



Artback NT

Numburindi Festival Artistic Report

Thursday 23 – Saturday 25 September, 2021





NUMBURI NDI

FESTIVAL



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OVERVIEW

The Numburindi Festival was established in 2016 to celebrate and highlight the dance, song and language from four of the clan groups living in Numbulwar - the Ngalmi, Nundhirribala, Murrungun and Nunggarrgalu Peoples'. This year, Mangurra joined the Festival to perform.

As a community-led event, festival activity is directed by community members' in consultation with locally based Numburindi Festival Artistic Director, Grant Nundhirribala. The Festival showcases the rich cultural heritage of the region over three days. This year young people's programming was scheduled each evening to ensure intergenerational learning was firmly established in the identity of the Festival and was also a feature of the daily schedule.

Each year the Festival is hosted in the remote Arnhem Land community of Numbulwar on the western coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory. Grant is responsible for community consultation regarding the Festival and also ensuring the artistic schedule reflects Numbulwar's ongoing cultural practices in the community and region. The Numburindi Festival encourages community capacity by creating opportunity for skills development and employment through support and delivery positions in the lead-up and during the Festival period. Local performers and invited guests are engaged and fees are budgeted for.

This year's Numburindi Festival was held from Thursday 23 to Saturday 25 September. Language, dance and song were celebrated with performances from Numbulwar clan groups together with broader family networks living in the Roper Gulf and East Arnhem Regions. The line-up of visiting musicians and dancers came from Groote Eylandt, Ngukurr, Daly River and Gapuwiyak. Audiences travelled from Darwin, Katherine, wider Arnhem Land and the Roper Gulf regions to enjoy the festivities of the three-day event.

PRE-FESTIVAL ACTIVITY

Roper Gulf Regional Council (RGRC) were instrumental with the Festival site set-up. Joshua Park was the perfect venue with beautiful ocean views. The gale force winds which hit Numbulwar during bump-in, requiring site re-assessment posed many challenges. The Council relocated a shipping container to act as a windbreak for the stage. The sand pit was required to be installed twice as the sand blew away.

Female participants of the Community Development Program were fundamental in the decoration and stage design of the new Festival layout. Facilitated by RGRC, the participants created an enormous new banner for the stage and hand painted flags for the larger festival site.

Amanda Ngalmi, the Youth Sport and Recreation Coordinator for RGRC coordinated a two-day basketball competition. The coordination prior to the Festival was imperative so that travelling teams could participate. Amanda coordinated the invitations, logistics, travel and accommodation for visiting teams and liaised with Festival Coordinator Laura Shipp to bring customised trophies for the winning teams and most valuable players from Darwin.

In the weeks leading up to the event, Numbulwar School opened their doors after hours to local music groups for rehearsal. School staff were onsite to ensure access was available to bands in Numbulwar to practise and use the music equipment.

PROGRAM

The 2021 Numburindi Festival showcased a culturally rich artistic program during the days and evenings of the Festival. The schedule was shaped by Artistic Director Grant Nundhirribala.

BURINDI
FESTIVAL



OPENING NIGHT

As the sun set on Thursday evening the Elders of the community used white ochre to paint the young performers in preparation for their dancing. In keeping with tradition, the Festival opened with a young people's Wungubul (youth dance) with performances from Numbulwar clan groups, Nundhirribala (Red Flag), Ngalmi/Mangurra (Gudarrgu), Murrungun (Dhaambulg) and Nunggarrgalu (A Gugu). Following the dancing, Numbulwar School children graced the stage and sang songs for the expectant audience. The school teachers band also performed some songs and treated the audience to a performance in Murrinh-patha language.

Grant Nundhirribala and John Terepo serenaded the crowds with their vocal harmonies and keyboard set. A performance the two men had been looking forward to performing together for a long time and finally got the chance to make in 2021.

To close the evening Numbulwar's own Yillila Band debuted a unique performance in an acoustic style set. This was the first time members of the Yillila band performed in such an arrangement, delivering an emotionally moving performance of five songs they had written, paired back with harrowing vocals. A truly moving performance to close out the opening night of the Festival.

SECOND NIGHT

Friday saw dance take centre stage as the focus for performance and celebration. Beginning with traditional dance and finishing with contemporary hip hop from aspiring young choreographers, it was a high energy evening that had everybody cheering and on their feet.

The Red Flag dancers initiated the performances and were followed with traditional dance contributions from Ngalmi/Mangurra (Gudarrgu), Murrungun (Dhaambulg) and Nunggarrgalu (A Gugu) clans. Audience members were encouraged to join the celebration and throughout the evening people would spontaneously run into the centre and join in the Wungubul. Visiting dance groups from Groote Eylandt and Galiwin'ku also performed throughout the evening. It was a real celebration with audience

members live streaming the event to friends and family across the country that were unable to attend.

