

QPAC AND CIRCA PRESENT

# SON

CREATED BY HARLEY MANN AND ALEXANDER BERLAGE WITH THE CIRCA CAIRNS ENSEMBLE AND KARDAJALA KIRRIDARRA



**A PIONEERING CIRCUS SUNG INTO EXISTENCE IN A THRILLING WORLD PREMIERE**

FEATURING LIVE PERFORMANCE BY FEMALE FIRST NATIONS MUSIC GROUP KARDAJALA KIRRIDARRA

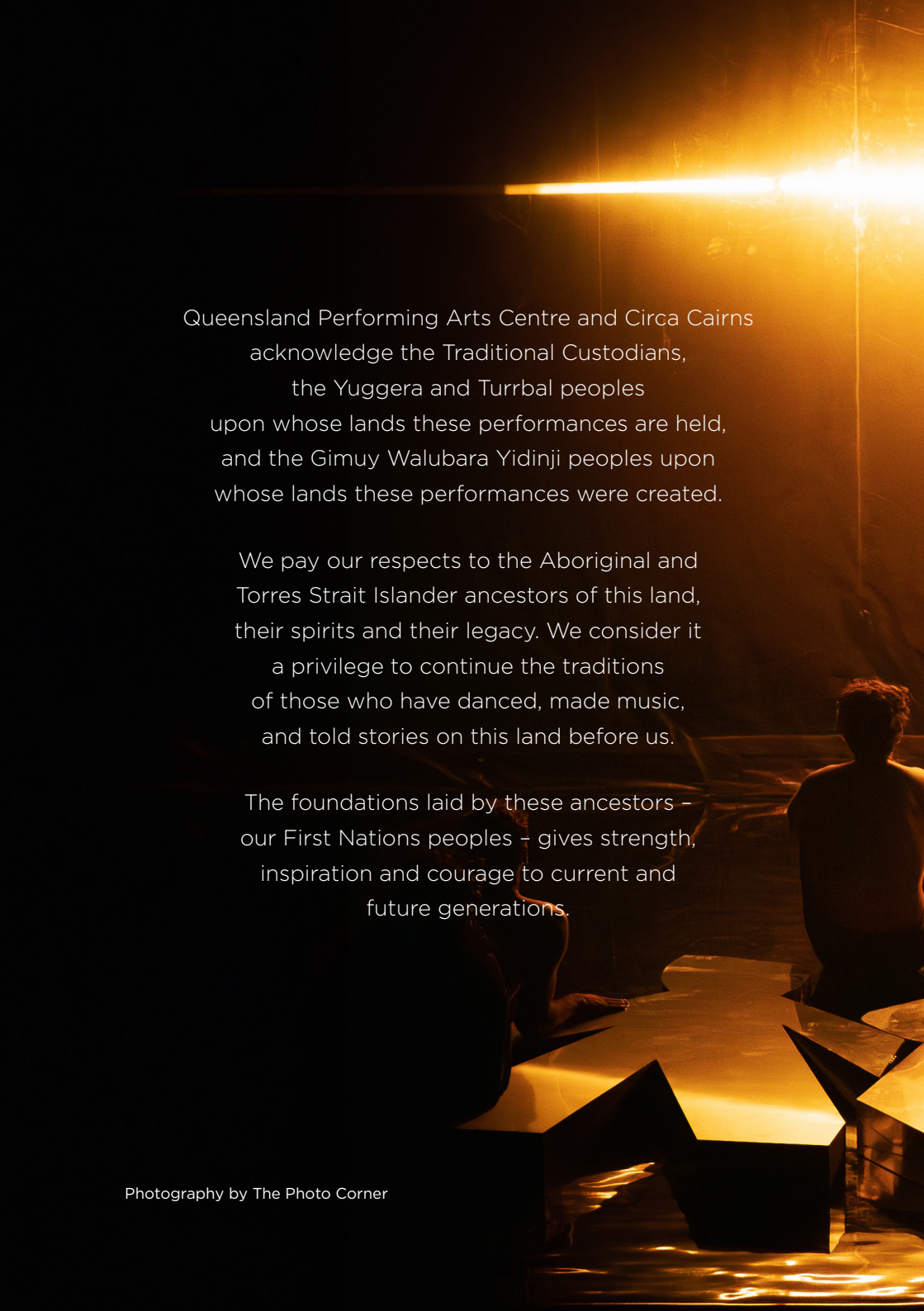
**22-25 NOVEMBER 2023 | PLAYHOUSE, QPAC**



