



Photographer: Paz Tassone

# THE OTHER SIDE OF ME

By Gary Lang NT Dance Company

## LEARNING RESOURCE

Presented by QPAC and Produced by Blakdance

Part of QPAC's Creative Learning program

## Acknowledgement of Country

*QPAC rests on the lands of the Yuggera and Turrbal peoples. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this country and recognise their rich cultural heritage and enduring connection to the land, waters and skies. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are this country's original storytellers, and it is our privilege to continue to share stories and be a place of gathering on this land that has been a meeting place for millennia.*

## Cultural Content Advisory

*This production contains references to the Stolen Generation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences are advised this production references people who have passed away.*

***The Other Side of Me*** translates into dance the true-life story of a young Aboriginal man, born in 1966 in Kalkarindji, Northern Territory, who was adopted by an English family and raised in a remote hamlet in Cornwall, United Kingdom. He was adopted towards the end of the period when Aboriginal children were stolen from their parents. The ease and haste of the process, which took less than a week, is typical of the history of Aboriginal adoption in Australia at that time.

Choreographed by industry leader and Larrakia man **Gary Lang**, this international, cross-cultural collaboration with Northumbria University (UK) communicates a story of the Stolen Generations' trauma and poses questions about relationships between country of origin, identity, adoption, the criminal justice system and psychological health.

The project draws on a collection of 30 letters and poems written over four years, from 1990 to 1994. It offers insights into the mindset of a man in his mid-to-late twenties re-evaluating his life and trying to come to terms with his First Nations Australian origins. Its title comes from his letters. He wrote:

**"Memories exist on the other side of me. I have two sides. The side I know. And the side I don't."**

From [The Other Side of Me - Artback NT](#)

This learning resource provides contextual background and structured learning experiences to accompany *The Other Side of Me*. Designed to support artistic exploration and critical analysis, it aims to deepen students' engagement with the performance and its historical significance. Educators are encouraged to tailor and adapt the activities to fit their specific teaching contexts and time constraints.

## One mother's love, another's loss.

Between them a child grows into manhood but can never return home. *The Other Side of Me* shares the tragedy of Stolen Generations through the true story of an Aboriginal man stranded between two families, continents and cultures – specifically the little-known experience of people adopted into families abroad.

Drawing on a collection of personal letters and poems, Larrakia man Gary Lang led a cross-cultural collaboration with Northumbria University in the United Kingdom. With care and compassion, this exquisite work of contemporary dance poses questions about the relationship between country of origin, identity, adoption, the criminal justice system and psychological health.

Achingly intimate, the duet confronts the destruction wrought by monarchy and colony, that is still felt by First Nations peoples, but finds redemptive beauty as his spirit is sung home. The work concludes with a 15-minute in-conversation for audiences.

*The story is based on real events. However, names, incidents and timelines have been changed for dramatic purposes. All characters depicted in the production are composites or fictitious. Any similarity to the original story, or of fictitious characters to an actual person, living or dead, is coincidental and unintentional.*



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# Creatives

**Co-Creator, Choreographer, Director**

Gary Lang, Larrakia

**Cultural Consultant, Songman**

Banula Marika, Yolŋu

**Co-Creator, Dramaturg, Writer**

Laura Fish

**Co-Creator, Dramaturg**

Liz Pavey

**Cultural Consultant**

Josephine Crawshaw, Gurindji

**Cultural Consultant**

Jesse Norris, Torres Strait Island descendent

**Voice Artist**

Janet Munyarryun, Yolŋu

**Sound Designer**

Arian Pearson, Yolŋu

**Rehearsal Director**

Noelle Shader

**Performer**

Alexander Abbot

**Performer**

Blake Escott, Dhunghutti, Worimi

**Original Cast**

Chandler Connell, Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal

**Composer/Sound Designer**

Samuel Pankhurst

**Projection Designer**

Samuel James

**Lighting Designer**

Joseph Mercurio

**Costume Designer**

Jennifer Irwin

**Producer**

BlakDance



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THE OTHER SIDE OF ME

Learning Resource

## Curriculum Connections

**Australian Curriculum General Capabilities:** Ethical Understanding, Literacy, Critical & Creative Thinking, Personal & Social Capability.

### Key Questions:

- What does it mean to have your foot in two cultures?
- Do you think that the impact of trauma can be passed on from one generation to another?

### Key themes

Stolen Generation survivor

Foot in two cultures

Storytelling

Trauma

Identity

Criminal justice system

Displacement

### Key forms

Visual performance

Sonic landscape (Sounds that shape our experience of a space)

Ancient oral traditions

Contemporary composition

Storytelling in dance

## Background information

### What is Truth-Telling?

Truth-telling, broadly speaking, encompasses any activity or process that exposes historical and/or ongoing truths. It often acts as a record of historical experience as part of a process of relationship-building, political transformation or reconstitution of political relations in divided societies. Truth-telling should be understood as a multifaceted and ongoing process (as opposed to a predetermined end) which deepens over time.

