

## **Report from Sarah Calver**

The 1989 Lajamanu project marked the beginning of things to come. It acted as a role model for other communities and enabled people within Lajamanu to understand us as artists and the processes involved in projects like this. As a result, the 1990 project had a different starting point, and the support, understanding, and input from the community itself was much more noticeable and welcome.

### **ideas, images and stories**

The first block of our residency was spent researching ideas, images and stories for the project as well as offering workshops in a variety of areas: dance, creative movement, circus and acrobatic skills. These initial workshops were offered to each class within the school and also extended to community groups after school hours.

### **Barunga Sports and Cultural Festival**

With the prospect of performing at the 1990 Barunga Sports and Cultural Festival only three weeks after our project commenced, rehearsals reworking pieces of the 1989 project were also scheduled into our timetable. The three pieces chosen were: the Girls' Dance - Mountain O' Things, the African Dance and the Rap - an extended version with acrobatic routines integrated with dance.

The workshops took on one of the following formats:

- Pure dance/movement workshops
- Straight Acrobatic/circus skills workshop
- A split workshop: half dance and a second half acrobatics

The performance group also experienced the above workshops, but as Barunga drew nearer, more emphasis was put specifically on the performance material. Our after-school community groups ceased their workshops prior to the festival as more and more time was spent practising sports: football for the men, and basketball for the women. The older women's traditional dance group also practised every evening, while others put time into their paintings and craftwork. It was a busy time for all, including the North Tanami Band, which would be opening the Festival.

The community performance prior to our departure for Barunga was exceptional, and the crowd really showed their support and happiness through their responses. The kids gave out a lot of energy, projection, and pride that night, and responded to the audience's reaction by doing an encore. Once again, this group of talented youth showed us how to do it well! In front of an audience, comprised mainly of family and friends, this group really came alive, and any pizzazz that was lacking during rehearsal times certainly oozed out and captivated their audience during this performance.

Barunga was truly a festival this year, with up to 3,000 people attending. People from all over the NT were there, and the exposure our dance group got was overwhelming - not to mention the positive feedback and applause the group received after each show.

the touring group

Once back in Lajamanu, the main focus of our work was workshops dedicated mainly to acrobatics and circus skills. In no time at all, a group of boys mastered the unicycles, and we selected a group of 20 kids to work with every day - the final selection of our touring group would come out of this group.

Days out hunting with the women for goanna led to the development of a hunting dance. The rest of the show was a culmination of our work and was as follows;

- The song "Home Sweet Home" by the North Tanami Band opened the show
- A variation of the girls' hunting dance set to the movement of Tim's goanna puppet
- The girls' Goanna dance
- The boys' stick dance, which included elements of modern dance, rhythm work, different uses of the stick, African dance, and karate sequences. This led to the Papua New Guinea stick dance, with everyone ending with the Filipino rhythm dance, where musician Nick created a percussive orchestra with those in the troupe not dancing
- The unicycle sequence
- The girls' dance - a modern dance extending on skills learnt the previous year, exploring dynamics and sequences created by the girls
- The boys' acrobatic routine led into the crash mat routine with everyone
- Snoring routine
- The wrestler
- Juggling routine
- An extended version of the rap, including everyone
- Finale - was carrying off the goanna.

This year's program was seen as a development on last year's, and many people were once again impressed by the skills learned and performed. The group's confidence and the dynamics of the various acts became more concrete as time went by.

The first tour to the Katherine and Darwin region was very successful, and the NAIDOC performances in Darwin were truly inspirational to us, the artists, and the various audiences.

## **perform for other Warlpiri communities**

With a strong sense of achievement from our first tour, the need to perform for other Warlpiri communities and the central region led to the development of a second tour. This had originally been part of our first tour, but due to mechanical problems with the school bus, we had to cancel that section of the tour. The second tour went ahead in October.

We then headed on down the corrugated track to Alice Springs - this 3.5-hour trip turned into a marathon 6-hour trip due to mechanical problems with the bus! However, we reached our destination. In no time at all, we had a fire going, and the Yapa women with us were soon busy cooking the goannas we managed to get along the way.

The three shows in Alice Springs were great. We were then on our way to Willowra - 'Ku-ku Land' to our mob, and anything that happened out of the ordinary whilst on our journey confirmed that this was 'Ku-Ku' country (ghost/monster/boogie monster country). Our homeward journey was a long one, but as usual, an interesting one.

The development on last year's project was evident throughout our residency. I feel the importance of this kind of project, and its need for further continual development, is too often overlooked by the people who live only in cities where there is always an opportunity to develop skills through the arts.

## **Lajamanu - its land and its people**

The enthusiasm, dedication and support of the Lajamanu people are positive, and I feel assured that in the years to come, this type of performance will be 100% Warlpiri as they have shown me and others what is possible - and being a strong people, there will be no stopping them. I am more than proud to be associated with this desert tribe and will always feel a special warmth in my heart for Lajamanu - its land and its people.