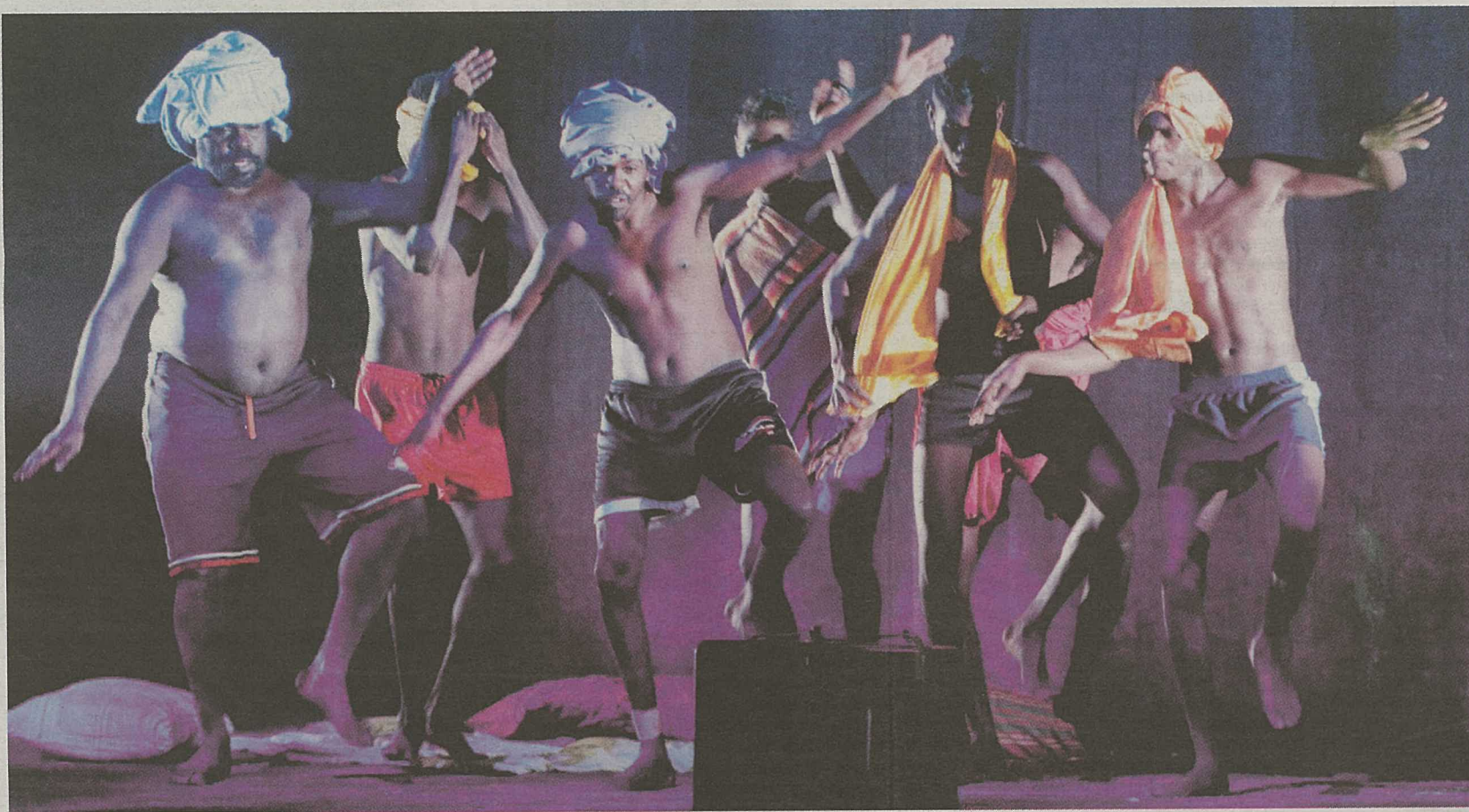


Fun and homage



Ngurrumilmarmiriyu (Wrong Skin)

Festival – Theatre
Her Majesty's Theatre, until tomorrow

The Yolngu of northeast Arnhem Land are proud custodians of a living culture that stretches back more than 40,000 years. With their ability to absorb and interpret the world around them, they'll be kicking up the dust with their music and ceremony for thousands more.

The Adelaide Festival's music-dance-theatre extravaganza with the Chooky Dancers from Elcho Island is irreverent, crazy, sublime, humbling evidence of this.

If you haven't seen their Zorba Dance Yolngu-style on YouTube, the thrilling music and movement mash that made them international stars, it's

in *Wrong Skin*. Nigel Jamieson, Gavin Robins and Joshua Bond use it to launch this cross-artform, cross-cultural, multimedia performance built around the exciting all-male ensemble, two extraordinary female performers and two mesmerising elder songmen.

But it won't prepare you for the sight of seven Aboriginal youths stamping their feet on a dirt stage and twirling umbrellas to *Singing in the Rain*, or falling into line for Bollywood and Hollywood-inspired routines.

The entertainment meter hit the roof on opening night and the audience went wild with delight.

But there's more to the 80-minute show than the mop-topped, limber-legged, thoroughly beguiling Chooky Dancers. There's traditional Aboriginal ceremony, a Romeo and Juliet-style love story about the Yolngu's strict kinship system, TV images, dance music, political statements, newsbites, documentary, mobile phones and film that sets Elcho

Island's spectacular landscape against the often harsh reality for those who live there.

Thankfully, the Yolngu are hard-wired to dance. As well as their own traditions, footage of children hitting the bitumen at the Elcho Island disco makes you realise how long the Chooky Dancers have been defining and redefining their moves.

They're fast, funny, sexy and smart, utterly dignified and refreshingly unaffected. They pay homage to Yolngu culture while having fun with it in the 21st century.

It's a winner for Festival director Paul Grabowsky, not necessarily in the context of a show where all the ideas are neatly nailed down, but in the context of something just as rewarding.

It's a peek at where culture is heading in a world where technology adds another dimension to the idea that we really are all connected. Trust the Yolngu to lead the way.

Louise Nunn