



BIG HEART STORY

Education Resource Introduction



Image Credit: Big Dance 2018, Castlemaine, Melbourne. Photo Pia Johnson.

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59 Frances St, Yarraville Vic 3013, Australia

Call 0480 359 982

Email victoria@ausdance.org.au

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Acknowledgements and Disclaimer

Resources written by Dr. Katrina Rank

Big Dance Choreography: Frances Rings and Craig Bary

Big Dance Composer: Huey Benjamin

Big Dance Tutorial videos created in partnership with NAISDA Dance College and their Developing Artists

Inclusion partners: Tamara May and Nicole Rinehart (Deakin University), Anna Seymour

Cinematographer: Tristan Baker

Film Editor: Reilly Baker

Accessibility videos: Filmmaker - Cobie Orger Dancers – Sasha Leong and Hannah Griebel

Photographers: Jamie James (NAISDA students), Sarah Walker (Melbourne event), Pia Johnson (Castlemaine event), Ryan Tews (Lilydale event), Elise Lockwood (Sydney event)

Proof Reader: Lesley Graham Design: Lauren Vassallo

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These resources have been reviewed and approved by NAISDA Dance College. NAISDA and Frances Rings have given permission for the Indigenous content within the Big Dance to be taught.

This guide has been created to align with the Victorian Curriculum. Ausdance VIC does not take any responsibility for changes to the Curriculum content.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Ausdance VIC acknowledges and respects the Traditional Custodians of the Lands on which we live, work and dance. Sovereignty was never ceded.

We celebrate the history and contemporary creativity of the world's oldest living culture and pay our respect to Elders – past and present.

We acknowledge the right to self-determination for First Nations People and seek to develop strong and lasting partnerships with Victorian First Peoples to achieve equity and prosperity in the communities we serve across the state.



Big Dance Education Resource

The **Big Dance – Big Heart Story** education resource includes general advice, teaching tips, unit and lesson plans and links to other resources for each band across the Victorian Curriculum F 12. Its purpose is to provide information and contextual background about the themes informing Big Dance – Big Heart Story, choreographed by Frances Rings and Craig Bary to music composed by Huey Benjamin. The resources will assist teachers and students to engage imaginatively with the themes, stories and issues that lay within the piece, to think critically and to form responses. The Big Dance resource offers:

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Foreword

by Frances Rings

When I was first approached about doing **Big Heart Story** I was a bit overwhelmed by the concept and being able to respectfully service the needs of our community as well as create something that everyone could authentically connect with. Having Craig Bary as Co-Choreographer really helped to define our objective and keep the intention true to that.

Both Craig and I are passionate about dance as a means of communication to bring understanding to our diversity and differences and to celebrate them. The dance industry in Australia today is vibrant with a diverse range of practitioners from varied cultural background, intergenerational leaders, and gender representations. The message we want to say is that we proudly come together on Aboriginal land to celebrate our vast communities and what it means to be Australian. Using contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous movement language, our aim is to create a dance that can be learnt, shared and performed by anyone and everyone in a global creative dialogue that acknowledges Dance as a refuge free from racial division and judgement.

When we come together, we confirm what it means to be a part of a wider community. Our collective voices speak of the importance of Art and creative expression to all levels of society and our right to access this. **Big Dance Australia** give us the opportunity as a community to celebrate Indigenous and Non-Indigenous coming together as one voice.

Creating **Big Heart Story** allowed us one of those rare opportunities where for a moment we set aside differences and stand as a community to say, our art is powerful, our identity is strong and we acknowledge our ancient country and its original custodians. To grow and heal as a nation, these steps affirm our commitment to a culturally rich and diverse society for future generations.

by Craig Bary

Big Heart Story for me was an opportunity to work alongside and collaborate with one of Australia's most renowned and celebrated choreographers, Frances Rings. Over the last few years, Frances and I have formed a strong relationship working together at NAISDA Dance College on the Central Coast. A college for our first nation's young people to come and build on their cultural and contemporary dance art forms, so when Frances asked if I would like to work with her on this project I jumped at the opportunity.

