

(Music plays)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Morning, everyone and welcome to our very first Artstate, a celebration and conversation of the arts in regional New South Wales. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Elizabeth Rogers, I am the CEO of Artstate and the MC of the event.

Apologies for the short delay this morning. I would now like to welcome to the stage Uncle Mick Roberts, who is going to welcome us to Widjabul country.

**UNCLE MICK ROBERTS:**

Thank you, Elizabeth.

(Speaks Aboriginal language)

Good morning, everybody. I can't see you all out there. I am standing in today for my dearest cousin, Dorrie. I don't know where she is, I think she must have got lost somewhere. Welcome here to Lismore, Widjabul country, part of the Bundjalung Nation.

What was most important to us was last night's welcome event, it was fantastic. I don't know if you went down there or not? Those of you who didn't go down there, you missed a fantastic, deadly night.

At the start of it with Uncle Harry talking language, and some of the boys. I shouldn't say boys just because some of them are younger than me. They are in their 50s now.

We asked Grandfather last night to stop the rain and I think he must have listened to it. He looks after us. I come from (Aboriginal word), the land of plenty, just on the outskirts of Lismore. I live there with my cousin Dorrie. Things must have some in there, because we came from a one-teacher school, six classes, one teacher. A Christian community, and we had really solid leaders.

Back in the old days, we had people come down from North Queensland and other places, all over New South Wales. I believe you are all from all over the state and all around, which is really good. Coming from country out there, I do believe next year we are going to hand over a gift to the people from Bathurst. So that will be exciting later on tonight at the workers club.

So, welcome here and enjoy your stay. There is a fantastic play on tonight about the Dreamtime story of three brothers and the legend of forming our country. Thank you.

(Applause)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Thank you so much, Mick. I would like to welcome Julian Louis, the director of NORPA.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

It is a delight to welcome you here to Lismore and NORPA. This is the home, this is where we are based, at Lismore City Hall. This was an old theatre for balls and dances. We used to set up

at the back, just a literal hole in the wall, and now it has been transformed into a performing arts centre.

Our work now place to two to three times the audience size that our works here play too. We are really proud of developing our audience.

I just wanted to say very briefly that last year (unknown term) wrote a paper about the regional arts being an untapped resource. I think that is true. I came here for a two-year contract and now I am here 10 years later. What happens to you when you go to a place of such community and your work is changed by it and you start to build work that connects.

In my theatre making, I have been affected by that greatly. I believe we are well and truly awake here. I think NORPA is one of the giants of the theatre sector. I'm so glad that you're here, and I hope you have a few days of robust discussion about the way that regional stories can inform a more contemporary narrative of what Australian culture is and can be. Thank you.

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

We are so excited to have our first speakers program here in Lismore City Hall. I just want to give you an overview of our scenes for today. Today it is creative practice.

We looked at so many things, the landscape in which we are planning to work next, which is up here in the Northern Rivers. It is very well known as a creative hub. So that's really how we came up with the creative practice and creative partnerships.

Partnerships, of course, are critical to developing the art anywhere, but more so in regional areas. Sometimes, I think that regional partnerships are easy to build in regional areas, and we will hear more about that tomorrow.

That is my very brief introduction on the themes.

It is my great pleasure to introduce our first keynote speaker. Some of you in Dubbo last year would remember (unknown term) who spoke with such enthusiasm. I contacted him and asked if he could recommend a speaker. He recommended our first keynote, Soumik Datta, who surprisingly made the big trip from the UK to Lismore. It is a big trip. He is here not only to deliver our first keynote but to perform two short recitals to demonstrate his instrument.

I do not think that his travels across regional India will have prepared him for regional New South Wales. His hallmarks are his collaborations with eclectic artists, including Beyonce, Jay-Z, Akram Khan and more.

Soumik lives in London and is acclaimed internationally. His touring band is a versatile quartet with a notable sonic spectrum between Indian ragas, drum and bass, and chorus. He has decided to share with us today his travels across India and his creative practice. Please give a warm welcome to Soumik Datta.

(applause)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

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Thank you so much.

A lot of people ask me, how do you start playing this instrument? Where do you begin? Well, just between you and me, it is all about having a great teacher. Since it is just us here this morning, let me give you a few basic pointers.

You start by taking off your shoes.

Sorry, one second.

Then you sit on the floor. For those of you with knee problems, please don't try this at home. I don't want to hear from your lawyer. The first thing is about posture. You sit up straight and cross your legs - not like a lotus, yoga people. Right leg over the left knee. Dig the belly of the instrument into your rib cage. Hips in. Back straight. Breathe out. Comfortable?

There are five main playing strings, and you have to make sure that your microphone is on. Top C, middle C, two Gs below middle C, and F. Maybe I should plug it in?

How about now? Can you hear?

Top C, middle C, two Gs below middle C, and F. The ones underneath are called sympathetic strings, but don't worry about them now.

You can make one of these plectrums yourself if you have a saw and enough sandpaper and a coconut.

This is mainly made of Indian mahogany wood. Not cheap. I know you are thinking it looks like a guitar or a mandolin, but a guitar has frets that help you land the notes, whereas this is a blank slate which you slide up and down with the tips of your fingernail. It really hurts.

The first lesson, which, when you start, is the ascending scale is made up of five notes. When you start it sounds a bit like this.

But don't give up - with a few years and a bit of practice, you get better. You are still shuffling around, your right arm is hurting, your fingernails are bleeding, but it all changes.

You play the scale up and down, symmetrically, the same way, 12 hours a day. Up... Down... For 14 years.

(Music plays)

(Applause)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

Thank you. That was a little extract from my piece, 'Fretless Nomad'. I will be playing that later on tonight. I'm going to hand the instrument over to Dee. Thank you, Dee. That was a piece that was inspired by a little personal struggle I was going through a couple of years ago.

I was travelling. This is what I do, I travel and play music - I'm basically a nomad - and after each performance, inevitably, there would be someone who would ask this question. "How long did it take you to master this instrument?"

On the surface, it sounded like a compliment, but I always froze up because I always had a problem with how to answer this question.

The first problem... I mean, the question is about time. How long did it take you? Honestly, I don't know, because I wasn't counting the hours. Maybe I should have been? Gladwell once said it takes over 10,000 hours to get to that level of excellence, that level of world class. Maybe I practiced for 10,000 hours, I don't know?

Or maybe we should be reading Franz Johansen? He believes this only applies to things like chess or public speaking. But what about other fields, like entrepreneurship? Like rock 'n' roll? Like devised theatre? Anywhere when someone is trying to invent a new language or play with an existing culture to update tradition. How do you practice that? You can't. So you choose. Gladwell or Johansen?

Anyway, back to the question. How long did it take you to master the instrument? I don't even know what 'master' means. Does that mean you reach the final rung? And even so, then where do you go? How do you keep climbing the ladder? If that's the case, I don't want it - I always have to have something to aspire to, to keep growing.

For a lot of my friends and a lot of artists around the world, it's something that is taught in education systems, and I believe it is wrong. My experience of developing has come from other things, from collaborating, from travelling, from encountering cultures that are completely different to mine. Finding myself way out of my comfort zone.

I would like to tell you about a few of those collaborations that have shaped the way I think, and on that note, it is just a real honour to be here at Artstate, so let's put our hands together for Artstate, please.

(Applause)

Let's start with a story. I grew up in London and listened to all types of music. I went to underground jazz bars and listened to all sorts of music - the 90s was an exciting time. I was also living a parallel life in India where I was studying Indian classical music under my guru, Pandit Buddhadev Das Gupta, so I had these two parallel educations going on - one was a formal classical training in India, and the other one was part of the establishment in London.

I watched drummers take apart their kit and stitch it back together in all sorts of ways. So I drilled into this ancient sarod, much to the anger of my parents. I realised I could change the sound, add electronics, and many of those innovations led to some pretty special collaborations I have done over the years.

But it wasn't until I started writing for orchestras that I realised something was wrong. I didn't realise what it was at the time, but there was this one piece where I was playing with the London

Philharmonic Orchestra, and they were playing this piece I had written, called the 'King of Ghosts'. And I found that this was the first time I had hit a wall in my own practice. Before I explain more, maybe we should just hear a little bit from it. Can we please hear 'King of Ghosts'?

(Music plays)

Thank you. I once heard the great dancer and choreographer Akram Khan talk about two time systems that exist simultaneously. One is horizontal time, linear time, and the other one which is circular time, spiralling.

Horizontal time is wasted time. It works like clockwork. There is a beginning and an end. Orchestral music is bounded on this. You start at one point and you end on the other.

Eastern time is circular. You know, this is related to the Sufi dervishes of Turkey. This is a time system that believes in birth and rebirth, mythology and nature.

I found that while it was working with orchestras, my teacher in India had instilled in me the foundations of Eastern time and I found that my approach to the notes was completely different to their approach. Although we were playing the same music of the same score, we went getting beyond a certain depth. I wanted to take this collaboration and dig deeper, one step further, and I found this wasn't happening.

So I went back to India, and my teacher, I'll never forget, said, "Everyone in this world has a common denominator." I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Roots. If you want to do this, you have to know where you come from."

I moved from India when I was 10 years old and I moved to London and I had this sort of split. This really spoke to me. It was a seed that led to a journey which took me around India in search of folk and tribal musicians hidden from the mainstream, living in small towns and villages. And I wanted to take this music away from my original home country to find the original roots of this music.

