

auSDANCE
VIC

INSPIRE WORKSHOP RESOURCE

Joel Bray



INTRODUCTION

Inspire is a dance educators professional learning program presented by Ausdance VIC. The 90-minute workshops provide insights into the recent works, processes, and dance-making skills of local choreographers Ngioka Bunda-Heath and Joel Bray.

Created in direct response to feedback from teachers, *Inspire* is designed to offer a unique opportunity for peer-to-peer collaboration and to engage in discipline-based discussions with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island dance.

Participants receive a recording of the workshop, this curriculum-aligned resource and suggestions for integrating the workshop learnings into classrooms. Each participant also receives the BIG HEART Education Resource, including eight Victorian Curriculum-aligned lesson plans, created by Frances Rings and Craig Bary.

Acknowledgements

Inspire is presented by Ausdance VIC in partnership with Dancehouse with the support of the Department of Education, Victoria, through the Strategic Partnerships Program.

Resource material provided by Joel Bray and prepared for *Inspire* by Dr Katrina Rank

Choreographic material: Joel Bray and collaborators

Disclaimer

This guide has been created to align with the Victorian Curriculum 2019-2025. Ausdance Vic does not take any responsibility for changes to the Curriculum content descriptions for the relevant year and subject.

URLs

The internet addresses (URLs) in this resource were valid at the time of publication and were chosen as being appropriate for use as an education research tool. However, due to the dynamic nature of the internet over which the publisher has no control, some URLs may have changed, may have ceased to exist since publication, or may inadvertently link to sites with content that could be considered offensive or inappropriate. The publisher does not accept responsibility for any such unforeseeable changes.

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.



ABOUT JOEL BRAY

A Naarm-based performer and maker, Joel Bray is a proud Wiradjuri man and Artistic Director of Joel Bray Dance. Joel danced in Europe with Kolben Dance, FRESCO Dance Company, Roy Assaf and Niv Sheinfeld & Oren Laor, and in Australia with CHUNKY MOVE.

Joel's intimate dance-theatre encounters in unorthodox spaces spring from his Wiradjuri heritage, and use humour to engage audiences in rituals about sex, history, trauma and healing. His experimental work challenges white audience expectations of Aboriginal performance and blur the colonial genres.

His works Biladurang (2017), Dharawungara (CHUNKY MOVE, 2018), Daddy (Yirramboi Festival 2019), Considerable Sexual License (Yirramboi 2021), I Liked It, BUT (2021) and Garabari (2022) have toured to the Brisbane, Sydney, Darwin, Midsumma, Auckland, LiveWorks and Dance Massive Festivals, and to the Arts Centre Melbourne and Canberra Theatre Centre. Joel's seven-channel video installation called Giraru Galing Ganhagirri (The Wind Will Bring the Rain) was presented at the National Gallery of Australia, and Storage Unit (2023) was commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria.

Joel was the 2019 National Library of Australia Creative Arts Fellow, a 2020 Sydney Dance Company New Breed choreographer and the 2021-22 inaugural CHUNKY MOVE Choreographer-in-Residence, and a member of the Melbourne Fringe Board.

PREVIOUS WORKS

These descriptions of Joel Bray's previous work, can be found on his website and is included here to ensure access in changing web environments.

CONSIDERABLE SEXUAL LICENSE

October 12, 2020

CONSIDERABLE SEXUAL LICENSE is a large-scale work that had its Australian Premiere at Yirramboi Festival 2021. Through gentle and carefully staged interactivity, this contemporary performance invites participants to consider the impacts of colonisation on ideas and expressions of sex, sex positivity, consent and societal queerness.

Through a fellowship at the National Library of Australia and consultation with Elders, Joel researched the ceremonies of his people — the Wiradjuri of Central NSW. RH Mathews, an anthropologist embedded with the Wiradjuri when Joel's people were still living traditionally, wrote in an article: "During the night preceding the taking away of the novices, considerable sexual license is allowed...".

What if sex positivity, queer sexuality and polyamory was a part of pre-contact Indigenous cultures?

The work is a promenade work for a Black Box space with no seating, with four performers. Joel Bray, Indigenous performer Carly Sheppard, Drag royalty Daniel Newell (aka Dandrogy) and Nadiyah Akbar. (Niharika Senapati original cast member).

CONSIDERABLE SEXUAL LICENSE extends promenade and participatory practices and thematics from Joel's previous works (Biladurang, Daddy) to create a space of both safety and provocation for audiences. The work manifests as an immersive dance-theatre experience performers weaving storytelling, dance and space for audience participation to ponder a past (and perhaps an imagined future) of the sexual ecology of Australia before the Coloniser and the Bible.

This project was supported for its premiere presentation at Northcote Town Hall by Darebin Arts in May 2021, for Yirramboi Festival.

This work will be the focus of this workshop.

