

**2010 Moved by Us Forum, Regional Arts Conference, Launceston, Tasmania
Presentation Tim Newth and David McMicken
What is an Australian Dancer Dancer?**

Tim

Tracks Dance Company has a 21-year history. We produce original movement based performances that look through Northern Territory eyes, to reflect on our contemporary understanding of Australia. This history is rich in long-term creative relationships built with a diversity of people, cultures, ages and experience, and founded on mutual respect.

David

Tracks is seen as successful, gaining State and Federal Triennial funding, giving us an ability to plan longer term. Recognised as the Northern Territory's premier performing arts company, and a key Australian community based dance company, we are renowned for our ability to develop work that comes from and speaks about our community, while still striving to be at the cutting edge of artistic excellence.

A Tracks cast reflects our geographic region and our diversity, especially Indigenous and South East Asian. Darwin is closer to Dili, Denpasar, Jakarta and Port Morsby than it is to any other Australian Capital city, and our indigenous population is 32.5% of the Northern Territory.

Tim

Living in Darwin we find ourselves asking: "what does it mean to be an Australian." For most Tracks dancers, dance is at the heart of their lives but is not, nor is it desired to be, their profession. Here are three profiles of typical Tracks dancers.

Vera Tabuzo would be seen as a principal dancer with the company. She is a young Filipino woman in her third year of nursing. Dance is the thing that makes her most happy. She began Hip Hop dancing in 2001 but was soon exposed to other forms of dance. Studying contemporary dance at school she also managed to try Belly Dancing, Islander, Ballroom, Ballet, and Break. In 2004 she first performed for Tracks, and soon become one of our youth dance Leaders. She was part of a delegation visiting the Philippines. The purpose was to gain a greater understanding of the cultural influences that affect our local Filipino dancers, and to see their culture in situ.

David

Vera has just performed in Tracks most recent production where she danced in the various styles of: Traditional Irish, Old School Hip Hop, a Chinese influenced love duet and some challenging contemporary choreography.

Vera is a typical Darwin Dancer who has taken up the diverse array of opportunities that have come her way. She seeks out dance experiences that challenge, give new skills, allow her to dance about herself and her own background, and that let her give back to others. People comment on her ability to transform herself, and connect to her community audiences. If all goes well, next year Vera will become a nurse.

Tim

Over 20 years ago I found myself in the remote Desert community of Lajamanu about 1,000 kilometres South West of Darwin. I was painting a water tank with an old Aboriginal man who I called my father. We were painting his family's dreaming – Ngapa – The

Rainstorm. His daughter had just arrived back from the nearest town, Katherine, 600k away. She held her newborn baby. The old man handed me the baby saying “this is Japanangka, he will call you uncle”.

Caleb Japanangka Patrick was born in 1988 and lives in Lajamanu. At the age of 21 he is the father of two children and it is likely he will never have a full time job. Caleb is passionate about his dancing, especially because of its fitness, strength and leadership potentials, and because it helps young people. He has seized many opportunities through Tracks.

David

Within Caleb’s life, Tracks has conducted 5 major residencies in his remote community, as well as workshops most years. Together, Tracks artists and the people of Lajamanu have created 20 performances.

Every 2 years Tracks works with the 500+ people of Lajamanu to produce Milpirri, a performance based in traditional ceremonial practices and reinterpretations of that practice for the youth.

Over 250 people dance, and everyone else watches, many of those having been involved in getting the show on.

This year with Tracks Caleb has assisted in running dance workshops in Lajamanu, been to Platform 3 Hip Hop festival in Sydney, performed at the Australian Dance Awards in Melbourne, and he has just finished dancing in our 2-week Darwin festival season with his brother and grandmother, (his 8th performance with Tracks)

Tim

Our work now exists because of long term, trusted relationships. In Lajamanu this has existed for over 3 generations. Questions arise such as: how do we allow artists to build such relationships? Do they even want to? How does funding support something that is so long term?

David

Working in remote and regional Australia is expensive. With a return airfare to Lajamanu costing up to \$5,000, how do we justify spending that when it could cover an entire fee for a choreographer working on a Darwin season?

Tim

Living in Darwin and coming from a Western arts and dance practice, how does one engage on a level playing field when working with people such as a traditional Indigenous elder or with a highly trained Balinese dancer?

David

In order to counteract isolation and vast distances from main population areas, we use dance to develop social networks and provide emotional support while concentrating on physical and mental well-being. Dance also provides valuable intergenerational pathways.

Tim

Audrey Gorrington was born in 1922 in England, studying tap dancing from the age of 4. She came into the Tracks family in 1989 joining a newly formed group for women over 60. This group, now called the Grey Panthers, was formed to ensure that seniors were

represented in a community dance performance, and they have continued a weekly class with Tracks for over 20 years.

David

I first met Audrey while creating a show about each decade in which the women had lived, Audrey giving us the tapping 20's. She has performed in 26 Tracks seasons, and over 200 community performances for charities and seniors organisations.

One year Audrey quietly took a few weeks leave from rehearsals to have a breast removed. Her doctor, amazed at her speedy recovery, said that the dancing, and her desire to get back into it, was the major reason for her quick healing. As another Grey Panther said: "dancing? – it's better than taking a pill!".

Tim

Audrey took the lead role in a show about retiring, and was the bride in a performance about finding love in later years. She rarely missed her Friday dance class. Dance assists in health promotion through disease prevention activities targeted at relieving conditions such as diabetes, osteoporosis, arthritis, social isolation and depression.

David

To me Audrey was always known as our own Isadora Duncan, and she lived community dance her entire life. While in her 80's she was awarded her dance medals in Modern, Latin, and Ballroom.

Six weeks ago, she turned up to her Friday Class, participated in a following rehearsal, gave us a rundown on her planning for a trip overseas to see her sister, and let us know that she would be available for the Abba Medley performance, she would have to practice the I Go To Rio dance while in England. Audrey died peacefully in her sleep that Sunday night.

Tim

People like all three of these dancers are at the core of our dance community, but how are their needs acknowledged and serviced within the larger dance sector. For most of our dancers, dance will not become a career, but it will be at the heart of their lives, and maybe something they do until the day they die.

David

We will now show a video which will put some images and faces to these words. Don't blink or you'll miss it, as it only goes for 30 seconds.