My brother, who is a filmmaker, came with me and we made a six part television series about this. We found some incredible musicians. In West Bengal, we found the Baul musicians. They play for the love of it. I was very privileged to be invited to this very close knit community. I would like to introduce you to one man in particular. Here he is.

**VIDEO PLAYS:**

He leads me away from the group towards a cluster of trees...

(Speaks in foreign language)

(Music plays)

(VIDEO ENDS)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

Musicians worry about coming and playing on stage, you worry about the temperature, for the strings and so forth. These guys weren't worried about that at all. It gets very hot in the summer of India. You just play with a lot of heart, and that's all that matters. The Bauls, like the Sufis, they lead a very frugal way of life.

Speaking of sufism, I travelled to Rajasthan. You might have heard of the music called qawwali? The production, I said we had to get into the shoot right away. I told him I hadn't had a rehearsal. I wasn't going to play, I didn't know the melodies of any of the qawwali songs. But there was no time. Here is a little clip from the troubles in Rajasthan.

(Video plays)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

OK, we've reached... I've come into a house. I don't even know which house it is. That's when it hit me. Will they let me sit in and play? I've never even played qawwali before.

(Music plays)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

The main singer explains to me that qawwali is a mystic form of sufism. It is similar to the whirling dervishes of Africa, but here there is a melody, and they can achieve a state of euphoria.

(Music plays)

(Conversing in foreign language)

(Music plays)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

They still use the vocabulary, they still use pitch and rhythm and melody. I could still use the training that they had to collaborate with these decisions. Because I didn't know the material, I could rely on my ear and intuition.

It wasn't until we got to the north-east corner in a place called Nagaland, where I found myself completely out of my depth. We were off music. I was really out of my depth. I didn't know how to process this. There was no pitch, just war cries. In its tribal state, how thumping on the ground could be so powerful. Although there is no musical link to it, I still want to show you what I found in Nagaland. I still can't process it.

(Rhythmic thumping)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

I didn't know what to expect coming to Nagaland. The music isn't the same as other Indian forms of music. I'm sad I didn't know more about it when I came in. The feeling you get when you are sitting there, hearing the thunderous drums, you are watching the dancers with their

spears. It is about this thump. There is something wild in there, you are not thinking in here, you are feeling, somewhere else, in the belly. Your whole body, the rhythm of it, it is this cycle. It is this boom, boom.

(Shouting and yelling)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

The series did really well on Channel 4 in the UK. In many ways the project was over, except the journey never ended for me. I remember waking up in the middle of the night feeling like I could feel sand between my toes, hearing voices from villages that I left behind. I was haunted by my journey. In many ways, I am probably still processing it today.

I lost all of my hair. That's what happens when you produce your own TV series. Think about that.

Seriously, I was hooked to the challenge of the unknown. Stepping outside your comfort zone to try something completely new and to allow that to help you grow, that is a feeling that I would never have had sitting in a room.

I wanted to continue doing that. It was like, what is the next project? So I started looking at instrumental traditions from across the world, not just India. Japan, for example, has a great music-nature connection. A few years ago, I met a great taiko drummer who taught me about the drumming traditions of Japan.

We put together - there was the Japanese drummer, a Korean instrumentalist and myself. The first rehearsal was a total disaster. Between all of us, we could speak about five or six different languages, but we couldn't talk to each other.

Ultimately, we just shut up and played, and we found that the music had plenty to say.

(Music plays)

(Drumming)

**WOOJAE PARK:**

This instrument's name is geomungo and it is from Korea. It is very old. It has six strings and I sit on the floor and play. We wanted to make different, rich, cultural music, and we wanted to make an old one and a new one.

(Music plays)

(Applause)

**SOUMIK DATTA:**

I have been very fortunate to have these collaborations in my life, these encounters. I found that this is how I grow, as an artist and a human being. It is not just through hours and hours of practice, it is by opening up to other people who can show you new things. I hope this will continue for the rest of my life. Thank you.

(Applause)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Thank you so much, Soumik. It has just been fantastic to have you come across to New South Wales from London. Here is a small token of our appreciation. Understanding that you have a lot of luggage, this is a small piece of artwork from our local Aboriginal artists. It is light and it will fit in your luggage.

For those of you who want to attend the recital, tickets are on sale, it will be at 6:30. Tomorrow at 2:00, he will be doing a Q and A with Paul Scott Williams, who is the director of the Goulburn Conservatorium of Music.

As we move from our international creative practice, we're going to go really into creative practice, particularly in the Lismore area.

Another one my board members has gone into this work. Stephen Champion has served as the board of Regional Arts New South Wales since 2012.

He is the manager of Bathurst Memorial since 2003 and has an extensive practice, dance theatre, the Nimrod Theatre and his worked in Poland. He also worked at the Sydney Olympic Festival. Please welcome Stephen, who will introduce the panel of artists from the Northern Rivers.

(Applause)

**SPEAKER:**

Hi, everyone.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

Good morning, everybody. This is a little enquiry into creative regional practice. I would like to introduce you to Leigh Carriage. You already know Julian Louis and Cate McQuillen.

You can read all about all of these people in your programs and online, so I won't give their full biographies. Before we start I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Widjabul People of the Bundjalung Nation, and acknowledge their Elders past and present.

There are three people sitting before you and they are, to me, what art is about. They are incredibly creative people who have chosen deliberately to work in a regional context. Leigh is an amazing singer and lecturer at Southern Cross University. Like Julian and Cate, she has not only a regional but a national and international career and reputation.

Julian, as you well know, is the artistic director of NORPA, one of, if not the, leading regional theatre company in Australia. I think what is particular about Julian's practice is that it is influenced by being in a regional area. 'Railway Wonderland' was one the most successful productions for 22 years. It says something about the traditional Aboriginal setting.

Cate is a multitalented creative artist who has founded mememe productions and produced the phenomenal 'dirtgirlworld', but has not only got onto success regionally in this country, but also internationally. It is something you think you would see in a capital city, but there is no barrier to her creating this amazing work in a regional context.

This will be under into a sort of discussion, and I invite any of the panellists to interrupt at any time. We will focus on each of the panellists in turn, and we would like to start with Cate. I think, to begin, we would like to see one or two clips of 'dirtgirlworld'.

**VIDEO PLAYS:**

(Music plays)

**SPEAKER:**

It's the story of us...

(Music plays)

(VIDEO ENDS)

(Applause)

**CATE MCQUILLEN:**

I have been on the road doing all kinds of things, from the Torres Strait to Hobart, but the Northern Rivers is my home. That's where we film, and it is very lovely to be reminded at the beginning of this session. It is my home, but it's also my family. All these people. While I'm going to be talking about my creative practices, I'm going to say up front that this is a story of my team, a team of amazing creatives, made up of 171 people.

'Get Grubby TV' is made here in the region apart from one outsider - I can't call Cameron who does the sound an outsider. He spent as much time here as he does in Melbourne these days. But all that work comes from here, and it is currently the number one rating children's show in Australia.

(Applause)

**CATE MCQUILLEN:**

Why that is important is because it is stories about nature, living responsibly, living resiliently. The kind of feedback we are having is that kids realise that it is a bigger world, and regional Australia is a part of that, and I'm so proud of that.

You can see that connection, and the animation series has been a montage, all those photos in the background, all our stories are embedded in that as well. Those are our chickens. It's important for me to get across that sense of place of where we work, live and create, is extraordinary to be able to do that and it comes out in the work.

I am a creatively driven person. I started my creative life as a singer, musician, actor, dancer,

magician's assistant, all kinds of crazy things. I was part of the International Fringe Festival for a little while.

When I was 26, I thought the world was going to end during the first Gulf War, and my partner and I decided to move, to try and connect and live a more simple life. We did that here on the Northern Rivers, playing in pubs and having lots of fun and creating music.

We found a lot of other families who are living a life we were trying to live, and I found that very inspiring. We live in a place here, and with our kids outside a lot of the time, the statistics aren't showing that. They are showing that there are many, many hours of kid spending time in front of screens. To me, this is frightening. So, this is a great place for us not just to be creative, and I can't tell you how many opportunities there are to be creative, but it's also great to be a part of a community that share of values.

We have the audacity to believe in this generation, and hopefully, we get to have a say in the lives of a lot of kids, so we're very lucky like that. This is Huey and me in the days where we used to roll around in the orchard with oranges.

This is headquarters, an old church in Myra Creek. If you are driving through Woodbury, make sure you get a Woodbury burger. It's 6km inland. There is a lot of peace and inspiration that comes with space.

For me, it is the lack of distraction. I get up in the morning and I get to connect with nature every single day, without the distraction of having to go out somewhere, go to a meeting, et cetera. People can see that as a problem, but I see it as an absolute benefit. That lack of distraction, lack of criticism, lack of people telling me how I should do things.

I don't like hearing, "Oh, you can't have all those animation styles going on in one show. It can't happen." I know that if we didn't have that network capacity this wouldn't happen. People say that in regional areas you don't have the networking, but I worked out after a bit of time the people in the city aren't doing that either. You think that they are always doing things and always going everywhere, but they are not. They are driving their kids to 15 activities after school. It's funny. We have this idea that they are all networking...

But the other thing I wanted to talk about. And I can talk about this underwater forever, is that I think this whole networking thing... It would be very easy, but we're very strategic. We had to think about it long and hard about what we needed to be at different times of the year.

We needed to be in New York, when it is to be in all sorts of places, but we make sure we needed to be where we needed to be. We didn't do this alone. We did a bit of it on our own coin as well. So, there is great support, but we have to know our industry. We lived in a place which had a 6 kB per second connection speed, and it has changed, and we now have satellite NBN. All that stress of connecting to the internet, it has disintegrated from my life with satellite NBN, and I'm so grateful.

