

Tracks is renowned for creating performance in unique locations and “Rivers of the Underground” is no exception. Originally created as a new work in 2001 and brought back by popular demand in 2002. Daring people to enter the amazing world created within the Boom Shed, (a vast and cavernous space; think underground dance party), Fort Hill Wharf, Darwin.

Continuing to bring Darwin what it has come to expect of a Tracks' production: the best of Darwin's physical performers together with top Australian guest artists. Key Elements: multicultural, youth, indigenous, new dance, DJ and new music, a visual feast, an amazing Darwin Venue. (The absolute windfall of securing a space that Tim and I had been looking at for ten years (the Boom Shed.)

The show aimed to explore one of life's greatest mysteries, '*what lies in wait on the other side of living*'.

I am personally interested in the aging body, the role of memory in surviving time, different notions of death and afterlife and how that effects the life: Spirit essences, reincarnation, burn in hell, forever in paradise, die for your God, cross the river, torment or ecstasy, burn or bury the body. We all die. Dying should be as an important ritual and passage as being born but I found little within my own Western culture to support this journey. Rather I felt conditioned to ignore and avoid it.

Rivers of the Underground is a response to beliefs that various cultures have towards the afterlife, or more particularly, how those beliefs affect our behaviour in the now. (The theme had been developing through an earlier trilogy of works about a community's response to HIV/AIDS, and people dying 'out of time': Bodies of light, Walking on Water, and Love Vs Gravity.)

Rivers strongly draws on Greek Mythology and references. Why?

- Hades' the kingdom of the dead is surrounded by five rivers: hate, oblivion, wailing, woe, and fire.
- As a western based performing artist, the ancient Greek theatre is as far back as I can trace my artistic lineage.
- Darwin is the 3rd largest Greek City in the World.
- The mythology is full of Archetypal characters with simpler motivations and are therefore more easily understood by audiences from varied backgrounds. (Young Hero who battles and solves tasks, forever youthful trickster/prankster who easily gains people's confidences and can therefore take people into the unknown, Ferryman/Grim Reaper who takes souls across for a fee, etc.)

- The Greek placement of the afterlife was not totally separated from the living, it was a place the same as the earth and the sky, and all the elements of heaven and hell and everything in between, existed in the one place. People physically 'crossed a river to get to the other side. (This was the key to allowing a multicultural approach)
- The Mythology also gave us a performance structure, a scenario of types, a setting, and a list of characters

Major cultural themes:

South east Asian: In the original this line was presented through the Hindu influences of Indian youth Sid Vemuri, and the Sri Lankan Bharata Natium dancer Rukshana Ramachandran, and guest dancer Sri Lankan/Italian Gerard Veltre.. In the second version Sid was replaced by Filipino Marko Taopo and Rukshana replaced by Indonesian dancer Yola George. So the movement style changed.

A strong male energy was expressly developed through the targeted employment of Dancer choreographer Gerard Veltre, who had a role of attracting and training a core of young male dancers Also by employing physical performer Yoris Wilson.

Indigenous Islander A group of Torres Strait Island women dancers whose performance was based on a story of a man who had crossed the oceans never to return to his family.

The female: Further input came from a group of young women from various backgrounds drawn from various contacts that we had made over the years, as well as us throwing a net out to see who out there wanted to perform with tracks.

David Pratt, a DJ, composer, and collaborator with whom I had produced several works with,

Matthew James, the only lighting designer in Darwin that we thought could give the show the ambience we were looking for,

As is often the way in Darwin, new shows have an unknown quality about them until they finish their season. So the opportunity to remount a show that had extraordinary feedback from many people was a godsend.

Having finished one season there were several key elements that we were then able to highlight

The venue was amazing

The integration of the music, DJ live with live compositions as well

The incredibly beautiful imagery
The relatively raw male energy of the young men
The very Darwin feel that came from the integration of the cultural ideas and groups.

As one person was “compelled” to write:

I am compelled to write and congratulate you all on your absolutely extraordinary production of Rivers of the Underground. The entire performance had me on the edge of my seat, completely enthralled.

The choice of venue was fabulous, allowing for an enormous and dynamic performance from your dancers. The music and exciting choreography, the clever simplicity of the set design and the lighting all made for a very memorable show. How lucky we are in this relatively small population of Darwin to have a performance company that can pull off something of such high quality.

I am also impressed with the very Darwin flavour of Tracks’ choreography, with the strong Asian/indigenous influences, reflecting the makeup of our local community. It is truly refreshing to watch a performance that is both familiar and challenging.

Finally, a big thank you for harnessing local young talent and energy in such a positive way.

All in all we had a show that had a strong young adult appeal due to its links with the hip hop culture, the DJ, the ‘rave’ venue, the darker subject matter. So when the Festival of Darwin suggested that we remount the work as a festival piece, we jumped at the idea, as we would have the perfect opportunity to market a known product, something we had never done before.

Scenario:

The Living; unknowing of what lies ahead,

Burn or Bury: what happens to the body/soul after death

Hermes (the messenger who takes the souls of the dead to the first river.)

River Styx: (fear of death, oaths, lost souls and crossings)

Caron (the ferryman, the grim reaper, takes the souls for a price across the river Styx to the gates of Hades' Kingdom)

Cerberus; (Three headed dog which guards the gates to the Kingdom. Has poison breath, was once put to slumber by opium soaked cakes.)

River Cocytus: (wailing and lamentation)

River Acheron (sadness and woe)

Elysium Fields (a place for heroes and the godlike)

Tartarus (a place of torments)

Cerberus, (three headed dog, guardian of the gates)

River Phlegethon (fire, burning away of wrong doings)

River Lethe (oblivion and forgetfulness)

Tree of Dreams (letting go)