

# My Cousin Frank

Written and told by Rhoda Roberts AO

A NORPA Production

**Dates:** Mon 3 – Wed 5 March

**Venue:** Space Theatre

**Duration:** 1 hr 15 mins, no interval

**Note:** Performed in English and Bundjalung.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that this performance contains images and names of people who have passed away.

**Credits:**

**Writer & Performer** Rhoda Roberts AO

**Director** Kirk Page

**Associate Director** Julian Louis

**Lighting Design** Karl Johnson

**AV Design** Mic Gruchy and Jahvis Loveday

**Sound Design** Damian Robinson

**Producer** Libby Lincoln

**Production Manager** Karl Johnson

**Stage Manager** Sheridyn Dalton

**AV Operator** Patrick Bolliger

**Rhoda dressed by** Ella Lincoln

## **FROM RHODA ROBERTS AO**

In the Kurna language, Adelaide is called "Tarntanya," meaning "red kangaroo place." We pay our deepest respects to this land, shaped by the ancestors, we recognise the custodians for their persistent stewardship. We humbly thank the knowledge holders for their continued presence and the passing of wisdom. We acknowledge the tradition bearers and their generous ways, of always welcoming us onto Country in the mother tongue of their forebears.

I am so proud to be sharing this part of our family story and to put Lismore, NSW on the map as the home of the first Aboriginal Olympian. My Cousin Frank provides insight into why boxing was so important in our family, the limited pathways out of poverty, the push for education, the story of Cubawee Aboriginal Reserve, our family and community.

When the floods hit, I wondered who would return to our Widjabul Wia-bul country. There was a deep sense of disaster, but also a collective spirit of community coming together. It was heartening to see resources shared, food exchanged, and people from all walks of life embracing each other after experiencing the shared story of devastation. At NORPA, even before the floods we had started creating work around the river - the lifeblood that nourished our people across the district. And it struck me that Lismore is home to Australia's first Aboriginal Olympian signed to an Olympic Team, a fact that had been largely overlooked. Imagine how proud Lismoreans would be to know this part of their history.

Since working on the project with the team, now, they do see him—Cousin Frank has become a warrior, a sportsman, and a local hero, and his story is no longer overlooked. Knowing of Cousin Frank's contributions have earned him the respect and admiration he truly deserves, ensuring our people have visibility, making sure our voices are heard.

The process of writing this story has been a deeply personal and transformative one, involving extensive research, community consultation, and my own reflections. It's been a journey of uncovering my family's history and ensuring the authenticity of the narrative, all while aiming to make an impact on the audience. I am incredibly grateful for the trust the family has placed in me to tell this story.

This production offers a layered exploration of the significant contributions, struggles, dreams, and vision of First Nations people. Through Frank's journey, it mirrors the broader story of rights and recognition, from the Second World War to the progressive shifts of the 60s and 70s. Despite the progress made, much remains unchanged. The show serves as both a celebration of achievements and a call for deeper reflection on our past and the work still to be done.

I'm truly indebted and feel honoured to have the opportunity to share this story. A big thank you to Brett Sheahy for the invitation and to the festival team for taking such great care of us. I'd also like to express my gratitude to Kirk Page, who co-created and directed this experience with NORPA, and to Julian Louis and NORPA, and all the creative team for further developing it for Tarnta. The creative team's collaboration made this production a careful curation of vital elements, each contributing to the telling of this story. I hope it resonates with you all.

**Rhoda Roberts AO**

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Rhoda Roberts AO

Rhoda Roberts AO is a Widjabul Wia-bul woman of the Bundjalung Nation. She is an award-winning producer, artistic director, journalist, broadcaster, actor and arts advisor who continues to make a vital contribution to the media, performing and Indigenous arts in Australia. Amongst her many achievements Rhoda co-founded Australia's national Aboriginal theatre company, was the first Aboriginal presenter on prime-time TV, founded and directed the Festival of Dreaming and was Head of First Nations Programming for the Sydney Opera House. She was awarded an Order of Australia in 2016 for distinguished service to the performing arts. Rhoda is NORPA's Creative Director of First Nations, Creative Director of the Parrtjima Festival in Alice Springs and Director of the Boomerang Festival.