Basically, the notion that you need to be strategic... If I was a soccer player and I was living in Woodburn, I would know the pathway, if I wanted to be in the national team, I knew I would

have to first make the state team, but of course the regional team as well, so there is a clear pathway there. So understanding your pathway is really important.

We did have a great sense of relief of knowing who we were, and that came from being supported, and it was also because Hewey and I believed in each other. We knew we would give it a go, and if it didn't work out, what was the worst thing? Move back to paradise.

Did it work out? In 2013, Gene Simmons gave us an award at the Emmy awards.

(Applause)

That was weird. We couldn't stop smiling, but when they announced, we just did this thing. And of course, my very first rock concert was KISS with Gene Simmons. It wasn't just about the win, it was the recognition of a story about sustainability from a small place in Australia, and the fact that we could do this. That was why that was fun. That's why we use the Emmy as our Christmas decoration. She's the most beautiful statue in the world.

My artistic practices are pretty simple. Gather a great team around you and allow them to do their best work. It is really that simple. If you get all of these people who have their own career path, their own goals... We are a bit weird because we are values-based company. Some people walk in with different values, but they will walk out with all the same values.

Because our audience started with kids, the future generation and looking after them, telling stories about them. It soon moved, and what I'm talking about with creative practices, you can't make content on air. You have to have a financial plan. It is really easy to make plastic toys and things, but we hated that, we didn't want things to go to landfill.

But we needed another way to market the business, so we moved into education. Our front door is on the ABC with our kids content, but we worked with the EPA last year on a project about green waste. Strangely, I am working for Barnaby Joyce's department.

We are working with biosecurity now. Weird, wonderful, life changing. So, I have to be changing all the time. Where can we put our storytelling in from the regions? Where can we put it in other places than screen, these life changing opportunities come on board, the community expect a lot of things for free.

But when you sign an agreement with the ABC, you get all of these sales through them. And I talk about monetising the business for two reasons, one is the capacity to employ regional people. Two, it gives us the opportunity to stand tall and be financially independent in Australia. We aren't there yet. But one day I'm hoping we can stand shoulder to shoulder with some of the other screen industries from the international industry. A bit of a goal. Not a massive goal, but one.

The last thing you can say is, you can live in the middle of nowhere, I live in the middle of nowhere, but you can reach people from across the entire world. It is absolutely possible.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

Thank you very much. Would it be possible to have the house lights up a little bit? It feels like

we are in a...

Obviously, this session, it could be entirely filled by Cate. Hopefully we will still have a little bit of time at the end for a three-way investigation. There was one amazing thing that she said to me when we were talking before the session. When you release a contract for your work you get the party that is signing the contract to come to your place to do the signings.

**CATE MCQUILLEN:**

That includes the UK, US, all of the buyers. The show has been sold around the world. They come to our house to sign the contract, because they need to know what they are getting themselves into. They need to have an understanding of what it is like to be in the region. They sleep in a tent or a caravan, they hold a big green frog, they make Vietnamese rolls. We have a whole routine now. Do this, do that.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

That mirrors why Artstate exists. It is really important to have people come and see the context in which work is made. I think that leads onto (inaudible) and the work that you are making that comes, evolves from the community you are working as the most successful work that NORPA creates. Why that important?

**SPEAKER:**

I think it is because my practice responds to place. The thought of the unknown is a driver for me as well as a theatre maker. I never start from scratch. I build works collaboratively with performance. The works are actor-driven. That way feel that the story can be immediate and that we can share. The writers in a process as well, we have a process that is malleable, flexible to the place.

You mentioned 'Railway Wonderland' before. Played two seasons of that. That story was built by engaging with the community. We put a call out for stories about the railway. We had over 50 short stories written to us.

We have live music during the reading of these short stories. From that there were characters are emerging. That filled the room with performers, improvisation, live comedy.

But then we met the community again in places where this nostalgia existed for the community. The community lost its whole train network. There is isolation in a way. That show resonated because, the backdrop this beautiful heritage railway station. I guess that was inspiration, the actual railway station.

But I think the major driver for me was, I don't want to make a show for four or five nights. As we were doing shows here that were playing two or three nights, they are the major companies, and they are wonderful shows, but I want to make shows for three-week seasons, four-week seasons. How do we build an audience if it comes and goes so quickly? The challenge for me was that.

We made five site-specific shows. All of the audience gathered here outside of Lismore City Hall. We took them on a mystery ride to the mystery location, it was a house. There were

musicians hanging out the window and playing, acrobats on the roof. We did it anyway, but we can't do that anymore. It was exciting and dangerous.

Then we walked in the door and the audience came in the house. It was 150 people. They went to the house, there was acting in the house, in the garden there was a whole circus show set up. This is a group called the Pitts Family Circus. There are wonderful local group.

I guess all of the examples showed us that we were determined to make theatre accessible, popular, but equally adventurous. The hook of the unknown, going back to that, is always going to be a driver. Even when I was in Sydney working with (unknown term) theatre, or working in the opera house, every year I would go to regional Australia and work in community.

The Pilbara, Lightning Ridge - we would make shows in parks. It is the connecting with community, that is how I build shows. The last one was dreamland, and that was on in a hall. We commissioned that show and co-created it. We don't want our work just to be successful here, we do wanted to work elsewhere.

But the sense of place is very important. The work, (Aboriginal word), opened a few nights ago. For me, the real excitement of that work comes from the audience. Our audience is the most diverse in age, I would say, and it was so exciting to have 40% Indigenous people in the audience. That is success.

Does that show need to tour? Maybe, maybe not. But we're very proud of the work that we're making. I guess all of those works are about connecting and finding the stories that exist here.

But we couldn't exist anywhere else. I do want to exist anywhere else.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

I take that. I totally get the importance of creating work in this place and display speaking through the work. Could you talk a little bit about creating the network, it is still an ongoing collaboration with people outside the region. Many of your performers aren't from Lismore, but you bring them to Lismore to create the work.

We want to build theatre that is very kinetic.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

But they are not all Lismore. That is interesting too.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

I did a one-man show about colonisation. I moved into an area where I had no idea about the country. I wanted to put that up there. I am not Indigenous, but I wanted to be conscious of the fact that I was entering onto Indigenous lands.

So I did a story about a man who went to the top of a mountain, who was in love with a bilby. The bilby is an important Indigenous creature.

'Dreamland' had five performers, but one of them is Toni Scanlon, who is great. Darcy Grant,

who works downstairs, he just directed 'Backbone', an award-winning circus show. He is working with me on a new show called 'Wild Skin'.

I would like to work more with people that are locally based, although I think it is important that we have that exchange.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

It feels like there is a revealing treasure in Australia that we are discovering, different characters from different regional communities. I think it is difficult for us to do because of the distance.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

When I look at the architecture of the railway station in 'Railway Wonderland', I want to build a new work there. I am thinking about my project in mind, I'm working on a project that will be across five regional centres. I think the research would happen in those places and we were to back to those places. So that work could be built with our associate artists.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

Thank you.

(Applause)

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

Leigh. Why did you stay here? You could be anywhere in the world, why here?

**LEIGH CARRIAGE:**

I am a musician, singer and songwriter. I am from a small town myself, so regionalism is in my blood. I finished my studies in the ACT and moved here in the late 80s, and the community that I grew up in, I grew up in an alternative community near Castlenest, if anyone has heard of that?

Because I am from a really big family, I am one of seven children, and because of that big family sense, I was looking for that as a student. Moving up here and studying at the Northern Rivers at that time, I found within that, I found another sub-community of amazing artists and musicians and I could also be part of a family.

The city called me, however, for lots of reasons. I studied, I came back, I moved overseas, and I settled in Sydney for almost a decade, but the city community, because I wasn't used to the hub, it really fought with my nature, and it fought with my art, too, a lot.

And also the sense of the kind is of community that I have here, the gentleness, embracing, all those things that my music requires for a loud, out-there performer, and sometimes darkness, and sadness, and all the things that we find difficult to share.

Literally, what Cate was saying, I needed all of that for my music to flourish. I was 26 and 27 when I started working here at SCU, and I guess, what they did for me as a performer, moving to a regional area, I knew it because I understood it as a child. I knew that there would be more travel and less venues. I knew that there would be this community of practitioners that I would

be able to access. And I know that this area is the largest hub of creativity outside a metropolitan area.

But really, for me, I have recently done a rehearsal piece which is in an odd time, and I can do that sort of instrumental work and work with a string quartet with other players from up here, so I had to pull these people together and work from a whole lot of people from everywhere to get this whole idea happening. There were musicians I knew who had passed away, and I wanted to pay homage to them. David was one of them.

For me, the connection to family that I can make is more important than anything else. And so, through that, I think what happened for me was that I moved up here and SCU offered me something that I didn't expect as a teacher.

In the first two years, I felt like I had lost my focus a little bit, and that my music would be always first and education would be secondary, but as time went by I saw that they were becoming equal. These things just didn't present themselves in the city.

Also, seeing what can be offered from a regional perspective, beautiful freshness, I just can't explain it. I started applying for grants, and I was interested in mentoring young women. In the city, we would have had all of this network stuff available to us, but this led me to Apra (inaudible), and we do interactive workshops running songwriting.