Following the traditional song and dance component of the evening, the youth dance competition closed out the night. The highly anticipated competition saw local dance groups perform original choreography to contemporary popular music. One brave young performer even did a solo performance captivating the crowd with a Michael Jackson inspired routine. An absolute crowd favourite of the Festival, this dance competition demonstrated the massive talent of the local young people of Numbulwar. Their commitment to contemporary and traditional dance practice seamlessly melded into original dynamic performances and resulted in a showcase with a night of brilliant performance.

Throughout the evening Hon Selina Uiobo addressed the crowd with some exciting new commitments and contributions from the government for the community and ongoing support for the Numburindi Festival. We look forward to seeing these changes aid in facilitating a big and better festival in years to come.

CLOSING NIGHT

Saturday's programming included afternoon music rehearsals, and the finals of the youth basketball competition that had commenced the previous day. The Numbulwar School provided an activities area for young children with games, drawing and play. There was also a photo booth where community members could get free family portraits taken against a customised backdrop and the ocean. As per the previous evenings a marque was set up at the front of the stage as a designated area for Elders and those with disabilities to have seating, shade and water.

There was an awards presentation for the participants and winners of the basketball competition and the youth dance competition. Trophies and vouchers to the Numburindi Store were awarded as prizes for the winners.



Due to ongoing Sorry Business in the community NT Express opened the evening with a one-minute silence as a mark of respect before they started their set.

The line-up for the final night of the Festival had a focus on bands and music, with a big local line up scheduled. The original run list was NT Express (Numbulwar), Tea Links (Ngukurr), Eylandt Band (Groote Eylandt), Salt Lake Band (Umbakumba), Lonely boys (Ngukurr), Ninich Band (Daly River) and Yillila (Numbulwar).

With Sorry Business weighing heavily on the community, the decision was made to cancel the final night of Festival programming. Artback NT whole heartedly supported the requests of the community and the cultural directives given by the Festival Director as the cultural advisor for the event. Out of consideration for the family and at the direction of the Festival Director the final evening of Numburindi Festival 2021 was respectively brought to a close early.

STATISTICS

Participants	Total 2019	Indigenous	Non- Indigenous
Performers	137	98%	2%
Production incl. Directors, Coordinators, Photographer and Videographers	10	50%	50%
Staffing incl. Emcee, Security, Bus Drivers, Cleaners, Stage Managers, Caterers	10	90%	10%
Audience	800	90%	10%

DANCE GROUPS AND PERFORMERS

Language Group	Dance Group/ Band	Community	Performers
Nundhirribala	Red Flag Dancers	Numbulwar	22
Murrungun	Dhaambulg - Murrungun Dancers	Numbulwar	8
Ngalmi/ Mangurra	Gudarrgu - Ngalmi and Mangurra Dancers	Numbulwar	10
Nunggarrgalu	A Gugu - Nunggarrgalu Dancers	Numbulwar	15
	Groote Eylandt Dancers	Umbakumba	11
	Gapuwiyak Dancers	Gapuwiyak	8
Nundhirribala	Yillila Band (acoustic set)	Numbulwar	5
Non Indigenous	John Terepo	Numbulwar	1
Ngalmi	Ngalmi Girls	Numbulwar	4
various	Jayo Girls	Numbulwar	3
various	NRR	Numbulwar	3
various	MBeez	Numbulwar	3
various	Stump	Numbulwar	1
various	NT Express	Numbulwar	4
various	Lonely Boys	Kgukurr	4
various	Ninich Band	Daly River	1
various	Tea Links	Ngukurr	
various	Eylandt Band	Groote Eylandt	6
non - Indigenous	Numbulwar School Band	Numbulwar	3
various	Primary School singing group	Numbulwar	25
TOTAL			137

Note: due to the Festival being cancelled on the final night before band performances could begin that some performers were unable to take the stage after sound check. Their presence has been factored into the statistics.



FUNDING

The 2019 Numburindi Festival was delivered as the the second Festival of its three-year funding agreement with Arts NT, which allowed for sustainable forward planning and security. The 2020 Numburindi Festival was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions, with that years funding being held over to 2021.

Funding for the Festival and associated activities was also secured from Artback NT, Numburindi Corporation, Arts NT’s Community Festivals and Strategic Festivals Grants, Member for Arnhem – Hon Selena Uibo, Tim Fairfax Family Foundation. In Numbulwar, we are thankful to have wide community support from individuals and significant local stakeholder partnerships which enable the Festival to happen annually.

