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# SYDNEY FESTIVAL REVIEW: DJUKI MALA

Arts and Entertainment Front Page Theatre January 22, 2016 No Comments Kerrie Davies  
Djuki Mala, Sydney Festival 2016



Djuki Mala perform during the 2016 Sydney Festival Photo: Jamie Williams

Sydney Festival's poster girl is Meow Meow whose orange mermaid fish lips adorn bus stops across the city. But while the cabaret performer is dominating publicity, the Magic Mirrors Spiegelent in which she performs is also hosting lower profile yet equally dynamic acts such as the Elcho Island dance troupe, [Djuki Mala \(The Chooky Dancers\)](#).

Since their first performance of Zorba the Greek on a basketball court in Ramining, Arnhem Land in 2007, Djuki Mala – Djuki being the Yolngu accent for chooky and mala meaning mob – the troupe has been critically acclaimed and nominated for a Helpmann award.

Their playful, Indigenous take on Zorba the Greek that day on the court, inspired by a Greek lady who helped Djuki Mala's founder 'Big Frank's daughter Priscilla while she was in a Darwin hospital, resulted in more than 500,000 YouTube hits. The clip now has over 2.5 million views.



Djuki Mala present a cultural and comic festival treat Photo: Jamie Williams

Powered by a fluid energy and comic timing, Djuki Mala also perform Indigenous twists on Bollywood and Michael Jackson's "Billy Jean". They clearly revel in the audience response. Prior to the show, artistic director Joshua Bond said: "This is not the opera or the ballet. We want you to clap and stamp your feet whenever you feel like it."

Despite this playfulness Djuki Mala is no silly show, but politically and culturally formed. The performance begins with a massive stop sign to closing Aboriginal communities and a traditional ceremonial dance backdropped by a film of "Country". The dances are interspersed with documentary interviews about how they are continuing, and teaching, Indigenous culture to the next generation.

The most impactful dance is Djuki Mala's claiming of Gene Kelly's "Singin' In the Rain" that begins with the musical's classic dance steps, then as the other dancers join in with umbrellas, it metamorphoses into a politically charged dance sampled with Indigenous music.

Of all the dances, "Singin' In the Rain" best marries the political, the playful, the cultural and the comic elements that so vividly characterise Djuki Mala's excellent performances

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