



February 2015

Queensland Theatre Company embarks on landmark Australian tour of *Black Diggers*

National tour takes home-grown stars to stages in Perth, Adelaide, Newcastle, Canberra, Melbourne and Bendigo

Telling the untold story of Indigenous soldiers in WWI, written by Tom Wright
3 March – 2 May

Director: Wesley Enoch

Set Designer: Stephen Curtis **Lighting Designer:** Ben Hughes

Composer/Sound Designer: Tony Brumpton

Cast Include: George Bostock, Luke Carroll, Shaka Cook, Trevor Jamieson, Kirk Page, Guy Simon, Colin Smith, Eliah Watego and Tibian Wyles.

Following critically acclaimed seasons in Sydney and Brisbane in 2014; the powerful *Black Diggers* is set to embark on a landmark national tour. *Black Diggers* tells the story of Indigenous soldiers in WWI and will open in Perth on March 3 at the Heath Ledger Theatre as the finale to the Perth International Arts Festival before traveling to Adelaide, Newcastle, Canberra, Melbourne and Bendigo.

Directed by Queensland Theatre Company's Artistic Director, **Wesley Enoch**, and written by **Tom Wright**, *Black Diggers* celebrates the contribution of WWI Aboriginal Diggers, following their exceptional stories from their homelands to the battlefields of Gallipoli, Palestine and Flanders. An extraordinary all-male, all-Indigenous cast will tell the story of these heroic men who were largely unrecognised by history.

The *Black Diggers* cast welcomes three new cast members joining the touring show; Kirk Page, Shaka Cook and Trevor Jamieson. The three actors have all performed with Sydney Theatre Company, and have a number of theatre, television and film credits. These include; Trevor Jamieson Best Actor is a Lead Role for *Ngapartji Ngapartji* at the Sydney Theatre Awards and Kirk Page TV Week Silver Logie Nomination as Most Outstanding Actor in *Redfern Now* – only adding more to the astounding line-up that is the *Black Diggers* cast.

Black Diggers is a work of immense importance and is being staged months after the centenary of WWI was marked.

QTC's Wesley Enoch said *Black Diggers* is long overdue. Drawing upon new research and extensive consultation, the production reclaims a forgotten chapter of the story we tell ourselves about Australia's wartime legacy, shying away from none of it. "One hundred years ago, men all over the world enlisted to fight in WWI – including over a thousand Indigenous Australians. Discriminated against in their own country, they took up arms to defend the fledgling nation," he said.

"When history has forgotten people they find ways of telling the stories. The history of conflict in this country goes hand in hand with stories of survival. *Black Diggers* is a collection of stories about the men who fought for this country and in this country. The war they faced was as much for recognition as it was for King and country and their legacy can be seen in the reconciliation movement of today ... black and white fighting together to overcome injustice."



While *Black Diggers* evokes the deep tragedy of war, and the particular tragedy of Indigenous Australians' participation, it also celebrates and affirms their legacy, and contribution, placing the Indigenous soldier within the mythology and canon of how we, as a country, think of our soldiers who served.

Moving through three phases of Indigenous soldiers' involvement in the Great War – enlistment, life in the trenches, and returning home – to tell an amalgam of black Diggers' experiences and representations, the story of *Douglas Grant is central to the play.

Black Diggers is a story of honour and sacrifice that has been almost forgotten. It draws from interviews with the families of 15 black Diggers who heard the call to arms – men who will step from the blank pages of history to share their compelling stories. After the curtain falls, we will remember them.

Black Diggers Regional Tour:

Regional Tour Venues:

- 3 – 7 March: Heath Ledger Theatre, Perth <https://2015.perthfestival.com.au>
- 10 – 14 March: Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide <http://www.adelaidefestivalcentre.com.au>
- 20 – 21 March: Newcastle Civic Theatre, Newcastle <http://www.civictheatrenewcastle.com.au>
- 25 – 28 March: Canberra Theatre Centre, Canberra <http://www.canberratheatrecentre.com.au>
- 22 – 26 April: Melbourne Arts Centre, Melbourne <http://www.artscentremelbourne.com.au>
- 1 – 2 May: Ulumbarra Theatre, Bendigo <http://www.ulumbarratheatre.com.au>

*ABOUT DOUGLAS GRANT

Grant was born in approximately 1885 in the Bellenden Ker Ranges in Queensland. As a baby, his parents were killed in either a massacre or a raid, and he was rescued by two members of a collecting expedition from the Australian Museum, Robert Grant and EJ Cairn. Sent to Robert's parents in Lithgow, Robert later adopted Douglas, who was raised and educated with his son Henry in Annandale. Douglas worked as a draughtsman in Sydney for 10 years before enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force in 1916. While regulations against Aboriginals leaving the country without government approval initially prevented Douglas from leaving with his Battalion, regulations were later lifted and he left for France in August that same year. In April 1917, Grant was wounded and captured in Bullecourt and held as a Prisoner of War at Wittenburg, where he was studied by German doctors, scientists and anthropologists as an object of curiosity. Repatriated to England in 1918, he visited his foster parents' relatives in Scotland and the next year embarked for Australia. Demobilised in July that year, he went back to work as a draughtsman before moving to Lithgow to work as a labourer. He was active in returned serviceman's affairs and ran a Digger's session on local radio. By the 1930s his foster parents and brother had died and he went to Sydney, where he worked as a clerk at Callan Park Mental Asylum (although some reports suggest he was an inmate). He died in 1951 in Prince Henry Hospital. He was unmarried. Grant suffered profound rejection on his return home and developed alcohol problems. He was a literate man, and could play the bagpipes. He had, when he wanted to, a thick Scottish accent. There is a lot of conflicting research when it comes to Douglas Grant, and other Indigenous soldiers in World War One. This is just one version of his narrative.