

Bangarra – 18 October 2017

Welcome, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for joining us tonight

Before the dancers join us tonight, which they will soon, I wanted to say a few brief words.

We are thrilled that Bangarra could come to Denmark and provide an important insight into Australia's Indigenous culture.

We hope you enjoyed being taken on a journey tonight. It was a truly powerful performance and a unique experience for many people who have not been lucky enough to experience Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture before.

Bangarra is Australia's pre-eminent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts organisation and one of seven resident performing arts companies at the Sydney Opera House.

Bangarra Dance theatre and the Australian government have a strong desire to promote indigenous performing arts. We are so pleased they were able to visit Copenhagen - in a country where our first Indigenous Ambassador completed his term.

Warm thanks to DANZ Friendship society for their support for tonight's event - providing financial support to the reception and much encouragement and input in early days of planning, esp Hanne - great friends of Aust

Spirit, the name of the theatre we experienced tonight, first premiered in 2004 and is a showcase of the best of Bangarra's repertoire and it didn't disappoint. Spirit has already toured from New York to Mongolia, Switzerland and China.

Acknowledge Stephen Page (Artistic Director) and other choreographers such as those who worked with Stephen to craft Spirit: Frances Rings and Bernadette Walong-Sene, leading this company for 28 years

Also important to acknowledge the indigenous peoples of this region particularly the Greenlandic people and the Sami people of the high north - Australia recognises the importance of ensuring First Nations peoples have access to and support for their own cultural expression of their history and heritage through cultural organisations such as Bangarra.

Earlier this week, Australia was elected to the UN HRC, our first time and the first time a country from the south- west Pacific has been represented in the HRC. We will

therefore provide a unique Indo-Pacific perspective and ensure that the voices of our Pacific neighbours and other small states are heard.

A key pillar in our agenda is to support advancing the human rights of indigenous peoples (words from HRC TPs on indigenous peoples). And we recognise that more needs to be done to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Obviously this is something Australia has firsthand experience in and something we have grappled with for many years,

Far from perfect but something that is an ongoing national conversation and something we strive to do better at recognising and celebrating the fact that Australia is home to the world's oldest continuous culture is an important part of that conversation

Storytelling was a key part of tonight's performance and is an integral part of identity for Indigenous Australians.

History, culture and heritage are passed down to the next generation through storytelling. Dance is one way that Indigenous Australians connect to country. By country I refer to the Indigenous values, resources, stories and culture associated with a particular area.

I wouldn't presume to articulate what country means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but having spent some time in remote parts of Australia, I can assure you that all around Australia the landscape captures you in a way that is hard to put into words - I can see why creative expression like dance is needed to communicate the depth of feeling it engenders.

Dance is also a way to traverse any language barriers, it provides a cultural context and can be deeply emotional.

It isn't just through these powerful performances that we get a cultural exchange with Bangarra.

Bangarra also actively seek to undertake cultural exchanges with youth and the future generations of our Indigenous cultures.

Yesterday Bangarra's dancers led a workshop with Greenlandic children here in Copenhagen. some travelled from Alborg to participate in the workshop.

In a creative environment, the children learn about Bangarra and how they incorporate story, land, language and totems into their work. It is also an opportunity to explore Bangarra's unique movement style.

Bangarra seeks to actively connect with and support First Nations people wherever they go and we are delighted that a connection has been made with this part of the world. Hope that it can continue

I also want to note the artworks you'll see around the room. They are part of the Yiwarra Kuju Canning Stock Route exhibit.

The Canning Stock Route is a track that was developed on Aboriginal homelands as mining and pastoral industries expanded in Western Australia.

*Yiwarra Kuju* tells the story of the route's impact, and the importance of the country around it, interpreted through Aboriginal eyes and voices.

It is a story of contact, conflict and survival, of exodus and return. Above all, it is a story of family, culture and Country.

I hope you get a chance tonight to explore the art and the stories behind each piece.

I trust that you enjoyed this special performance, I hope you will have a chance to meet the dancers when they join us here tonight and thank them

Thanks for attending, enjoy the evening