Big Dance gave us the chance to bring to light the coming together of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous communities and celebrate our strengths together, and to celebrate this wonderful rich land that we get to live, work, and perform on. Both Frances and I are interested in creating work that is more than entertainment, rather art that asks you to think about the society in which we live. I feel we have achieved this beautifully with simple movement and story that anyone can dig their teeth into, and I am excited to see how this translates around the country and the globe.

Background

Big Dance is a participatory festival, open to everyone, creating a unique opportunity to participate in a large-scale dance event. Taking place every two years, Big Dance commissions acclaimed choreographers to create a work that can be learnt by anyone in the world, through online tutorials and community workshops. Big Dance engages with thousands of people and connects them in real time via live stream using the unifying power of choreography.

History of Big Dance

Big Dance originated in London in 2006, led by the Mayor of London in partnership with People Dancing and the Big Dance Hubs, a network of leading dance organisations across the UK. This biennial celebration of dance has inspired thousands of people to get dancing in London, the UK and internationally. In 2016, London hosted their final Festival with over 42,000 people in 44 countries around the world learning or using the commissioned choreography to create their own spectacular performances.

In 2014, Ausdance NSW was part of a partnership initiative led by the Greater London Authority, Sydney Dance Company, Get Scotland Dancing, Arts Council England and the British Council. Over 2000 participants learnt the choreography commissioned specifically for this event by Sydney Dance Company's Rafael Bonachela. **Big Dance** was performed and filmed at Sydney Opera House, Bega and Port Macquarie, with live satellite links to London and Glasgow. The Big Dance Australian component was led by Ausdance NSW and produced by Sydney Dance Company. It was funded by the Australia Council, City of Sydney; Sydney Opera House and Arts NSW. In 2017 a further 2000 participants performed the same choreography at MONA (in Hobart) for the 24 Carrot Garden Festival.

In 2016, Ausdance NSW worked with inter-state partners, Tracks Dance Company (Darwin, NT) Ausdance QLD (Brisbane), to teach participants choreography by Akram Khan. In the Northern Territory over 75 dancers performed in front of approximately 8,000 onlookers during the Territory Day festivities. Meanwhile, in Brisbane over 50 dancers performed at the Brisbane Powerhouse and footage was uploaded to the Big Dance UK website and screened at the 2016 Australian Dance Awards.

Big Dance UK has now passed the legacy to Ausdance. In 2018, Big Dance Australia led by Ausdance NSW and Ausdance VIC, showcased the choreography of acclaimed choreographers Frances Rings and Craig Bary. The **Big Dance** was named '**Big Heart Story**'.

Vision

The Ausdance vision for Big Dance- Big Heart Story was for there to be entire communities learning dance through video, dance teachers or community leaders and thousands of people filling dance halls, ovals and lounge rooms around Australia learning the contemporary Indigenous choreography.

Aims

The aims of Big Dance - Big Heart Story are to:

- raise participation in and appreciation of dance
- deliver a dance program that provides creative health and community benefits, and contributes to social interaction and cohesion
- enable people to be part of their 'local' community and 'virtual community'
- engage with existing and develop new participants and audiences for dance
- share, promote and broaden the knowledge of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal dance and culture
- promote on-going engagement with dance (participant / audience)
- create a short dance work that embodies and shares Australian culture using contemporary practice.

Community engagement

Big Dance – Big Heart Story was taught live through workshops across the country and online, through short videos. Ausdance filmed the Big Dance choreography and developed online resources to share with participants. This allowed the participants to learn the Big Dance choreography anywhere in the world. Some participants chose to organise their own event, create an online response to the choreography or participate in one of the major events happening throughout Australia or overseas.

On April 29 2018, all the major participating cities were connected via live stream and satellite technologies. The participants and onlookers were able to view the dancers in other cities while simultaneously performing.

Choreography

Big Dance – Big Heart Story was created by acclaimed Indigenous choreographer Frances Rings and New Zealand born Craig Bary. The dance has all the hallmarks of the richness and beauty of Rings' work and Bary's contemporary dance experience, offering participants access to a unique insight into Contemporary Aboriginal dance and culture.

The five-minute dance can be learnt by anyone in the world and includes versions to suit different capabilities, including standard and seated.