CATERING

Gale force winds in the lead up to the Festival meant the boats couldn’t be used for hunting and the traditional bush oven cook up that usually takes place at the Festival had to be cancelled. When the winds subsided and hunting could take place, a cook up was provided the day after the Festival. This was made available to all performers who had participated in the Festival. A feast of sea turtle and root vegetables was cooked in a traditional ground oven.

During the festival a free BBQ was provided by RGRC and the ALPA store in Numbulwar. There was also a food stall serving up authentic Thai food with satay and fish cakes, a real crowd pleaser amongst young and old.

PARTNERSHIPS

Organisation	Type of Support
Roper Gulf Regional Council – Katherine Office / Numbulwar Office, Night Patrol, Sports and Recreation and Community Development Program	Site production installation, stage, catering, staff, office resources, cleaners, Night Patrol security staff, decoration and site design/ making and tables and chairs Funding for the Festival

Numbulwar School	Music equipment, production support staffing, rehearsal venue and support, market stalls, children’s activities
Numbulwar Homelands	Generators
ALPA Numburindi Store	Donation of award prizes for the young people’s Wungubul Donation for community BBQ
Numburindi Corporation	Funding for Festival and staffing
Numbulwar Culture and Media (AiRemote)	Promotion and film documentation of Numburindi Festival

MEDIA AND MARKETING

As Numbulwar is a remote and isolated community the value of social media platforms is significant. Pre-event marketing saw Artback NT and Roper Gulf Regional Council run a series of online stories through the website and social media (Instagram, Twitter and Facebook) to promote the Festival. Rebecca Renshaw, Communications Manager, Artback NT worked remotely from the Darwin office to support the Festival. The Numburindi Festival is not an open event for the public therefore the marketing strategy prioritised general awareness of the Festival rather than attendance. An official Numburindi Festival flyer was designed by Artback NT Graphic Designer Oscar Waugh and was distributed in Numbulwar and communities of visiting musicians and performers. The lead up to the event was documented through social media channels with behind-the-scenes action shots giving the public a taste of Numburindi Festival magic.

During the event there were two media operators:

- Benjamin Waralngundu Ellis Bayliss, ITDP’s photographer documented the Festival
- Numbulwar Culture and Media project had an incredible film crew working across the three days of the Festival and in the lead up documenting activity.



CHALLENGES

In 2020 Numbulwar had taken a big step back from artistic programming in light of how COVID-19 was developing across the country and the risk this potentially posed to the remote community. As a result, the Numburindi Festival did not take place in 2020 nor did any other Artback NT initiatives.

2020 also saw Artback NT's Arts and Cultural Coordinator of five years leave the organisation. With COVID-19 this was a year of major change and the aftermath of such significant alterations to the regular engagements between Artback NT and the Numbulwar community was felt throughout 2021.

The second half of 2021 saw engagement recommence. Stakeholder relationships had to be reformed in the community as there was a new production crew and Festival Coordinator. The Numbulwar community and stakeholders rallied together in support of the new Artback NT crew and together they brought together a successful Numburindi Festival, even amidst gale force winds!

We look forward to building on the positive outcomes from this year's Festival and working towards an even better Festival in 2022.

FORWARD PLANNING

In light of the announcement of plans to install public toilets onsite at Joshua Park, Artback NT look forward to further discussions around how this space can be used to facilitate visiting guests, audiences and performers that would like to camp in Numbulwar to attend the Festival. Festival Director Grant Nundhirribala said **"This is such good news, it means we can invite families from far away and our festival can grow bigger."**

Future planning will be dependent on securing new funding for the Festival and a big focus post the 2021 Festival has been ensuring funding streams are secured. We are very grateful for our incredible partners and look forward to working with them in the future.

STAFFING

Artback NT supports local capacity building and employment opportunities for remote communities, and this year's Numburindi Festival continued to prioritise this.

Grant Nundhirribala is the Artistic Director for the Numburindi Festival and Project Coordinator for Numburindi: strengthening culture and country bush camp program. He is a significant cultural leader and songman in Numbulwar from the Nundhirribala clan group. He is the lead singer of the band "Yilila" and the Red Flag Dancers. Grant sings in Wubuy, Anindilyakwa, Kriol, English and Bahasa Makasar and he has performed regionally, nationally and internationally at festivals, concerts and events. Grant has been Artistic Director of the Numburindi Festival since 2016 and is the advisor on cultural protocols for the broader artistic and cultural programming for Artback NT in Numbulwar. His vision and passion continues to drive the festival. This year Grant was the Emcee as well as coordinating the local and visiting performance groups.

