

Arts Centre Melbourne present

MEREMERE

Relaxed Performance Visual Story





Wominjeka yearmann koondē biik Wurundjeri balluk. Welcome to the land of the Wurundjeri people.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we gather and meet, the Wurundjeri, Woi-Wurrung people, and pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

We acknowledge the Taangata Whenua of Aotearoa, and their Elders, past and present.

Me Mahi Tahi Taatou mo te Oranga o te Katoa.

We shall work together for the wellbeing of everyone.

We wish to extend our respect and acknowledgement to First Nations Elders across Australia and the First Nations artists who come together as part of this program.

Welcome / Wominjeka / Tēnā koutou

Alter State is a celebration of disability, creativity and culture.

Co-presented by Arts Centre Melbourne and Arts Access Victoria, Alter State is a major arts and disability event engaging artists and audiences across Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Seeding something unique for arts and disability, the Alter State 2022 festival program invites audiences to gather, be curious, and connect with disabled artists across a range of in person and online events.

[Alter State runs
12 September – 9 October 2022.](#)

Welcome To Arts Centre Melbourne

Relaxed Performance

All performances of Meremere at Alter State are relaxed performances. Relaxed performances are designed to present a show or event in a way that may be friendlier to those with sensory sensitivities and a variety of other disabilities that may not find the social rules around attending the theatre accessible.

All audience members are encouraged to move, stim, pace and/or make noise during performance in whatever manner helps you to best enjoy the show. We also encourage you to bring and use your own stim toys, headphones or anything else that will help with self-regulating.

Audience capacity will be reduced and all tickets will be general admission, which means you can decide your seat on the day of the performance. If you prefer to have your seats selected for you, please ask an usher who can recommend seats and take you to them.

If you need to take a break, such as for decompression and self-regulation, then quiet spaces are available.

For this Relaxed Performance season of Meremere at Arts Centre Melbourne the theatre doors will remain open, there will be additional lighting in the aisles and at the entry points to the theatre throughout the performance. You can leave the venue at any time during the performance if required. You can view a live video stream of the show in a space near the theatre, if you wish.

Contact

If you would like any additional information in the lead up to your visit, please contact Arts Centre Melbourne on 1300 182 183 during business hours or email tickets@artscentremelbourne.com.au

This visual story has been developed in collaboration with writer Artermis Munoz.

This relaxed performance season has been made possible by the generous support of Anne and Mark Robertson OAM.

The Production

Meremere combines monologue, dance, music and projection to weave a tapestry of stories from the life of Rodney Bell | Ngāti Maniapoto.

It touches on moments from his exceptional journey through international dance, through homelessness to his homecoming and reconnection with whānau and whenua in Aotearoa (New Zealand).

All shows are Auslan Interpreted, Audio Described, available for live captioning by mobile device and Tactile Tours are offered.

Venue

This production of Meremere will be performed at the Fairfax Studio, which is inside Arts Centre Melbourne. The Fairfax Studio is wheelchair accessible and fitted with assistive hearing technology.

Length

Meremere runs for one hour with no interval.

Age Recommendation

Meremere is designed for adults, but we have performed to all ages. We recommend this show for ages 8+. You are encouraged to review warnings and talk to staff in order to assess appropriateness of content.

Content Warnings

- This event will be filmed for broadcast.
- While there is no strobe light, Meremere has extensive use of light and projection, including moving and flickering lights, and haze effects (smoke).
- Meremere contains spoken dialogue and has a continuous soundtrack of live and recorded music that includes loud noises, overlapping voices, electronic drum beats, harmonica and amplified vocals and guitar.
- There are some moments of audience participation within this show, but involvement is entirely voluntary.

- The themes of Meremere draw from Rodney Bell's life experiences, which include times of hardship, homelessness and violence. Rodney discusses his life with an optimistic tone and gentle reflection, so while the topics may potentially be distressing to some people, they are not dwelled upon at length. The show also contains strong language.
- For more information about this content, please read the detailed summary further in this Visual Story.

Theatre Guidelines

- Face masks are strongly recommended indoors.
- Photography is not permitted during the performance. Mobile devices (i.e. iPads) are permitted to be used for live captioning and to assist with communication – please inform the ushers or ask for assistance. It's always fine to use a device in the foyer or quiet areas.

