

## Jimi Bani realises a dream as *Othello* comes to the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair 2021

Queensland Theatre to premiere a thrilling version of Shakespeare's *Othello*, told through a Torres Strait lens

Shakespeare's *Othello*, adapted by Jimi Bani and Jason Klarwein, will premiere as part of this year's Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) from Monday 16 to Saturday 21 August at Bulmba-ja.

This tri-lingual (Kala Lagaw Ya, Yumpla Tok and English) production is set between Cairns and the Torres Strait, illuminating the vital role of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion during World War II. More than 800 Torres Strait Islander men volunteered to protect the northern tip of Australia and this setting inspired the adaptation.

For co-creator and lead actor Jimi Bani (*My Name is Jimi, Our Town*), staging *Othello* at CIAF is a chance to share the stories of his family, while fulfilling a long-held career aspiration.

"*Othello* is the role I have been wanting to play since studying and graduating from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2007 — it's always been my dream and I'm so grateful that the opportunity has finally come!

"It's fitting that we set this version in wartime 1942 in the Torres Strait. My grandfather, the late Solomon Gela and my great grandfather, the late Ephraim Bani Snr both enlisted — as did all able-bodied Torres Strait Islander men. I grew up on Thursday Island and had the privilege of hearing their war stories, and I continue to carry all these men and women in my heart."

Jimi will be joined by a stellar cast with Emily Burton as Desdemona, Benjin Maza as Cassio, Andrew Buchanan as Iago, Majeda Beatty as Bianca and Eugene Gilfedder as Brabantio. Casting also includes Matt McNally as Roderigo, Sarah Ogden as Emilia and Kevin Hides as the Lieutenant Colonel.

As audiences would expect from a Jimi Bani production, family is always integral to the experience, and his brothers complete the company — Richard Bani as Montano, with Conwell and Gabriel Bani as soldiers/dancers.

Director Jason Klarwein (dir. *My Name Is Jimi, Death of a Salesman*) has relished collaborating with Jimi again, finding *Othello* the ideal play to connect with the unique story of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion.

"Jimi and I have a strong professional relationship after creating *My Name Is Jimi* with his father, the late Adhi Dimple Bani. I am very blessed to be able to further our connection through promoting and preserving the languages and culture distinct to Torres Strait Islander peoples," he said.

"Many people know about the bombings of Darwin during the war, but not many know the story of Horn Island and the straits, which were bombed more than 500 times. This had a huge cultural impact on Far North Queensland, for not only First Nations peoples, but all people living there. This era of change and danger makes a perfect platform from which to begin the tragic twists and turns of *Othello*."

Lee Lewis, Artistic Director of Queensland Theatre, is excited to premiere *Othello* in North Queensland, the first Company production to debut outside of Brisbane since 2017.

"Jimi Bani is one of the true treasures of Australian theatre. It was such a joy to see audiences captivated by his incredible presence in *Our Town* earlier this year. I can't wait for CIAF audiences to be first to see him in this new, deeply personal production of *Othello*," Ms Lewis said.

"Premiering work in centres other than Brisbane is essential for us as the state theatre company, and we are so pleased that our partnership with CIAF allows us to do just that."

Janina Harding, Artistic Director of Cairns Indigenous Art Fair sees *Othello* as adding an important and thought-provoking perspective to the CIAF experience this year.

"For CIAF to premiere this provocative interpretation of *Othello* is a perfect fit for today's social climate, as it addresses issues of 'othering' and racism. I look forward to CIAF audiences gaining new insights, whilst being entertained by the brilliant Torres Strait Islander-led cast."

# QUEENSLAND THEATRE

A Queensland Theatre production presented by CIAF 2021

Shakespeare's *OTHELLO*

adapted by Jimi Bani and Jason Klarwein

16–21 August 2021

Bulmba-ja, Cairns

Bookings: [queenslandtheatre.com.au](http://queenslandtheatre.com.au) | 1800 355 528 | [sales@queenslandtheatre.com.au](mailto:sales@queenslandtheatre.com.au)

Jimi Bani and Jason Klarwein will be in conversation with Wesley Enoch at the Cairns Convention Centre on Friday 20 August, 12noon – 1pm as part of CIAF 2021.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

*Othello*, William Shakespeare's classic tale of jealousy, betrayal and revenge is thrillingly re-imagined by Jimi Bani and Jason Klarwein for its premiere 2021 season.

This tri-lingual (Kala Lagaw Ya, Yumpla Tok and English) production is set between Cairns and the Torres Strait, illuminating the vital role of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion during World War II. More than 800 Torres Strait Islanders signed up to protect the northern tip of Australia, including Jimi Bani's great grandfather, the late Ephraim Bani Snr and his grandfather, the late Solomon Gela.

Infusing the narrative of *Othello* with the historical setting of the battalion brings together two powerful artistic cultures — Shakespeare and Wagadagam — creating an utterly distinctive and electrifying theatre experience.

## CAST and CREATIVES

Othello	Jimi Bani
Montano	Richard Bani
Bianca	Majeda Beatty
Iago	Andrew Buchanan
Desdemona	Emily Burton
Brabantio	Eugene Gilfedder
Lieutenant Colonel	Kevin Hides
Cassio	Benjin Maza
Rodorigo	Matt McNally
Emilia	Sarah Ogden
Soldiers/Dancers	Conwell Bani, Gabriel Bani
Playwright	William Shakespeare
Director	Jason Klarwein
Set Designer	Richard Roberts
Costume Designers	Simona Cosentini, Simone Tesorieri
Lighting Designer	Ben Hughes
Sound Designer	Brady Watkins



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For further information, imagery or interviews, please contact Amanda Lawson, Queensland Theatre via [publicity@queenslandtheatre.com.au](mailto:publicity@queenslandtheatre.com.au) or phone 07 3010 7669

Queensland Theatre acknowledges the Jagera and Turrbal people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, and their unique relationship with the lands, seas and waterways. We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