**CIRCA  
CAIRNS**

**CIRCA**





Queensland Performing Arts Centre and Circa Cairns  
acknowledge the Traditional Custodians,  
the Yuggera and Turrbal peoples  
upon whose lands these performances are held,  
and the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji peoples upon  
whose lands these performances were created.

We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander ancestors of this land,  
their spirits and their legacy. We consider it  
a privilege to continue the traditions  
of those who have danced, made music,  
and told stories on this land before us.

The foundations laid by these ancestors –  
our First Nations peoples – gives strength,  
inspiration and courage to current and  
future generations.





# WELCOME



Circa Cairns is a First Nations-led, regionally-based contemporary circus ensemble. It is an initiative of Circa, created with the support of and made possible by Arts Queensland and the Tim Fairfax Foundation.

Under the leadership of Wakka Wakka man Harley Mann, the team is grappling with complex issues of culture, identity and authenticity. They work in the badlands beyond genre – somewhere where circus, movement, physical theatre, storytelling and song meet.

To create a new future, we need new forms. These are both acts of hope and of resistance; chances to imagine a new world while wrestling with the challenges of our old one.

I see Circa Cairns's work as a chance to grow fresh roots of optimism. By bringing the world's oldest living culture into vigorous contact with one of the world's youngest and freshest artforms, contemporary circus, it provides a genuinely new and fresh perspective on who we are and where we might be heading.

The team at Circa is proud to support this initiative. We are thankful to QPAC, the Cairns Regional Council and our core funders for their support and trust.

*Son* is Circa Cairns's first major production to open in Brisbane. It is a fresh work, taut with the tensions of being a son, of being Blak, Queer and from somewhere else. It is exactly the sort of bold, unconventional ambition we hoped for when we first imagined Circa Cairns.

I wish them and all our audiences a provocative, moving night in the theatre, together.

**Yaron Lifschitz**

Artistic Director, Circa

# WELCOME



Gaining insight into others' lived experiences is an essential part of self-discovery and understanding where we belong. We are all shaped as people not only by our choices, but by circumstance, family and the culture in which we're immersed. And art has a lovely way of storytelling that reaches where words may not.

With *Son*, Circa Cairns has created an authentic and sometimes raw exploration of those familial connections and cultural norms, sharply told through a blend of acrobatics, contemporary cultural dance and song. It is a moving and powerful experience that we welcome to the Playhouse in Circa Cairns' very first season at QPAC.

We are delighted to see a First Nations-led circus ensemble working alongside the much acclaimed Circa, continuing that company's engaging talent for using human movement to tell stories. The added layer of song created especially for *Son* by lauded ensemble Kardajala Kirridarra makes this a very special production indeed.

We hope this is the first of many QPAC seasons for Circa Cairns and we're proud to present this season with Circa.

**John Kotzas AM**

Chief Executive, QPAC







# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

At its heart, this show is about a boy trying to figure out what kind of man he wants to be – and what that even means. It's a work that's prompted me to draw and reflect upon my own complicated relationship with notions of masculinity, and together as a team we've tried to grapple with the thorny questions those notions give rise to, and explore them on stage: with our bodies, and with our culture.

I really wanted to make this work for mothers; too often we forget the love they give, and pain they endure. It's been so nourishing to create with Kardajala Kirridarra. Their creative spirit and cheeky energy have given us the gift that all mothers give: the gift of making the heaviness of life feel lighter.

Working with Alex Berlage has been another enriching process as we have honed in on what the queer masculine experience looks like and how it has flavoured this work.

