

THE
REDFERN
STORY

PRESS KIT

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THE REDFERN STORY

One liner:

A small group of passionate, determined visionaries pioneered Redfern's National Black Theatre in the 1970's, a politically volatile time in our history, transforming Australian culture and politics forever.

Short Synopsis:

The National Black Theatre movement in Redfern formed at a very crucial time in Australian political history, culminating with the establishment of a political movement and the setting up of a number of significant Aboriginal organisations. The National Black Theatre has left a lasting legacy on national politics, social welfare and the Australian arts scene.

THE REDFERN STORY

Background:

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Sydney suburb of Redfern became home to over twenty thousand Aborigines. With the gradual revoking of the reserve system in NSW, Aboriginal people drifted to the city looking for friends, family and work. Redfern, then a run down slum where only the poorest people lived, was the cheapest and therefore most affordable place for these displaced country people to find refuge.

Soon overcrowding, poverty, illiteracy and alcohol provoked anti social behaviour and conflict arose between the new inhabitants and the police. White citizens of Sydney cared little for this situation beyond its inconvenient impact on society.

In 1967 the overwhelming "yes" vote in the Referendum had given Aboriginal people hope that their plight would be recognised and help given to address their problems. A few brave pioneers, like Faith Bandler and Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonucle) were working hard to raise awareness of the cause. However in reality little changed.

Then, in 1971, something happened which marked the beginning of the fight for equal rights and equal opportunities for Australia's first people. A small group of untrained, but passionate and talented activists came together and formed The National Black Theatre.

"The Redfern Story" documents the steps taken through activism and theatre to bring the cause of indigenous people to public notice, as a first step towards gaining land rights and better treatment.

A group of visionaries living in Redfern used theatre, dance and song as a political tool to take control of their culture, to provide a focal point for Aboriginal issues and to fight for change.

It was these fighters who gave voice to a broader political struggle on a national scale. Redfern became a thriving and vibrant melting pot of politics, passion, art and creativity.

THE REDFERN STORY

Synopsis

The film focuses on the events that led to the setting up of The National Black Theatre in Redfern in 1972 by a small group of untrained political activists, writers, dancers, and actors with Bob Maza at the helm. Spanning only 5 years, it was a way that Aboriginal people felt they could get their voices heard effectively.

In 1970, Maza and fellow activists travelled to America to learn from the black American experience, bringing back and implementing what they had learned. On his return to Australia Maza moved his family from Melbourne to Sydney and the Black Theatre was established at the Maza residence at 181 Regent St Redfern. It later moved to a warehouse in Cope Street.

The film contains interviews with people who worked with Bob Maza, and who were involved in the Black Theatre and were instrumental in shaping and bringing about significant social change. They include academics Marcia Langton and Gary Foley, brothers Gerry and Lester Bostock, actors Alileen Louise Corpus, Bindi Williams, Bronwyn Penrith, Lillian Crombie and the talented daughters of Bob Maza, Rachael and Lisa. Actors Bryan Brown and Max Cullen are also interviewed about playing white roles at the Black Theatre.

These interviews are intercut with historical footage of the time, documenting the life and culture of Redfern. We cover the creation of the Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Legal Service, which were the first of their kind and were set up to address the neglect of the struggling community, and the establishment of the Tent Embassy in Canberra.

The National Black Theatre's genesis was in street theatre performances at the first land rights marches, developing into the first formal production, "Basically Black" at Nimrod Theatre in 1972. This was followed by Robert Merritt's *The Cakeman* and then later, Gerry Bostock's *"Here Comes The Nigger"* in 1975.

The film pays tribute to the artists of the Black Theatre movement who are no longer with us, such as Justine Saunders and Zac Martin, and actor, director and drama teacher, Brian Syron.

"The Redfern Story" is about a significant and rich part of modern Aboriginal history which until now has been virtually undocumented.

THE REDFERN STORY

DARLENE JOHNSON - WRITER DIRECTOR PRODUCER

When Darlene Johnson was a small child in the 1970's, she lived in Redfern with her mother, who was part of the arts and activist scene in the heart of Redfern. Zac Martin would often sing and play music and entertain guests at Darlene's house. Darlene often sat on the table while music was played and discussions took place about indigenous politics. Zac would also borrow Darlene's mother's guitar and take it up the road to the Black Theatre.

"The Redfern Story" is her tribute to that time.

Darlene Johnson is an Aborigine of the east-coast Dunghutti people of the mid north of NSW.