- During the Relaxed Performance, a relaxed attitude is taken to movement, noise and eating/drinking in the auditorium (this is okay).
- You are welcome to bring in and use any headphones, sunglasses and stimming devices/fidget toys.
- If you need to take a break during the show, you are welcome to come out of the theatre and make use of the space in the Amcor Lounge off the Fairfax Studio Foyer, or one of the Quiet Spaces up the corridor near the lifts on Level 3. Trained staff are available to assist as required.
- At the end of the show, we ask you to join us in a Deaf clap, by waving your hands in the air, as some audience members find clapping hands together really uncomfortable.

Photography

Photographs of Arts Centre Melbourne by Kate Disher-Quill, Mark Gambiano and Jason Lau. Photographs of Meremere by Vanessa Rushton.

Venue Information

Meremere is being performed at the Fairfax Studio, one of the three theatres within Arts Centre Melbourne's Theatres Building. It's the building on St Kilda Road with the spire on it.





Entering The Theatres Building

When you arrive you will most likely enter via the foyer on street level of St Kilda Road or via the Arts Centre Melbourne car park.

If entering from St Kilda Road, proceed through any of the glass doors. The automatic doors on the far left are recommended for wheelchair users. If entering from the car park, you will move through a hallway to the Smorgon Family Plaza. This is a large foyer on Level 5 of the building, one floor below street level.

In the foyer areas you might encounter other people who are coming in to see shows. As audiences arrive, the areas this guide is about to describe can get crowded. If this might be a challenge for you, we recommend arriving earlier to give yourself some more time, bringing items with you like headphones or stim toys that may assist you and/or asking staff if you can access a quiet space before the show.

Trained staff are available to assist if required – this includes ushers who wear black uniforms, and it's their job to make getting around the venue as easy as possible. Alter State ushers can also be found at an information desk located to the right of the doors on the street level – they wear purple t-shirts and can help you with access information.

If you need assistance upon arrival, you can also contact our staff by phoning (03) 9281 8298 or (03) 9281 8196.





Find Your Way

After entering the Arts Centre Melbourne street-level foyer, head across to the lifts, which you will find directly to the right of the Australian Music Vault. If you arrived from the car park, go through the Smorgon Family Plaza to a ramp to find the lifts. Take them down to Level 3. There are some moving images and beeping sounds in these lifts. When you reach Level 3, turn to your left and take the first corridor – it will lead you directly to the the Fairfax Studio. There are signs that can help you find your way if you feel disorientated.

If you prefer, you can use the escalator and stairs to take you through the street level foyer and the Smorgon Family Plaza down to Level 3 – there are several flights of stairs needed to navigate these areas.

On Level 3 is the Fairfax Studio Foyer, a purple carpeted area with some mirrored pillars. This is the standard area to wait before the show. Ushers will let you know when it is time to move into the theatre and give you further instructions about the best way to find your seat.

The nearest accessible toilets can be found opposite the lifts on Level 3, and more can be found on Levels 5, 6 and 8. Please ask an usher if you need directions.

Seating

When doors to the theatre are open, you are welcome to head inside and take your seat. The inside of the Fairfax Studio has red carpets and seats which are arranged in curves, with each row from the entrance a little lower than the last until you reach the stage. For many of the rows you will need to take stairs downwards.

This event has no allocated seats, meaning you can choose to experience the show from wherever works best for you. If you prefer to have your seats selected for you, please ask an usher who can recommend seats and take you to them.

If you need Auslan interpretation and/or prefer to be where the interpreters are, please find our Front of House staff before the show and ask them for recommendations. We will also have an Auslan interpreter before the show to assist with this.

Accessible wheelchair spaces are available in the Fairfax Studio and can be selected during the online booking process. You can also book a wheelchair to use during your visit free of charge. For events at the Fairfax Studio there are designated locations where you can transfer out of a wheelchair into a theatre seat. To book either of these services please call 1300 182 183 or email tickets@artscentremelbourne.com.au.



During The Performance

Meremere will go for about 60 minutes. There is no interval but if you need to take a break during the show you can leave your seat and come out to the foyer area. You can do this whenever you need to. The ushers will be around to help you find your way around the venue if needed. Feel free to speak to them if you have any questions.

