

MELBOURNE FESTIVAL

8-23 OCT
2010

AUSTRALIA

World Premiere

JACK CHARLES V THE CROWN

Starring
Jack Charles

Presented by Melbourne International Arts Festival
and Ilbjerri Theatre Company

the Arts Centre, Fairfax Studio

Tue 12 – Sat 16 Oct at 7.45pm
Sat 16 & Sun 17 Oct at 2pm

1hr 10min no interval

Photos: Bindi Cole

WARNING: Adult Concepts, Coarse Language,
Drug Imagery

www.ilbjerri.org.au
www.melbournefestival.com.au

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Credits

Based on the life of Uncle Jack Charles and spoken in his own words

Co-writers Jack Charles, John Romeril

Director Rachael Maza Long

Dramaturge John Romeril

Script Consultant Melanie Beddie

Set & Costume Designer Emily Barrie

Lighting Designer Danny Pettingill

Musical Director Nigel MacLean

Guitar & Violin Nigel MacLean

Percussion Phil Collings

Bass Mal Beveridge

Audio Visual Designer Peter Worland

Production Manager Bronwyn Dunston

Stage Manager Ashley Groenen

Bastardy footage courtesy of Film Camp, Amiel Courtin-Wilson, Ghost, Film Victoria and Filmfest Ltd

We would like to show our respect and acknowledge the Traditional owners of the land we gather on today: the Woiworrung/Wurundjeri, Boonewrung, Taungurong, Djajawurrung and Wathaurung that make up the Kulin Nation. We pay respect to their Ancestors and Elders and to any Elders that may be with us here today.

ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY would also like to give a big shout out to:

Everyone at Melbourne International Arts Festival, Phillipa Campey, Amiel Courtin-Wilson & the whole *Bastardy* mob, Lia P'apa'a & the incredible Mumgu Dahl Students, Sophie Milne, Northcote Pottery Supplies, Vicki Cousins & The Koorie Heritage Trust, Glenn Elston & The Australian Shakespeare Company, St Martins Youth Arts Centre, Alex Jarvis & Lucy Lawson, Terry Dean, Rod McNichol, Phil McNamara, Rodney Bolt, David Field, Tom Long, and everyone, both past and present, who has made the telling of this story possible.

Ilbijerri Theatre Company is supported by Australia Council, Australian Government Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Arts Victoria, the City of Melbourne and Arts House



ARTS HOUSE

With assistance from Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, Une Parkinson Foundation and Department of Justice



ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY

Artistic Director Rachael Maza Long

General Manager John Harvey

Office Co-ordinator Shauna Maguire

Finance Manager John Paxinos

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Angela Clarke (Vice President), Frances Bond

(Treasurer), Rosie Smith (Secretary), Jirrah Harvey,

bryan Andy

Biographies

UNCLE JACK CHARLES WRITER, PERFORMER

Born in 1943 Jack Charles was well and truly a child of the Stolen Generations. He spent many of his formative years in the boys' homes of Melbourne, which he took on with his usual laconic outlook.

"It was alright by me – I was happy to assimilate. The only trouble was I wasn't ever going to fit in. I'm fucking brown mate."

In 1971 he founded the first Aboriginal theatre company Nindethana and has performed with

the cream of Australia's actors and directors including Geoffrey Rush, Neil Armfield, John Romeril and Tracey Moffat.

His work has spanned feature films, TV series and hundreds of plays including *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, *Bedevil*, *Ben Hall*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Most recently, he was the subject of Amiel Courtin-Wilson's award-winning documentary *Bastardy*, and was awarded the prestigious Tudawali Award at the Message Sticks Festival in 2009, honouring his lifetime contribution to Indigenous media.

A Note from Jack

Shortly after the screening of a 56 minute version of my documentary, *Bastardy*, on the ABC, I started to receive, almost immediately, feedback from a number of sources... testament that my story had hit that 'sweet spot' in the minds and hearts of ordinary viewers, here in Melbourne and nationwide.

It had impressed so many people, from all walks of life, that many were urged to contact me by phone or postcard, others content to wait for a chance meet, face to face. On the streets, on a tram, bus, or train... each one practically falling arse over tit to engage, talk and thank me for the experience. I thoroughly enjoy the rapport and support offered by complete strangers, and understand and honour their reaching out to me.

