

ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY presents

# Sisters of Gelam



**Written by** Lisa Maza & Rachael Maza Long  
**Dramaturgy by** Melanie Beddie  
**Directed by** Rachael Maza Long & Melanie Beddie  
**Musical Director** Stephen (Stretch) Teakle  
**Set & Costume Design** Gav Barbey  
**Lighting Design** Danny Pettingill  
**Puppet Design** Katrina Gaskell  
**Puppet Director** Megan Cameron  
**Featuring** Lisa Maza, Rachael Maza Long & Ben Graetz  
**Production Manager** Eva Tandy  
**Stage Manager** Lionel Austin  
**Sound Technician** Russell Goldsmith

**With...**  
**Photography by** Steven Rhall  
**Graphic Design by** inscopemedia.com  
**Publicity by** Katrina Hall

## ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY

### STAFF:

RACHAEL MAZA LONG	ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
JOHN HARVEY	GENERAL MANAGER
SUZI CORDELL	PROJECT MANAGER
KRISTY MAYER	MARKETING MANAGER
SHAUNA MAGUIRE	OFFICE COORDINATOR

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**Ilbijerri Theatre Company** believes in the power of black voices telling black stories. Based in Melbourne, the company is the longest existing Indigenous theatre company in Australia. Over our history, we've toured nationally and internationally, finding resonance with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. Now, on the brink of our 20 year anniversary, Ilbijerri is poised on the edge of an immensely exciting new era of Indigenous theatre – where our journey is one of discovery, and the rules are simple: be bold, black, and brilliant.

[www.ilbijerri.org.au](http://www.ilbijerri.org.au)

**We would like to show our respect and acknowledge the Traditional owners of the land we gather on today: the Woiworrung/Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Taungurong, Djajawurrung and Wathaurung that make up the Kulin Nation. We pay respect to their Ancestors and Elders and to any Elders that may be with us here today.**

## WRITERS' NOTES

The commitment to writing this play began two years ago, but the story behind *Sisters of Gelam* stretches back a long way before that. In a way, it began from us being kids growing up during the 60's and 70's. But even before that, it had a beginning from the day our Torres Strait Islander/Aboriginal father and Dutch mother met. Again, even further back, it began in the journey of Gelam and the creation of the Torres Strait Islands.

The inspiration for telling this story came from us wanting to create a play that was contemporary and relevant to 'us', but also to all Australians. *Sisters of Gelam* is an essentially Australian story as it interweaves Indigenous Culture with the Non-Indigenous in a contemporary setting. It was really important to us that we acknowledge and celebrate both voices & cultures. It was also important to us that we pushed the form of this piece beyond the more familiar Naturalistic/ Documentary style of theatre, to explore a new style within this genre.

The story of Gelam was told to us as children, by our Father. It was told to us again recently by our Auntie Gari, who we thank gratefully for giving us permission to use this traditional story, and who patiently translated and tutored us on all the Meriam Mer language in the play – an element that is really important to us.

*Sisters of Gelam* is of course inspired by real people and events. However, in the telling of this story, we have made a conscious decision to go beyond the bounds of historical fact. In this way, and with the superb dramaturgical guidance of Melanie Beddie, we have found a place of freedom that we think best celebrates the many stories that have woven together to bring us here today.

*Rachael Maza Long & Lisa Maza*

## DIRECTORS' NOTES

All theatre is a collaboration between the artists involved. What is delightful about this show is that it retains the energy of those fruitful collaborations right through to what you see tonight.

The *Sisters of Gelam* is a performance which explores the complexities of family – of generations, siblings, and their relationships to place and country. The piece has multiple strands and weaves a number of stories and cultures together, so we have brought together various forms of theatrical storytelling to best suit each strand: song, puppetry and spoken text.

We believe that *Sisters of Gelam* is one of those times where the whole is greater than it's many single parts. Throughout the writing process and the creative development many people have brought their ideas and passion to the piece. We would like to thank the wonderful design team, the ever resourceful production and stage management team, and the inspired support of the project by the entire staff of Ilbijerri Theatre Company.

*Melanie Beddie & Rachael Maza Long*

## RACHAEL MAZA LONG

Co-Writer, Co-Director & Performer

## LISA MAZA

Co-Writer & Performer

### (THE MAZA SISTERS)

Rachael and Lisa are proud Mer/Yidinji/Dutch women, who have been singing together for as long as they can remember. They had an obvious role model in their (late) father, Bob Maza. Growing up in Sydney, they played in various inner city bands: Lisa on lead vocals and Rachael on Bass guitar.

As a duo they have performed at the "Nambundah Festivals" at Belvoir, "Rail and Cane", Survival '98 & Moomba 2000, The Boites "Winter Dreaming", "Keep the Fire Burning" at VCA, Deadly Expressions and other KBN events, ABC's "Sending a message" NAIDOC concert, Darebin Music Festivals and Yalukit Wilam Ngargee 08.