Choreographers

Frances Rings



Frances is of Kokatha heritage and also of German descent.

In 2002, Frances made her main stage choreographic debut for Bangarra to outstanding critical acclaim with the Rations bill of *Walkabout*. Frances has followed this by creating 6 works for the company; *Bush* (co-choreography), *Unaipon*, *X300*, *Artefact*, *Terrain* and *Sheoak*.

Frances has choreographed and danced in works for many of Australia's leading Dance Companies and Choreographers including: West Australian Ballet, Tasdance, Leigh Warren & Dancers, Meryl Tankard and Legs on the Wall. Internationally Frances has established important intercultural creative relationships with First Nations artists most notably Kahawi Dance Theatre (Canada) and Atamira Dance Company (NZ).

From 2016 – 2018 Frances was appointed Head of Creative Studies at NAISDA Dance College.

Frances's work, *Terrain* has been selected on the 2019 -2021 Higher School Certificate Dance Syllabus. In 2019, Frances returned to Bangarra in the position of Associate Artistic Director and became the Artistic Director in 2023.

Frances has been the recipient of many awards the most recent include: Helpmann Award Best New Australian Dance Work and Best regional Show for *Terrain*. *Sheoak*, Best New Dance Work, Best Choreography in a Dance Work at the 2016 Helpmann awards.

For further information on Frances Ring's work visit:

- National Library of Australia, *Rings*, Frances <https://trove.nla.gov.au/people/721071>
- *Terrain*, Bangarra <https://www.bangarra.com.au/productions/terrain/>
- *Engaging Women* <https://engagingwomen.com.au/stories/frances-rings>

Craig Bary



Craig Bary is an active member of the dance community in Australia and New Zealand. He has been a founding member of key organisations such as The New Zealand Dance Company and Garry Stewart's Australian Dance Theatre. Craig has worked with many different companies and choreographers and choreographed works on Sydney Dance Company, Footnote New Zealand Dance, and the iOU collective. Craig regularly works with The New Zealand School of Dance and is currently the Unit Manager for Contemporary Dance and Physical Theatre at NAISDA Dance College.

For further information on Bary's work visit:

- Arts Review: <http://artsreview.com.au/on-the-couch-with-craig-bary/>
- The New Zealand Dance Company: <https://www.nzdc.org.nz/node/craig-bary/>
- Dance Informa: <https://dancemagazine.com.au/2011/07/on-side-with-craig-bary-and-lisa-griffiths/>

Composer

Huey Benjamin has worked as a session and touring musician with many of Australia's top recording artists and bands. Huey has composed the score for five of choreographer Narelle Benjamin's stage works *Inside Out* (2004) and *Out of Water* (2005) for the One Extra Dance Company and *Gossamer* (2006) for the Sydney Dance Company, *Figment* for the 2007 Sydney Festival, *In Glass* for the 2010 Spring Dance Festival, and *Hiding in Plain Sight* (2014, Performance Space at Carriageworks). With choreographer Garry Stewart, Huey has composed for the works *The Centre & It's Opposite* (The Royal Birmingham Ballet Company, W.A. Ballet), *UnBlack* (Ballet Du Rhin France), *Worldhood* and *Proximity* (Australian Dance Theatre), *Monument* (The Australian Ballet) and *Object* (Royal Ballet Flanders). Huey is currently the music and film production lecturer at the Indigenous performing arts college NAISDA.

Key ideas and structure

When developing this dance Rings and Bary considered the following:

- Australia is an ancient country that proudly sustains a living cultural history that extends back 60 000 years.
- Its First Nations people have a relationship with the lands and seas that underpins their existence and informs their identity and relationship to Country.

- Our Country is a reflection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices from varied backgrounds whose presence represents the diversity of genders, cultures, beliefs and communities.
- All contribute to our nation's vibrant artistic landscape.
- We acknowledge and celebrate the many diverse voices that make up our incredible community and reflect that as we unite to dance our own Big Dance Australia.

The choreography has three coloured groups. Rings explains their significance:

'The black is the Indigenous and the white is the non-Indigenous; the red is really the heart of our country. It's the red soil, it's our bloodline, it's our lineage and it's our spiritual heart of Australia, which is Uluru. And that is something that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people connect with.'

