



**Artback NT**

## **Malandarri Festival Artistic Report**

18 - 19 June 2021



All photos by:  
Benjamin WarIngundu Ellis Bayliss  
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Right:  
Crowd enjoying The Sandridge Band

Cover image:  
Wandangula Dancers







Wandangula Dancers

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Artback NT

Connecting people  
and place through arts  
development and touring





## Introduction

Malandarri Festival is a special community-led event celebrating both traditional and contemporary arts and cultural practices from the four clan groups living in Borrooloola: the Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Gurdanji and Mara people.

The Malandarri Festival, formerly known as DanceSite, is a part of Artback NT's Indigenous Traditional Dance Program (ITDP). ITDP was established to support the NT's artistic and cultural practices through inter-generational learning, strengthening relationships between Elders and young people and encouraging cultural leadership. The annual Malandarri Festival event is part of a range of ongoing artistic, mentorship and professional development opportunities throughout the year based in Borrooloola and the wider Gulf of Carpentaria region.

The ITDP program has delivered DanceSite events in Alice Springs (2009) and Tennant Creek (2010 – 2012). ITDP is currently working with the communities of Numbulwar (2016 – present) and Borrooloola (2013 – present), with each community developing a distinct engagement model in response to specific needs.

### The aims of ITDP are:

- To assist in the coordination of an annual event that celebrates the diversity of traditional Indigenous dance in the Northern Territory, providing an exciting cross-cultural platform for audience and performance development;
- To deliver remote community support that facilitates opportunities for arts and cultural performance and skills development within the region through a series of projects, rehearsals, workshops and events each year; and
- To provide further Territory, national and international performance opportunities where appropriate for the hosting community to establish business and professional development pathways.

## Malandarri Festival 2021

The 2021 Malandarri Festival was held over 18-19 June and was a very localised program, with a strong emphasis on cultural tradition and transition to younger generations. Due to National Covid-19 standards to deal with a pandemic, the event focused on local input with minimum outsiders involved in the event. This meant community agency driven program development with a strong focus on the younger generation and intergenerational advocacy. Showcasing performance, song, dance and community festivities, the 2 day event attracted a strong audience attendance across both days. A local workforce was utilised primarily, working alongside long term Borrooloola stakeholders locally supporting the event. The family focused event commenced with traditional dance and transitioned with ease into a younger generation of joyful performance, ending with legendary local band The Sandridge Band creating a wonderful celebration of music and dancing.

This event was the first key community cultural event since the National Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. The event was scheduled for October 2020 however was postponed following the passing of key community Elders. The community has also been affected by the national lockdown, loss of income from tourists and a reduction in economic development, with schools restricted with travel and programming. But a key loss, which is harshly felt across the community, has been the passing of Elders across all clans, affecting their performance of traditional ceremony, and taking part in the festival.



Barnabas Timothy and  
Borrooloola Primary sing  
*My Island Home*





Ghenoa Gela with Borroloola secondary students rehearsing *Ocean to Ocean*



Steven Allen and Brendan Miller rap and dance performance

**ITDP staffing**

The engagement of local staff and growing opportunities for community members continues to be at the core of Malandarri Festival. Artback NT recognises the importance of nurturing individuals and relationships as part of its engagement in remote communities.

**Festival Director**

Festival Director Marlene Timothy Karkadoo is a local Yanyuwa/Garrwa woman from Borroloola who works for Artback NT and Waralungku Arts Centre. Marlene also represents her region as a Councillor with Roper Gulf Regional Council. Marlene has been vital to ITDP’s development and sustained delivery in the region. She is an active leader within the Borroloola community and her presence on the ground reinforces the program’s local commitment, ensuring that the program is community driven, of high cultural value, and delivered at a high production level. She is the key contact with local community service providers and this enables strong long-term committed vision with key community agencies.

**Project Officer**

Barnabus Timothy worked across the year in preparation for the event. This included engaging with production training and performance in November 2020 provided by Barkly Regional Arts Winanjjikari Music Centre and working with the school base performers as the local musician across multiple projects. Barnabus also performed a solo set at the festival and provided production technical services across the two nights of entertainment.

**Production Coordinator**

Artback NT's Art and Cultural Coordinator Laura Shipp works with Marlene to coordinate the festival program delivery. Laura had multiple planning sessions and on the ground development opportunities with Marlene in the build up to the 2020 and 2021 event. She put in place key stakeholder arrangements however tragically Laura had a medical emergency that prevented her from completing her on the ground role three weeks prior to the event. Artback NT replaced Laura with Vanessa Hutchins who has a long-term association with Artback NT, Marlene and the Malandarri festival event. Vanessa worked with Marlene on the ground in the final two weeks of the event scheduling and following up on resources and arrangements.