It came as no surprise when Rachael Maza Long, the Artistic Director for Ilbijjerri, rang to talk about taking my story to its rightful place – the stage, the theatre. The mob at Ilbijjerri were always aware of the rise in my profile and standing in the performing arts arena, so it wasn't long before I got the call to arms from Rachael and Ilbijjerri – Bold Black 'n' Brilliant!

Rachael had roped in my old friend from the Pram Factory days, John Romeril to be my dramaturge. T'was easy to re-connect to the man who'd written the original play, *Bastardy*... I expect we'll do even better this time round.

This is one very important piece of theatre that I am so anxious and ready to do. I reckon that people from the arts and performing industries have come to the realisation that I will be sharing the writing with Romeril, writing a couple of the monologues myself, and performing clean, without any giggle-juice or drugs to enhance my presence on stage.

Jack Charles V The Crown is the culmination of years of frustration and rejection from bureaucracy, both black and white. This is a timely, necessary journey we at Ilbijjerri undertake in the national interest. I don't want to, and won't, be giving too much info 'bout 'the crown show' – don't want to let the cat out of the bag! But if you wanna know what *Bastardy* did for me, I suggest you sit back and enjoy the show.

JOHN ROMERIL **WRITER, DRAMATURGE**

Born in 1945, John Romeril began writing plays in the late 1960s while a student at Monash University. He was a founding member of the Australian Performing Group at the Pram Factory during the 1970s, writing nearly 40 plays for them. They included the greatly acclaimed *The Floating World*, which earned him the Literature Board's inaugural Canada-Australia Award in 1975. He is also remembered for other works from the 1970s, such as *Marvellous Melbourne*, *The Dudders* and *The Accidental Poke*.

Romeril's recent works include the script for the film *One Night the Moon* and the stage plays *Miss Tanaka* and *Love Suicides*. *One Night the Moon*, a 2001 Australian music drama, gained both cinema and television release. *Miss Tanaka*, based on a short story by Xavier Herbert, was the writer's last major play in Melbourne. He transplanted its setting from Darwin to Broome as a salute to Noriko Nishimoto, the Perth-based Japanese puppeteer who was a key collaborator on the script.

Other recent work has been as dramaturge for Kamarra Bell-Wyke's *Chopped Liver*, a play about Hepatitis C produced by Ilbjerri Theatre Company. After touring Aboriginal health centres, community centres and prisons in regional Victoria and South Australia last year it has been touring other states.

Over a 40-year career as a dramatist, Romeril has produced nearly 80 works for stage, film and television, including satirical, musical and humorous drama. His theatrical approach retains an improvisational element, is collaborative in style and is responsive to a wide range of social issues. In the 1980s and 1990s his involvement in live theatre concentrated on musical drama with *History of Australia: the Musical*, *Jonah*, *Legends* and *The Kelly Dance* among his significant works.

John Romeril's work has been consistently performed at all levels of theatre: state, company, community and educational. His plays have also been translated and performed in Japan, Vietnam, Italy and elsewhere.

RACHAEL MAZA LONG **DIRECTOR**

Rachael Maza Long is the Artistic Director of Ilbjerri Theatre Company. She is well known as a television presenter on SBS's *ICAM* and ABC's *Message Stick*, and for her stunning performances in *Radiance* and *The Sapphires*.

Most recently, in her role at Ilbjerri Theatre Company, she has directed *Jacky Jacky in the box* (Federation Square 2009, Melbourne Museum 2010), *A Black Sheep Walks into a Baa...* and *Black Sheep: Glorious Bastards* (Melbourne International Comedy Festival 2009 & 2010) and *Chopped Liver* (National tours 2008 & 2009).

She performs regularly with her sister Lisa in the duo 'The Maza Sisters', and together they wrote and performed in the highly successful theatre production *Sisters of Gelam*, which premiered in Melbourne in 2009.

ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY

Ilbjerri (pronounced 'il BIDGE er ree') is a Woiwurrung word meaning Coming Together for Ceremony.

Ilbjerri Theatre Company is the longest existing Indigenous theatre company in Australia. Since commissioning and producing Jane Harrison's renowned classic *Stolen* in 1992, the company has toured nationally and internationally, finding critical acclaim and resonance with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2010, Ilbjerri is poised on the edge of an immensely exciting new era of Indigenous theatre – where the journey is one of discovery and the rules are simple: be BOLD, BLACK, and BRILLIANT.