Each group (black, white, red) is assigned a different choreographic sequence/variation. Participants should note that these colour choices are symbolic and in no way literal. You may freely choose the group you follow with a movement story you connect with and want to tell.

Themes

In the choreography, Rings and Bary explored several themes and ideas including:

- Indigenous and non-indigenous people coming together in a shared dialogue.
- Country; its spiritual heart, its red earth.
- Bloodlines and culture making up our shared identity.
- Breathing into our shared cultural life and sustaining that connection.

Viewing and learning Big Heart Story

The **Big Dance – Big Heart Story** can be watched at <https://www.bigdance.org.au/learn>

Video credits:

- Choreography: Frances Rings & Craig Bary
- Music: Huey Benjamin
- Dancers: NAISDA Developing Artists
- Filmed at: NAISDA Dance College
- Date: 12th December 2017

AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS DANCE

Australia is home to Indigenous people of many nations, each with their own cultural stories, practices and traditions. The dances are part of a cultural understanding and communication and belong to a rich and deep heritage. Protocols generally surround who performs the dance and who can teach it.

Big Heart Story is a contemporary Indigenous inspired piece by Frances and Craig's connection to Countries and Culture. Big Heart Story is not a dance that belongs to any one Indigenous culture. This contemporary dance has been designed so that people from all nations can learn and perform the dance without breaching protocols.

Protocols

Protocols are appropriate ways of using Indigenous cultural material and interacting with Indigenous people and their communities. Protocols encourage ethical conduct and promote interaction based on good faith and mutual respect. Indigenous protocols arise from value systems and cultural principles developed within and across communities over time.

Responsible use of Indigenous cultural knowledge and expression will ensure that Indigenous cultures are maintained and protected so they can be passed on to future generations.

- Protocols for using First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts <https://creative.gov.au/investment-and-development/protocols-and-resources/protocols-for-using-first-nations-cultural-and-intellectual-property-in-the-arts/>

It is important to note that most Indigenous cultures have their own dances, influenced by their own history, society, culture and environment. Protocols exist within these cultures about who can learn and perform the dances, under what circumstances.

Acknowledgements

When performing **Big Heart Story**, it is important to acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples on whose land you are performing. Ideally and where appropriate, you would invite a local elder to perform a Welcome to Country on the land that Big Dance is being performed.

For more information about Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, you can visit the following site:

- https://www.indigenous.gov.au/contact-us/welcome_acknowledgement-country

Connecting with your local Indigenous community

Before you begin your unit of work, we strongly encourage you to gain your Principal's support to contact an elder from your community and invite them to speak to your students or watch their performance. This can happen at any time during the unit of work. The intent is to pay respect to the custodians of the land in which you are working and to learn as much as you can about local Indigenous country, culture and people; to discover the ways in which place is important to Indigenous peoples; and how these things affect the themes and movements within their dances.

If your invitation is accepted by an elder, make sure to ask how he or she would like to be addressed and introduced, how the space should be prepared, and anything else that is needed. Discuss together the context of your unit of work. You can share a link from the Big Dance website to provide information. Ask if and what the elder would like to present in this context.

Advise your Principal on your planning, so the school can continue to deepen relationships with local Indigenous leaders or begin to establish one.

If you have the opportunity for questions and answers, or an 'in conversation' you might like to prepare some questions on

- the Indigenous community of your area
- significant places
- important cultural stories
- the Indigenous community of your area
- significant places
- important cultural stories
- their dances and songs
- what their dances and songs mean to them

Useful links

If you are not sure who to contact or which language, tribal or nation group you need to speak with, the following Map of Indigenous Australia may help you. Please note that the publishers of the map advise the map is not definitive.

- <https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/search>

Some areas have a local Aboriginal Land Council. Local Aboriginal Land Councils maintain and enhance Aboriginal culture, identity and heritage in their area. Contact your local Council for advice on who you should speak to and how you should best make contact.

The Australian Local Government Association provides links to each state and territory. Click on your state or territory to search individual municipalities or just ring the general number provided and ask to speak to someone that can advise you on contacting an elder that you can speak with.