And like what Julian was saying, these healthy pollinations crossing over, and pulling these gorgeous people from the community who you want to work with, into your art.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

Thank you. What I'm hearing is that it is a surplus situation, creating work in a regional context, but are there any deficits? I know, Cate, that you said that when you started, there were obstacles, but many of them have disappeared now?

**CATE MCQUILLEN:**

I don't even notice them anymore. When you are starting out, you just have to work through them. But now, living in the region, it just doesn't seem like it is a hindrance whatsoever. If anything, it is a big plus. So, when you are feeling this, part of it is just head space as well. And you can put location right up there with it.

You know, somewhere along the line, you get the strategicness. You know, we have some awesome things. We have inspirational theatre, you are not as connected from spectacular performances. We have screen works who are extraordinary in connecting us to performers. We have musicians that travel.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

The focus is the really important thing. Every show that we make is a piece of regional Australia, and you know, it's built here, but I think there are challenges. I think the challenges are really around connecting that work. Getting reviewed.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

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Does it matter?

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

Yes, it does. Like Cate said, it's about inviting them into your home. We've been working hard to make our work accessible. And some reviewers can write whatever they like, but seriously... I think the other challenge other funding bodies. In terms of accessibility to see the work, that has changed.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

Artstate is changing it.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

Yes, and we're not regional theatre companies, we are theatre companies based in a regional area. Are we doing both well? Maybe not? There's a lot of pressure as well, being the big fish. I think, for that would allow us would be (inaudible). Controversially, and that was a very controversial move by Brandis, we have... But we have shows touring overseas, and we're really pumping.

**LEIGH CARRIAGE:**

When I first moved to the city, and I had this huge network in Sydney, and in Melbourne, because I travel there a lot, and then when I moved up here, there were a few other women working in improvisation, but very few.

I found that a really tough thing for the first decade here. I've been here 20 years now, but that was tough, to be honest. That has changed dramatically. I really want to use my educational connections to make sure that I was meeting a lot of great women through the course and hopefully, would come back to this region and fulfil the cycle. I've seen it time and time again.

I saw Freya Hooper playing with Harry Angus for the first time. There are many examples like that.

A great example of funding, and I worked with Katie Noonan, and I wanted to go to regional areas to do songwriting workshops with women, and say, "Here's all the things you need to do. I can teach you everything I've got." And then pass them around. And in terms of original perspective, not feeling the obligation to do that.

**CATE MCQUILLEN:**

It's interesting, when I move overseas, they don't care if I live in Sydney or Woodbury.

I spent a lot of time in different regions, and I always wonder how do you pitch through? How do you network? How do you get the notes?

Talking about the unknown, it's exciting because there are no rules. But we have to help people fill comfortable and confident about moving forward. Whether it is individually or with screen works or workshops, and work together on networking together, hanging out with friends and just jamming ideas, I think that is really important. Once again, I go back to that thing, they are not doing it in the city. I just think it is something that we think they are doing.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

I don't know.

**CATE MCQUILLEN:**

From a creative point of view.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

To connect in the foyer with my colleagues is pretty exciting (inaudible). That is really important. I crave that. I think that is, not a challenge, but these conferences and certainly the national conferences that we attend, it is about breaking into your creative community.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

I think it is a myth that the regions are... Certainly they are more focused and there is space to create work, but the thing I found moving to a regional place was after a while, because there was so much opportunity to make project happen, I became busy. And maybe it was because I wasn't sitting in traffic, I was busier than I'd ever been in my life.

**CATE MCQUILLEN:**

I worked harder and longer hours and I ever thought were possible. Just because I'm excited!

**LEIGH CARRIAGE:**

We cannot talk about that at the same time.

**JULIAN LOUIS:**

We are all tired, it is the end of the year.

**LEIGH CARRIAGE:**

It's impossible to keep that all in balance. I would have a four-week period of annual leave where I would be a creative. What I would do, if there were any other musicians out there doing teaching, and there are a lot of them, there is a connection between education and the arts. Here is a method that might work. I keep snippets the whole year and I collaborate online with musicians all year.

We send things back and forth. I'm collaborating with people who are working in the Northern Territory at the moment. So I have all this stuff recorded everywhere and then I have four weeks and I go, "Right, I have four weeks to pull this all together and record an album."

So I recorded, work out who the collaborators are really early, book the studio and go. It takes me one to two days to record the whole of. I love doing my arms like that. I work with amazing musicians who are readers. It's like, "Boom, boom."

Sometimes I mix it up and go overseas. I wrenched out and collaborated with an group of people in LA and then brought it back. For me, that is a lovely idea. You've got to be really time savvy. I am the most timeframe-managed person I know. Including, I have to leave here in 45 minutes.

**STEPHEN CHAMPION:**

In terms of being time savvy, our time unfortunately is up. Cate, Julian and Leigh, you have

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inspired me and I hope you have inspired the audience. Could you please thank the panellists?

(Applause)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Thank you, everyone. That was a really interesting conversation. It just showed us the challenges of working regionally. I am sorry it is a little bit late, but you now have morning tea time. So you can go out and cross pollinate. Please be back in 20 minutes because our next keynote will be starting then.

(Break)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Thank you for being so prompt.

We now enter our session for creative practice. We are now going to be talking about a Regional Creative Practice.

Our second keynote is going to be delivered by Rhoda Roberts. When we knew we were going to be on Widjabul land in Bundjalung country, who else could we get but Rhoda? We were very lucky to have her direct last night.

She is the Head of Indigenous Programming at the Sydney Opera House, and is director of the Boomerang Festival. She told me this week that they want her back, and I am not surprised.

We would be here all day if I was to read her full CV, but notably, Rhoda was awarded an AO for her services to the arts. Please join me in welcoming Rhoda Roberts.

(Applause)

**RHODA ROBERTS:**

Hi, everyone. Thank you, Elizabeth, so much, for this wonderful opportunity to reflect on our First People's creative practice.

(Speaks Aboriginal language) I would like to acknowledge our wisdom from our people of the past, our knowledge from our people of today, and our wisdom from the people who will come tomorrow.

We have lost two of the most senior men, the late Mr Al Boston, who was a pioneer on television and film. And the late Mr Ed (unknown term). He was a pioneer in the medical and legal services.

They honour their families and I thank them for ensuring that we always have their wisdom there.

I would also like to thank everyone here today and our international guests. I would like to mention one person in particular who has travelled from far away. Caroline, are you here?

(Applause)

Our Widjambul knowledge shapes us, guides us, and encourages us to shape the cultural narrative that is all-encompassing. I believe that New South Wales is the gateway to Aboriginal Australia.

Last night, the gathering was held at the place that has become known as the Quad, but it has also been known as (Aboriginal word) or the hoop pine. I thought about where I have come from, and this is where I will go back to.

Like those nettles that get spiky and underneath your feet, I can be spiky at times, but those hoop pines have helped to shape our country and the legacy we have inherited. It is a likely inheritance but it has not (inaudible) shaped our states.

But I am confident, and we are certainly seeing change. As the 3000th generation of Widjambul, as the daughter of Frank and Muriel Roberts, as the cousin of the first Aboriginal Olympian, Frank Francis Roberts, as the granddaughter of Lyle Roberts, as the sister of unsolved murder victim Frances Roberts. As the great granddaughter of Lyle senior.

Grandfather Lyle was the last man to be fully initiated on our Bundjalung territories. This was before the Aboriginal Protection Act came into place.

The knowledge and ceremonies that we inherit, I have only learned a small part of these because I am a girl, I have never gone through business. But I continue my life, as my children educate me, and I will remind them of their relationship to those ancestral practices that are featured in our age-old stories, (Aboriginal word) the three brothers, the (speaks Aboriginal language), the intangible and tangible that circles the world.

It is around us and reminds us of the yesterdays and tomorrow but it is not about time, it is not about the past. Time is the word that we need to use, when we are talking about the now.

We have a vocal inheritance with a voice that matches and slammed into the technology. We are the scientists of yesterday and the future. We are the event managers, we are and always will be the storytellers.

Our cultural legacy has a value-based dialogue. So is it a concern of those in the art-based sectors or is it a concern for all of us in the arts industry? The value-based dialogue is a key thing for me in my everyday work, no matter what I do.

But how is it measured? How is it measured for competitive funding rallies? How is it enshrined in our national cultural piece?

I do question the practices, particularly in the eastern and southern states. For too long and too frequently we see Aboriginal profiling in the media. And having travelled the country, particularly going to arts fairs and events, I am really saddened, particularly standing in Darwin and there is

a map of art centres across the country, the only dot that is not on the map is New South Wales.

And my colleagues will say, "Well, it is New South Wales, it is not quite authentic." But it is important to have cultural programming from the eastern regions.

But then every day something happens. I walked into this building today, Lismore City Hall, a building that sits on (Aboriginal word) land, it sits on Bounty Street, it is a bounty that once taught our people, but told of the stories, but told our religion, but told us the environment, the other clans that met on the (Aboriginal word) homeland.

I want to thank Digby Moran, I hope you have seen the sand sculpture. I would suggest it is very authentic and indeed very relevant.

So, are we valuing our First Nations people's contributions? Are we measuring the box office on the number of event nights? In the production areas we tend to now put the number of likes on social media and the number of mentions in the press. But this speaks more to us rather than the culture.

There is a disconnect with the evaluation and the rhetoric, the treasuring of the art. I believe we should encourage the tenacity, and the values-based dialogue, that enables risk-taking and failure as part of that process.

What do we actually want to achieve when we look at values and how do we measure it? Through our KPIs and reconciliation action plans? What is the benefit of our First Nations that we can really start to understand and benefit from?

