



Artback NT

**Numburindi Festival
Artistic Report 2016**

Contents

- 2016 Numburindi Festival Artistic Report 4**
- ITDP staffing 5**
- Numburindi Festival 5**
- Pre-festival workshops 6**
- Programming 6**
- Dance groups and performers 9**
- Bands and music 9**
- Children’s activities and marketplace 10**
- Festival crew employment 10**
- Partnerships 14**
- Funding 14**
- Media and marketing 14**
- Highlights 14**
- Challenges 15**
- Summary 15**
- Future engagement in region 15**



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← Ananias Nundhirribala of Red Flag Dancers



Women of different clans have family connections with the Murrungun Clan celebrate the Dhaambul dance ↑

2016 Numburindi Festival Artistic Report

The Indigenous Traditional Dance Program (ITDP) was established to support and facilitate traditional dance practice throughout the NT. The framework developed is based on a three year community engagement cycle, which has now been delivered in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Borrooloola. ITDP is set to engage with the community of Numbulwar from 2016 for the next three years. Each community has seen a different model developed to respond to specific community needs.

In 2016, Artback NT was in the unique situation of being able to continue its engagement with the community of Borrooloola (2013 – 2015), whilst also developing a new relationship with the community of Numbulwar (2016 – 2019).

Numbulwar's engagement in 2016 was predominantly around the delivery of the inaugural Numburindi Festival and the development of relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders in the community.

The aims of ITDP are to:

- Assist in the coordination of DanceSite, or 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
- 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 further Territory, 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 DanceSite as an annual event in the hosting community and its uptake in 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
- To provide an integral strategy to create

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

ITDP staffing

ITDP Numbulwar is currently staffed by ITDP Coordinator Lia Pa'apa'a who works remotely from her home in Cairns to secure funding, develop appropriate models of community engagement and provide mentoring and support to local Media Officer Ella Geia and community leader Grant Nundhirribala.

Ella Geia currently works full time for Roper Gulf Shire as the Media Officer, developing and delivering Numburindi Festival as part of her role. Artback NT paid additional wages for the out of work hours Ella provided over the festival.

Artback NT also engaged local song man and community leader Grant Nundhirribala as the artistic and cultural liaison and leader for the festival. Grant is well respected and had previous performance experience from international touring with his band Yilila. As a result, he was able to create a vision of how he

wanted the festival to look and feel, as well as advise on cultural protocols.

Numburindi Festival

Due to both funding restrictions and community priorities, it was decided the 2016 ITDP would focus on delivering a festival outcome. Numbulwar is made up of four different traditional dance groups that all have a strong cultural practice. Therefore, the same level of external support wasn't required for cultural maintenance or intergenerational exchange compared to previous ITDP sites. This allowed festival staff the opportunity to develop a best practice model of festival delivery, one that would showcase the unique culture and traditional dances, as well as bush bands from Numbulwar.

An annual festival had been a long term goal for the Numbulwar community; a festival advisory committee had already been established prior to Artback NT's engagement, however a lack of resources meant this festival couldn't be delivered. This formed the basis for the committee's decision to approach Artback NT in 2015. The committee also decided that as it was the first event of its kind in Numbulwar, it should not be open to visitors or other dance groups from neighbouring communities. Rather, the focus would be on supporting local groups, providing them with a safe space to

The site was chosen for its centrality in the community and its stunning views and beach front location.

perform publically in front of their community. This also meant organisers could learn, grow, evaluate and reflect on their experiences internally before opening up their doors to the wider community. Furthermore, as Numbulwar has limited facilities, with no public accommodation options available to visitors, an outside presence has significant impact on the community.

The dates of the 7th and 8th October were determined as they fell at the closure of the term three school holidays, while the site was chosen for its centrality in the community and its stunning views and beach front location.

Pre-festival workshops

With only a three week lead into the festival, there was limited opportunity to deliver an extensive program of pre-festival workshops, however, the level of participation, engagement and support exceeded all expectations.

A group of local men worked with the Batchelor Institute as part of their Centrelink requirements to build a stage for the event. The group came up with the design and learned both woodworking and welding skills in order to create the 10 x 3 metre stage. The crew also helped with stage set up and general onsite preparations.

A small group of women were engaged to create decorations for the festival site. The

group created a series of flags that had motifs and designs that were culturally specific to the community, as well as more general designs promoting the music and dance elements of the festival. This workshop included painting, sewing and applique and was enjoyed by all that participated. The flags became a key element, providing colour and vibrancy to the site.

Programming

There were several elements to the two day programming that needed to be considered. This included the official opening of the site, which is now known as Joshua Park in memory of an Elder from the community. To celebrate this event, the festival was opened with a parade of traditional dancers who danced from the old man's house, through the streets of the community, to the festival site. A plaque was then unveiled with speeches from appropriate family members. Numbulwar also has several local bands, so it was decided the event would consist of a night of music and another of traditional dance with the latter taking place on the Friday as a continuation of the opening ceremony for the site. Children's activities and workshops also took place alongside a marketplace on the Saturday from 2pm. This had limited attendance but all the young people who did attend enjoyed water slides and early childhood activities including face painting, drumming and free play.



Three of the bands, Yilila, NT Express and Mumbali Band were all local and appreciated the opportunity to perform with such high production values in their own community.

Dance groups and performers

Traditional groups performed on the Friday evening, with each showcasing their traditional song and dance across a 40 minute set. For groups smaller in numbers, it was heartening to see dancers from other groups support them on stage.

There was also a contemporary group called Fancy Fresh, which consisted of six young local men who performed a 15 minute set to fast paced music (much in the style of Djuki Mala). They were a huge hit with the audience and it was great to see young people utilising the event as a platform for their own dance and youth culture. There was also a crew of young local and Torres Strait islander girls who performed.