**For further reading:** [What is truth-telling? – ANTAR](#)

## Stolen Generation

The phrase Stolen Generation refers to the countless number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families under government policy and direction. This was active policy during the period from the 1910s into the 1970s, and arguably still continues today under the banner of child protection. It is estimated that during the active period of the policy, between 1 in 10 and 1 in 3 Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities.

The removal of Indigenous children was rationalised by various governments by claiming that it was for their protection and would save them from a life of neglect. A further justification used by the government of the day was that it was believed that "Pure Blood" Aboriginal people would die out and that the "Mixed Blood" children would be able to assimilate into society much easier, this being based on the lie that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were racially inferior to people with Caucasian background.

There were a number of government policies and legislation that allowed for the removal of Aboriginal children. One of the earliest pieces of legislation in relation to the Stolen Generation was the Victorian Aboriginal Protection Act 1869, this legislation ordered the removal of Aboriginal people of mixed descent from Aboriginal Stations or Reserves to force them to assimilate into White Society. In NSW, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines was established in 1883. Prior to 1909, this Board acted without legislative authority. In 1915, the Aborigines Protection Amending Act 1915 (NSW) was introduced. This Act gave the Aborigines' Protection Board the authority to remove Aboriginal children without having to establish in court that the children were subject to neglect.

Once a child was removed from their family, they were forced to assimilate into the White Society. This included being forbidden to speak their traditional language or participate in any form of cultural practice or activity and having to adopt new names and identities. Many of these children were informed that their families had either given them up or had died. To increase the success of removal policies, the authorities would often send the children vast distances from their Countries and families. For some of the children that were removed and forced to assimilate into White Society, they developed a shame of their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. For some as they grew older and started their own families, they continued to hide their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage from their family, with many not accepting this heritage until much later in life.

Many of the stolen children were placed into group homes such as the Kinchela Boys Home and the Cootamundra Girls Training Home. At these homes the children were taught skills such as housekeeping and farm handing, so that once they were to leave the home, they would be able to be placed into the service of a white family. Whilst in these training homes many of the children experienced neglect and abuse in many forms, including sexual and physical abuse.

In 1969, New South Wales abolished the Aborigines Welfare Board, and this effectively resulted in all States and Territories having repealed legislation that allowed for the removal of Aboriginal children under a policy of 'protection'.

The practice of removing children continues to this day, research released in 2019 compiled from data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and data from the Western Australia Department of Communities and Department of Health indicate that between 2012 and 2017 the number of Aboriginal Children placed into Out of Home Care rose from 46.6 to 56.6 per 1000 children. This research also found that the rate of infants (under 1 year old) placed in to Out of Home Care rose from 24.8 to 29.1 per 1000, between 2013 and 2016 [2].

[The Stolen Generation - The Australian Museum](#)

### Further information

<http://www.stolengenerationstestimonies.com/>

<https://healingfoundation.org.au/>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/timeline-stolen-generations>

### Teaching resources

<https://healingfoundation.org.au/schools/>

## What is intergenerational trauma and approaches to best practice?

The colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and the (ongoing) oppressive practices that followed have resulted in a legacy of unresolved intergenerational trauma for Indigenous Australians. Not only is the experience of unresolved historical trauma a risk factor impacting Indigenous Australians' social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB), but re-traumatisation and the cumulative effect of trauma-on-trauma can manifest through other risk factors such as family violence, incarceration, substance misuse and self-harm (McCallum 2022). This trauma can be passed between generations both vicariously and through prolonged exposure to stressors, leading to a cycle of trauma that is left unaddressed

### Intergenerational trauma and mental health:

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation work report (Dudgeon et al. 2016) identified several critical factors that are indicative of successful whole-of-community, on the ground, whole-of-government approaches to SEWB, mental health and suicide prevention (Dudgeon et al. 2016).

Central to these frameworks is the fact that they:

- Are guided by expert Indigenous groups
- Privilege Indigenous ways of doing, knowing and being, including program design, methodologies and delivery
- Involve the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Indigenous Leadership.
- The following essential criteria are identified by the CBPATSISP Evaluation Framework (CBPATSISP 2018). They are based on evidence of what works in suicide prevention and SEWB programs and services.

These criteria assess whether programs and services:

- assist in Indigenous capacity building
- prioritise Indigenous knowledge and experience
- respect cultural values
- recognise Indigenous rights and self-determination
- facilitate cultural strengthening
- facilitate and promote Indigenous leadership and governance
- foster genuine partnerships and community engagement
- promote healing.

For further reading please consult:

[The Indigenous Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Clearinghouse](#)

## Before viewing

Before the performance discuss with the students:

- Why is it important to learn about this part of Australian History?
- What do students already know about The Stolen Generation?
- Define the Stolen Generation?
- Which tribal groups lands are you living on? Can you identify and describe what happened to the traditional owners of the land you live on? Use the [map resource from Healing Australia](#) to help. (Quick note: Cases of siblings being split up and sent to other parts and sides of the country were common)
- Do you know any stolen generation survivors? How old are they?
- What other dance performances have you seen that explore a historical or cultural issue?
- What can dance do that other art forms cannot deliver?