It is a value that really enables constant interconnectivity and it is a benefit for all Australians. So, if this is the case, I believe we need to take some hard steps to enable conversations.

When I started in the industry several years ago, my dad would say to me, "Learn the system, because when you learn the system you can create change for a tomorrow."

And I would hear it from all the old people, "Learn the system."

And I was to wonder, and they meant that I really did need to learn from tomorrow and bring in yesterday, and we have had this conversation about – am I an arts worker or am I am Aboriginal arts worker? We have these conflicting views.

But no matter how we identify ourselves in the arts, and think it is very varied, what we are always trying to do is seek challenges and actually combine that yesterday with today. Because that is what dreaming is, it is combining the past with the future.

I left at the age of 18 with the desire to travel the world. I had dreams that I would write and direct great Australian plays. So, I had to visit the house of the dying John Keats in Rome, because my mother introduced me to his poetry at an early age.

My father introduced me poetry as well by an Aboriginal woman, Oodgeroo Noonuccal.

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She wrote a poem for her son, Denis. That poem touched me and I think it really changed my tiny little worldview. And I'd like to read that poem, if you will allow me, because it sits in my heart very deeply.

My son, your troubled eyes search mine,  
Puzzled and hurt by colour line.  
Your black skin as soft as velvet shine,  
What can I tell you, son of mine?

I could tell you of heartbreak, hatred blind,  
I could tell you of crimes that shame mankind.  
Of brutal wrongs and deeds malign,  
Of rape and murder, son of mine.

But I'll tell you instead of brave and fine  
When lives of black and white entwine,  
And men in brotherhood combine,  
This I would tell you, son of mine.

Those last few words had a huge impact on me – “when lives of black and white entwine and men in brotherhood combine”. She talked of the past, of a future, there was a way forward.

My grandfather, Lyle Senior, set down three precedents for his descendants to live by.

Number one, retain pride of race and colour. Number two, retain identity and language. And the third point – consider all other people to make the best of life in the future.

This three-point plan guides me and reminds me of the importance of why we do what we do, of the interconnectivity we should ensure. The arts is about enabling the classics to be retained, to witness the dance, to enable the music to be heard, the books to be printed, the plays to be produced.

And plays and writings and films that reflect our society. So, every time I approach a creative work, I consider those principles as part of my creative process.

I also consider the four directions that influence that creative process. They are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country and just as important to many First Nations around the world.

The four directions reflect our spirituality, the importance of the Southern Cross, it determines the law, the ceremonies, the kinship structures. And our languages.

It was a four-directional approach that we used as an arc during the 1980s at the Aboriginal National Theatre Trust. It was the third national theatre company to be developed, and every play we produced, devised or wrote, had an outcome.

In the 1980s we held the first national black playwrights conference. It was when the theatre

mantle was handed to the next generation, the continuing of the intergenerational exchange.

At that conference, I will name some of the playwrights – Bob Mazza, Oodgeroo Noonuccal , Bobby McLeod, Vivian Walker and others. Some of these names you may not have heard of but they were our pioneers, ground-breaking writers and our extraordinary theatre makers.

We were young and amongst us actors were Ernie Dingo, Richard Whalley, Brenda Croft, Michael Johnson and myself. At the last panel of the conference it was determined to have some future outcomes, the Elders approached us and suggested we should be setting up the next Aboriginal National Theatre.

They gave a three-year mandate that each year a new work would be produced, that we had to develop the second national black playwrights conference and we had to incorporate the Aboriginal National Theatre as a trust.

Lydia Miller, Vivian Walker, Michael Johnson and myself were selected. They either thought we were really stupid because we didn't know what we were going to do, or they really did think we could make it work.

They knew our families. They knew who we were and where we were from. They know that we had been moulded by our communities and our families and they knew that we understood or had an awareness, but had a long way to learn about our kinship system.

It was bloody hard work. We didn't have any money at first, but both Lydia and I, as registered nurses, did night duty so we could run the office during the day. We looked at marketing and communications and looked at everything it took to produce works.

We learnt fast but the most extraordinary thing, the black and white entwined, so many came forward with their knowledge and their skills from the mainstream theatre industry and they offered their help.

So we learnt fast and those collaborators gave us great advice. By year three, we held the second national Aboriginal playwrights conference and it was a huge success. There were six plays produced that ended up touring the world.

We had to contact writers, musicians, poets, art curators, various people around the country and we said we didn't care what form it came in, we would just like to get some writings. You have to remember – this was the days of fax machines and electric typewriters.

And the post would arrive daily and we would carry up these parcels loaded with envelopes, with structures, poems, songs and letters. And one day we received a big yellow envelope and opened it up and 52 pieces of paper fell out.

Some were little, some were A4, there was blotting paper, even a serviette. I recognised lyrics of a song and it was by a band I used to play on my show 'Radio Redfern'. I can't sing but as I hummed those lyrics, we looked around the office and we knew we had something great, a new genre that we hadn't gone into, a musical.

So when the playwrights conference opened, the playwright from WA by the name of Jimmy Chi arrived. He had songs, so the actors sat in a workshop with Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Bob Mazza, and others and we structured the songs. On the last day we had developed two scenes and a reading and the audience heard, (Sings) "There is nothing I would rather be, than to be an Aborigine, and watch you take my precious land away..."

We knew we had a hit. Jimmy Chi stood in that theatre and held that script high in the air and said the Aboriginal Theatre Trust will produce this. And we'd tour it around the world. My dreams and hopes at the age of 18 were coming to fruition.

Of course, the next day the scepticism started. How could young black Aboriginal people from the East Coast of Australia develop a work of restructure? There was no faith or commitment in the work we had been doing.

For three years we had had a hit every season. Thanks to Sue Nattrass, who offered a venue in Victoria at the Arts Centre... When we were running the Aboriginal Theatre Trust and producing plays, we couldn't get a venue in Sydney because they weren't quite sure how an all-Aboriginal-produced production could work.

But Sue Nattrass had seen our work and she had faith. It was absolutely fantastic. And then again, change occurred. A young woman by the name of Chris Westwood joined Belvoir Street Theatre and she decided that an all-Aboriginal-produced production could be effective in Sydney.

So we started doing our work at Belvoir Street Theatre. When she left a new artistic director arrived on the scene who thought there was no way an Aboriginal could direct a play. He had no faith in our ability.

I think he had been affected by the Aboriginal profiling in the media. So we thought – what the hell, it is what it is, and we moved into television and film making, documentary making. We began to write and direct our own work, independently.

There was a period of time when we were getting a lot of work as actors, but all we wanted to do was direct, we were giving the directors on those shows an awful time.

So we pooled our money and we decided – why don't we get someone and commission them to write what we want to do? Because we would go on to a set or a theatre show and we would have to put on the black fella boys, the drunk prostitute etc.

We decided we would do it ourselves. Then we looked for a writer and we thought we would get the flavour of the month to get the attention, so we were looking at David Williamson's plays. Everyone goes to his plays. But at the time Louis Nowra was doing an awful lot of work so we pooled our money and we went to see Louis Nowra and we gave him the brief.

And in fact, when I look at what we pay playwrights now, when we commission them, he did very well. We said we wanted him to write a play about three sisters. We don't want the word Aboriginal mentioned once. And we want the three sisters to return to their homelands after 10 years for their mother's funeral. And we want every emotion under the sun so we can show how

fabulous we are.

And so every Friday night for a period of about eight months, we did every restaurant on Glebe Point Road and it was fantastic. We would go to dinner and sometimes Lydia would cook the dinner and throughout the dinner we would talk about these characters and become those characters.

At the end of that eight months, we had a script and we called it 'Radiance'. We were able to put it on at Belvoir Street Theatre, but under the reign of that AD, we couldn't have an Aboriginal director.

It was a great success and it is now on the school curriculum and it changes people's thought processes on our diversity as people – we have various opinions and we fight amongst ourselves, and that's OK.

I don't know that we had thought about the long-term production, but we actually did it. We just had to make that change for ourselves. Now, we are seeing across the country, many of you looking at extending friendships with your local regions, your communities with that region, making sure that our venues are accessible to Aboriginal people.

This is where I get a bit cranky, because I think that is brilliant, of course you need to speak to your Elders in your community, custodians of those lands. Often we will see productions get up. But, and I come under training from Brian Siren, and the big thing is to tell us that our culture comes from excellence and sophistication, but yet we don't see some great community projects. I am delighted because our people have access to culture.

You have to remember in New South Wales, for a very, very long time, it was the era of silences. We were not allowed to speak the language, sing our songs or do our dances. But we kept our traditions alive.

But now we have people going off to our big cities, doing filmmaking, producing or writing plays, and then we come back to our smaller regions and not one of them are involved in those projects. And it is not fair. They are learning the knowledge from those Elders and custodians and are almost invisible.

It just infuriating. So please, if you are working with communities and have the expertise...

Another thing that gets my goat... I will just get these things out and then I will get back to some nice things. How do I put this nicely?

**SPEAKER:**

Don't worry about it!

**RHODA ROBERTS:**

Oh, you are arts people, I can even say fuck, can't I? (Laughs)

Before doing this keynote, I was so incredibly nervous, because you are my peers and colleagues. I was wondering what I could say. Because sometimes it can be so exciting, when

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you are working with a great team, and other times it can just be, like, you just want to give up.

