



Stephen Page

The artistic director of Indigenous group Bangarra Dance Theatre dishes on his new production, *Patyegarang*

PATYEGARANG IS ABOUT HERITAGE:

William Dawes was a lieutenant in the First Fleet. His diaries are about his dealings with the Eora and Darug people of Sydney, and his relationship with an Indigenous woman named Patyegarang. This production is about the stories told in those diaries.

In the southern end of our country, with the loss of language and customs, people spend a lot of time trying to put pride and hope back into their heritage. For me, it's about that celebration of putting life into one's heritage.

DANCE IS A STORYTELLING MEDIUM:

We don't use words on stage; we use choreography to connect to the spirit of a story. When all the elements come together – dance, costumes, music – you have wonderful storytelling through Indigenous dance.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE: This is a white man's



MOVING STORY

Jasmine Sheppard as Patyegarang and Thomas Greenfield as Lieutenant William Dawes



“We’re a part of the wonderful serpent trail of storytelling”

story, based on his notes about his relationship with the Indigenous people of that time. It's been a challenge trying to find a spirit and a heart from the Indigenous perspective.

INDIGENOUS STORIES ARE VITAL:

Putting life and spirit into Indigenous storytelling is really important. You can do it in theatre, it's been successful in film with *The Sapphires* and on TV

with *Redfern Now*. We're a part of that wonderful serpent trail of storytelling.

THE STORY IS IMPORTANT FOR A SYDNEY-BASED COMPANY: Bangarra

is based in Sydney and has been since '89. We come from different parts of the country and we haven't told a full-length Sydney story for a long time. It felt right to reawaken a Sydney story and give it as a gift to the people. *

Patyegarang premieres in Sydney on 13 June before touring to Canberra, Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne from July to September

WHAT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO

Leah Purcell is directing a production called *Brothers Wreck* at Belvoir Street (showing until 22 June). My son is playing a lead role in it.