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ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER VIEWS :

DANCE WORKSHOP : LISMORE



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The Workshop took place from the 15th to 22nd September, as part of Lismore's September Festival. Our main activity in the Festival was teaching young Aboriginal children on missions and in schools.

There were three dancers, Michael Leslie, Malcolm Cole and myself, along with our teacher, Lucy Jumawan, who attended the Festival. Our director, Carole Johnson joined us towards the end.

It was also handled as a student teaching project of the Aboriginal/Islander Dance Training Course, since advanced dance students taught the children the dances under teacher supervision. Lucy Jumawan assisted us, the student teachers. She would watch us and sometimes started the class off with a few simple steps/movements, just to warm up and encourage a feeling of security and relaxation. Each of us had been taught certain dances to teach. While one person was teaching his or her dance, it would mean the other two would help and correct the children.

Our main workshop was with the Box Ridge Mission, about thirty kilometres out of Lismore itself. We taught here for three consecutive days. Approximately twenty children between the ages of six and twelve attended. They were all so eager to learn and work together. The ability to pick up so quickly fascinated me. We taught them various folk dances, and a song and dance from the Torres Strait Islands. We had a film showing of "Sunrise Awakening", a film that told the story of how our Dance Course began; so they were able to see us on film.

On our last day we gave the young people a small performance. They then gladly got up and performed for us the dances we had taught. Our work on Box Ridge Mission was truly a success and an achievement for the children.

Cabbage Tree Island, another mission, was the next community we worked in. This Island is about 45 kilometres out of Lismore. We taught at the primary school here for a day. Here it was mainly the children from the school we were involved with, since the rest of the community was not as accessible. The children were between the ages of five and nine years. Our teaching therefore was very basic and not so much set dances, but imaginary dance, also imitating animals and objects in the form of dance. The children were intrigued and stimulated by the creativity that had come into their world. Time did not permit us to be there for a longer period, which was a great disappointment for the children and us.

To me, the most important work we did in this Festival was at the missions. Doing the workshop right in the mission was the best thing that could have happened. There the community could be part of it and also experience the reality of their children being constructive and creative. These are the places that are crying out for the kind of creative communication we shared with them.

Our last couple of days were spent teaching in the schools of Lismore. Some of these schools had a percentage of Aboriginal children. But here was where we saw the difference between city and mission. Many of the students had already experienced dance in the city through the school dance workshops. The schools were South Lismore Primary, St Mary's High School, and the Pre-school Community Centre. Most of the children were much older than in the previous workshops, ranging from about 10 to 15 years of age. At St Mary's, we gave a dance demonstration and performance. At that school a dance group was already established. At the South Lismore Primary School we mainly taught the repertoire of dances we had been teaching since there was a mixture of ages. At both these schools, there was a dance teacher.

We also spent time at the Advanced Technical College of Education, where we had once again the opportunity of showing the film, "Sunrise Awakening". We gave a brief lecture about the film and performed for them.

Besides the teaching projects we had to slot into our scheduled rehearsals for our main performance/concert. This concert took place at the Lismore City Hall on the 20th September. These were: The Yirrkala Traditional Dance Group, solo and duet musicians, and the three of us who represented the Aboriginal/Islander Dance Group. Our group itself had a three-quarter hour

slot, and Carole Johnson gave a brief history of the Dance Group.

Since this was the first time that the Lismore September Festival had incorporated Aboriginal representation, I feel it is very important to participate there every year during the Festival. It brings to mind that around this area the Aboriginal culture and life was very strong and alive many years ago.

This indeed was a very unique and rare occasion for black performers in Australia. Even with the audience there was a strong link, since most of them were black themselves. It meant that they could identify with all that was happening and at the same time feel a sense of pride and dignity. Almost the whole of the Box Ridge Community had come with their children. The children could relate what we had taught them. Who knows, there may be just one or two of those children who would one day follow the footprints we had made for them.



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BI-LINGUAL SEMINAR - AURUKUN

ISSUES RAISED BY ABORIGINAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Aboriginal teacher aides attending the Bi-lingual Seminar at Aurukun, 5-10 April, 1978, raised the following issues:

ROLE OF THE NON-ABORIGINAL TEACHER

1. Should teach more English and maths.
2. Help the aides know more about European society so that they can tell the children in language.
3. When a European teacher is talking she/he should stop every now and then and explain so that the aide can explain to the children.
4. A European teacher should help the aides with teaching skills in their own language.
5. The children need help, both from the European and Aboriginal teachers.