Because you will go on to be in a production workshop or something, and if I was doing the Irish play, or the play that shouldn't be mentioned, the first thing I would do as a director or an actor would be to learn the nuances of that character, go to the expertise about how I would learn the Irish accent. So, I would bring in an expert on the Irish accent.

But our actors, art directors, when they work in the creative industries, they come with all this to carry the load and responsibility. That is before they even get in the door to actually do the job they are employed to do. And then of course, they are Aboriginal.

You'd have people say to you, "Can you please tell me, what is the Aboriginal word for water?"

"Oh, look, we have this in the script, it doesn't sound right, can you tell me how an Aborigine would say that?"

"Oh, who can we contact here, can you tell me?"

"We are looking for an Aboriginal dance group here, who could you recommend?"

And when you ask them what the budget is, they say they have no budget, "They could do it for the experience, for the exposure."

But this is a business, this is their livelihood. We shouldn't just sit there silently. This is my bee. I am a little over the ooga booga stuff. You are often there as the consultant as well, and you know everything. Oh my God, we know this much. And Aboriginal culture is not a homogenous thing.

And back in the 1980s, when I was working with people – I love every single person that I work with because they teach me something – but back in the 1980s we started looking at how it works, what were the titles we were using, and the imagery.

And we decided not to use language because then they will know it was black. And we looked at the images we were using on the posters, because it would almost look like cultural art.

Then we moved into the '90s, and everyone started talking about branding, and we started to look at it and decided we could use language and we could use the imagery and people would get excited, and perhaps we were preaching to the converted. We knew that change was slow to come but we were making change.

For the Yirramboi Festival in Melbourne this year, it captured the essence of who we are with our logo, and how we snugly fit into way the world is or has been. I don't know if you remember it but they had Yirramboi and then underneath it they had 'to work for tomorrow'.

I looked at what Victoria is doing, and they are ensuring they support an industry-based festival that showcases the business of our culture and allows the voice of our theatre workers and artists.

The Northern Territory, where I have done a lot of work, is certainly different. I have had the opportunity of working on a number of festivals such as the (Aboriginal word) and (Aboriginal word) festivals and raising funds is very different. They have raised millions of dollars just for Aboriginal work.

I'm about to enter the second year for the Parrtjima Festival. It shows that art in the future can bring big bucks. It is an economy that can create independence and has an impact on the local market and can tackle those pesky issues of health, housing and education.

But this is where the media has to help to ensure that the real culture is in the Northern Territory. I mean, I'm sure you have all seen the (Aboriginal word) material that appears on our screens, and you count how many politicians have flocked to (Aboriginal word) to have the Aboriginal experience.

It is a time for them to put their Aboriginal agendas and policy in place. But it is a time for them to come to ours as well. And I saw a policy get into place last night, but it is a time for politicians to come to us as well.

But unlike other states and territories, I am so proud of New South Wales. I'm really proud of the way that Creative New South Wales is working, the fact they have incredible expertise of their creative staff.

I am also proud that New South Wales is the first state in the country to introduce legislation into Parliament to acknowledge the unique value and importance of our language for (audio drop out) and students. Yeeha! And that makes me proud because we have not lost a language here, except for (inaudible) and there is always the exchange (audio drop out) in my grandfather's day.

In South Australia, they raised \$17.54 million (audio drop out) (Aboriginal word) Festival. In the (Aboriginal word) language there is an expression called (audio drop out) which is the spirit of equal exchange and responsibility which underpins all good relationships.

The word from the traditional owners of the (inaudible).

...Signifies new beginnings. But then I look at the team at BHP, and the BHP Olympic Dam and I do see (audio drop out) new beginning. And they were praised by the media for their support.

But let me just remind you of the Olympic Dam. It is on (Aboriginal word) lands and the mine uses the water required for its processing from the Great Artesian Basin.

This is water for our future. It has been in safekeeping under the ground. Over the years we have seen so much environmental degradation around the land.

But when they opened the festival, there was not one word said about how tarnished Olympic Dam's background was. Journalists praised them as being at the heartland of Australia's First Peoples.

But God help them, what are they teaching these days in communications? Australia is a First

Nations country. And how often do we hear people say, "I am going bush to get back on country?" You are standing on country everywhere in Australia. You're standing on occupied lands, no matter where you are.

Midnight Oil have been doing their tour recently. It is very interesting. I saw them in Alice Springs. They sang a favourite of mine just after (Inaudible) million dollars, they sang 'Blue Sky Mine' (inaudible).

Would mining money change our gaze? Create a new lens, and when it is applied well it opens up and changes the discussion, and those artists, do they feel recognised and listened to?

They are very much different on the east coast. I have learnt your creative practices, the way we divide our services culture. The way that money is nurtured, and I do know the way that ignorance is considered bliss. I know this is all of you do as well. But we do need to be reminded to listen and be open.

Recently I asked about that mining money and I think of Woodford when they took that Santos money. They were vilified. I wouldn't have taken that money either because of the situation we faced on the Northern Rivers with coal seam.

Then I saw the Santos Adelaide and Brisbane festivals. Nobody complained there but in the regions they attacked Woodford and it made me think how we now have to be very creative to get money to make sure that we do have that long-term narrative.

We have seen the culling. We have seen the silences in the last year of the small to medium sector. We have witnessed the direct impact of these federal funding cuts.

How do we clean that up? How to ensure our creative minds are nurtured? At the Sydney Opera House through our First Nations program we develop budgets for those who would be affected. They were destroying our structures and our acts, questioning the wealth of (audio drop out) that write about the status quo and change the thinking in this country.

That national arts (audio drop out) and creating (audio drop out), that is not a national arts policy I want (audio drop out).

(Inaudible) guarantee creative minds would be (audio drop out).

So what do we do? Think back to the Biennale in Sydney, when it announced it would sever its ties with the founding partner, Transfield. They caved into artists, artists angered by the ethics of a company linked to offshore detention centres.

The Biennale staff were abused with the taunt, "You've got blood on your hands." They were torn between the loyalty to an event they loved but they wanted to make a stand against a horrible government policy.

But it did break the creative spirit and so many turned on the event like they did with Woodford. So, why not the same vigilance on events that take unethical money?

(Audio drop out) should consider our work how we will pay for it. We have Destinations NSW (audio drop out) in the release of (audio drop out) selling NSW to the world. They go everywhere and sell our destinations, but there is not one Aboriginal in any of these advertisements.

On that note, I think I am out of time. I want to end with uncle Bruce Pascoe. Have you heard of him? He wrote a book called 'Dark Emu'. This sums up the way I think about creative process.

“Aboriginal culture cannot be summed up in story or myth because the English translation always reduces it to a diminutive and describes it that way – as an Aboriginal story, myths and legends. When in fact, the story is an explanation of the universe.

“I could explain that by talking about the law in NSW and Victoria,” he writes, “about its all-encompassing philosophy. But some elements are too close to my heart and most I don't know sufficiently to give a coherent explanation.

“The best I can do is talk about some rock art in the Northern Territory. To see it properly you have to lie on your back and see it as the artist, the philosopher, saw it. I can't explain it, it would be indecent of me to try. It is in the shape of a giant egg. It is massive and has a border around the egg like the edge of the universe.

“Inside the egg, everything is everything, the whole of human experience. I had water spilling over my face when I realised what I was looking at and I felt shame for being a tourist. Was I supposed to be looking at this statement without undertaking the gruelling journey towards its unveiling?

“I won't go back even though I often dream of the universal egg. And I suppose the Dreaming means I don't have to go back. There are protocols for the handling of Aboriginal art and story but they will always be inadequate until Australia accepts that our people were the first people and had a philosophy, a spirituality of such enormous power and subtlety that it was adopted year after year after year after year by each new generation for hundreds of thousands of years.

“Not without changes in style and texture and detail, but just adopted for its profound integrity. And there may be signs that Australia can begin to embrace the Aboriginal story. 'Redfern Now', 'The Gods of Wheat Street' could not have appeared 10 years ago. But perhaps there is an audience now, a willingness to explore beyond the white soap.

“Art always marches in front of politics and the economy. Downloading the odd black movie is not the same as adopting those stories as your own history. Australia's readiness to understand the cultural protocols can be evident in our future.”

So, thank you also much for allowing me this time. And thank you, Uncle Bruce.

(Applause)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Thank you so much, Rhoda. We allowed that to go overtime but I think the message was

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extremely important.

We just got a correction to the next panel, unfortunately Maria Randall is unable to attend and then her replacement Robert Appo, unfortunately had a loss in his family yesterday.

Rhoda is going to join the conversation. And let me introduce Sharni Jones, who will moderate this discussion for this final panel on Aboriginal creative practice. Regional Arts NSW has the development of regional creative arts as a key priority and to achieve this we have a designated position on our board.

Sharni Jones joined the board this year, replacing Peter White, who had completed his six-year term and was instrumental in determining our direction and very helpful. Sharni Jones is an Aboriginal woman from the Kabi Kabi and Waka Waka nation on her mother's side. She spent her formative years in the Illawarra region of NSW where her family still resides.

She has deep knowledge and extensive engagement in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture, with specialisations in visual arts, strategic policy and stakeholder engagement. She is a highly networked facilitator with 20 years of professional practice.

Her current day job – you don't get paid to be a board member of an arts organisation – she is the manager of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection at the Australian Museum. Please welcome Sharni Jones, and she can introduce her panel.

**SHARNI JONES:**

Thank you, Elizabeth. I would like to pay respect to the Widjabul people of the Bundjalung nation.

What an amazing keynote that was, Rhoda. Thank you for participating in this panel.