Her career as writer/director started with the internationally acclaimed short film "Two Bob Mermaid" in 1996, a story inspired by her mother's experiences of growing up under the assimilation period of the 1950's. It deals with the effects of racism on a fair-skinned Aboriginal teenager, and struck a chord nationally and internationally. Darlene has continued exploring themes of race, identity and perception in both documentary and fiction, from "Stolen Generations which was nominated for an International EMMY Award," to "Stranger in my Skin" and "The Making of Phillip Noyce's 'Rabbit-Proof Fence'", to her supernatural fictional drama "Crocodile Dreaming" which featured the first-time pairing of legendary Aboriginal actors David Gulpilil and Tom E Lewis, and her poetic and moving portrait, "River of No Return," about the complexities of living in a remote Indigenous community. "River" was chosen as the opening film at Imaginative Film Festival in 2008. Darlene has recently been producing documentaries for the Message Stick series at the ABC TV.

She is currently writing two feature films, her first, "Obelia" will be Executive Produced by Phillip Noyce.

SUE MILLIKEN - PRODUCER

Sue Milliken is one of Australia's foremost producers. She began her career in continuity and production management, and her producing credits include "The Odd Angry Shot", "The Fringe Dwellers", "Sirens", "Paradise Road", "My Brother Jack" and "Crocodile Dreaming".

She represented the completion guarantor Film Finances in Australia from 1980 to 2009, successfully delivering over two billion dollars' worth of production in that time.

She has served on the Film & Literature Board of Review and the board of Screen West. She is a former president of SPAA and Chair of the Australian Film Commission.

In 2013 "Selective Memory", her memoir about her time in the Australian film industry, was published.

THE REDFERN STORY

INTERVIEWEES

"The Redfern Story" tells the story of Aboriginal activism in Redfern in the 1970's through historic film and interviews with people who were there.

Lester and Gerry Bostock

The Bostock brothers are well-known identities in the indigenous community of Sydney, for their work to better the lives and conditions of Aboriginal people and to provide opportunities for young people.

Lester Bostock has had a long and pioneering career in indigenous media, after moving to Redfern in the 1970's from Brisbane. He was the Manager of the National Black Theatre responsible for raising the funds to keep the theatre open. Subsequently he was instrumental in the founding of Radio Redfern and has been deeply involved in promoting training, opportunities and mentorship for indigenous film makers. He has worked at SBS and the Australian Film Television and Radio School and established a community-based training scheme at Metro Screen, subsequently becoming President of Metro Screen for six years.

Gerry Bostock joined the army as a young man living in Brisbane, and after nine years including service overseas, he left the army and moved to Redfern, where he became involved in the National Black Theatre. His play "Here Comes The Nigger" was the second production performed by the Black Theatre. He subsequently became a film maker, and today practises as a spiritual healer.

Bryan Brown

Bryan Brown, one of Australia's best known actors and movie stars, counts his role in "Here Comes The Nigger " for the National Black Theatre as a seminal moment in establishing his career. He went on to many legendary film and television roles, including Cocktail, Two Hands, Dirty Deeds and Australia.

Aileen Louise Corpus

Born in Darwin, Louise Corpus came to Sydney in the 1970's and joined the acting community of the National Black Theatre in Redfern. She has lived in Redfern for over 40 years, and stays actively involved with the community, working when needed with Bronwyn Penrith on social and family issues.

Lillian Crombie

A member of the stolen generation, Lillian Crombie was born in South Australia and grew up with foster parents in Port Pirie. She came to Sydney in the early 1970's to begin an acting and dance career, beginning with NAISDA, later the Aboriginal & Islander Dance Theatre. Lillian also studied with Brian Syron at the National Black Theatre and with the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre in the USA, and became a distinguished actor working with the Belvoir Theatre, the Sydney Theatre Company, the State Theatre of South Australia, and with film credits including Baz Lurhmann's Australia and Mystery Road.

Max Cullen

Max Cullen is one of Australia's best known character actors, who has also had a successful career as a painter and arts reporter. His acting roles include "My Brilliant Career", "Sunday Too Far Away" and "The Great Gatsby".

Ernie Dingo

Ernie Dingo, who grew up in Mullewa, Western Australia, is one of Australia's best known actors and television personalities, who became a household name for his work on the TV programme The Great Outdoors. His acting credits include "The Fringe Dwellers", "Heartland", "Crocodile Dundee II" and "Bran Nue Dae".

Dr. Gary Foley

Gary Foley is a legendary actor and activist who was part of the movement in Redfern for a better deal for Aboriginal people. He grew up in Grafton and Nambucca Heads in NSW, and came to Redfern in the late 1960's. He was at the forefront of the protest movement which resulted in the Tent Embassy on the grounds of Parliament House in Canberra, highlighting the demand by Aboriginal people for recognition and land rights.

