

ARTS COUNCIL OF MONGOLIA



'When we dance, we stomp the earth, we touch your soul'

Jessica Lumb

To celebrate the shared spirit of Mongolia and Australia, Ulaanbaatar will soon become the stomping ground for the Bangarra Dance Theatre group. Landing on September 18, the tour aims to promote international cooperation and intercultural dialogue and understanding between Mongolia and Australia while providing local audiences the opportunity to experience a world class dance performance.

The project is sponsored by Rio Tinto who is showing their commitment to supporting the arts, culture and cultural heritage of Mongolia. Their visit also celebrates a successful international partnership with the people of Mongolia, Oyu Tolgoi employees, as well as business and political partners.

Australia's leading Indigenous performing arts company, Bangarra is recognised both nationally and internationally for their distinctive dance theatre performances that combine the spirituality of traditional culture with modern storytelling. Under the leadership of Stephen Page, who recently received NAIDOC's (an Australian organisation) Artist of the Year award, Bangarra celebrates and respects Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures. Committed to developing the next generation of Indigenous storytellers through the mentoring and training of creative indigenous young people, their vision is to respect and rekindle the links between traditional Indigenous cultures of Australia, new forms of contemporary artistic expression, and create inspiring dance theatre productions of integrity and excellence that resonate with people throughout Australia

Rio Tinto



Australia's Bangarra Dance Troupe performs in Mongolia for the first time



Unusual visual artistry captivates audience's attention



Raw emotion choreographed to unite all people of the world

and the world.

Like Mongolians, Indigenous Australians have a strong oral culture and connection with the land. This is celebrated through their production 'Spirit'. A dynamic and evocative theatrical celebration of contemporary Indigenous dance and music, 'Spirit' has been described as a memorable and enriching experience that encompasses the heart and soul of Bangarra.

"This work is a bush galaxy of poetic imagery and stories that make up our history – ranging from the comic mimicry of stick spirits, the power of rocks and land formations, the ritual and medicine of fresh water, and the transformation of a caterpillar into a moth," writes Page in his artistic director's notes. "Spirit embraces all those diversities and inspirations that come from living from the land."

Set to a beautiful and evocative musical soundscape by David Page and Steve Francis, Spirit is also a celebration of the resilience of Indigenous cultures. From the last breath of sunset to the first finger-light of dawn, the audience experiences a powerful engagement with Bangarra's stunning Indigenous performers.

"Spirit didn't seem to focus so much on the issues or the struggles of its protagonists, but rather celebrated them as they went about their respective journeys," David Page and Francis write about the music. "Whether it was the life cycle of the humble moth, the feeding goannas or the Two Sisters creation of the landscape, there seemed to be a thread of hope and beauty that was common to them all. This became the starting point for the creation of our score. Our choice of themes and instrumentation hopefully reflect this beauty."

The production is co-choreographed by Frances Rings, and for her 'Spirit feels like coming home'. It's a cleansing and it is the rituals you go through in the process. There is something old and ancient about it or like when you have been doing things throughout the day and reflections of a dream keep coming back to you. We are tapping into a spiritual dimension that is comforting and nurturing.

Despite having performed all over the world (including the United States, the United Kingdom and throughout Europe and Asia), this will be Bangarra's first visit to Mongolia, a fact that is causing some excitement among the group. "Its official" writes dancer Jasmin Sheppard on the Bangarra blog, "we are headed to Mongolia, a country I've wanted to visit since primary school, and we'll be dancing there!"

The tour aims to build a reciprocal awareness of Australian and Mongolian arts

and culture, an aspect that is often lacking in the relationship between the two countries that has an emphasis on economics and diplomacy. Bangarra's visit will be an eye opening experience for local audiences and dance professionals but will also provide an introduction to Mongolia for the Australian visitors. It is an exceptional opportunity for both audiences and artistic communities to be inspired by new perspectives, and play an important role in the development of future cultural networking. And the benefits of culture in our lives, Page believes, shouldn't be underestimated.

"If there's any way for people to glimpse the true spirit of our myriad cultures, it would be through the arts," he said in a recent speech. "Art is a medicine; it can heal us, unite us, strengthen us, challenge us and inspire us; it feeds our bodies and our imaginations. We see ourselves through art and learn about our community, and our place within it. Discovering who we are, writing our own verse in a song line that has been carried through the ages, gives us a sense of belonging, and the knowledge of where we come from empowers each and every one of us."

"The theatre is a perfect environment for merging the past with the present in a timeless space, where every element – from costumes and sets to lighting – is symbolic and infused with meaning. Choreography and theatrical direction is a conduit to the unseen; to how our people view the world – part physical, part spiritual."

As a part of their visit, Bangarra will conduct professional development workshops for students and teachers of the University of Arts and Culture and professional dancers of local dance ensembles before giving two public performances at the State Opera and Ballet Theatre on September 22 and 23.

"I think that 'Spirit' is purely about letting the audience into the spiritual glory box of what is sacred," finishes Page, "communicating how special this land is to us through certain specific inspirations such as Annhem Land [an Indigenous region of Australia], my traditional family's stories and my relationship to them. It is a personal endeavour. It is also about maintaining an honest respect for land creations and people."

This is an excellent opportunity to experience one of the finest dance troupes ever to stomp the earth firsthand. Feel their spirit this September, and let Bangarra touch your soul. Bangarra Dance Theatre's tour to Mongolia was initiated by the Arts Council of Mongolia, and is sponsored by Rio Tinto. For more information contact ACM at 976-1131-9017

Arts Council of Mongolia, Delta Foundation Center, IV floor, Tourists Street-38, Chingeltei District
Tel/Fax: 976-11-319015 E-mail: education@artscouncil.mn Web: www.artscouncil.mn

The Mongol Messenger is operated by the government news agency MONTSAME and is printed by the MONTSAME.
Home Page: www.mongolmessenger.mn; E-mail: momessenger@maginet.mn (ISSN 1684-1883)