

BLOKES – What’s it about?

CREATIVE RATIONALE

Blokes is an investigation into the archetype of the Australian bloke. Using their own cultural heritage as a starting point, dance artists Matt Cornell & Josh Thomson aim to understand what it really means to be a ‘bloke’ today, by spending time with the very men who define themselves as such.

Blokes will be created through gathering, recording & connecting the stories of men from regional & remote parts of Australia. The result will inform the strong beginnings of a dance piece uniquely of this country; a homage to the men whose stories they are, & to communities from which the stories have come. What is the cultural definition of an Australian bloke? What are the social systems that have developed around this particularly Australian male culture, & how do these systems both constrain & liberate those who are a part of it?

To be developed throughout regional & remote parts of the NT, **Blokes** will explore the lives & times of the Australian ‘bloke’, a section of society not often given a voice within contemporary dance. In particular, stories of older men will be given attention. The aim is to capture & ultimately preserve a sense of culture, place, & significantly, identity, which we hope will resonate beyond standard stereotypes of the Aussie man.

The artists’ recognition of their fathers’ lives as truck driver & bricklayer respectively, their own experiences of physical labour undertaken with them, & the personal relationship each man has with his father is the genesis of this project. Their belief is that although each man’s life is unique, there are common threads across their experience & life approaches. It is this commonality they aim to work at drawing out & use to illuminate both the subjects & by extension, ourselves, in a way other than as a caricature of type.

The raw physicality of the Australian ‘bloke’ lends itself beautifully to evolving innovative dance movement for this project. As dancers & young men who have engaged with their male elders in physical ways throughout their lives, Matt & Josh are well placed to interrogate the rhythms & ‘silent symphonies’ of manual work, & develop ways to make this movement something beautiful & honourable to behold.

PROCESS

The shape planned for this creative development will involve research, interviews & short apprenticeships with the ‘bokes’ of the title. During their 6.5 weeks in the field, the artists will record sound & image, begin to choreograph, & share their processes with the wider community. We are aiming for a small development showing in Adelaide River at the end of Week 2 with some of the men & their families, however three formal work-in-progress showings with opportunities for viewer feedback have been programmed into the Darwin Festival, & will take place over 23-24 August.

The artists will spend time with Australian ‘bokes’, & research their subjects via participatory activity. Working in situ with the men on their own projects across the Top End, they will undertake ‘speed-apprenticeships’ alongside them & use the time to hear their stories, absorb their physicality & learn more about their approaches to the world first-hand.

Key in Cornell & Thomson’s artistic process are the bokes themselves. It is the men’s energy, their relationship to their families & communities, & their sense of their own place in society that will shape &, ultimately, define this project. The work’s underpinnings stems from childhood experience of the men Matt & Josh grew up around. Both children of working class families, they observed (& were inducted into) the quite particular ways Australian men – bokes - interact with each other & wider society.

BEYOND BLOKES

Blokes has great potential to bring fresh eyes to Australian male culture. By drawing on their fathers' lived experience, Cornell & Thomson will bring lives not usually explored in contemporary dance to the contemporary canon. Through hands-on investigation in outback Australia, the process of contemporary dance making is immediately accessible to a wider community.

The approachable subject matter has potential to draw audiences for whom most contemporary dance work is irrelevant. Conversely, exploring concepts of masculinity through contemporary dance brings to existing audiences the Australian male viewpoint which may well have been considered irrelevant in urban centres.

At this early stage, we are exploring the possibilities of a range of presentation formats for the full work, which may allow staging in non-traditional theatre spaces into the future. We see this as an exciting prospect, particularly for festivals & small regional spaces, however the likelihood of this will become clearer after the development's completion.

Particularly well suited for a festival context, we hope to promote **Blokes** in these arenas. The work's content & potentially versatile form of presentation is also likely to have particular resonance with regional audiences, so key regional presenters will be invited to the Darwin Festival showing.

For further information, please contact Narelle Lewis, Producer:

narelle@performinglines.org.au

Ph: 02 9319 0066

Mob: 0407 281 602