## During the performance:

Invite students to notice and remember as much as they can, what they are seeing, hearing and feeling in each moment. Encourage them to be fully immersed in the story and the movement, allowing themselves to be carried by both the narrative and the choreography.

Remind them of the importance of being a respectful audience member, attentive, generous and present.

If the performance raises any questions or concerns, encourage students to speak with their teacher afterwards so the conversation can continue in a safe and supportive way.



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## After the performance:

**Some questions to support understanding of the performance and to prompt further research. Students are to research the closet mission to their home.**

- When did it close?
- When was the last mission closed?
- What do students understand about Stolen wages?
- Students to create the journey of a Stolen Generation survivor and the stages of being taken and brought up in a mission or foster family and the lives as they grew older? Can they then create a dance sequence for a dance story to capture this?
- Linkup is an Indigenous service that helps Stolen Generation survivors find and reconnect family members. Add to your dance story an alternate ending of finding their family again or not? Some Stolen Generation survivors never found their family again. How does that make you feel?
- How could being a survivor of the Stolen Generation affect you emotionally, physically and mentally? How can this trauma affect their children and grandchildren?

## Ideas to support dance creation post-performance:

- Students to select a favourite moment and recreate. Repeat and teach to another student. Students select their own music to accompany.
- Students to select something new they have discovered in the performance. How could they communicate this in a dance sequence and what dance elements could they include? Students teach to another student and share with class.
- Students select a story that they would like to tell. How might they tell this in dance? Encourage them to think of all the elements of dance.

## Resources

### Scripts / Articles to read

*Is that You Ruthie?* by Leah Purcell, a playscript about Dr Ruth Hegarty and her story from childhood, mission, domestic servant, to writer and elder.

[Gary Lang's 'The Other Side of Me' Constructs a Sonic Architecture of Displacement at the Sydney Opera House – Martin Cid Magazine](#)

[NITV Radio - Gary Lang's 'The Other Side of Me' gives voice to a Stolen Generations story](#)

[Explore | AIATSIS corporate website](#)

[Institutions Map | Stolen Generations History | The Healing Foundation](#)

[Education Toolkits & Lesson Plans | The Healing Foundation](#)

[Bringing Them Home: The 'Stolen Children' report \(1997\) | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

[Link-Up | AIATSIS corporate website](#)

### To view

***The Last Daughter*** – Brenda Matthew's story

Synopsis

Brenda's first memories are of growing up in a loving white foster family, before being suddenly taken away and returned to her Aboriginal family.

Decades later, she feels disconnected from both halves of her life. But the traumas of her past do not lie quietly buried. So, she goes searching for the foster family with whom she had lost all contact.

Along the way she uncovers long-buried secrets, government lies, and the possibility for deeper connections to family and culture. *The Last Daughter* is a documentary about Brenda's journey to unearth the truth about her past, and to reconcile the two sides of her family.

<https://www.thelastdaughter.com.au/>

### ***Servant or slave***

Synopsis: *Servant or Slave* follows the lives of five Aboriginal women who were stolen from their families and trained to be domestic servants. With the government exercising complete control over their wages, many thousands of Aboriginal girls and boys were effectively condemned to a treadmill of abuse, from which there was little hope of escape.

### ***Stolen Generations***

Synopsis: A documentary using historical and interview footage to tell the story of three people removed as children from their families, who are now one of the many referred to as the Stolen Generations. The tapestry of life experiences is woven around the filmmaker's own personal questions of identity, and an administration put in place with the sole purpose of annihilating Aboriginal peoples.

### ***Rabbit Proof Fence***

*Rabbit Proof Fence* is a powerful film that follows the true story of three Aboriginal girls who escape from a government settlement in 1931 and embark on a 1,500- mile journey home, guided by the rabbit-proof fence.

### ***Utopia***

*Utopia* is intent on lifting the veil on Australia's racist treatment of its Aboriginal population, calling the conditions faced by Aboriginal people the country's "dirtiest little secret". Utopia is a vast region east of the Stuart Highway. But the film also compares the utopia of suburban Australia with the actual Utopia in the remote Australia. It is a film about these two Australia's.

### ***Incarceration Nation***

*Incarceration Nation* examines the Australian justice system's treatment of Indigenous people, exploring the historical and contemporary factors contributing to their high incarceration rates. The film features interviews with various individuals, including activists and legal experts, providing insights into the systemic issues faced by Indigenous communities. Through personal stories and archival footage, the documentary aims to raise awareness and promote discussions about the need for justice system reforms.

### ***The New Boy***

In 1940s Australia, when a 9-year-old Aboriginal boy arrives in the dead of night at a remote monastery run by a renegade nun, his presence disturbs a delicately balanced world.

### ***Genocide in the Wildflower State***

The documentary *Genocide in the Wildflower State* offers a deeply moving and disturbing exposé of the often denied and dismissed reality of racist state thinking and the resulting misery families experience today. It provides voice to Survivors' proposals on what must be done to redress the wrongs.



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