Reviews:

Theatre Travels 'Considerable Sexual License at Northcote Town Hall Arts Centre' by Thomas Gregory, May 8 2021: <https://www.theatretravels.org/post/review-considerable-sexual-license-at-northcote-town-hall-arts-centre>

Time Out, 'Considerable Sexual License' by Stephen Russell, 29 April 2021: <https://www.timeout.com/melbourne/dance/considerable-sexual-license>

Vimeo link to a teaser for Considerable Sexual License: <https://vimeo.com/joelbraydance/cslteaser>

GARABARI

April 17, 2019

Across the globe, First Nations cultures have harnessed the enduring power of rituals to transmit knowledge. Countless generations have undergone rites of passage that have left them changed – closer to others, and more attuned to themselves. By returning to these unchanging rituals, we are changed as we grow in wisdom and stature in the community.

Garabari draws from this rich well of meaning to create a celebratory dance work that plugs you into this wellspring of energies.

Garabari features lavish costumes by Wiradjuri fashion designer Denni Francisco, driving beats by Byron Scullin and otherworldly lighting and projection by Katie Sfetkidis.

Garabari was crafted in close collaboration with the Wiradjuri community in and around Wagga Wagga. The work is performed by five Indigenous and non-Indigenous dancers, with a little help from you. Join the circle and dance.

A key element of this work is that it was made in genuine collaboration with the Wiradjuri community in Wagga-Wagga and the Riverina. Uncle Christopher Kirkbright, Joel's father, is the Project Elder providing oversight and insight to the creative process. The creative team spent time on Country yarning with the elders, offering work-in-progress showings to the community and workshops for young people. In addition, local Elders, artists and youth were invited to contribute designs, songs and stories that have been woven into the work. Garabari is a work Contemporary Performance of scale, that disrupts Western ideas of individual authorship and, like a ritual should, feels like the common property of the whole community.

Premiere Season: Arts House, Melbourne, December 2022.

GIRARU GALING GANHAGIRRI

February 8, 2022

Giraru Galing Ganhagirri means “The Wind Will Bring Rain” in Wiradjuri. It speaks to the implacable force of Country- of the assurance that, in nature, one thing follows another and the meeting of the elements of air and water. Always have and always will. In these times, solace is to be found in the ‘ancientness’ and endurance of Country. Whatever happens, the wind will always bring the rain.

This dance work on video, is the result of a collaboration between Wiradjuri choreographer Joel Bray, filmmaker James Wright and composer Daniel Nixon. Giraru Galing Ganhagirri is a multi-channel screen video installation of pure dance- a poetic, choreographic meditation on the elements. In a nod to ancient ceremony and filmed entirely on Joel's ancestral Wiradjuri Country, Joel gently inhabits the landscape with his body literally ‘painted’ with Country.

The work premiered at the National Gallery of Australia as a part of the 4th National Indigenous Art Triennial, curated by Hetti Perkins, in 2022.

Giraru Galing Ganhagirri toured around Australia, as part of the National Gallery of Australia's Triennial exhibition tour. It toured to the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, Germany, as part of the Songlines. Tracking the Seven Sisters exhibition, 2022, and exhibited at Blind Side Gallery, Melbourne for Midsumma Festival 2024.

Giraru Galing Ganhagirri was commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra for the 4th National Indigenous Art Triennial: Ceremony, created in consultation with Uncle James Ingram and Wagga Wagga Elders, and with support from City of Melbourne, Phillip Keir and Sarah Benjamin (the Keir Foundation), City of Port Phillip, Create NSW, Blacktown Arts, Arts Centre Melbourne, and Yirramboi Festival 2020.

CURRENT WORK

HOMO PENTECOSTUS

This description of *Homo Pentecostus*, Joel Bray's latest work, presented at the Mathouse, Melbourne, May 2024 can be found on the [Malthouse website](#) and is included here to ensure access in changing web environments.

“Join an odyssey of self-discovery and liberation. Actor, dancer, and writer, **Joel Bray** invites you to an intimate exploration of his secret queer identity within the confines of a 1990s Pentecostal Church.

Partake in a shared ritual that immerses you in the transformative power of music, movement, and collective ritual. From the humble church halls to the vibrant disco dance floors, *Homo Pentecostus* peels back layers of conflicting allure and hidden shame to illuminate our quest to embrace our true selves.

Awaken your spirit. Shake up your perceptions. *Homo Pentecostus* is an ecstatic testament to resilience, love, and the pursuit of personal truth.

LEAD ARTIST'S NOTE

In the late 19th Century, John Stuart Mill coined the term *Homo Economicus* to describe an imagined perfectly rational person. At the same time, the seeds of Pentecostalism were being laid by the industrious Wesleyans who believed that one needn't wait for Heaven to be perfect; rather one can attain spiritual sanctification here on Earth.