Near the Fairfax Studio Foyer, to the right-hand side of the bar and along the wall, is a room labelled Amcor Lounge. If you want to leave the theatre, you can use this space at any point to view a live video feed of Meremere. This space is visually stimulating, with a backlit wall containing 464,000 marbles and 2,300 individual objects donated during the 1990s. There are also three-dimensional (3D) paintings that are fascinating to look at, but are not for touching.



Quiet Spaces

Quiet Spaces are located down the corridor to the left of the Amcor Lounge. Once you have exited this corridor, pass the lifts and accessible toilets to find three mirrored doors. The first door is locked, and the second door on the left, which says 'Suite 2' on it, is a Solo Quiet Space. If the door is closed, please do not disturb the person using the space, but if it is open you are welcome to the space yourself if you would like to be alone. The next door to the left, which says 'Suite 3' on it, is a Shared Quiet Space.

You can use this space along with any others who may need it.

The Quiet Spaces have comfortable bean bags, cushions, armchairs and gentle lighting so you can relax away from the theatre if you want to. You can return to the Fairfax Studio and watch the rest of the show whenever you feel ready. If you need assistance, you can also use the telephones that are located in these rooms.



About The Performance

Meremere is an artist's journey that explores connections with time, land, and people. Rodney draws strength and resilience from his Māori culture, family and identity. It looks closely at moments from Rodney's life and discusses disability, ableism, homelessness, dance and the process of being displaced from one's home and later returning. Birth and death are mentioned and Rodney describes in detail some situations that could have ended with his death and/or injury but did not.

There is also optional material that may cover some of the following content: police violence – including a head injury; interpersonal aggression and violence – including a stabbing; a building fire, food scarcity, a car accident, discussions of alcohol and other drugs. Only one of these stories is told in each performance. While the content may deal with some heavy topics, Rodney shares his stories with empathy for all involved.

Meremere is a highly audio-visual experience with a nearly constant soundtrack and extensive use of light and projection, including moving and flickering lights, loud noises, overlapping voices and electronic drum beats. There is a portion of music played live on the harmonica by Rodney, and he is joined throughout the whole of the show by Jol Mulholland, who performs live vocals and guitar.

There are some moments of voluntary audience participation, one of which you can join in from your seat and another where a volunteer is brought on stage and given objects to interact with. All of these are entirely optional so you do not have to participate if you don't want to. Much of the show is addressed to the audience and Rodney may attempt to make eye-contact with members of the audience. You are in no way expected to meet this or to behave in any particular way.

Performers

The main performer of Meremere is Rodney Bell. Rodney is a 51 year old Māori man. During the show he wears sleeveless shirts and dual-tone pants and his long dark hair is tied back. He sits and dances in a titanium wheelchair.

Before Rodney begins his story, Tūi Matira Ranipiri-Ransfield will present a waerea – a protective incantation that clears any obstructions and acknowledges Rodney's mana. Tūi is the Mātanga Mātauranga Māori/Kuikui (Specialist/Expert Māori Knowledge and Wisdom) / Indigenous Cultural Advisor for Meremere. She will step out of the audience to call.

Jolyon Mulholland performs music live throughout the whole of Meremere. He'll be set up with a sound desk, keyboard and computer to the side of the stage. Jol and Rodney work very closely throughout the performance in response to each other.

Joining Rodney on stage for part of the show is guest dancer Brydie Colquhoun – she will be wearing a dark long-sleeved top and tight pants with a black, white and grey pattern.



The Stage

The stage is set up in a diamond shape on a white floor. There are two tall panels that run along the far sides of the diamond made of paper. There are scrunched up pieces of this fabric along the bottom edge of these panels, where they meet the floor. At the far corner of the diamond, the panels do not meet, creating a gap through which the performer is able to enter and exit. During the performance, shadows, video, and animated lighting effects are projected against the panels and the floor.

Against the wall between the panels is a wooden statue. The eyes of the figure are made from paua shell that can sometimes appear to light up if the lighting hits them in a particular way. The statue is called a Tekoteko. This is a wooden carving of a human form, highly stylised, around 40cm tall. The Tekoteko are used in Māori whares – often located on the gables of houses, or around villages and sometimes represent guardian spirits.



