work (b) provide long enough time frames

Asking the question 'What is contemporary Indigenous dance?'

Supporting diversity

Sourcing broader support including funding to make promotional material e.g. brochures, videos etc.

Artists in Community group

This group reported several points including:

What is important for artists working in community to be successful includes:

Communicating with elders

Relationships to youth, elders, everyone

Relating to young people in critical

Consultation with artists in developing an initial concept and budget

Having self-description as artist/educator

Bringing your history to the work

Deciding what balance there is between traditional and modern

Everyone needs to be involved.

Factors, which prevent artists working in community to be successful, include:

Lack of exposure of contemporary Indigenous dance to (a) Indigenous people (b) mainstream arts/community

No budgets for the period when artists are being introduced into the community

No recognition of professional status

Times where there is no community support.

The group reported there are issues that artists working in community may face including:

Non-Indigenous teachers implementing a kit of Indigenous material (e.g. Bangarra's eight-week kit)

No continuity of support for working with communities. E.g. artists may work with youth on a project but what happens after that ends?

Skills development for sole traders in arts businesses

Community consultation with those running local cultural activities.

Artists in Companies Group

This group reported that artists working in companies face many issues including:

Long term sustainability (e.g. project verse program funding)

Arts, cultural, business management

Accessing people who know (a) where to look for funding and (b) how to run a business

Lack of funding for community consultations

Public and political opinion and values need to change

The need for more Indigenous people at decision making levels- talking to people who understand us

Valuing ourselves.

The group talked about the following continuum:

Culture – Advocacy – Learning – Profession – Industry.

The actions the group recommended included:

Skills development (business, professional and cultural). Training as performers, and / or dance teachers and in a cultural + community context:

practical during training

mentoring

more and broader skills

laboratories

creating and maintaining an 'alumni' or list of the ex students of Indigenous dance teaching programs (such as but not limited to

NAISDA).

Post tertiary education alternatives:

developing more and broader skills

how to develop as an artist when not in a company environment

post institution support.

Support diversified new models

Attention to non-Indigenous dance teachers in schools attempting to deliver Indigenous content

Development and use of protocols, policies and procedures

Continuity of support and continuity of relationships with communities

Community consultation when running local programs

Long term stability

Creation of mechanisms to support increased critical debate about the nature of Indigenous dance

Audit of services provided by existing arts and cultural organisations

Identify funding opportunities to support Indigenous Dance Officers to provide support and connection and identify need

Identify sanctioned representatives from across the regions to consult and speak on behalf of the sector

Practitioners, companies and funding bodies should apply industry standards (e.g. pay rates)

Networking/Access to information and Regional dialogue:

support for local community connections

information sharing

central database.

Current funding models need to consider:

time frames that are long enough

support for the holistic process of producing new work

increasing the available resources

increasing the available funding dollars

models for pro-active solutions for sustainability of artists.

Working to change public and political opinion

Increased Indigenous participation in decision making

Valuing ourselves/accreditation/remuneration

Exploring the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and

Indigenous Affairs' (DIMIA) Women's program and Men's (to support women) program.

Group Debate about use of the term "Contemporary"

The group reported that use of words like contemporary, modern, traditional and classical are all western terms. What do westerners mean by them? Do Indigenous people have to, want to, need to use them?" Do we need to label ourselves?" Samantha Chalmers has written a paper about them.

There are other ways to distinguish dance, e.g. by geography (country family skin), the 'age' of the dance, and the content of the dance (e.g. Darwin bombing dance).

What distinguishes "maintaining" a dance and "teaching" it? This involves:

What is Contemporary Indigenous Dance?

Protocols, policies and procedures

Teaching of Indigenous Dance.

Teaching of Indigenous dance:

By non Indigenous teachers

Dealing with bureaucracy.

Working with communities:

Protocols, policies, procedures

Consultation.

Industry standards

Acknowledgement of "cultural specialists" in the training environment

Dancers as service providers

Increased options for mature artists.

Advocacy Group Report

This group reported that the main issue is the desire to maintain the networking, discussion, dialogue, importance and power of this group of artists.

The forum posed the questions of “who speaks for us” and “who brings together our voices?”

One option for the future could be a National Indigenous officer working with Ausdance to support, connect, and identify needs. The role would not necessarily need to be located in Canberra but would require a large travel budget. The group recognised the limitations for any one role. Irrespective of the options, there is a need for Ausdance to support local support for Indigenous artists.

