

Dancing with living libraries

A new dance program is fusing the expression of local Aboriginal youth with a new understanding of Aboriginal tradition and culture in the Illawarra and South Coast of NSW.

by CARLA VIOLA

Timothy Bishop is embarking on a EPIC career development opportunity. A contemporary dance artist based in Redfern, Sydney, Tim was one of five people recently selected for the Australia Council for the Arts' EPIC07 initiative, which offers emerging producers practical experience in managing a youth-focused dance or media arts project in the community.

Based at the Merringong Theatre in Nowra, Timothy is coordinating a dance program fusing the existing expression of local Aboriginal youth with a new understanding of Aboriginal tradition and culture in the Illawarra, South Coast and Nowra regions.

Australia Council executive director of community partnerships and market development, Karilyn Brown, said EPIC07 would provide valuable hands-on experience for young and emerging producers like Tim, who are looking to further their careers in dance or media arts.

"Through support for contemporary youth arts and cultural projects, EPIC07 allows us to contribute to Australia's artistic and social capital — with a particular focus on regional areas," Ms Brown said.

In July, as he was just getting underway, I interviewed Tim about his project:

Q. What are your hopes for the project?

"I'm looking to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander based contemporary dance to local Indigenous youth from Helensburgh down to Ulladulla. Finishing early in 2008, I plan to achieve this through conducting dance workshops with a view to create

a performance, either on a small local community level or through to a large, general public showing at Illawarra Performing Arts Centre

"Firstly, I hope that everyone that I get the opportunity to teach enjoys the experience. Giving the youth something to be proud about — their own culture and heritage, is a main focus.

"This project will also give me the chance to choreograph, and I'm hoping that I can create work that stretches the youth physically and culturally, and extends me creatively."

Q. What challenges do you envisage, in bringing young Indigenous people in those areas to a connection with their traditions and cultures?

"I am hoping to produce work based on any existing culture, or stories that the youth want to tell. The seed behind this idea is to give back ownership of the work to the community involved with the project. Seeking out elders with this knowledge will be a challenge, but will be equally rewarding.

"They say that when an elder dies, a library burns down. With permission, I hope to bring to light some culture specific to this region and invigorate cultural identity. This is easy to say, and but know that a lot of time shared with elders (and lots of cups of tea!) will be required to aid in this process.

"I've been given carte blanche with this project, so the ideas of what I can do with dance are changing on a daily basis. I am in a position where I am learning as the project unfolds, and am always open to other



Tim Bishop in Rainbow Valley, NT, February 2006. Photo: Yolande Brown

people's ideas and experience. Facilitating dance workshops are part of my planned outcomes, but learning from others — whether youth or elder — is equally important." ■

Contact Tim Bishop Tel 02 4226 3699 ext 118 Email tbishop@merringong.com.au

Carla Viola is an OzCo Comms Officer Tel 02 9215 9053 c.viola@ozco.gov.au

EPIC07 is supported through the Australian Government's Young and Emerging Artist Initiative for artists aged 30 years and under. For more information visit www.ozco.gov.au/epic.

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