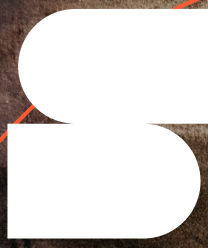




# PLANT A PROMISE



Sydney  
Festival  
2025

# PLANT A PROMISE

Henrietta Baird

WORLD PREMIERE

The Studio Theatre at Bangarra

22-25 January

55 minutes (no interval)

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## CAST AND CREDITS

**Concept and Creative Lead** Henrietta Baird

**Elders** Aunties Leonie Coleman, Reatha Williams & Lois Baird, Uncle Allan Baird

**Weavers** Florience and Adalene Williams

**Dancer** Tara Robertson

**Dancer** Andrea Adidi

**Dancer** Harlisha Newie-Joe

**Dramaturg** Vicki Van Hout

**Design** Lara Week

**Sound Design** Andrew Batt Rawden

**Lighting Design** Priyanka Martin

**Digital Design** Marian Abboud

**Pyrotechnician** Mike Roberts

**Lighting Operator** Anastassia Korolev

**Production Manager** Annie Winter

**Creative Producer** Pippa Bailey

## ABOUT THE SHOW

Inspired by the 2019-20 summer of fires and growing concern about the changing climate, *Plant a Promise* is a multidisciplinary work in four parts: a dance performance, Baya (fire) installation, community planting and yarns that weave together Indigenous knowledge and environmental science to share about the importance of caring for Country.

We have created a multifaceted experience, inviting the audience to be a part of a greater conversation around caring for Country. Walk into a state of emergency triggered by the smell of fire and danger, follow the displacement of home and connection.

We look at the leaders of the world making decisions that only benefit a few. We feel the stress of our ecosystem and migration after the fires, as epicormic growth leads to planting a promise.

We know our old people were scientists before the title 'scientist' was introduced. This work voices conversations of caring for Country from a First Nations perspective, inviting non-Indigenous people to care for Country too.

Country is letting us know she is not well. Listening to Country is vital, as everyday stories are woven through this work to try and assess the way we behave and how to live and practice a sustainable life, with appreciation for plants, healing of Country and all she does for us.

*Plant a Promise* is a call to action, a heartfelt plea to make a promise to take better care of Country and the natural world.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE CREATOR

How to get people to care for Mother Earth in a careless country?

As a collective we say we'll make more of an effort but when it comes to caring for the old girl, what are we actually doing? Based on experiences of the summer of fire in NSW, if you were not in the line of the fires, it was something happening somewhere else to someone else. But as smoke started to infiltrate the city, it was undeniable, there was no escape and we became part of this devastating story.

That was five years ago. Now it's common see and hear that fires have affected different countries, but not all countries are used to big fire events. And it's not just fire, it's floods. Seeing my family in the community of Wujal Wujal and in Kuranda underwater in 2023, one of the worst floods we'd experienced, with family airlifted by black hawk helicopters to safety, we realised again how devastating this Earth crisis is. Family were not able to go home for months. Country still there, home not the same. And as we prepare for this Sydney Festival, severe fires are burning in Victoria and South Australia.

Fire is a major topic in life, because in our Country plants need fire to germinate, and we see from a cultural aspect that it brings new life. The centre of

conversations and ceremonies, fire is important, it feeds you, it keeps you warm. This comes from years of practice of our old people reading the land and understanding how to use the fire to look after the land.

From a western point of view, learning about land management was interesting – there was no understanding of how to care for it as a whole system, and I found that I needed to learn from my own people as information was missing. So *Plant a Promise* is linking different art forms, different sites and different approaches to try and share a holistic cultural understanding of how we are all connected. These connections help us explore what we can do now to care for Country and have it for longer.

– Henrietta Baird

### HENRIETTA BAIRD

Henrietta Baird is a proud Kuku Yalanji woman from Kuranda in Far North Queensland. She studied at NAISDA (National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association) Dance College and has performed and collaborated with many notable First Nations artists and productions, that have toured nationally and internationally.

Henrietta wrote her first script *The Weekend* as part of Yellamundie Festival 2017. It was developed at Weesageechak Begins to Dance Festival, 2017 in Canada. *The Weekend* premiered at Sydney Festival 2019 and then toured to Kia Mau Festival, 2019 in New Zealand. Henrietta has two new projects in development - *Pretty One, Sexy One, Anyone* a new play about her experiences in the online dating scene and *Ngaya Bubu* - exploring Kuku Yalanji language through her Aboriginal and Scottish ancestry.

### PLANT A PROMISE

The *Plant a Promise* creative team is a collection of highly regarded First Nations and non-Indigenous artists, brought together to weave skills and ideas that bring this complex work to life.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Plant a Promise* is a proudly independent work. Delayed by COVID-19, this project has undergone various developments since 2022. As independent artwork becomes increasingly challenging to create, we are grateful to all those who have supported this journey including: Clarence Slockee, Noleen Baird, Neville Boney, Glen Thomas, Jacob Boehme, Vivien Donohue, Telfia Joseph, Kyle Dhinawan, Lyle Hunt, Open Life Studios, Alexander Murphy, Jestin George, Melinda Omokaro, Sue Healey, Claire Hicks, Sophie Daniel, Victor Steffensen, Vanessa Kavanagh, Dr Brett Summerell, Julie Vulcan, Lee-Anne Litton and Alejandro Rolandi, Dr Lyndal Hardstaff, Jasmin Shepphard, Agnès Michelet, Neil Godfrey, Matt Mackay, Darren Charlwood, Tim Bishop, Uncle Matthew Doyle, Peta Strachan and Christine Donnelly.

Critical Path has supported the development of this work with a Truth Telling Research Residency in 2023 and Carriageworks, who supported Henrietta as the inaugural recipient of a First Nations Fellowship 2022-23. *Plant a Promise* is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW and by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.

Sydney Festival sincerely thanks The Scully Fund, Oranges & Sardines Foundation and all our private donors whose generosity and support helped to make this production possible.

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