**RHODA ROBERTS:**

Thank you, I am sorry I went over.

**SHARNI JONES:**

First of all, we have Karla Dickens, who went to the National Art School in the 1990s. She explores dialogue between past and present practice, grounding conversations in her Aboriginality, sexuality and spiritual life that informs her practice.

She attempts to characterise herself as a reductionist and her work is vast as a visual artist. Before I move on to introduce Kirk, I would like to requote:

"The older I grow, the wider my artistic practice becomes. I need more than one person to communicate with. The found objects I use are my healer and my voice..." And I think that is significant given some of the work Rhoda has spoken about in terms of our practices, using cathartic tools to heal ourselves individually and collectively sharing our stories with the rest of Australia.

We also have Kirk Page, who is working here at NORPA. Thank you for taking the time out, given you have a very busy schedule at the moment. Kirk on his father's side is a (speaks

Aboriginal language) man. He was co-director of the Bathurst circus and physical theatre. Welcome. And Rhoda, as you know, needs no introduction.

Karla, we wanted to have a yarn about each of your individual practices and how you are working on different spaces. How, as Aboriginal people, we come together and be regionally based. And how that frames your cultural practice.

**KARLA DICKENS:**

Hello, everybody. I would also like to acknowledge the country that I'm standing on today and thank the people of this country and the ancestors. I've been here for about nine years now and it's been really good to me, this country.

I'd also like to acknowledge and thank my ancestors because I am still here. I won't start with art, but I have some slideshows that James has got. You can have a look at that. This morning I got up and I am a professional artist now and I was looking at the washing up...

(Laughter)

I was thinking about what to wear. My mate John wears white linen so I found some linen. Yeah, it's interesting. I'm very grateful to be invited to do these things and in a couple of days I will be turning 50 and I'm in therapy at the moment.

My therapist has been working very hard to get me organised for my 50th.

(Laughter)

I thought I'd be a middle-aged woman and go to Bali.

(Laughter)

To get my teeth cleaned, and stuff. I was all prepared, but now there is a volcano happening. But on a serious note, the therapy has been intense, but it makes me very grateful to be here and to have art as the voice that's guided me through traumas, you know. So that is kind of very much all in the forefront at the moment.

So that little projection up here is different works of mine. There are some images of a young Bundjalung woman who I've had the privilege of working with. I'll show an image in a moment of the windscreen project in Wynyard and Barrangaroo. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to play that, but I want to, as it is footage that has been shot here in the Northern Rivers.

I might need some help with some of this.

**KIRK PAGE:**

What is this?

**KARLA DICKENS:**

Oh, it's Bali.

(Laughter)

**KARLA DICKENS:**

My work is like Sharni just spoke about. It is quite fast, in different mediums. Even when I was at the National Art School in Sydney, I left that in 1991, 1992, it is expensive to make art. I had come straight out of detox, and went straight into art school, and making art was another expensive lifestyle that I chose.

(Laughter)

**KARLA DICKENS:**

So I started to find different things off the street that I could use. And, you know, when I did come up to the Northern Rivers and life expenses kind of dropped down a little bit, I started back on canvases and working on canvases, and as happens with artists, money got tight.

This one was called Warrior Woman. So, the metal knickers. This was part of a show at the National Art School.

**SHARNI JONES:**

Your work is quite prolific. When you get into your studio at home, or you are washing up, do you feel like you are constantly creating and living and breathing your work?

**KARLA DICKENS:**

I'm quite grateful to have my work to concentrate on. The thing I learned from the National Art School is that you don't just wait until you get a grant, because otherwise would never work (Laughs), you just work.

Fortunately, over a period of time, I was able to have a space in the Hunter Valley which was \$45 a week so that I could make art. Fortunately I have been able to set myself up in a lifestyle where there were very few outgoings.

And you know, I've heard other people say this – I reckon they're wankers, but I'm going to say it – I don't really feel like I have a choice. I make work. A lot of my work is... Can we, maybe, play that video of... It is a funny kind of shape because the screen is... Oh, well, we can watch this one. (Laughs)

This was made with a Bundjalung man and woman a number of years ago. I make work because I need to, and listening to Rhoda speak, and talking about New South Wales and New South Wales indigenous artists, I tell my family story.

I tell my family story and a lot of that involves trauma. A lot of that involves the product of assimilation. In the old regional Gallery, Arts Northern Rivers, two women have just put up a show and I have worked in there called 'Dark Secrets'.

That work is about my great-grandmother's story. She was taken. She was a domestic. She was raped and abused. She died in Callan Park.

So, I have worked with those stories, and it is a healing for me. Whether it goes on the craft

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side, or the not really groovy side, it is what I do. It is a therapy for me. It is just a perfect way to find a voice and work through who I am as an indigenous Australian in New South Wales with people looking at you.

"You're not dark enough. You don't really know where your people come from," you know, just all those assumptions and stuff. I have had to question them because those are the questions I get asked, so that is really what my works are about.

There is another piece of work in the exhibition at the new regional Gallery. At the event, Mr John (unknown term) put together called 'Four Women' that I have got four pieces in there of four women. And that is paying tribute to the women of the Northern Rivers, and with Rhoda here I will get emotional, of women being found and unfound in the Northern Rivers.

The 4 Corners story about Lynette Daley, which is not far from here. So, that is kind of what my work is about.

**SHARNI JONES:**

Thank you, that is such a beautiful and poignant work. It is so traumatising though that if you didn't use art and practice to convey that sense of loss and difficulty. Dealing with the ongoing transgenerational trauma, and being in a small regional town, do you feel like you have support from other Aboriginal artists or practitioners?

**KARLA DICKENS:**

I do feel like I have support. Fiona Foley has moved into the area. Fiona has been an incredible support person and just having such an incredible artist in my life and who I have watched from a distance, has been great.

And (inaudible).

**KIRK PAGE:**

This is my mother.

(Laughter)

**KARLA DICKENS:**

And this is my daughter... (Laughs) and we have the new TV series. It depends on how focused I am on my work and how comfortable I am to go out with, who I reach out to.

**RHODA ROBERTS:**

And you did go out into the big wide world, to the Sydney Opera House.

**SHARNI JONES:**

And you are out in the big wide world, and with our practices, who we are as a people, we are connected in a lot of practice areas, and your discipline, we are all connected and it is really important process.

So, Kirk, you have been on the Bundjalung land for a number of years now after moving out of Sydney. Can you talk to us about the importance of being connected when you are regionally

based?

**KIRK PAGE:**

As a performer I have always been involved in creating and performing those stories in the last couple of decades. I have been lucky enough to get a job in NORPA in beautiful Bundjalung country for the last two years.

Coming on board in the company I have been assisting around projects and shows that have been made, and recently we opened a production, 'Djurra', on Wednesday. So, that has been keeping me busy in the last couple of months.

I have also been working with a number of emerging young Aboriginal artists in the local area. So we have been working on building relationships around the place and that has been a big part of it.

**SHARNI JONES:**

And how do you use your practice, evolving as a practitioner? Do you feel that has changed you and experiences with working with those emerging artists?

**KIRK PAGE:**

Changed is not quite the word, but I feel I have had a lot of experiences with people, and you start to think, "Oh, wow, I have a lot of great things to share," or I have lots of things to share on 'Djurra'. And working with Sarah Bolt, she has never worked on stage before.

Very often you might feel insecure, speaking personally for myself, and that has been a great part of the work I have been doing here, working with the artists. Sharing that knowledge has been great.

I think from my practice, it doesn't feel like it has only just started, it feels like I've been practising for a long time but not necessarily practising them and putting them on stage with my name on them. I think for me I am really interested in, as a storyteller, what the body and the physical story or practice of body, what the stories are and what that embodies, that is what I guess I am interested in.

**SHARNI JONES:**

That kind of transference of knowledge as well can be really empowering, and talking about excellence in the region, and we are practitioners in original place, but it is important to feel that connection regionally. So, when I go home to Dharawal country in Adelaide, it gives you that sense of connectedness, and you spoke about resilience.

I find that sharing that with non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, it is the way of being able to think locally and globally as well.

**KIRK PAGE:**

I was born two hours up the road, so I do feel like I am a bit closer to home as well.

**SHARNI JONES:**

What kind of challenges are there working as a First Nations practitioner? One of my

colleagues, we laugh and joke about being called the oracle, because as Aboriginal people, you are supposed to be the know all for Aboriginal things, whether it is part of your practice or not.

There can be those expectations of you as a leader in that space.

**KIRK PAGE:**

Something I am aware of – and a bit worried about, to be honest – since when did I become the cultural attaché of the region? I am not and I don't claim it. I think it is about creating spaces for people to flourish and making that space, I think that is what the company has done, and me working on the projects, there are challenges.

Things don't run by a 9-to-5 program a lot of the time. You have to spend time building relationships with people. And I think you mentioned it before, Rhoda – “We need to know what the Aboriginal word for mobile phone is...”

(Laughter)

Working with Elders or knowledge-keepers, the challenge is you cannot lean on them every time you need help. My experience is you create the relationship and I try not to ask stupid questions. There would be the challenges around that.

**SHARNI JONES:**

So, now living on this country, in terms of your practice, how does culture continue to inform your practice here? And the new show is a great example. In terms of your story telling and narrative, have you had to incorporate about yourself differently?

