

COME TOGETHER

When cultural meets classical, magic happens.

A new collaboration between the Bangarra Dance Theatre and the Australian Ballet has seen the creation of a stunning dance event called *Gathering*.

The event features the critically acclaimed production *Rites*, and a world premiere performance of a brand new work, *Amalgamate*, both of which are created by Bangarra's choreographer and artistic director, Stephen Page.

Originally produced in 1997 for the

Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, *Rites* was the outcome of a groundbreaking affiliation between Bangarra and the Australian Ballet. Set to Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*, the work is a blend of classical ballet and Australian Indigenous culture.

Rites is made up of six parts – *Awakening, Earth, Wind, Fire, Water* and *Dreaming*.

"*Rites* is an exploration of the natural forces which determine our ancient landscape," says Stephen. "Beginning with *Awakening* and completed by *Dreaming*, these elements are all part of a great cyclic universal force: that is, our spiritual essence, our dreaming."

Amalgamate takes its inspiration from the process of bringing the two companies together, and explores the notions of exchange and fusion

between emotion, spirit and culture. The score was created by award-winning composer David Page and Elena Kats-Chernin.

"The Australian Ballet dancers' discipline is the western classical form," says Stephen. "And I suppose you could say that Bangarra's 'discipline' is what we inherit culturally.

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One of these "amazing" dancers is Bangarra's Yolande Brown. Yolande is a descendant of the Bidjara clan of the Kunja nation in central Queensland, and also shares

Celtic and French origins. Since joining Bangarra in 1999, she has toured internationally with the company and contributed to the choreographic development of several productions including *Skin, Walkabout, Corroboree, Clan* and *Bush*. She also performed in the original production of *Rites*, which toured New York in 1999.

"This version of *Rites* is slightly different to the original," Yolande says. "Originally, our cultural consultant Djakapurra Munyarryun played the central role, and he



brought his Aboriginal influence to it. This time the role is being played by Patrick Thaiday, who comes from the Torres Strait Islands."

Combining classical ballet with traditional Indigenous dance creates new challenges for each of the dancers in the production, but luckily for Yolande, this is not so much of a problem.

"Because I studied ballet and contemporary dance at university, I don't find the combination of the two styles as difficult," she says. "But you'll find that ballet has a lot more length to it and the way you hold your body is different, whereas Bangarra emphasises more broken lines, bent legs and a lot of floor work. You find yourself using different muscles to what you're used to."

Yolande also notes that the body shape of ballet dancers is different to that of traditional Indigenous dancers.

"For the women especially, we are more muscular than the ballet dancers," she explains. "But by doing something like *Gathering*, it shows people that you don't have to be a certain body shape to be a successful performer. We're different movers, and so it really opens people's eyes up to possibilities in movement, and what you can aspire to."

Yolande believes that the most challenging aspect of the new production is the music.

"In *Rites* particularly, the music is incredibly complex," she says. "There are discordant parts and swells of sounds that you really have to tune into."

Differences also lie between the two dance companies. Due to the large number of dancers in the Australian Ballet, the relationship between the performers is not as closely knit.

"There are only 12 of us in Bangarra, so we're really more like a family," Yolande says.

"The Australian ballet has about 70 different dancers in the company, and they all have different roles, from the principal dancers to the corps de ballet (group dancers). For us, we each have a different area of expertise, so it's a much more level playing field."

A graduate of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), in 2005 Yolande was the recipient of the QUT Outstanding Alumni Award for the Creative Industries. In 2004, she was nominated as Most Outstanding Dancer and Dancer to Watch at the Dance Australia's Critics' Choice Awards.

Also an actor, pianist and singer, Yolande enjoys contributing vocals to Bangarra soundtracks and recently released an EP.

"My EP is called *Further to Fall*," she says. "I composed all the music and lyrics myself, and then worked together with some other musicians to complete it."

"It's really great to have another creative outlet, especially after dancing all day. I found sitting down at the piano or in the recording studio to be quite therapeutic."

Yolande is looking forward to taking *Gathering* to new audiences, but is not sure at this stage whether the production will be taken overseas.

"It's possible," she says. "Bangarra is a company that many people all over the world are keen to learn about."

Gathering will premiere in Melbourne on March 17 at the State Theatre before opening in Sydney in April.





ACTIVITY 1: READING FOR MEANING

Circle the correct answer:

1. What is the main purpose of the article?
 - a. to advertise the upcoming dance event entitled *Gathering*
 - b. to entertain readers
 - c. to inform readers about the collaboration between the Bangarra Dance Theatre and the Australian Ballet and to persuade people to go and see the performances
 - d. to tell a story

2. What does “critically acclaimed production” mean?

3. What are some of the challenges for dancers that arise from combining classical ballet and traditional Indigenous dance?

4. What does dancer Yolande Brown say is the most challenging aspect of the new production?

5. How many dancers are there in the Bangarra Dance Theatre compared to the Australian Ballet?



ACTIVITY 2: UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE

Circle the correct answer:

1. In paragraph five, the term “choreographer and artistic director” is an example of:

- a. metaphor
- b. colloquial language
- c. technical/specialised language
- d. personification

2. **What is the main purpose of including the photographs with this article?**

3. **Which language technique is used in the sentence “it’s a much more level playing field”?**

- a. onomatopoeia
- b. pun
- c. metaphor
- d. simile

ACTIVITY 3: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

In what ways are the Bangarra Dance Theatre and the Australian Ballet similar and in what ways are they different?

Similarities	Differences



ACTIVITY 4: SHORT ANSWERS

1. The central photograph on page 5 supports the caption that tells us “*Gathering* combines classical ballet with traditional Aboriginal dance.”

Explain how this is achieved through

colour:

layout:

ACTIVITY 5: WRITING – DESIGN A POSTER

Design a poster to advertise the dance event *Gathering*.

Include the most important information about the dance companies, premiere dates and venues. Include quotes from critics, directors and dancers to persuade the audience. Include visuals.

