



June 2014

Queensland Theatre Company and Brisbane Festival, in association with Queensland Performing Arts Centre and The Balnaves Foundation present

Black Diggers

Telling the untold story of Indigenous soldiers in WWI
A Queensland Theatre Company & Sydney Festival production

The landmark, critically acclaimed production *Black Diggers* tells the untold story of Indigenous soldiers in WWI and will open in Brisbane on September 25 at the Playhouse QPAC as part of Brisbane Festival.

Directed by Queensland Theatre Company's Artistic Director, **Wesley Enoch**, and written by **Tom Wright**, *Black Diggers* uncovers the contribution of WWI Aboriginal Diggers, following their exceptional stories from their homelands to the battlefields of Gallipoli, Palestine and Flanders. An extraordinary all-male, all-Indigenous cast will evoke these heroic men, largely unrecognised by history.

The production, a collaboration between Queensland Theatre Company (QTC), Brisbane Festival and Sydney Festival in association with QPAC and The Balnaves Foundation, is a work of immense importance and is being staged as the centenary of WWI is marked. Its Brisbane season follows the world premiere sold-out season at the Sydney Opera House as part of Sydney Festival.

QTC's Wesley Enoch said *Black Diggers* is long overdue. "One hundred years ago, men all over the world enlisted to fight in WWI – including over a thousand Indigenous Australians. Discriminated against in their own country, they took up arms to defend the fledgling nation," he said. "Drawing upon new research and extensive consultation, the production reclaims the black Diggers' place in Australia's wartime legacy."

"When history has forgotten people they find ways of telling the stories. The history of conflict in this country goes hand in hand with stories of survival. *Black Diggers* is a collection of stories about the men who fought for this country and in this country. The war they faced was as much for recognition as it was for King and country and their legacy can be seen in the reconciliation movement of today ... black and white fighting together to overcome injustice."

Brisbane Festival Artistic Director Noel Staunton said he was excited to have QTC back as part of the festival.

"The cast of *Black Diggers* help to tell one of this country's most important stories, made even more poignant by the painstaking research that has gone into this production by the state's flagship theatre company," Mr Staunton said.

Moving through three phases of Indigenous soldiers' involvement in the Great War – enlistment, life in the trenches, and returning home – to tell an amalgam of black Diggers' experiences and representations, the story of *Douglas Grant is central to the play.

Black Diggers is a story of honour and sacrifice that has been almost forgotten. It draws from interviews with the families of 15 black Diggers who heard the call to arms – men who will step from the blank pages of history to share their compelling stories. After the curtain falls, we will remember them.



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Black Diggers

Telling the untold story of Indigenous soldiers in WWI

A Queensland Theatre Company and Sydney Festival Production

By Tom Wright

24 September to 12 October at the Playhouse, QPAC

Director: Wesley Enoch

Set Designer: Stephen Curtis

Costume Designer: Ruby Langton-Batty

Lighting Designer: Ben Hughes

Composer/Sound Designer: Tony Brumpton

Dramaturg: Louise Gough

Cultural Consultant: George Bostock

Researcher: David Williams

Cast: George Bostock, Luke Carroll, David Page, Hunter Page-Lochard, Guy Simon, Colin Smith, Eliah Watego, Tibian Wyles.

Tickets are available at queenslandtheatre.com.au or by calling 1800 355 528.

***ABOUT DOUGLAS GRANT**

Grant was born in approximately 1885 in the Bellenden Ker Ranges in Queensland. As a baby, his parents were killed in either a massacre or a raid, and he was rescued by two members of a collecting expedition from the Australian Museum, Robert Grant and EJ Cairn. Sent to Robert's parents in Lithgow, Robert later adopted Douglas, who was raised and educated with his son Henry in Annandale. Douglas worked as a draughtsman in Sydney for 10 years before enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force in 1916. While regulations against Aboriginals leaving the country without government approval initially prevented Douglas from leaving with his Battalion, regulations were later lifted and he left for France in August that same year. In April 1917, Grant was wounded and captured in Bullecourt and held as a Prisoner of War at Wittenburg, where he was studied by German doctors, scientists and anthropologists as an object of curiosity. Repatriated to England in 1918, he visited his foster parents' relatives in Scotland and the next year embarked for Australia. Demobilised in July that year, he went back to work as a draughtsman before moving to Lithgow to work as a labourer. He was active in returned servicemen's affairs and ran a Digger's session on local radio. By the 1930s his foster parents and brother had died and he went to Sydney, where he worked as a clerk at Callan Park Mental Asylum (although some reports suggest he was an inmate). He died in 1951 in Prince Henry Hospital. He was unmarried. Grant suffered profound rejection on his return home and developed alcohol problems. He was a literate man, and could play the bagpipes. He had, when he wanted to, a thick Scottish accent. There is a lot of conflicting research when it comes to Douglas Grant, and other Indigenous soldiers in World War One. This is just one version of his narrative.