**KIRK PAGE:**

Yes, I had a private initiation of my own in this project. The various artists who have worked on the show, I have learnt a lot from that. I will walk into a rehearsal room and be the most well-behaved person ever. That is one thing I have learned. (Laughs)

In terms of cultural practice, I'm learning as I go. And I know a certain amount of things but, for me, it is about being open and listening. That's how I would approach it.

**SHARNI JONES:**

Thank you, Kirk.

(Applause)

Rhoda, I think we nearly started to cry when we were out the back listening to you talk, particularly around Oodgeroo Noonuccal, who was a friend of my grandmother's. For me, that creative practice has always been a large part of what I am in that exchange.

We cannot forget our past because we assist each other to continue to be grounded and move through that and if there are opportunities, obviously, being a cultural leader in a place, those young minds get to see how rich our culture is and how varied it is, rather than being put in a box about what is Aboriginal arts practice in NSW and nationally.

And that is important because we do have our own, for want of a better word, identity in NSW. It is not about creating dot paintings. We are all diverse and come from different country. Being able to share a myriad of cultural practices is great for us as Aboriginal arts workers.

I enjoyed listening to you describe that and I thought about that in my own career to date. In terms of cultural leadership, what challenges have you seen? You work at the Sydney Opera House, and then commuting back to country, how do you maintain your practice in a way that you are not compromising who you are and your cultural integrity and knowing when you are playing in the big pond and with other stakeholders in Sydney, how does that impact on your practice?

**RHODA ROBERTS:**

I think one of the things that not so much impacts on your practice, I don't want to be known as a cultural leader, because I am not a leader. In fact, this young man has led me over the last six months.

Like, I'm really old-fashioned and I have this thing about theatre protocol. And Kirk comes in with this new energy and I learnt so much from his openness. And during that period, a very sad period, the resilience of this young man, and I learnt many years ago that the only way I could cope is throw yourself into the work and make the work speak.

Like you are saying, the work helps you feel. So seeing that with Kirk taking on this new project with hundreds of expectations, you have absolutely no idea. I so admire him and little things he would tell me, I would go, "Well, you are so open and good."

He has another project, 'The Horse's Mouth', looking at suicide and other issues. That shows me you will be a leader in the arts. He is my teacher at the moment because he is helping me understand the relevance of social media and how you can use that in projects.

I don't know if you remember, one of our great performers and cultural knowledge people in this area is a man called Lewis Walker. As is Roy Gordon, who was culturally consulted on the production. Lewis was playing the didgeridoo last night and we were chatting about how we cope with the world.

And he goes and does all the ceremonies at funerals and stuff and he told me that it is 1,969 in the last nine years, that he has buried. And that just blew me away. That is so many, so many funerals.

I think the work is the greatest healing and we learn from that. I think maybe we've always done that, but I appreciate the voices of the young people coming in. You might have seen those young girls last night. Sarah works with them consistently and that is so encouraging to know there is another driver in the industry and in the region that will keep that going.

I must get a note to her because I have been texting Sarah every night and sending her photos of the rehearsals, only to discover I've been sending them to Sarah Bond and not Sarah Bolt.

(Laughter)

**SHARNI JONES:**

It's great to have those champions as well, to know there is this ongoing legacy for community as well and being able to drive that practice.

Rhoda, you have had a pretty wonderful career. Are there particular highlights that you would like to share?

**RHODA ROBERTS:**

There are so many highlights. It was a bit like – not that I'm that old – that thing with Kirk, was a bit like my relationship with Nanna. The highlight, apart from the fact I am still alive today, the Sydney Olympics, to bring those country men and women from across the country to host that awakening ceremony.

Running a dreaming festival for 15 years and giving those artists the opportunity to have economic independence. A big highlight.

(Applause)

And now since the Minister's love last night, the Parrtjima festival is big. The economy can develop from it. We are self-funded since 2010. That is my greatest challenge and that is what I will do.

(Applause)

But I won't take the bloody money.

**SHARNI JONES:**

Finally, from all of you, what sage advice would you give to companies who are wanting to engage with First Nations practitioners but don't know where to start or what they are looking for?

**KIRK PAGE:**

You just have to do it. Start it. No-one has the answers. A series of falling on your face and tripping over and walking forward... I was going to say the gutter.

(Laughter)

Not the gutter, a pool of water. Be ready to be told you are not right.

**SHARNI JONES:**

What about you, Karla, have you found challenges when you have been asked to commission a work with a gallery or the likes in Sydney and again maintaining that resilience to stand strong and know who you are as a practitioner, but as a person around cultural integrity, if something is not proper in the way it is supposed to be, not being shy about going forward?

**KARLA DICKENS:**

Yeah, it's a constant struggle for me. I have just had my last work leave my studio, which is going down to Manly Museum and Art Gallery. That exhibition is based on North Head. I am the

only Indigenous person invited to be in that show.

There are lots of beautiful landscapes and amazing work by the artists involved, a lot that I really expect. For me, I have to go – the story is not pretty, it is Middle Head, the birth of the shit fight. I did a piece, it is in the gallery – people would not have seen it yet – it would be confronting and I have to keep owning the facts and owning the history and owning my storytelling of that.

That can be a challenge. I didn't get invited to do an artist's talk for the show.

(Laughter)

But that's OK. I think a lot of it is about communication. I think First Nations artists, any artist, people ring up and say we have the show, can you send this or that? And you know, I'm incredibly fortunate now that I have a gallery, Andrew Baker, he is a human.

He is like, "You've got stuff happening with your daughter, you've got family stuff, do you want me to take care of that?" It is engaging with artists. It is like me this morning saying I need to put my professional artist hat on.

And it's like, "Where the fuck did I leave that?"

(Laughter)

**KIRK PAGE:**

Where's the costume?

**KARLA DICKENS:**

Because there is a whole range of... There is life. And like Rhoda was saying about Lewis Walker, there is life, there is a lot of trauma and grief, it's big in the world for lots of people at the moment.

Just for galleries and art workers, just to have a bit of grace with the people around that stuff. I find that challenging at times. It's not like I can't make deadlines but sometimes I feel like I have to put on this happy face that I just don't have. I am in the studio doing work about rape and torture and the coming of the British into Middle Head and I haven't always got a jolly face on or a personal nice kind of phone manner.

(Laughter)

**SHARNI JONES:**

To tell a story is extremely important, and as you have all said, you're making yourself extremely honourable to tell these stories and do it with authenticity and be true to yourself.

And I would like to wrap up and read a poem by Oodgeroo Noonucca, 'Cookalingee'.

Cookalingee, now all day

Station cook in white man's way,  
Dressed and fed, provided for,  
Sees outside her kitchen door  
Ragged band of her own race,  
Hungry nomads, black of face.  
Never begging, they stand by,  
Silent, waiting, wild and shy,  
For they know that in their need  
Cookalingee give them feed.  
Peeping in, their deep dark eyes  
Stare at stove with wide surprise,  
Pots and pans and kitchen-ware,  
All the white-man wonders there.  
Cookalingee, lubra still  
Spite of white-man station drill,  
Knows the tribal laws of old:  
'Share with others what you hold;'  
Hears the age-old racial call:  
'What we have belongs to all.'  
Now she gives with generous hand  
White man tucker to that band,  
Full tin plate and pannikin  
To each hunter, child and gin.  
Joyful, on the ground they sit,  
With only hands for eating it.  
Then upon their way they fare,  
Bellies full and no more care.  
Cookalingee, lubra still,  
Feels her dark eyes softly fill,  
Watching as they go content,  
Natural as nature meant.  
And for all her place and pay  
Is she happy now as they?  
Wistfully she muses on  
Something bartered, something gone.  
Songs of old remembered days,  
The walkabout, the old free ways.  
Blessed with everything she prized,  
Trained and safe and civilized...

(Cries)

**KIRK PAGE:**

Do you want me to read the rest of it?

**SHARNI JONES:**

I will keep going.

(Reads)

Much she has that they have not,  
But is hers the happier lot?  
Lonely in her paradise  
Cookalingee sits and cries.

And I just wanted to say that we all have a long, deep history of truth telling, and the arts and cultural space can all help us to share the cultural stories for the young ones and the next generation.

Please join me in thanking everyone. My performance debut, everyone.

Please thank Karla, Kirk and Rhoda for such a stimulating panel discussion.

(Applause)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Sharni, thank you so much. You can see Kirk tonight in the performance of 'Djurra', I believe there are still tickets available at the box office.

It was such a beautiful session on Aboriginal art practice.

Before you all bound off, I have a bit of housekeeping.

We have Sam (Unknown term) being replaced in the next session by (Unknown term).

I am speaking too fast, and I have totally forgotten what I am trying to say. There is a panel this afternoon on the Newcastle infrastructure plan. Alex Bowen unfortunately couldn't be with us but Craig Lincoln is replacing him.

The parallel sessions are down King Street in St Pauls Hall which is the hub for Everything about Screen and the other sessions are in the event room at the Lismore City Gallery.

Have a look at the map on the back of your nametag. That is for convenience so you don't have to look at the printout.

Lismore is a nice grid pattern and we only have about two blocks between each venue. There are still tickets available for sessions tonight. The only exception is Cheeky Cabaret box office closes at 5:00 and is moving across to the Star Court at 6:30 PM

There is then an amazing session called 'If These Walls Could Talk' - if you want to see the amazing work by them, they are unticketed.

So just to cover that again, the Cheeky Cabaret box office is closing at 5 PM and moving across to the Star Court at 6:30 PM.

I am having trouble deciding which one I want to see. There is so much on.

I look forward to seeing you all tomorrow.

Thank you very much. Lunch is in the foyer.