Co-Director: **Harley Mann** (Wakka Wakka)

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It has been such an absolute honour and thrill being part of the creation of this new work. *Son* is a deeply personal work for Harley and working with him has been an incredibly enriching experience, as we set out to explore and explode our complex and varied relationships to the concept of manhood in a world dominated by the pressures of western masculinity. This work does not so much set out to provide any concrete answers, but is more a celebration of the beauty of discovery of oneself, outside of the mould.

Co-Director: **Alexander Berlage**





QPAC AND CIRCA PRESENT

# SON

**A pioneering circus sung into existence in a thrilling world premiere.**

Fathers are the bone on which sons sharpen their teeth.

**Son** is a cultural circus work about the relationship between fathers and sons.

Inspired by **Circa Cairns'** Artistic Director **Harley Mann's** own experience growing up in a single mother household and how it informed his masculinity, **Son** challenges the Western model of family to celebrate Culture and Queerness.

We see four male First Nations acrobats embrace who they are, their physical strength and guarded vulnerabilities. Accompanied live by female First Nations music group **Kardajala Kirridarra**, the work is beautifully sung into existence, juxtaposed with striking acrobatics and contemporary cultural dance.

From sunset to sunrise follow the son as he questions his identity through his journey into manhood. Part odyssey, part coming of age story, **Son** is pioneering circus on the cusp of tradition and revelation from First Nations-led circus ensemble Circa Cairns.

Created by **Harley Mann, Alexander Berlage** and  
the **Circa Cairns Ensemble** with **Kardajala Kirridarra**

Co-Directors **Harley Mann** and **Alexander Berlage**

Music Group **Kardajala Kirridarra**

Lighting Designer **Alexander Berlage**

Costume Designer and Co-set Designer **Isabel Hudson**

Cultural Dramaturg **Uncle Raymond D Blanco**

Hero Image by **Romy Photography**





# CREATIVES & CAST

**HARLEY MANN** – Director, Circa Cairns  
Artistic Director, Ensemble Member



Harley Mann, is a Wakka Wakka man from Queensland, Australia. Drawing on his own Aboriginal heritage as inspiration Harley founded Na Djinang Circus in 2017. Harley has since completed his bachelor of circus arts and worked with some of the

world's leading contemporary circus companies. Under Harley's guidance, Na Djinang have established themselves as one of Australia's most exciting contemporary circus companies.

In 2022 Harley embarked on a new adventure as the Artistic Director of Circa Cairns. This has seen Harley lead a team of diverse artists to create, perform and tour circus works from the nexus of Culture and place. Alongside sitting on a number of advisor panels across the arts Harley is a current member of the PAC Australia Board. He was recently a recipient of the Circus Oz Fellowship program 2021 and a graduate of 2022 Creative Australia Future leaders' program. Harley is ensuring that he challenges himself, the stories and the ways we tell them as he hopes to contribute to where the next generation can dream bigger than we ever could.

**ALEXANDER BERLAGE** – Director



Alexander Berlage is an award-winning director and lighting designer as well as currently being Co-Artistic Director of Redline Productions at the Old Fitz Theatre. Alex has won the Sydney Theatre Award Best Direction of a Musical two years

in a row – for *American Psycho The Musical* and *Cry-Baby* at Hayes Theatre Co. His smash-hit, sold-out production of *American Psycho The Musical* won nine Sydney Theatre Awards including Best Direction of a Musical, Best Production of a Musical, Best Male Actor in a Musical, Best Set Design of an Independent Production, Best Costume Design of an Independent Production and Best Lighting Design of an Independent Production and more. Alexander's 2019 production of *Gloria* was nominated for two Sydney Theatre Awards. As a lighting designer, Alexander has worked for

Sydney Theatre Company, Opera Queensland, Circa, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Sydney Chamber Opera, Pinchgut Opera, Sydney Dance Company, Griffin Theatre, Ensemble Theatre, Hayes Theatre Co, Australian Theatre for Young People, and Redline Productions, with directors such as Kip Williams, Imara Savage, Jessica Arthur, Mitchell Butel, Constantine Costi, Yaron Lifschitz, Domenic Mercer and Marion Potts.