Other resources

To engage deeply on another level, you and your students can use other resources. Contact your state or territory's Department of Education for recommendations.

TEACHER ADVICE

Tips for safe spaces

Dance should take place in suitable spaces which ensures an environment that is safe and conducive. In general, a dance space should have suitable flooring, with a safe surface designed and constructed to minimise the risk of injury. It should have adequate heating, cooling and ventilation.

In general, carpet and/or concrete surfaces are not suitable for dance. However, for Big Heart Story, carpet and concrete are suitable if you ensure the surface is dry, clean, level, free of small objects and slip hazards. Outdoor spaces and classroom are also acceptable if you look for possible hazards and act to minimize risk. For example, if dancing outside, consider sun exposure and any trip hazards. If inside, make sure there are no objects on the floor such as pins, paper, plastic sheets that dancers can slip on.

How much room do I need?

Make sure there is enough room for each student to extend their arms and turn in a circle without touching anyone else. Ensure students have enough room to take three large steps forward and three to the side. Students will not enjoy themselves if they are worried about colliding with another dancer.

Tips on inclusion and access

Begin by placing positive expectations on what students can do. Be positive and expect your students to achieve at a high level. It's important not to place limits on any person, regardless of who they are and what you think they can do. You may be surprised just how much dancers can do without the need for modification.

- Plan to progress at an easy pace. Allow a long period of time to learn the dance so that your group builds its skill and confidence with each week
- Watch the Big Heart Story first and discuss it in an age and developmentally appropriate way.
- Much of the Big Heart Story choreography refers to the heart. Use the heartbeat of a way to connect students, to ground them and think of the movements that move away from and towards the heart
- Build ownership and investment in the Dance. Ask students for favourite moments.

- Why do they like them?
- What does it remind them of?

Use these thoughts and images to name the different parts of the Dance.

- Link movements to simple words. Once the dancer knows the movement and what it is called, they can usually execute the skill independently (for instance 'rowing' or 'heartbeat').
- Monitor how your group is going.
 - Are they ready to move onto the next small block of movement?

If people aren't ready to move on, that's alright, sometimes you just need to find a different way to 'explain' the movement.

- Once your group has mastered the movement to the degree you're pleased with, review and build upon this movement from week to week.
- We all need encouragement and support. Be specific and help where needed, but also give your students the opportunity to discover answers for themselves.
- Many people will be nervous and worried when starting a new activity, and it can take a while for confidence to develop. Practice the dance a lot. The more practice we do, the better we get and the less we worry.

Tips to adapt the material for individuals and groups

Be willing to adapt both movement and expectation and uniquely for individual's needs. There are many ways to adapt the choreography of Big Heart Story so that your group can access and enjoy it in a meaningful way. You and your students can do this by

- modifying the space
 - Make the area larger or smaller.
 - Make visible boundaries, or places to stand.
 - Prepare spacing as close to the spacing you'll use in performance.
- adapting the dancer's roles
 - Limit or add responsibility (i.e. dance captains for lines, counting the music, documenting the rehearsals, taking notes).
 - Modify demands on the student (you can dance all the dance or some of it).
- focusing on the strong shapes, movements and imagery
 - Ask dancers about the symbols or images they see in the dance (i.e. heartbeat with one hand, a bird, waves, rocking, sprinkling water).
 - Encourage individuals to improvise with these actions.
 - Make them bigger, slower.
 - Change levels.
 - Turn some of the movements.
 - Freeze them on a cue such as in the game of musical statues.
 - Travel forward, backward, sideways.
 - Change the quality of the movement to make it sharper or softer etc.

- Respond to the beat/pulse of the music, following with a different body part for 32 – 64 counts (body parts might include fingers, hands, arms, torso, feet, legs, spine, head).

Other teaching tips

- Create visual cue cards or videos for different movements (make and show some).
- Use inclusive language rather than ‘walk’, say ‘travel’.
- Designate spot markers for each student within a larger group.
- Plan for consistency by starting and ending with the same activity.
- Encourage individuals to introduce a concept, then improvise with it. For instance, use the sun gesture and play with changing it from:
 - large to small (big shape followed by a very small shape)
 - high to low (high shapes followed by a low shapes).
- Describe and discuss what a flash mob is, showing examples.
 - How could this approach be used in the performance of the Big Dance?
- Discuss where the performances will take place. Show this via images and diagrams.