Melbourne has been home to the Maza Sisters for the past 10 years. Both Maza Sisters are accomplished Actors but also involve themselves with many other artistic pursuits.

Lisa has been acting for stage and television professionally for over a decade. In 2008 she tour managed "Chopped Liver" for Ilbjerri Theatre Company. After doing a Certificate III in media at the beginning of 2009, Lisa co-directed her first documentary "Living in Two Worlds".

Rachael is well known as a television presenter on SBS's *ICAM* and ABC's *Message Stick*, and for her stunning performances in *Radiance* and in *The Sapphires*. She is currently the Artistic Director of Ilbjerri Theatre Company, and has most recently directed Ilbjerri's productions of: *Jacky Jacky in the box* (Federation Square 2009), *A Black sheep walks into a Baa...* (Melbourne International Comedy Festival 2009) and *Chopped Liver* (National tours 2008 & 2009).

## MELANIE BEDDIE

Dramaturg & Co-Director

Melanie is a graduate of Sydney University and VCA. She was a co-founder of the \$5 Theatre Co. and is artistic director of the independent theatre company The BRANCH. She works as an actor, dramaturg and director.

She has worked for a variety of companies including MTC, Playbox, La Mama, Hothouse and has taught at Latrobe University, VCA and WAAPA. In 2004 she won Best Director (Green Room Independent Theatre) for her production of *TRAITORS*. In 2009 she has directed *AVIARY* (The Branch), *THE REAL WORLD* (Branch/MWT), a creative development and *THE LARAMIE PROJECT: 10 years Later* (Redstitch).

In 2002 she co-founded the *Dramaturgies* forum with Paul Monaghan and Peter Eckersal. In 2004 she received the Dramaturgy Fellowship from the Australia Council. She was an inaugural board member of [Playwriting Australia](#). She received a Gloria Fellowship from NIDA in 2009 and she is currently the dramaturg in residence at St Martins Youth Theatre. In March 2010 she will co-convene the event *Dramaturgies #4: Dramaturgy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

## BEN GRAETZ

Performer

Ben has just completed a Graduate Diploma in Movement Studies (NIDA 2008). He is also a graduate of the 1998 NIDA acting course, and completed a Certificate in Aboriginal Theatre at WAAPA in Perth in 1995.

His professional acting credits involve playing Romeo in Bell Shakespeare Company's *Romeo and Juliet*; *Outside Lives* with Tropic Line Theatre Company; and *Three Sisters* with Theatre 20/20. While doing the acting course at NIDA, Ben played the role of Czolgosz in Tony Knight's *Assassins*, Silvius in Richard Wherret's *As You Like It*, and is remembered most notably as SMIKE in Tony Knight's *Nicholas Nickelby*.

Ben was also part of the coordination team for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony where he helped look after over 1000 Indigenous performers from all across Australia for the "Awakening" section directed by Stephen Page. One of his most memorable moments was performing during the closing ceremony as a dancer for Christine Anu's "My Island Home".

Among other things, Ben wrote and directed the short film *Immortal Man* which screened on SBS television. He has also taught acting at a number of Sydney dance schools and has worked as Assistant Stage Manager on various high profile events around Sydney.

Ben's work is very much influenced by his German, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Background, and he is passionate about changing cultural and religious stereotypes within our society.

## GAV BARBEY

Set & Costume Designer

*"The idea dictates the medium... the medium does not enforce the artistic passion"*.

Gav's artistic career has spanned 25 years, from his early apprenticeship as a commercial artist, to scenic artist and sculptural prop maker, to the study of theatre and film design at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts.

As a professional Designer Barbey collaborated with such companies as Pina Bausch, Sydney and Melbourne Theatre Co, and was a founding member of Richard Roxboroughs award winning Co, 'The Burning House'.

His early interest in Puppetry, Dance and Image Based performance has taken him to International Festivals as not only a Designer but also as a Performer and Visual Artist.

As a Film Maker, Writer and Director Barbey's films have won awards, and programmed Internationally including 'Sundance International Film Festival'.

As an Exhibiting Visual Artist Gav has exhibited throughout Australia. Internationally in Korea, USA and is held in collections in the above and including the UK and South Africa.

His latest body of works is a culmination of visual art, performance and film.

In 2008 his first book was published by Pan MacMillan, his feature art film 'ART2b' was shot in December 2008 to be released late 2009, his hand painted pre school animation series 'Sunny Time Zoom Zoom' is in development with the ABC television and BBC UK.

## **DANNY PETTINGILL**

Lighting Designer

Danny graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2006 and has a Diploma of Small Companies and Community theatre (2003). He has designed for companies in Melbourne, Hobart and Sydney including Red Stitch Actors Theatre, LaMama, Union House Theatre, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Aphids, Full Tilt, Malthouse Theatre, Bsharp, Terrapin Puppet Theatre and Tasmania Theatre Company whilst also working with a number of independent groups on productions around Melbourne. He was awarded Malthouse theatre's Besen Family Scholarship in 2008 and was nominated for two Greenroom awards for his work in 2008, collecting the award for Lighting Design in Independent Theatre.