A Note from Writer John Romeril

Looking at Roy Grounds Fort, river-side of the water-curtain entrance, aka the 'Fish Monger's Gate', you couldn't miss it. Advertising its *Photography and Time* exhibition, the National Gallery of Victoria had slung a huge banner on its front wall.

It was a blown-up version of one of Rod McNichol's photographic portraits of Jack Charles, part of a '7-up' style series Rod's been making, catching Jack and other Melbourne identities in their 30s, 40s, 50s and so on.

An icon on an icon, for three long months a 25-foot high Jack Charles loomed large over St Kilda Rd. Meanwhile the award-winning feature length documentary Amiel Courtin-Wilson made with Jack in the noughties had secured a long cinema release, was screened by the ABC, and remains out and about on DVD.

A hard act to follow? Co-fashion a show as huge as the life this man's led; make it as luminous, as haunting, as Rod's portraits, Amiel's doco, and the NGV's banner. Am I anxious re Jack Charles v *The Crown*? Of

course, my next has to be up with my best or I'm cactus!

Thankfully I have some prior form. Based on elements of his life I wrote *Bastardy* for Jack in 1972. The Australian Performing Group did it at the Pram Factory and Amiel paid me the compliment of re-cycling the title for his doco. I wrote a second vehicle for Jack in the early '90s. Elements of his life and character again were central to *Going Thru*, the gist being a jail-tale he told me when I visited him in Castlemaine.

What calms my nerves however is knowing what a dynamite performer (and writer) Jack is.

Here I call on Bill Hunter who terms Jack "a one or two-take man". If you're across film financing, you'll appreciate how on the money Jack must be to earn a rap like that. I cite also Neil Armfield. Jack is "one of Australia's great original artists".

If he can't make anything I pen look good I must need God as a mate.



A Note from Director Rachael Maza Long

Having grown up in theatre, I have known Uncle Jack for most of my life, and have long admired his work. It seems therefore most fitting that I should work with him now, all these years later. His is the generation that started Black Theatre in this country, paving the way for those of my generation to follow (Uncle Jack, along with my father Bob Maza, established Australia's first Aboriginal Theatre Company, Nindethana, in Melbourne in 1972).

It is through theatre that I have learnt the true history of this country, history that was never taught in the school books. It is this early theatre that inspired who I am today, inspiring in me the passion to continue to tell the stories that need to be told.

One of my earliest memories in the theatre was at the Sydney Opera House: a scene in which two fully clad early 19th century soldiers entered, carrying between them a fully naked 'Bennelong' (a young Jack Charles) to centre downstage, his feet dangling above the floor....

After seeing the phenomenal documentary *Bastardy*, I was inspired to bring Jack's story to the stage, knowing what a brilliant actor he was. The opportunity arose to get him in for a script

reading. (I was aware he was getting on in years and it seemed wise to see how he was fairing). He was incredible! Every word danced off the page with those deep rich resonant melodic tones – as if he had created the words himself, in that moment. A master of the spoken word. My decision to pursue this story was set in stone in that moment.

Jack's story is not dissimilar to many other Aboriginal people who were victims of past Government policies. He was stolen from his family at three months and placed in a boys' home, where he would endure years of abuse. He then spent the majority of his adult years doing 'burgs' and 'doing time' to feed his addiction. There is no doubt in my mind that all of this got in the way of what would have been a truly brilliant career on stage and screen.

Melbourne born and bred, a true Gentleman, generous in spirit, warm of heart, sharp of wit... Jack Charles is a true Elder!

It is such a great honour and privilege to work so closely and intimately with one of Australia's great living legends. A special thanks to Uncle Jack for his incredible generosity in sharing his story.

20 Years: Bold. Black. Brilliant Ilbjerri Theatre Company: A Retrospective

Ilbjerri Theatre Company is proud to celebrate its 20th anniversary by coming together with Bunjilaka at Melbourne Museum to present an exhibition of its achievements as the longest running Indigenous theatre company in Australia.

Curated by Ben McKeown, the exhibition features elements of production sets, props, costumes and photography from throughout the company's rich and unique history.

The exhibition runs until 7 November 2010

Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre
Melbourne Museum, Nicholson Street Carlton

Open 10am – 5pm daily.
Adults \$8, Children and Concession FREE

The celebration continues with VIPAS 2010!
Join us as we glam up, groove out and celebrate all things Bold, Black and Brilliant.
Go to www.ilbjerri.com.au for more details.