Show Details

The following portion of the guide goes into detail about the sights, sounds and story you will experience whilst attending Meremere. If you would like these things to remain a surprise you are welcome to skip this portion of the guide.

Ceremony

Tuī Matira Ranipiri-Ransfield will walk out of the audience to present a traditional Maori song, a call that will clear the energy of the space to make it ready for Rodney's performance.



Introduction

The show begins with a pre-recorded voice-over of Rodney sharing his memories of returning to his hometown in Aotearoa after a period of homelessness in San Francisco, USA. Rodney talks about carving a Meremere and being reminded of sacrifice. A Meremere is a Māori weapon made from wood – the wood Rodney used is black maire, which is very hard.

The soundscape begins at a pulsating drone, guitar sounds eventually join in as the pulsing quickens and intensifies – eventually turning to a distorted bassy rumble and a wet clicking sound.

Rectangles of light move around the space bringing different parts of it into focus and at times changing from white to red and back to white. This can be fast at times.

In isolated sections of light Rodney holds out objects: A paddle of flat wood, a long thick stick (rakau), a short Māori weapon (patu) and some feathers that he lets fall to the floor where they will sit for the rest of the show.

Rodney moves forward with the stick. He picks up a microphone and speaks. Any time Rodney speaks live and not pre-recorded he will speak into this microphone. He says "Sound stops when I do this" and slams the stick on the floor. The sound design makes a loud noise. Light fills the space.

Dancing like before

Distorted music with digital percussion in the soundtrack.

Rodney performs a dance that recalls the choreography from previous shows he has been involved in. He raises the stick and turns it in different directions and makes a sound which he encourages the audience to participate in.

As he turns the stick, shapes of white light move in the same manner. He then cues the audience to stop making the sound by slamming the stick to the floor in the same way he did before. In the absence of that sound, Rodney tells a story about his birth. He leaves the space.

Girlfriend

The next part of the soundtrack heavily features vocals, singing without words, but also many overlapping voices - many very quiet and in the style of speech or a whisper. The distorted drums from earlier fade out, replaced with a heavy click and melodic guitar lines.

This section begins with the only light closing to a thin red line, vertically in the space. White light slowly fills in the rest of the centre vertical portion of the stage with the red line remaining there in the middle.

Rodney brings out a second wheelchair and dances with it. He tells a story about his past girlfriend and how he now considers the chair to be his new girlfriend.

Moana the seagull

Music morphs from melodic lines to more of a drone. Still a little distorted. Heavy click continues.

Light fills space. The light gives a floating almost underwater quality, the shadows of feathers fall through the space.

Rodney tells the story of Moana, the seagull friend he had when he slept on the pier in San Francisco. Rodney dances like Moana used to move.



The Latina shelter

The music takes on a percussive quality. Rodney in a voice-over talks about some of the times he spent lining up for beds at a shelter.

On the left-hand side of stage is projected an urban image of trees and cars around a concrete building. On the right hand side a mural painted on a building is projected. It is predominately blue and has text on it but it is cut off a bit. The floor and centre portion of the stage has a projection of horizontal lines on it, almost like a roller door. Bed shaped sections of dark blue light will flicker in and out of the design on the floor for a while. The horizontal lines disappear as the side of the stage are projected with the image of another close up portion of the mural. This time you can read the words "the homeless". It is replaced by another picture of rows and rows of bed in a large room.

One final image is projected of the whole mural. It shows the Statue of Liberty tipped over and in chains and a poem by Emma Lazarus.

During this section, Rodney gets out of his chair and moves along the floor, trying to land in the patches of bed-shaped darkness that always flicker away before he truly finds a moment to rest within them. When the voice over mentions a day when he was successful at securing a 90 day bed, this stops and Rodney gets back in his chair.

San Fran Dance

The music in this section heavily features guitar, though percussive undertones continue. Some noises of the microphone being rubbed and thrown are also likely to be heard. By the end of this section murmuring voices will also join the soundtrack. All of the music, including guitar, vocals and sound effects, are performed live by Jol.