One purpose is having an Indigenous dance festival and market, perhaps alongside the Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM).

The group reported that it is important to recognise the need to fight, to recognise the need to educate Ausdance field staff about the experience of Indigenous dancers, and the importance of political lobbying to influence politics.

Group suggestions included:

- Support for local community connections
- Indigenous artist market and dance festival
- Being aware and using our voice.

Strengths

Diversity of dancers and styles
National presence and critical mass of Indigenous dancers
Creative wealth of intellectual property and expertise

Opportunities

Weaknesses

Lack of funding support for:
dance companies / ensembles – dancer initiatives
residencies – bicultural commissions – collaborations
Recognition of the body of Indigenous dancers

Threats

Increase repertoire	Narrow focus on options available to mature artists e.g. dance education
Increase employment	Increasing unrealistic expectations for young people who won't be able to participate
Economic development	No employment strategy or career pathway defined by Indigenous dancers and supported by cultural agencies
Increased engagement in critical debate about what is Indigenous Dance	Inequity of cultural representation
Increased public representation of Indigenous dance	x64 non Indigenous cultural organizations
Dancers broker cultural dance programs for community service providers	x1 Indigenous dance company
	x2 Indigenous training companies

Professional Group

The group reported that this group did a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis. The group reported that one of many actions is to acknowledge that there are generations of dancers (not just high profile individuals).

Suggestions included establishment of a communications framework for the sector focusing on:

Sector networking

Information sharing and

Regional dialogues that provide support for local community connections

Central database knowing where the waterholes are and the tracks between them dancers / network / funding

Who does this and can we do it ourselves? Relevance of current organizations

Pro-active solutions for sustainability of artists (funding)

Ongoing gatherings for sharing and performing e.g. *I moves* in NT.

S.W.O.T.

Funding support was called for to support:
Dance companies / ensembles
Bicultural residencies
Commissions and collaborations
Dancer initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In reviewing the outcomes of *Creating Pathways*, the following suggestions will be pursued by Ausdance:

Ausdance agreed that when new staff and board members joined the organisation, they will be briefed about the integrated service offered by the network at national and State/Territory levels

Ausdance will allocate time in strategic plans, which acknowledge the need for Indigenous dancers contribution and participation

Ausdance will improve awareness and advocacy at all levels of the organisation so that national projects and initiatives are acknowledged in strategic plans as value-adding to programs and services, and providing a uniquely integrated professional approach at all levels of the dance profession

Keep up human links – don't resort to yet another strategy of

producing more papers. Facilitate gatherings of people at local level and enable links to continue. On a smaller scale, this can happen more frequently

Keep an open and generous agenda – pick up on ideas and identify them as important to continue. Drop away some of the methodologies and get to outcomes

Help to develop cultural leadership models through people who attended *Creating Pathways*, and encourage feedback and debate in their wider communities. There were large sectors of communities who were not represented at the forum, and participant lists should be utilised to identify a broader constituency. Ausdance National had developed a broader database which would continue to be updated and shared with the network.

CREATING PATHWAYS PARTICIPANTS

Diat Alferink	Mitchell Park	SA
Nikki Ashby	Mt Waverley	VIC
Sermsah Bin Saad	Mosman	WA
Raymond Blanco	Fortitude Valley	QLD
Phil Yubbagurri Brown	Banks	ACT
Phil Callaghan	Adelaide	SA
Sarah Calver	Darwin	NT
Li-anne Carroll	Perth	WA
Samantha Chalmers	Casurina	NT
Lee Christofis	Melbourne	VIC
Danny Doyle	Capalaba	QLD
Fiona Doyle	Capalaba	QLD
Roslyn Dundas	Canberra	ACT
Julie Dyson	Canberra	ACT
Jeanette Fabila	Waterford	QLD
Tamara Forester	Dutton Park	QLD
Jasmine Gulash	Walsh Bay	NSW
Deon Hastie	Adelaide	SA