He gained his doctorate at the University of Melbourne in 2013 and is currently lecturing and tutoring at Victoria University, Melbourne.

Professor Marcia Langton

Well known for her academic work, her writing on indigenous matters and her commitment to indigenous causes, Marcia Langton was born in Brisbane. She spent time in Redfern in the 1970's, working at the Aboriginal Medical Centre and being involved in the Black Theatre and the protest movement.

A graduate in Anthropology from the University of Queensland, Marcia Langton is currently Professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne.

Rachael and Lisa Maza

Rachael and Lisa are the multi-talented daughters of Bob Maza, the leading light of the National Black Theatre of Redfern, where they grew up during the 1970's.

Rachael has appeared on stage and in films and television in "Sea Change", "Radiance", "The Sapphires" and as a presenter on ABC's Message Stick series. She is currently the artistic director of Ilbijerri Theatre in Melbourne

Lisa is a singer, actor and performer who has worked on a number of organisations, committees and advisory groups. Her theatre performing credits include "The Sapphires", "Stolen", and "Corrugation Road". She has had TV roles in "City Homicide", "Kath & Kim" and "House Husbands".

Bronwyn Penrith

Bronwyn Penrith is a Wiradjuri woman, an Elder of the Tumut/Brungle Community Community in NSW. She moved to Redfern in the 1970's and has worked in community and family issues ever since. She is a Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner and Community Mediator and is the only Aboriginal woman on the

LANSW Family Dispute Resolution Panel. She is Chairperson of the Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Womens' Corporation. She continues to use street theatre as an educational tool for raising awareness about family violence.

Bindi Williams

Bindi grew up in Melbourne where he started acting as a child of eight in television productions such as Tent Town for ABC.

He moved to Sydney and attended NIDA, one of the first Aboriginal actors to do so, but did not graduate. He became a well known actor for his roles in "Woobinda, Animal Doctor", "The Magic Boomerang" and "Basically Black". He has had roles in "Homicide", "The Rovers", "Boney" and "Rush". He played Captain Midnight in the iconic 1970's movie, "Stone".

THE REDFERN STORY

FRONT CREDITS

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation
& Screen Australia Present

A Samson Productions Production

THE REDFERN STORY

END CREDITS

The National Black Theatre existed from 1972 to 1977.
There are now over 160 Aboriginal controlled medical and legal services operating
across Australia.

We pay tribute to all those deadly trailblazers who fought so bravely for land rights
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and who made a lasting impact on
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Written & Directed by
DARLENE JOHNSON
Produced by
SUE MILLIKEN
& DARLENE JOHNSON

Interviewees
GERRY BOSTOCK
LESTER BOSTOCK
BRYAN BROWN
AILEEN CORPUS
LILLIAN CROMBIE
MAX CULLEN
ERNIE DINGO
DR. GARY FOLEY
PROF. MARCIA LANGTON
LISA MAZA
RACHAEL MAZA
BRONWYN PENRITH
BINDI WILLIAMS

Director of Photography
SIMON SMITH
Editor

DEB PRINCE
Music by
ADAM MOSES & GUY GROSS
Sound Recordist
RHYS WEBB
Production Manager
SANDRA ALEXANDER
Production Assistant
MITCHELL STANLEY
Production Accounts
MONEYPENNY,
DEBORAH EASTWOOD/LIANE LEE
Assistant Editor
DAVID SHARPE
Archival Research
ALEC MORGAN
Legals
RUSSELL ALLEN,
LLOYD HART LAWYERS
Camera Equipment
VIDEO AUSTRALASIA
Studio
METRO SCREEN
Post Production
SOUNDFIRM AUSTRALIA
Dialogue Editor & Re-Recording Mixer
ANDY WRIGHT
Colourist
ANGELA CERASI
Facilities Co-ordinator
JASMIN CORNFORD
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GILLIAN MOODY
KYAS SHERRIFF

ROBERTA McNAMARA
FILM FINANCES

Australian Broadcasting
Corporation Content Sales
Excerpt from "Sunrise Awakening"
courtesy of Ande Reese
Film & Stills from the Maza family collection
courtesy Rachael Maza & Lisa Maza
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New Dawn cover, "The Cake Man" courtesy
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and the NFSA Film Australia Collection
Forever Hold Your Piece courtesy
Teralba Road Films Pty. Ltd.
Ningla-A'Na by Alessandro Cavadini
courtesy of Smart St Films Pty. Ltd.
T3Media

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