**Festival Team**

The festival team was 100% local Indigenous workforce which included:

Production load in team	3 paid roles
Front of House	2 paid roles
Security	1 paid role
Bus Drivers	2 paid roles
Cleaners	2 paid roles
Performer Catering	multiple paid roles
Load out team	7 paid roles
Photographer	1 paid role





Gangalidda Dancers from Doomadgee



Festival Site

The festival site had pre-production work commence early with Roper Gulf Shire preparing the dance site grounds and completing gardening and watering in advance of production load in.

The site was fenced to prevent traffic in the grounds and parking on site. It also assisted with entry ways ensuring crowds had ample space to socially distance.

The site featured festoon lights around the audience area and trees were decorated with fairy lights. Art works from former programs decorated the site. The Indigenous flags hung proudly at the site and were back-lit as were the trees and festival banners that decorated the dance site.

Emergency lighting was in place at the front gate so that the audience could safely transgress through the area. Parking was located outside, however the shuttle bus service could ensure access to the site for the elderly and disabled. Toilet facilities were well stocked, with additional hand sanitizer stations at front gate, backstage areas and near food stalls.

Fire pits were set up in advance of expected cold weather.

Rehearsal Studio

The Festival engaged Barkly Regional Arts Studio Coordinator Reggie O’Riley from Winanjirkari Music Centre to run a rehearsal and recording studio for two weeks prior to the festival at the MAWA Hall. Reggie is himself local to Borrooloola and plays as part of The Barkly Drifters, a well-known band that performed at the 2019 Malandarri event. The localised studio allowed musicians time to rehearse with quality grade equipment, backline and facilitation.

Reggie had also planned to provide event production services to the cancelled 2020 event so was familiar with the objectives of the program and had participated in the program in November 2020 trialling production technical workshops.

Micah Wenitong, Indigenous musician and recording engineer, joined the preliminary rehearsals a week from the event, jamming and encouraging local music performance.

Technical Lighting and Sound

Michael Vernau, from Charles Darwin University, provided technical services and expertise courtesy of the school of music where he teaches a Diploma in Technical and Music production.

He is a great teacher and his skill in this area enabled him to easily work and introduce the local crew to using new technology and music live production equipment.

Neil McKnight provided technical services and worked with locals on the installation of lighting and electrical providing festival festooning to the audience area.

Pre Festival development activities

Training and equipment access - 23-26 November 2020.

Barkly Regional Arts Studio Coordinator Reggie O’Riley, together with Neil McKnight technical assistant from Winanjikari Music Centre, ran a community available rehearsal and recording studio for a week in MAWA Hall.

*My Island Home* by Neil Murray (Warumpi Band), translated into Yanyuwa by Mavis Timothy with guitar by Barnabus Timothy. This was taught to Primary school children 4,5 & 6 years in the lead up to the cancelled 2020 event and than recommenced with new students in 2021 for preparation of the 2021 festival. *We are Australian* was performed in Garrwa and translated and taught by Daphne Mawson with help from Marlene Timothy Karkadoo and guitar by Barnabas Timothy. Costumes were created and made by Teachers Assistant Daphne Mawson, Kathy Ger and Marlene Timothy Karkadoo.

On the 10 June a video of the rehearsals of My Island Home was sent to Neil Murray and Sammy Butcher formerly of Warumpi Band. They were delighted the song is being used as a tool for language and knowledge keeping and we had their full approval for it to be used on social media and performed at the festival.

With assistance from Danielle Schmidt, the students rehearsed at MAWA Hall with Reggie in preparation for using the concert sound system. They additionally did a site visit and final dress rehearsal on the festival site on Thursday 18th June.

Ghenoa Gela - Hip Hop Contemporary Dance Artist

Ghenoa brought a wonderful energy over her two-week residency with Borrooloola primary and secondary students. During this time the students learnt to express themselves through dance and contemporary movement techniques. The song *Oceans to Oceans* by Rupert Gregson-Williams was a well chosen well known track. It was adapted so that the older students could use a contemporary style of dance and the primary students were also engaged by dancing in chorus in clan groups showing the totemic animal representations of shark and crocodile. Ghenoa was unavailable to attend the festival however Benjamin Warngundu Ellis Bayliss kept the students motivated in their rehearsals in readiness for the event.

Performances

Families as First Teachers (FaFT)

Songs translated by Elders in Garrwa, Yanyuwa and Gudanji languages.