Laura Shipp is the ITDP (Indigenous Traditional Dance Program) Project Manager and works alongside the Numbulwar community to develop and deliver the Numburindi Festival. Laura is new to Artback NT and this role, this is the first Numburindi Festival to be organised with her co-direction. Before relocating to Darwin to join the Artback NT team, Laura called Arnhem Land home for a number of years. Her experience spans project management and community development in the creative arts and health sectors. Working remotely from the Darwin office, Laura develops stakeholder relationships, manages logistics and seeks funding opportunity in accordance with community input and consolation. On the ground, Laura supports all programming direction and decision making from Numbulwar based Artistic Festival Director Grant Nundhirribala. She is also responsible for coordinating the Technical Team to run the production elements for the festival and overall event management.



TECHNICAL TEAM

An experienced technical team were brought in from Darwin to oversee production, sound and lighting, Neil Macnight, Michael Vernue and Naomi Hook. All of the PA equipment, instruments and backline were provided by Artback NT. Neil and Michael have worked for Artback NT in the past delivering production for the Malandarri Festival in Borroloola. Collectively the trio's experience spans decades working in the sector having worked on most major events and festivals in the Territory over recent years.

Numburindi Festival employed 150 local community members from Numbulwar as musicians, performers, caterers and festival crew. The festival supported wider employment and engagement in the community with RGRC staff doing an outstanding job installing the infrastructure onsite at Joshua Park. This installation included the production shipping container – that doubled as a wind break, stage, flag poles and sand. The Community Development Program Women's Group created two large scale banners to reinvigorate the set for this year's Festival. They also created an array of new hand painted flags used to identify the boundary of the festival site and enhance the stage set.

Malandarri Festival Director Marlene Timothy Karkadoo from Borroloola was engaged to come and work an exchange program as an assistant to Artistic Festival Director Grant Nundhirribala. Unfortunately, due to medical reasons she was unable to travel during festival time. This Festival Director Exchange builds relationships between the two communities in the Roper Gulf Region and supports the ITDP ethos of cultural exchange through learning and Indigenous self-determination. This exchange program provides a two way learning opportunity between the poignant cultural leaders, experienced event managers and artistic visionaries.

Numburindi Festival looks forward to having Marlene involved in the exchange for 2022 and has invited Grant to contribute to the same exchange program for the Malandarri Festival in Borroloola next year.

ABOUT THE INDIGENOUS TRADITIONAL DANCE PROGRAM

Numbulwar has been involved with the Indigenous Traditional Dance Program (ITDP) since 2016 with the delivery of the inaugural Numburindi Festival. Since then, the relationship between Artback NT and the Numbulwar community has continued to strengthen and grow.

The Indigenous Traditional Dance Program (ITDP) was established to support the Northern Territory's artistic and cultural practices through inter-generational learning, the strengthening of relationships between Elders and young people and encouraging cultural leadership. For over a decade this arts and cultural community development initiative has been delivered in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Borroloola and Numbulwar.

ITDP currently facilitates simultaneous engagement with the remote Northern Territory communities of Borroloola and Numbulwar, including the delivery of the Malandarri Festival and Numburindi Festival.

The aims of ITDP are to:

- assist in the coordination of an annual festival event that celebrates the diversity of traditional Indigenous dance in the Northern Territory, providing an exciting cross-cultural platform for audience and performance development
- 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
- provide local, national and international performance opportunities where appropriate for the hosting community to establish business and professional development pathways

The objectives of ITDP are:

- sustainability of an annual event in the hosting community and its uptake within the region
- an improved overall understanding in remote Indigenous communities of the integral relationships between cultural maintenance and professional performing arts opportunities through participation in local, regional and national showcase events



- an increased awareness of the value of traditional Indigenous dance as an integral strategy in community wellbeing and a pathway to improved employment and further education and training for individuals, particularly disengaged youth
- the preservation of culture by traditional intergenerational learning methods that strengthen the relationships between Elders and youth and encourages cultural leadership
- the creation of pathways for cultural understanding, appreciation and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia
- Undertake independent evaluation through
 - data collection
 - qualitative and rich media
 - structured feedback and review
 - critical reflection
 - regular, rich reporting

LIST OF IMAGES

1. Cover: Ladies performing at the Numburindi Festival 2021
2. Inside cover: Sound check, Numburindi Festival 2021
3. Young people's Wungubul, opening night
4. Painting-up in ochre preparing for the Young people's Wungubul
5. Young people's Wungubul
6. (top) Opening night
(bottom) Numbulwar School performance
7. (top and bottom) Youth dance competition
8. (top) Basketball competition
(bottom) Closing night Awards Ceremony
9. (top) pre-festival set up
(bottom) Numburindi Festival Director Grant Nundhirribala and Coordinator Laura Shipp, side of stage, opening night
10. Numbulwar School performance
11. Red Flag Dancers
12. Back page: Opening night pre-performance preparation

All photographs taken by Benjamin Waralngundu Ellis Bayliss

FUNDING PARTNERS



PROGRAM PARTNER



MEDIA PARTNERS







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