**KARDAJALA KIRRIDARRA**



Kardajala Kirridarra translates to 'Sandhill Women.' Kardajala is the name of the mysterious bush woman from the sandhills behind the community of Malinja,

Northern Territory. Kardajala Kirridarra create music to empower women in all aspects of their role as creators, from young girls through to being mothers and grandmothers. From their inception until now, Kardajala Kirridarra has won the NT Song of the Year award, played at Golden Plains Festival, Wide Open Spaces, and Barunga Festival, and were the first all-female band to appear at Bush Bands Bash in 2016. The descendants of a mysterious bush woman from the Northern Territory, these compelling women are from the communities of Marlinja and Kulumindini (Elliott) and together with Melbourne based producer Beatrice they form Kardajala Kirridarra. With the release of their debut self-titled album featuring new single *Ngabaju (Grandmother's Song)*, Kardajala Kirridarra meld the contemporary with the traditional. Sung in both Mudburra and English, together they tell the story of the connection between Aboriginal women and country as a reminder about the importance of women as creators.

**ISABEL HUDSON** – Costume Designer,  
Co-Set Designer



Isabel Hudson is an award-winning set and costume designer. Isabel won Sydney Theatre Awards for Best Set Design of an Independent Production in both 2019 and 2018 – for her set designs on the smash-hit,

sold out musicals *American Psycho The Musical* and *Cry-Baby* at Hayes Theatre Co. She also received Sydney Theatre Award nominations for Best Set Design of an Independent Production for the musical *The View Upstairs* (Hayes Theatre Co), and for *Dry Land* (Outhouse Theatre Co). Isabel is the Australian Set Associate for *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* (Global Creatures) for the Australia, Korea and Japanese tours; and for Opera Australia, Isabel was assistant designer for *Merry Widow* and *My Fair Lady*; and for Sydney Theatre Company, she was associate set and costume designer on *Fun Home* directed by Dean Bryant. Isabel graduated from NIDA with a Bachelor of Arts in Design in 2015 and holds a Bachelor of Arts (Screen and Sound) from the University of New South Wales. She was awarded the William Fletcher Foundation Scholarship 2018, the Kristian Fredrikson Scholarship in 2022 and The Thelma Afford Award for Costume Design in Stage and Screen in 2022. Isabel is a lecturer for the Design for Performance program at NIDA.

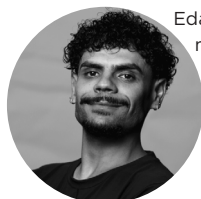
### DAVID KILA BIONDI-ODO – Ensemble Member



David Kila Biondi-Odo is a First Nations Independent Contemporary Artist of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island descent. David is a proud Aboriginal man whose people are Mamu and Kalkadoon from Queensland, and a proud

Torres Strait Island man from Mer Island in the Torres Strait. David studied at Aboriginal Centre of Performing Art (ACPA) graduating with an Advanced Diploma in Performing Arts in Dance in 2016. He went on to study at NAISDA Dance College, developing his language and art of dance and graduating with a diploma in dance in 2019. David has worked with many renowned artists and choreographers throughout his career and hopes to continue to develop and grow his relationship with dance and movement.

### EDAN PORTER – Ensemble Member



Edan Porter is a proud Gomeroi man from North-West NSW. Edan's dance journey started at the age of six with Traditional Aboriginal dancing learning from his family in Moree, NSW.

Edan started his professional dance training in 2016 with NAISDA Dance College and graduated in 2019 with a Diploma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Practice. Over the course of his studies, Edan worked with choreographers like Craig Barry, Frances Rings, Pamela Williams and other incredible people that have shaped him as an artist. Edan has worked with companies including Sydney Dance Company, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Marrugeku, Opera Australia, Brown's Mart Theatre, NT Dance Company and KARUL Projects. Edan danced in Canada as part of the Intercultural Creation Lab at Banff Centre of Creative Arts and hopes to travel more internationally. This year Edan joins Circa Cairns and is also working with choreographer Jacob Boheme. Through this time, Edan is continuing to hone his choreographic development and creating more work that he hopes will resonate with audiences to continue to share his story.