Walumba Walumba – *Twinkle Twinkle*

Wongulumirri – *Barramundi song*

*We are the children of the bush*

Borrooloola Primary School Choir Years 5,6 & 7

*We are Australian* - Bruce Woodley and Dobe Newton

*My Island Home* – Warumpi Band

Borrooloola Secondary School

Dance piece to *Ocean to Ocean*, with additional performance work by the Primary students

Other Performers

Brendan Miller and Steven Allen performed Chain Hang Low Dance

Tyrone Charlie performed two self-devised Hip Hop songs

Gangalidda Dancers from Doomadgee

Wandangula Dancers from Borrooloola

The Sandridge Band from Robinson River and Borrooloola

Barnabas Timothy - Solo performance

Language Group	Dance Group/ Band	Location	Performers
Garrwa / Yanyuwa	Wandangula Dancers	Sandridge Outstation	25
Gangalidda	Gangalidda Dancers	Doomadgee	14
Garrwa / Yanyuwa / Gurdanji / Mara	Families as First Teachers	Borrooloola	16
Garrwa / Yanyuwa / Gurdanji / Mara	Borrooloola Primary Yrs 4,5 & 6	Borrooloola	18
Garrwa / Yanyuwa / Gurdanji / Mara	Borrooloola Secondary	Borrooloola	16
Contemporary Hip Hop dance Yanyuwa / Garrwa	Brendan Miller Steven Allen	Borrooloola	2
Contemporary Rap Garrwa	Tyrone Charlie (Yirrara College)	Borrooloola	1
Mara	Barnabas Timothy	Borrooloola	1
Garrwa / Yanyuwa	The Sandridge Band	Sandridge Outstation	5
TOTAL			98







Catering, Food stalls and Activities

Saturday evening continued the festival tradition of the free community feed for the performing dance and music groups, which was facilitated by Elizabeth Hogan and the Morrison family. During Saturday, the catering team cooked the delicious feast in ground and bush ovens offering half a cow and roasted vegetables. The remainders were delivered to the Doomagee group for a late evening meal before their departure the following day.

Rhoda Hammer from Waralungku Arts made delicious damper scones and provided hot tea and treacle on the colder Saturday night.

John Moriarty Football also ran youth games and sports activities as a part of the Community Marketplace on the Saturday of the Festival from 3pm-5.30pm

Local family supplied two public catering options on both nights of the festival cooking locally sourced fried barramundi and additionally selling clothes and bush medicines.

McArthur River Mine donated an assortment of boxed fruit and water over the two days for everyone’s enjoyment.

Liam Maza and Lia Pa’apa’a engaged the audience in Artback NT’s Culture Counts survey. As former residents of the town they were ideal in this voluntary capacity.

Media

Benjamin Warlŋgundu Ellis Bayliss was the official Festival photographer. Malandarri Festival is usually widely advertised across multiple media platforms. In previous years visitors have been encouraged to visit Borroloola to attend and share in the celebrations. In light of the developing Covid-19 situation across Australia and after consultation with the Borroloola community, the decision was made to redefine Malandarri Festival as a community only event.

Partnerships

Organisation	Type of Support
McArthur River Mines Community Benefit Trust (MRM CBT)	Wages support through the Remote Arts and Culture Program (RACP)
NT Major Events Company (NTMEC)	Community Festivals Grant \$30,000
Roper Gulf Regional Council	Community Grant \$3,000 Venue support lawns and sand ground, fencing, water, toilet facilities and waste/ collection, media support, staffing and CDP program support
Mawurli Wirriwangkuma Aboriginal Corporation (MAWA)	Sponsorship \$5,000 MAWA Hall, offices, security lighting and general support
Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association	Vehicle, office space, staffing support, fencing resources and equipment. Bus for shuttle service. Li-anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers and Workshop / Nursery team- trestle tables
Families as First Teachers (FaFT)	Workshop facilitators, staffing support and artistic and youth program content
Borroloola School	Workshop facilitators, staffing support and artistic and youth program content
Malandari Store	Cash handling and safety, change and assistance
Barkly Regional Arts	Technical support

The community was very supportive of the event and individuals went out of their way to provide for the event. Equipment was loaned and delivered with the festival workforce installing on site. This was exemplified by organisations being well prepared for the event, for example MAWA had already serviced the light towers in readiness of the event.

Rope Gulf Council were onsite for additional support with waste and water management. They called service providers to fix a sewerage issue overnight after issues on Friday with plumbing.

The venue was ready in advance of load in and post the event was cleaned and left in the original condition as when occupied.



Marlene Timothy Karkadoo  
Festival Director



Barnabas Timothy  
Project Officer



Vanessa Hutchins  
Production Coordinator



Mike Vernau  
Technical Lighting and Sound



Neil McKnight  
Technical Lighting and Sound



Reggie O’Riley  
Technical Lighting and Sound



Micah Wetitong  
Project Assistant



Benjamin Warlŋgundu Ellis Bayliss  
Festival photographer









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