Numbulwar has several different cultural groups living within the community and there was representation from both the Tongan and Niuean communities who performed their traditional dances.

Language Group	Dance Group/ Band	Community	Performers
Nunggubuyu/Nundhirribala	Red Flag Dancers	Numbulwar	48
Nunggubuyu/Murrungun	Murrungun dancers	Numbulwar	32
Nunggubuyu/Ngalmi	Ngalmi dancers Manggurra Dancers	Numbulwar	30
Nunggubuyu/Nunggarragalu	Nunggarragalu dancers	Numbulwar	28
Nunggubuyu	Yilila Band	Numbulwar	7
Nunggubuyu	NT Express	Numbulwar	4
Nunggubuyu/Mambali Anindiliyakwa	Mambani Band	Numbulwar	6
TOTAL			155

Bands and music

The Saturday night program consisted of performances by four bands. Each played for up to 60 minutes and were enjoyed by all. Three of the bands, Yilila, NT Express and Mumbali Band were all local and appreciated the opportunity to perform with such high production values in their own

Artback NT engaged local community members across several areas of festival delivery including security, catering, and site set up and pack down.

community. The fourth, 'The Lonely Boys', were an unannounced extra who arrived half way into the night. Although it was initially decided there were to be no visiting performers, the decision was made by Grant and Ella on the spot to include them. They are currently receiving high rotation on radio in the region so they were a big hit and brought a rock star status to the event.

Children's activities and marketplace

The 2-5pm Saturday program was focused on running a suite of children's activities which included a waterslide by Roper Gulf Sports and Recreation staff, an early childhood corner with storytelling, face painting and craft play. There was also a bongo drumming circle and sporting equipment available for the young people.

The marketplace allowed local artists and community members to have a stall and test the market for their local produce. A regular marketplace is something that the community had long discussed so Numburindi Festival was a great opportunity to show the community

what was possible. Several stalls took place including Island Kaikai, service providers Northern Land Council, Roper Gulf Shire and a \$2 shop!

Festival crew employment

Artback NT engaged local community members across several areas of festival delivery including security, catering, and site set up and pack down. The production team was headed by local Darwin resident Josh Grant who teamed with Artback NT Project Officer, Eve Pawlik. They worked with locals to coordinate the festival site and manage the stage and sound.

Participants	Total 2016	Indigenous	Other
Performers	200	98%	2%
Production/Crew	20	90%	10%
Committee	16	100%	0%
Contractors	4	0%	100%
Volunteers	5	100%	0%
Audience	500+	95%	5%





Children dancing ↑

Partnerships

Due to the lack of time in the lead up and the limited funding available, partnerships were a key element to delivering the successful festival. If it had not been for the support of the local organisations listed below, the event would not have had such an impact.

Organisation	Type of Support
Roper Gulf Shire	Staffing, venue support, vehicles, staging, firewood, rubbish collection and drinking water
AirRemote	Video Documentation
Homelands	Generators and production support
Numbulwar School	Marquees, music equipment
FAFT (Families as First Teachers)	Children's Activities

Funding

The Numburindi Festival has been assisted by the Australian government through the Department of Communication and the Arts' Catalyst—Australian Arts and Culture Fund'.

The Festival was also supported through the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal and the Bertalli Family Foundation.

Artback NT is proudly sponsored by the Northern Territory Government.

Media and marketing

As the event was not available for the general public to attend there was only a very small run of posters printed to be distributed throughout the town. The rest of the publicity was achieved via Facebook and word of mouth, with weekly town meetings held in the central courtyard for public discussions and information sharing.

Highlights

The excitement and enthusiasm of the local community to get behind such an event exceeded all expectation. For many, this was the first time they had attended a festival. Organisations and individuals were incredibly generous with their time and knowledge to pull the event together in such a short amount of time. It became very evident to the organisers that this event was something the community had longed for and they utilised the opportunity to showcase the best of their cultural and artistic talents. There was also a strong sense of cultural pride and authority from within the community and this was evidenced by the intergenerational participation from all the clan groups. The result was a magical night of traditional dance on the Friday with the ocean as a backdrop and a clear starry night above.

The participation from the men in the community to build the stage was also a major highlight as many were also engaged as security, catering support or as performers, resulting in a great sense of achievement and ownership.

Challenges

Numbulwar is considered a very remote community and due to unforeseen weather conditions the road from Katherine was closed for over three weeks. This meant a significant lack of fresh produce. In addition, the decision had to be made to charter the production team in and out rather than risk road travel. This in turn meant they were only able to bring a limited amount of gear rather than the full rig that was anticipated. Furthermore, organisers didn't have a car whilst in Numbulwar, which meant a greater reliance on others to support the set up and pack down of the festival.

There were limited market stalls this year, which organisers believe was due to the lack of fresh food, as well as a limited understanding of the event layout and what the possibilities were within the marketplace context. It is hoped that now people have seen what is possible they will be able to participate more in future years.

There is no permanent electricity source at the festival site so generators had to be sourced. We were fortunate to have what was available in town at the time, however, a reliable source for future festivals will need to be found.

Summary

Overall, the inaugural Numburindi Festival was a great success, bringing the community together for two nights of culture and arts that made all present incredibly proud. Artback NT recognises the great capacity to develop new works with some of the clan groups across both traditional dance and music with the level of excellence that is available.

Future engagement in region

Artback NT is committed to a three-year engagement with the community of Numbulwar as the ITDP site. Community consultations and strategic planning will occur in late 2016 in order to devise a three-year plan for funding and program delivery.



Everyone gets involved in the Brolga Dance of the Ngalmi Clan ↑