It starts with a spot of golden light on an otherwise dark - bluish-purple space. White lights come up pushing the purplish colour into the centre. When Rodney faces the back the lights will redden and then darken leaving him in silhouette. Red lines will appear projected in the darkness in the manner of the streets of San Francisco.

Rodney pulls the shirt he is wearing behind his neck – exposing chest. He dances – mostly movement with arms and face, before he picks up the microphone, twirls the chord and slaps it on his hand. He rubs and slaps it on his body in time with the music, throws it down and turns to the back. He takes off his shirt and dances with his hands upward in the air. He wheels himself off the stage.



Para-dice

In this section there is no music – although we can hear a city soundscape.

The light is a warm white that lights up the whole space. A projection of a map of San Francisco on the left and a list of titles on the right, first titles of Rodney's 'para-dice' tricks and later titles of stories Rodney may tell. The map will later fill both sides of the stage.

Rodney returns wearing a different sleeveless shirt. He tells us about how he would busk to get by, both by playing music but also by getting tips from people to play a game called para-dice with him. This game would result in him doing various tricks with his chair. He demonstrates a few of these tricks and then calls someone up from the audience and asks them to roll dice. This time the dice number chosen will determine which one of six different stories Rodney will share.

Rodney will tell one of these stories, depending on which dice number is selected. He shares the story with either a joke or an empathetic conclusion.

1. A story about getting picked up by cops and getting thrown in prison. He details violence he encountered at the hands of police (including a head injury) as well as from another prisoner who he refers to as a 'little prick'. He talks about how he nearly came to blows with this person as they both were released but instead, they parted ways without additional violence.
2. A story about Rodney's experience in an alcohol and other drug recovery shelter, where he suffered severe burns requiring hospitalisation and surgery.
3. A story of a building fire. Rodney was not hurt in this fire but he mentions that others were.
4. A story about a friend from the streets named Pink Cloud who was always getting his things stolen. Rodney talks about the time Pink Cloud took him to a food court where they ate the half-eaten meals of students who were throwing away half of their food.
5. A story about hitting someone with his van, speaking to police about it and being sent along because the person he had hit was under the influence of drugs.
6. A story about the waiting room of a homeless shelter. Rodney mentions giving people food, encountering an aggressive dog and watching one person stab another over a waiting room chair.

Harmonica solo and pink clouds

Jol plays the blues live on guitar, while Rodney takes a harmonica out of his sock and plays it live into the microphone. Jol and Rodney are jamming the blues together.

While this musical interlude takes place, a slideshow of pictures of Rodney in San Fran is projected onto the stage.

When this is done, the projection is changed to that of a pink sky with clouds. The soundtrack features beatboxing sounds that occasionally sound a little wet.

This time the dice number chosen will determine which one of six different stories Rodney will share.



Isadora Duncan Award

The music fades out, replaced by a low heavy drone.

Rodney tells the story of being nominated for the Isadora Duncan award and accepting it on stage.

This happens in a neutral light. When Rodney mentions a woman sitting next to him that looked bird-like, a projected shadow of a bird-woman walks into the space and sits. Eventually, she gets up and walks off. Her chair slides down as Rodney talks about being lifted up by the hoist that gets him onto the stage to accept the award.

Book of past dances

Music. Low drone with singing in harmony, piano. The singing is in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language). At some point the singing stops while the drone and piano continue.

Light fades out. Almost total darkness.

Rodney holds open the white book and footage of him dancing is projected onto it. First a video of him with a dance partner. He turns the page. Video switches to show him dancing, suspended in his chair. He turns the page. Video switches to show him suspended with a partner - spinning in his chair and turning upside down.

Rodney takes out a single page and moves it around. Dancing hands are projected onto it. He puts it on his face and rippling water is projected onto the page. Slowly the rippling water projection fills the whole space. It calms. The projected shadow of a hand comes in and starts the ripple again.

Suspended

The light is a yellow and red gradient which starts in the centre of the space. There is a projection of the silhouette of Rodney being raised up, arms outstretched and tense. When the story turns more dire a red cross is projected on top of that silhouette.

Rodney tells the story of a technical malfunction while he was suspended - holding himself up with his outstretched arms. Rodney mentions hearing a ripping sound and imitates it but ultimately everything ends up being okay.

