

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

5 November 2020

A STATEMENT FROM QUEENSLAND THEATRE

Queensland Theatre has a long-term and deep commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works and artists. We apologise sincerely that the announcement of our 2021 program has cast doubt on that commitment. Nothing could be further from the truth.

While our 2021 Season in Brisbane does not include a First Nations work, we will be presenting *Othello*, adapted by Jason Klarwein and Jimi Bani, in Cairns in 2021 to coincide with the Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair (CIAF). This production was originally scheduled as part of our 2020 program but was cancelled because of COVID-19. We did not include this in the season launch as the date for CIAF in 2021 is yet to be finalised. This was a mistake. Nonetheless, we are proud that this bi-lingual (Kala Lagaw Ya and English) production will first be developed and embedded in the Torres Strait Islander community.

After its Cairns debut, *Othello* will return to Brisbane for the 2022 Season. As was the case with *My Name is Jimi*, the importance of premiering work in centres other than Brisbane remains central for our state theatre company. The conversations we have had with all the artists involved give us great confidence that the additional time and investment will make this work even stronger.

Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have made it clear to us that they are disappointed by the lack of investment in developing new Queensland stories in the past few years. Works have been bought in from other states to the detriment of local initiatives. There has been no pipeline of new Queensland First Nations stories. So in response, we are redirecting significant programming funding to this area.

We are especially focused on the creation of new works from Torres Strait Islander playwrights that can be shared on stages across the country. There are currently two new works that will be in development in 2021, one of which is *MUDSKIPPER: A New Mythology* by Walter Waia and John Harvey, a co-commission with Playwriting Australia, which we announced in July.

We acknowledge that the absence of a First Nations work on the Brisbane stage in 2021 is disappointing. However, we are convinced that the strategy we implemented earlier in the year to increase investment in the development of local artists and stories will ensure that in a post-COVID-19 environment we will be able to share outstanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories from Queensland with the rest of the nation.

We appreciate the passion and courage of the artists and others who have communicated their views about the 2021 Season with us. We welcome these important conversations and look forward to working with these artists in the future.

For further information, imagery, interviews or more, please contact Kath Rose 0416 291 493 or email kath@kathrose.com