Juliette Hubbard	Wulagi	NT
Marcus Hughes	Brisbane	QLD
Rachael Jennings	Canberra	ACT
Kerry Johnson	Alexandria	NSW
Rayma Johnson	Alexandria	NSW
Lewis Lampton	Katherine	NT
Garry Lang	Wagaman	NT
Lynette Lewis	Alice Springs	NT
Bronwyn Liddle	Parkdale	VIC
Gail Mabo	Townsville	QLD
Patrick McClosky	Tennant Creek	NT
Marilyn Miller	Coorparoo	QLD
Peggy Misi	Manoora	QLD
Djakapurra Munyarryun	Gove	NT
Dennis Newie	Thursday Island	QLD
Kath Papas	Melbourne	VIC
Sharman Parsons	Maryvale	QLD
Pauline Pearce	St Clair	NSW
Dalisa Pigram	Broome	WA
Jason Pitt		NSW
Rita Pryce	Manoora	QLD
Mariaa Randall	Casino	NSW
Penny Stannard	Sydney	NSW
Smilar Sinak	Sydney	NSW
Monica Stevens	Manoora	QLD
Simon Stewart	Hilton	WA
Rachael Wallis	Nhulunby	NT
Leigh Warren	Adelaide	SA
Hartley Williams	Haymarket	NSW

The report from *Creating Pathways* the National Indigenous Dance Forum held 27 to 30 October 2005 at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra includes:

Overview - Lydia Miller

Dance Forum Editorial – Marilyn Miller

Keynote Speech – Raymond Blanco
Reflection – Monica D Stevens
The Creating Pathways program
The Ausdance report – Julie Dyson
Paths for action coming out of the event
The database of participants
Main issues, which emerged, had three essential elements or themes:
o Culture
o Skills development
o Professional networking.

Follow Up and Future Actions

These issues were identified by Ausdance to facilitate at State/Territory levels:

- Keep up human links and avoid resorting to producing more papers. Facilitate gatherings and networking of people at local level to enable links to continue. On a smaller scale, this could happen more frequently.
- Keep an open and generous agenda – pick up on ideas and identify them as important to continue.
- Help to develop cultural leadership models through people who attended *Creating Pathways*, and encourage feedback and debate in their wider communities.

Ausdance Recommendations

- Funding remaining from *Creating Pathways* should be directed to forums in each State and Territory. *Creating Pathways* participants would be invited to prioritise actions emerging from the October event
- Each State/Territory forum to select one person to represent them (to become part of a national reference group). The Australia Council to convene a further national meeting of these representatives to develop list of priorities and strategies for further action and resourcing
- If a strategy such as the establishment of Indigenous dance officers in each State/Territory became a priority, identify other funding sources
- Provide Ausdance memberships to each participant for one year to help with communication and advocacy
- Develop special mentorship programs with eight to ten established Indigenous dance artists, providing for emerging artists to develop leadership skills in communities. Identify the same number of younger emerging artists to work with a mentor of their choice. Identify existing models, e.g. in SA.
- Begin a pilot study on regional artists' development by establishing a joint NT/SA regional dance development officer in Alice Springs to work with Ausdance SA and Ausdance NT to further the needs identified by *Creating*

Pathways. Look at existing models and role descriptions, e.g. Access Arts.

PATHS FOR ACTION – notes and recommendations

PLENARY SESSION REPORT BACK FROM GROUPS

Individual Artist Group

This group reported several points including:

1. Skills Development
2. Dance training doesn't prepare students to post tertiary pathways. For example:
 - Joining professional companies and if you can't do that, how to survive
 - By secondments, working with performance groups, by coming to a laboratory environment
 - Business development skills, submission writing etc.
 - Maintaining body and mind
 - Building an alumni (a group of all former students) and a cyclic relationship with the people in that alumni.
3. Current funding models do not (a) provide holistic frameworks for development of work (b) provide long enough time frames
4. Asking the question 'What is contemporary Indigenous dance?'
5. Supporting diversity
6. Sourcing broader support including funding to make promotional material e.g. brochures, videos etc.

Artists in Community group

This group reported several points including:

What is important for artists working in community to be successful includes:

- o Communicating with elders
- o Relationships to youth, elders, everyone
- o Relating to young people in critical
- o Consultation with artists in developing an initial concept and budget
- o Having self-description as artist/educator
- o Bringing your history to the work
- o Deciding what balance there is between traditional and modern
- o Everyone needs to be involved.

Factors, which prevent artists working in community to be successful, include:

- o Lack of exposure of contemporary Indigenous dance to (a) Indigenous people (b) mainstream arts/community
- o No budgets for the period when artists are being introduced into the community

- o No recognition of professional status
- o Times where there is no community support.

The group reported there are issues that artists working in community may face including:

- o Non-Indigenous teachers implementing a kit of Indigenous material (e.g. Bangarra's eight-week kit)
- o No continuity of support for working with communities. E.g. artists may work with youth on a project but what happens after that ends?
- o Skills development for sole traders in arts businesses
- o Community consultation with those running local cultural activities.