### Kirk Page

Kirk Page is a Screen Practitioner, Theatre Maker, Movement Consultant, Choreographer and Director. Widely acclaimed for his physical theatre, aerial and dance work, Kirk has appeared in Martin del Amo's *Slow Dances for Fast times*. He also performed at the Catapult Festival for the Bathurst Regional Council, *Ochres* for Bangarra Dance Theatre, which toured Australia and internationally, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Opera Australia and performed numerous times for Legs on the Wall, in productions including *Eora Crossing* and *Runners Up*. In musical theatre, Kirk has appeared in *Priscilla* for Back Row Productions, *The Sunshine Club* for Sydney Theatre Company, *Corrugation Road* for Black Swan Theatre Company, *Dreamland* for NORPA and *One Night the Moon* for Malthouse Theatre. On screen, Kirk played the lead in *Bloodlines* for SBS Films and the Australian Film Commission and also appeared in the film *Shadow Play* for Porchlight Films. He has also appeared in the ABC television series *Redfern Now*. As a Movement Director, Kirk has worked in film, television and theatre. Having worked on the ABC's *My Place* and on feature film *Bran Nue Dae*, in 2006 he also choreographed the Indigenous section of the Melbourne Commonwealth Games *My Skin, My Life*. Kirk was also as Assistant Director for *Bloodland* and worked as an outside eye for *Posts in the Paddock My Darling Patricia*.

### Julian Louis

Julian is a theatre-maker and Artistic Director of NORPA, where he develops and supports multi-art form work that combines physical theatre, dance, music, and text. For NORPA Julian has conceived and directed large-scale, site-specific work often built through a devised theatre process. This body of work includes *Love For One Night* (2022) - set at The Eltham Hotel, *Dreamland* (2016, 2019) - set in community halls and *Railway Wonderland* (2012, 2015) set on Lismore's disused railway station. In 2015, Julian co-directed *Cockfight with The Farm* which has toured extensively. Prior to NORPA, Julian led independent theatre company State of Play, making works for Sydney Festival and state-wide tours. He has also taught acting and movement at The Actors Centre, The Conservatorium of Music and ATYP among many others. Other previous credits include Artistic Director of 13/26/52/78 Storey Treehouse stage shows (Sydney Opera House & national International Tours). He is a graduate of Charles Sturt University Theatre /Media, NIDA's Directing program and trained in physical theatre and acting with Philippe Gaulier in London.

### Mic Gruchy

Mic works across stage, screen and video art. He is a pioneer of Video Design for Theatre, designing shows for all the major companies and festivals around Australia over more than 30 years. He has created video designs for theatre, opera and dance around Australia, in London's West End, across Europe and in Asia. His shows have won Helpmann Awards and he was awarded a Creative Australia Established Artist's Fellowship for Interdisciplinary Practice in 2012. He has edited feature films, TV, documentaries and his video artworks are in collections and museums around the world. Commissioned

works include installations for the Sydney Opera House, Sydney Olympic Park and the Biennale of Sydney. Mic teaches as Head of Video Design at NIDA, the National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney.

## **Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA)**

Based in Lismore in Northern NSW, NORPA is a not-for-profit theatre company with a thirty-year track record of making original Australian work inspired by its surrounding country and culture. NORPA makes bold and vital theatre for everyone and are recognised for creating work at the intersection of community, place and popular theatre. NORPA supports artform and artist development, youth engagement, and is dedicated to supporting First Nations and Indigenous artists to tell their stories and develop creative works about Bundjalung country. Since losing its 30-year-old home and theatre in the 2022 Lismore Flood, NORPA is focussed on creating a new flood resilient and contemporary home in Lismore's CBD. From here the company will continue creating and presenting original site-specific productions in iconic locations, and once again be a creative hub for the Northern Rivers performing artists.

NORPA holds an awarded track record for creating ambitious theatre works that attracts large audiences. These include *Railway Wonderland* (2012, 2015) set on a disused railway station, *Dreamland* (2016, 2019) presented in local halls, and *Wildskin* (2024) staged in a large rural shed. *Flow* (2019, 2023) was restaged as free, outdoor music concerts telling the dreaming story of Bundjalung and Yaegl people's connection to water. Our 2024 production *Love For One Night* at the Eltham Hotel was recognised by the Australian Performing Arts Centres peak body (PAC) winning an IMPACT Award in 2023 and gained national and local media coverage. NORPA brings homegrown stories to life in locations that prove small towns have big creative potential. NORPA is led by Julian Louis (Artistic Director) and Libby Lincoln (Executive Director).

## **NORPA Board**

Damian Kassagbi (Acting Chair)

Jen Djula

Jill Eddington (Secretary)

Bill Harris

Edwina Johnson

Julian Louis

Kate Stroud

Luke Sullivan

Meredith Wray

Mitzi Zaphir (Treasurer)

## **NORPA Executive**

Julian Louis – Artistic Director

Libby Lincoln – Executive Director

[Norpa.org.au](http://Norpa.org.au)

[instagram.com/norpalismore/](https://www.instagram.com/norpalismore/)

[facebook.com/norpa.lismore](https://www.facebook.com/norpa.lismore)

[info@norpa.org.au](mailto:info@norpa.org.au)