He stays in place while spinning his wheels and moves forward and back frantically in the space. Rodney dances with his chair – the chair and Rodney are one. Rodney builds power and momentum.



Shadow conductor

The soundtrack is filled with hummed vocals.

Rodney conducts a chorus of projected shadows of people to stand and move in particular ways. After a while, he gestures at them to walk towards him. All of the shadows get larger as they move forward and disappear.



Duet

Rodney calls forth someone from the audience and places them in space. This is the guest dancer, Brydie Colquhoun. They begin a choreographed dance together. Their dance is fast-paced and focused on their limbs.

The dance happens to flashes of white light and higher pitched electronic drum beats.

The soundtrack switches to focus on vocals and breathing as the dancing becomes more fluid and involves more of the body. They dance together for a while with Brydie occasionally standing on top of Rodney's chair and his back as he wheels them around.

This is a highly technical skill but they are both professional dancers who have rehearsed so this is very safe. As the two continue to dance, eventually the sides of the stage project a video – it is from a different time/place as they are dressed differently but the video is of Rodney and Brydie doing the choreography we see now. The video cuts to show the dancers suspended and spinning in the air as the two do grounded spinning tricks live.

Music ends with the sound of bird song. The stage is lit with whiter light and touches of purple. The dancers hug and part ways for now as the second dancer returns to the audience.

Questions from childhood

No music. Rodney picks up the microphone and talks about his love of dance duets - he is interrupted by a pre-recorded voice. A close up silhouette of a face switches from one side to the next. The voice-over is an imagined younger version of Rodney from the past, asking him questions about his life now.

Home

The soundtrack features electronic drums and humming. Purple and golden light fill the space.

Rodney places the book from earlier on the floor in a triangular shape. He picks up two sticks and points them at the edges of the stage, as he moves a line of white light is drawn at the edges matching his pace.

He talks about the geography of the place where he lives - as he points, shapes of light appear to signify the places he speaks of - triangles for his family's houses - lines for railway tracks and the river. He speaks of his dream house and it is drawn in white lines of light and the other shapes disappear



The Horizon

Darkness. A bumpy white horizontally line appears in the space. Given the darkness, it is all we see. There is a voice-over of Rodney talking about grass, lawns and status.

A projected video of the landscape appears – the line we have been seeing matches the line of the horizon. The line disappears and we just watch the video scroll across.

Earth

Rodney appears in a spotlight that grows until it fills most of the space. He has a large pile of wood shavings on his thighs. He wheels into the center and dumps the woodchips onto the stage. Rodney flicks it up, runs over it – spins in circles leaving marks on the floor. He picks up the stick from the beginning and drags lines through the woodchips. Dances around.

Jol sings a song about letting the grass grow.

Videos of ten different Rodneys in a white shirt talk at different paces as Rodney spins in continuous circles. Four more images of Rodney appear on the floor. The circling slows and he turns to face the audience. This movement is about acknowledging the past; both the hopes and hurts.

As Rodney moves to the back, a red triangle of light appears. Rodney holds out his arms, like in the story with the technical malfunction. His hands disappear behind the edges of the barrier but are projected instead. Suddenly there are many hands. All making bird-like movements. This is Rodney flying home, into the future.

Rodney wheels himself back into the centre of the space. He picks up a beanie, picks wood shavings off, shakes it out and puts it on before leaving the stage.

Epilogue

Live music: guitar and vocals performed by Joylon Mulholland from the side of the stage. The song is inspired by Rodney's experiences on the streets of San Francisco, far from home.

Rodney's silhouette appears behind the paper partitions. He goes back and forth from one side to the other. He picks up and plays with a basketball - eventually picking up the statue, the Tekoteko, that has sat in the back and centre of the stage all show and bringing it off stage.

Bows

Rodney will bow and be joined by Joylon and Brydie. They will bow again together.

To show appreciation to the artists for sharing their work with you, you might want to clap and cheer loudly for the performers. For some of our audience members clapping is really uncomfortable, so we ask you to join us at the end of the performance in a Deaf clap. This means using an Auslan sign for clapping by waving your hands in the air with the same energy that you would use to clap your hands together.



