Djuki Mala (The Chooky Dancers) At The Garden Of Unearthly Delights – Adelaide Fringe Review

The Garden Of Unearthly Delights' Aurora Spiegeltent, Tue Mar 10

Djuki Mala certainly know how to entice a smile! But this is not purely a show for entertainment value; this is an event full of heart and humanity. Following a respectful welcome to elders and family, and an acknowledgement to the traditional caretakers of country, the stage blackens before illuminating with beautiful images of sand, feet and land. Elder Margaret Nyungunyungu and others, through several short video clips, speak of the joys of life as well as the many challenges within their small Elcho Island community. 'Big Frank' (Nyungunyungu's late husband) was a strong promoter of physical and mental health amongst the youth. He organised community festivals where the last group left to dance, the ones remaining when the sun came up and the rooster crowed, came to be known as the 'Chooky Dancers'.

The Chooky Dancers became accidental YouTube sensations when their cheeky rendition of *Zorba The Greek* was uploaded back in 2007. The compelling mixture of traditional and contemporary dance notched up some half a million views within twelve weeks. What was less known was the backstory of the tragedy behind the performance; the sickness which befell a loved one, and the subsequent dance performed as a 'thank you' to the Greek lady appointed carer until her death. Since then The Chooky Dancers have changed their name to Djuki Mala and continue to work up routines of equal depth and humour, performing in many countries across the world.

The range of styles Djuki Mala take on is impressive, from the intensity of indigenous dance, to hilarious Bollywood and disco reinterpretations. And ever present is a sense of rawness and absolute charm. Although choreography and technique may not always be slick the vitality of these fit young men is evident, and their spirit, passion, and enjoyment shine brightly.

Jenna Bonavita