Warming up and down

Approach dance sessions as you would any physical training session. You wouldn't undertake sport without a proper warm up (or you shouldn't). The reasons for warming up include:

- You need to ‘tune into’ your body. You should listen carefully to how your body feels and what it needs.
- Before dancing you should gently and gradually increase your range of motion (ROM) in the joints.
- Increase ROM (range of movement) by performing gentle slow movements, which will increase heat and blood flow, which in turn primes the muscles for action. Gradually, over the course of 15 minutes, you can increase the size of the movement or the speed.
- If you miss out on warm up, you risk tearing or ‘pulling’ whilst undertaking the actions, straining muscles or spraining ligaments.
- Warming down is also important. Warming down can incorporate some of the movements you just performed in a much slower fashion. It is an opportunity for students to refocus, drawing their attention back into their bodies, concentrating on breathing or visualising successful moments (past, present or future). After a very physical class, the warm down enables a break-down of the lactic acid that can build up in muscles during physical activity. Stretching can be incorporated into a warm down, but be aware of the following:
 - Don't force a stretch.
 - Don't buddy stretch so don't allow students to stretch each other.

- Overstretching often results in damage to ligaments, which are designed to provide structural support for the body so over-loose ligaments can result in future injuries.
- Don't just suddenly stop moving.

More in depth information about safe dance practice and warming up and down can be found in the Ausdance fact sheets at <https://ausdance.org.au/publications/details/safe-dance-factsheets>

Additional Resources

Big Dance - The Big Heart Story links:

- Big Dance learn: <https://www.bigdance.org.au/learn/>
- Big Dance Melbourne and Sydney event video: <https://vimeo.com/272707974>

Media links:

- Sydney Morning Herald: <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/choreographerfrances-rings-has-all-the-right-moves-for-big-dance-20180424-h0z6m7.html>

Glossary Of Terms

Beat

The beat is a basic unit of time, often described as the underlying pulse, which is regular and measurable.

Body actions

Refers to movement of one body part, or multiple body parts. This can include simple movements such as waving, nodding, shrugging shoulders or more complex movements such as turning, jumping, leaping and raising a leg to the side.

Canon

One movement follows another. For instance, one person or group begins the phrase, after 4 counts another person or group begins etc.

Contrast

Movements or phrases that differ from each other. For example, you create 2 travelling sequences and half the class perform travelling sequence A while half the group perform travelling sequence B.

Elements of dance

Elements of dance: space (body shape, levels, direction, pathways, groupings), energy (dynamics – soft, strong, heavy, light, sustained, suspended, percussive, vibratory, collapsing) and the relationships between groupings.

Focus

Focus can be internal. For instance, the way a dancer concentrates focus on memory, feeling, movement quality. It can also be external. For instance, the way a dancer focuses their attention while performing. The latter may include eye focus and direction (such as the way the eyes follow the hand or looking out to the audience as opposed to looking at your feet).

Movement vocabulary

Some dance styles have a specific movement language, such as an arabesque in ballet or a contraction in contemporary dance. Style specific movements are not a requirement of the curriculum F-6.

Neutral stance

This is a stance with feet in parallel with each other, head erect, spine long and hands out to the side. The dancer should feel comfortable, relaxed and ready to move.

Pathways

In dance this refers to the path in which a movement travels from A to B. This might include non-locomotor activity such as the way in which a student, reaches up as high as he can go and then drops down to touch the ground. Pathways also refer to locomotion or travelling movements, such as running directly or indirectly to a place in the room.

Rhythm

Rhythm is a strong, regular repeated pattern of movement or sound. It can be simple and complex in its arrangement.

Technical skills

These include control, coordination, balance, flexibility, strength and stamina. The last two in this list are not expected of young children. The first four will continue to develop throughout the child's primary and secondary years.

Tempo

Tempo is the speed or pace at which music is played.