## **KATRINA GASKELL**

Puppet Designer

Trina began making puppets with Handspan Theatre (more years ago than she can believe) and has since worked with a number of puppetry companies such as Polyglot Puppet Theatre and Snuff Puppets. As a freelance artist Trina largely designs and makes puppets for theatre and festivals. She has designed puppets for *Chookahs!* Children's Festival in Melbourne, *Walking With Spirits* festival in Beswick (N.T.) and previously for Ilbjerri she designed *Headhunter*, a co-production with Polyglot Puppet Theatre. For a number of years Trina was based at Al Martinez Studios where among other things she worked on puppets and props for the 2006 Commonwealth Games and the Melbourne production of *The Producers*. After many years of making puppets she is still fascinated by the life that comes to the lifeless puppet when manipulated. Under threat of having to register the dog she is making for Tom E. Lewis, Trina is finishing a dog puppet, being a mum, building a studio and growing vegies.

## **MEGAN CAMERON**

Puppet Director

Megan is one of Australia's leading and most experienced and diverse Puppeteers of her generation. She graduated from V.C.A school of Drama as an actor in 1989 and has toured productions throughout Australia, Europe, Asia and the American continent for, HANDSPAN, BLACK HOLE, TERRAPIN, BACK TO BACK, SKYLARK, ARTS KATHERINE, PLAYBOX, POLYGLOT, DRAMATIC EDGE, DJILPIN ARTS, ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY and SNUFF PUPPETS. Megan is co-creator/producer of the 2007 Fringe award-winning SHITT FAMILY PUPPET SHOW.

Her television and film work includes Doris the pig in LIFT OFF 2, Horace in HORACE AND TINA, and Bunyip in SHAPE! SHAPE! SHAPE! THE MICALLEF PROGRAM, and the Warner Bros film WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE directed by Spike Jonze.

Megan also devises, writes and performs her own solo puppetry performances. She has performed her own work across Australia and Singapore. She was invited in 2008 to perform two of her works: ANDY CLOCKWIZE and FIN at three Festivals in the Czech Republic. Megan now works and performs with the Prague Theatre Company DIVADLO ANPU in the Czech Republic and in Australia.

## **STEPHEN (STRETCH) TEAKLE**

Musical Director & Musician

Stephen is a freelance musician, artist, tour manager and music teacher who has worked all over the country & internationally with festivals, tours, universities and remote Indigenous communities. As a Musical Director he has worked with artists such as Deborah Conway, Katie Noonan & Claire Bowditch; and has played support for Paul Kelly, Tiddas, Archie Roach & Ruby Hunter among many others.

## **ANDREW O'GRADY**

Musician

Andrew performs in a wide range of musical settings ranging from jazz, country and blues to chamber music and independent theatre projects. Currently Andrew regularly performs with Nick Charles and The Blue Strings and The Charcoal Club with Richard Frankland.

## **PHIL COLLINGS**

Musician

Phil plays music with Lou Bennett & The Sweet Cheeks, Kim Salmon & The Surrealists, Sophie Koh, and The Ben Carr Trio to name a few. He also heads his own projects - The Halftides and Fall 10X. Phil has been involved in Theatre over the years working with the enigmatic David Branson with Splinters in the ACT, Melbourne Workers Theatre Production "Show Us Your Tiddas", and Live music score performances on Broadway NY with The Blue Grassy Knoll.

## **EVA TANDY**

Production Manager

Eva is a freelance Production and Stage Manager for Melbourne Theatre Company, Melbourne International Festival, Sydney International Festival, Sydney Theatre Company and Malthouse Theatre amongst others. She has worked with the likes of Elvis Costello and Robert Wilson as well as an array of international and local actors, directors and producers. Independently she has worked with The Black Lung Theatre and The Hayloft Project to name a few. This is the first, of what she hopes will be many collaborations with Ilbjerri Theatre Company.

## **LIONEL AUSTIN**

Stage Manager

A proud Gunditjmarra man, Lionel graduated from Swinburne University studying Indigenous Performing Arts. Lionel has been involved in the performing arts industry both on & off stage (including as an actor in Ilbjerri Theatre Company's sellout seasons of *The Dirty Mile*), though his main focus at present is on behind the scenes. His experience in Stage Management includes *Rainbow's End*, *Shruken Iris* & the 2008/09 national tours of *Chopped Liver* (Ilbjerri Theatre Company), as was also part of the stage management team of the Melbourne Theatre Company's *The Sapphires*, WIPCE 2008 (World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education) & AFL's "Dreamtime at the G". He has also worked as the state co-ordinator for NAIDOC Week, Associate Producer for Next Wave Festival & a radio presenter on 3KND.