Artists in Companies Group

This group reported that artists working in companies face many issues including:

- Long-term sustainability (e.g. project verse program funding)
- Arts, cultural, business management
- Accessing people who know (a) where to look for funding and (b) how to run a business
- Lack of funding for community consultations
- Public and political opinion and values need to change
- The need for more Indigenous people at decision making levels-talking to people who understand us
- Valuing ourselves.

The group talked about the following continuum:

Culture – Advocacy – Learning – Profession – Industry.

The actions the group recommended included:

- Skills development (business, professional and cultural). Training as performers, and / or dance teachers and in a cultural + community context:
 - o practical during training
 - o mentoring
 - o more and broader skills
 - o laboratories
 - o creating and maintaining an 'alumni' or list of the ex students of Indigenous dance teaching programs (such as but not limited to NAISDA).
- Post tertiary education alternatives:
 - o developing more and broader skills
 - o how to develop as an artist when not in a company environment
 - o post institution support.
- Support diversified new models
- Attention to non-Indigenous dance teachers in schools attempting to deliver Indigenous content

- Development and use of protocols, policies and procedures
- Continuity of support and continuity of relationships with communities
- Community consultation when running local programs
- Long term stability
- Creation of mechanisms to support increased critical debate about the nature of Indigenous dance
- Audit of services provided by existing arts and cultural organisations
- Identify funding opportunities to support Indigenous Dance Officers to provide support and connection and identify need
- Identify sanctioned representatives from across the regions to consult and speak on behalf of the sector
- Practitioners, companies and funding bodies should apply industry standards (e.g. pay rates)
- Networking/Access to information and Regional dialogue:
 - o support for local community connections
 - o information sharing
 - o central database.
- Current funding models need to consider:
 - o time frames that are long enough
 - o support for the holistic process of producing new work
 - o increasing the available resources
 - o increasing the available funding dollars
 - o models for pro-active solutions for sustainability of artists.
- Working to change public and political opinion
- Increased Indigenous participation in decision making
- Valuing ourselves/accreditation/remuneration
- Exploring the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs' (DIMIA) Women's program and Men's (to support women) program.

Group Debate about use of the term “Contemporary”

The group reported that use of words like contemporary, modern, traditional and classical are all western terms. What do westerners mean by them? Do Indigenous people have to, want to, need to use them?” Do we need to label ourselves?”

Samantha Chalmers has written a paper about them.

There are other ways to distinguish dance, e.g. by geography (country family skin), the ‘age’ of the dance, and the content of the dance (e.g. Darwin bombing dance).

What distinguishes “maintaining” a dance and “teaching” it? This involves:

1. What is Contemporary Indigenous Dance?
2. Protocols, policies and procedures
3. Teaching of Indigenous Dance.

Teaching of Indigenous dance:

- By non Indigenous teachers
- Dealing with bureaucracy.

Working with communities:

- Protocols, policies, procedures
- Consultation.
- Industry standards
- Acknowledgement of “cultural specialists” in the training environment
- Dancers as service providers
- Increased options for mature artists.

Advocacy Group Report

This group reported that the main issue is the desire to maintain the networking, discussion, dialogue, importance and power of this group of artists.

The forum posed the questions of “who speaks for us” and “who brings together our voices?”

One option for the future could be a National Indigenous officer working with Ausdance to support, connect, and identify needs. The role would not necessarily need to be located in Canberra but would require a large travel budget. The group recognised the limitations for any one role. Irrespective of the options, there is a need for Ausdance to support local support for Indigenous artists.

One purpose is having an Indigenous dance festival and market, perhaps alongside the Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM).

The group reported that it is important to recognise the need to fight, to recognise the need to educate Ausdance field staff about the experience of Indigenous dancers, and the importance of political lobbying to influence politics.

Group suggestions included:

- Support for local community connections
- Indigenous artist market and dance festival
- Being aware and using our voice.

Professional Group

The group reported that this group did a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis. The group reported that one of many actions is to acknowledge that there are generations of dancers (not just high profile individuals).

Suggestions included establishment of a communications framework for the sector focusing on:

- Sector networking

- Information sharing and
- Regional dialogues that provide support for local community connections
- Central database knowing where the waterholes are and the tracks between them dancers / network / funding
- Who does this and can we do it ourselves? Relevance of current organizations
- Pro-active solutions for sustainability of artists (funding)
- Ongoing gatherings for sharing and performing e.g. *I moves* in NT.