### GUSTA MARA – Ensemble Member



Gusta Mara is an Angamudthi and Atembiya man from the tip of Cape York Queensland and a Goba, Argun, Wagadagam and Kaurareg man from the Inner and Western islands of the Torres Strait. He is an Indigenous artist and creator,

proud and committed to representing his culture on an eclectic range of projects and educational programs. Gusta graduated from NAISDA Dance College in 2018 with a Diploma of Professional Dance Performance. In 2019 he undertook the Russell Page Graduate Program to advance his skills further. Gusta then went on to perform as a full-time ensemble dancer with Bangarra Dance Theatre from 2019-2022. His career to date has seen him touring extensively around Australia, regionally, nationally, and internationally including in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, facilitating community engagement, cultural exchange and specialised workshops. Gusta has worked across diverse projects, varying in scale and artform, and collaborates with directors and choreographers to deliver their vision whilst being committed to excellence. Gusta joined Circa Cairns in early 2023 undertaking different creative developments for *Son*. It was here, where he learnt new acrobatic skills and has taken on the artform of circus arts.



# CIRCA CAIRNS

Circa Cairns is a proudly First Nations-led contemporary circus ensemble, based in regional Queensland, dedicated to creating bold art from the nexus of place and culture.

Fuelled by values of thrilling, challenging and connecting its diverse team which features a majority of First Nations artists, creates, presents and tours new circus productions and innovative engagement programs.

Circa Cairns is a Circa initiative supported by the Queensland Government and the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation. Circa Cairns received support in 2022 by the Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund – an Australian Government initiative.

Circa Cairns is based in Gimuy (Cairns). This work was made on the lands of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people and is sung to life in Mudburra. We acknowledge that art has been practiced here over many millennia, and that it remains a fundamental way of life for the traditional caretakers and custodians of the lands on which we work, create and perform today. We acknowledge that we are here as visitors and accept the responsibility to respect and care for these lands and tread lightly.

Always was. Always will be.

Discover more about Circa Cairns by subscribing to **enews at [circa.org.au](https://circa.org.au)** and following the company on



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**#circacairns**



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## Circa Cairns

Artistic Director – Harley Mann (Wakka Wakka)

General Manager – Baeley Dear

Community Engagement Coordinator – Ally Humphris (Wakka Wakka)

Training Coordinator – David Kila Biondi-Odo (Mamu and Kalkadoon)

Sector Relationship Lead – Edan Porter (Gomerioi)

## Ensemble

Ally Humphris (Wakka Wakka)

David Kila Biondi-Odo (Mamu and Kalkadoon)

Harley Mann (Wakka Wakka)

Edan Porter (Gomerioi)

## Circa

Artistic Director – Yaron Lifschitz

Executive Director – Shaun Comerford

Executive Producer – Danielle Kellie

First Nations Advisor – Cameron Costello (Quandamooka)

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Director-General, Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts:  
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**We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors of this land, their spirits and their legacy. The foundations laid by these ancestors – our First Nations Peoples – gives strength, inspiration and courage to current and future generations, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, towards creating a better Queensland.**



## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

**QPAC warmly thanks our key donors who help us engage broadly across the state and continue enriching lives through performing arts.**

Tim Fairfax AC and Gina Fairfax AC, Dr Lee and Professor Peter Coaldrake AO, Leigh Tabrett PSM, Susan Rix AM, Julian Meyers, Dr Sally Pitkin AO, Dare Power, Dr Cathryn Mittelheuser AM, Queensland Community Foundation, de Groots Charitable Fund, Sandi Hoskins, Klaus Beckmann, Barbara Snelling, Jill Hutchins, Leigh Wheeler, Joachim and Paula Erpf, Frank and Karen Alpert, Alison Iverach, Jenny Morton, John Ryan, Margaret Heggie, Natalie Nelson, Ben Castleton, Meg Bock, Anthony Wade-Cooper and several donors who wish to remain anonymous.

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