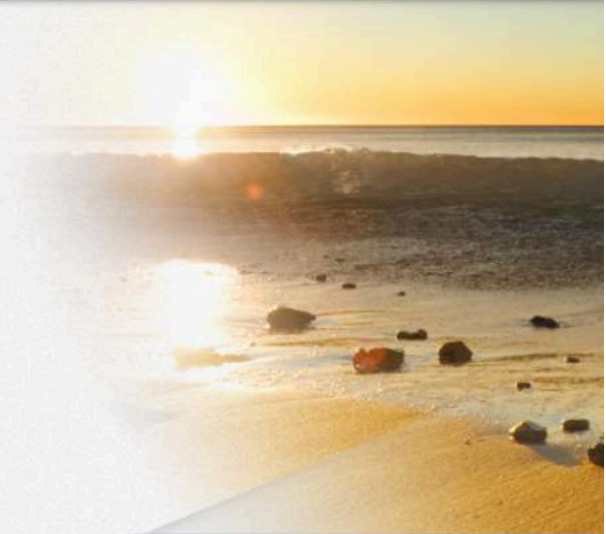




20 JAN 2016 - 4:37PM

Djuki Mala dancer draws inspiration from an unlikely source



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Standing on Gadigal country getting ready for opening night at the Sydney Festival, Djuki Mala dancer Yalyalwuy Gondarra is a long way from Yolngu country in north east Arnhemland. He spoke to NITV's Malarndirri McCarthy on how a Greek story combined with his Yolngu culture, helped him get to where he is today.

By Malarndirri McCarthy
Source: NITV News

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The year is 2007. It's September 30, end of 'The Dry' and just in time for the humid hot weather 'build up' in Ramingining in the Northern Territory where only a cluster of stringy bark trees can provide some relief from the glaring sun.


So of course it's night time, the coolest part of the Arnhemland day and the best time for bungul, where families gather to dance and perform ceremony.


Photos: Meet the Djuki Mala dancers





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On this night the Yolngu people of Ramingining in north-east Arnhemland prepare for a bungul on the very worn but familiar community basketball court.

The usual mesmerising rhythm of the yidaki, or didgeridoo, is replaced with musical sounds from Greece. It's still hard to fathom how the oldest culture in the world was on this night performing bungul to a tune which Greeks have been dancing to since the 1960's.

For 13-year-old Yolngu boy, Yalyalwuy Gondarra it's a dance that ignites his imagination.

Cretan Author Nikos Kazantzakis wrote the novel, 'Zorba the Greek' in 1946, which was then followed by the film 'Zorba the Greek' in 1964 with composer Mikis Theodorakis penning the theme song.

Neither Kazantzakis or Theodorakis could ever have imagined their work would be so celebrated on the mystical lands of the Yolngu.

Gondarra grew up on Galiwinku (Elcho Island), a neighbouring island to the mainland community of Ramingining, but kinships are so deeply interwoven that geography connects all family links.

He knows the traditional dances of his people, and now nearly ten years on he carries the story of that night in his heart.



"Before the Zorba dance, my role models were Michael Jackson and other 80's singers," he tells NITV as he prepares for his first night performance at the Sydney Festival.

Gondarra shares the story of how 'Zorba the Greek' became such an online phenomenon which catapulted the Yolngu dancers on the international stage.

"His name is Lionel, he started it because his sister was sick, the carer was a Greek lady so when she passed away then Lionel he think of a dance, the Zorba dance to give thanks to the Greek lady. So that's why we did Zorba."

Gondarra says of his Sydney audience he hopes they "understand to see where we come from , who we are, and to recognise our culture."

"I have been to Canada, Solomon islands, Beijing," he tells NITV.

After Sydney Gondarra flies to Montreal with the other Djuki Mala dancers, Baykali Ganambarr, Danzal Baker, Gadidjirimiwuy Dhamarrandji and Bapadjambang Atu, and Artistic Director Joshua Bond.

Not bad for a 23-year-old who dreamed big under the stringy bark trees of Arnhemland.



The Djuki Mala dancers are performing in the Magic Mirrors Spiegeltent in Hyde Park as part of the Sydney Festival from January 19-24, 2016.



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