The Pentecostal Movement distinguishes itself from other Christian faiths with this emphasis on the Holy Spirit 'corner' of the Holy Trinity. The world is seen through a Spiritual prism: an epic, ongoing battle between angelic and demonic forces. Pentecostalism and Capitalism have developed hand-in-hand ever since and the two have fused in the phenomenon of the Megachurch, the global paragon of which we have here in Australia: Hillsong.

The Pentecostal Church is also profoundly homophobic. Many young Queers have been subjected to 'faith healing', basically conversion therapy in 'spiritual camouflage'. And I was one of them. In fact I was a passionate 'Hillsonger'. Until I suddenly wasn't. I left the Church, closed that book and never looked back.

Until now.

Making this work has been revelatory, and it's been healing. One of the many surprises has been how much Pentecostal aesthetics, and ways of being, moving and communicating are coded into my very DNA. I am, in so many ways, a *Homo Pentecostus*.

I've had two extraordinary fellow pilgrims on this 'Road to Damascus': co-director Emma Valente and co-performer Peter Paltos. Peter has been unerringly generous in sharing his,

and his family's, story and his continued keen spirituality has been very present in the room and has caused us all to handle this material with a greater sensitivity. The resulting work is far more nuanced thanks to him. He's also hilarious and the process has been a very Queer delight.

Emma is one of my absolute favourite theatremakers, and it's been a joy to peek behind the curtain and witness the brilliance up close. Her capacity to hold vast amounts of data and to continually nudge our sprawling tangle of materials into a clear *almost* narrative has been quite breathtaking to witness. It has allowed me to be my full chaotic self and head down creative tangents, safe in the knowledge that she is grabbing anything useful. It has been an absolute joy.

The three of us wrote *Homo Pentecostus* through interviewing each other, recording and re-learning. The resulting work is a conversation between two Queer men discovering each other, their shared experiences of religion and culture and, just as importantly, their differences. So, this work is woven from our own autobiographies, yet it is also fictionalised and incomplete.



'Dharawungara' (2018) by Joel Bray. Photo by Pippa Samaya.

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

In this workshop, Joel will unpack his performance-making process. He will briefly touch on the three elements which he weaves together to make his unique brand of participatory Choreographic-Theatre:

- writing and speaking using our choreographic toolbox,
- invitational and consensual audience participatory elements, and
- En Route, a movement improvisation methodology to generate choreographic material

Then we will take a deep dive into this third element. Joel will lead participants through an En Route physical practice, demonstrating how we can craft a palette of very specific choreography states and modes. Throughout the workshop Joel will use one of his works Considerable Sexual License to demonstrate how this process is applied. There will also be plenty of time for discussion and questions.

Participants will walk away with not only a clear understanding of Joel's choreographic process, but also some practical tools in teaching improvisation and supporting students in their own generative practice.

Alignment to VCE Dance Scope

Knowledge and skills gained in this workshop will give teachers tools to support dance students to choreograph dance works. The tools Joel presents may contribute to or inspire new choreographic processes for the development and manipulation of movement vocabulary and phrases. The workshop will provide examples of ways to structure improvisations as well as opportunities to physically engage in selected practices.

Please note:

1. The workshop plan may vary at the artist's discretion and so some of the mapping below may be more or less relevant.
2. Also note, that the artist may use terminology in this workshop that varies from the exact terminology used in VCE Dance. When uncertain, please ask the artist for clarification.

Unit 1

Area of Study 2, Choreography and performance

Outcome 2

Key knowledge

- solo, duo and/or group structured improvisations

Key skills

- respond spontaneously in movement within given frameworks
- explore and develop personal movement vocabulary through improvisation

Unit 2

Area of Study 2, Choreography and performance

Outcome 2

Key knowledge

- solo, duo and/or group structured improvisations using selected frameworks
- safe dance practice in relation to development of personal movement vocabulary
- approaches to manipulating the movement categories and the elements of movement to develop a personal movement vocabulary
- the use of the choreographic process

Key skills

- develop personal movement vocabulary through completion of solo, duo and/or group structured improvisation

Unit 3

Area of Study 2, Choreography and performance

Outcome 2

Key knowledge

- manipulations of movement through a range of choreographic devices
- approaches to producing a form that facilitates the communication of the intention

Key skills

Choreography, rehearsal and performance of a skills-based solo dance work

- select and develop an intention for a skills-based solo dance work that facilitates the execution and safe use of a wide range of physical skills, use of movement vocabulary from each movement category and manipulations of the elements of movement
- use the choreographic process
- structure a solo dance work that facilitates the communication of the intention
- rehearse the solo dance work
- prepare to perform and perform the solo dance work
- communicate the intention of the work and demonstrate artistry in performance

Unit 4

Area of Study 2, Choreography and performance

Outcome 2

Key knowledge

- ways of using the choreographic process to create movement vocabulary that involves a range of actions to communicate the intention

Key skills

Choreograph a cohesive composition which communicates a selected intention by using the choreographic process and choreographic devices to create movement vocabulary