

DJUKI MALA

Presented by Artback NT: Arts Development and Touring

[chooky]
[dancers]

Here's a challenge: watch 'Zorba the Greek Yolngu Style' on YouTube and try not to laugh and forward it to everyone you know. This month we meet the Chooky Dancers as they gear up for a national tour of their long-awaited, self-titled new show Djuki Mala.

By Anna Dowd

Hailing from the remote community of Elcho Island in North East Arnhem Land, this group of young artists has been on a wild ride since their Zorba creation catapulted them onto the world stage in 2007. The Chooky's utterly original brand of physical language marrying acrobatics, clowning, theatre and traditional and contemporary dance has taken them across the globe, delighting audiences at comedy and cultural festivals in the USA, Canada, Asia and across Australia.

Producer and director Joshua Bond grew up on Elcho Island speaking the local language, Djambarrpuyngu, and has been with the Chookys through much of their journey. He says their audiences always walk away with a lot of questions and this new show intends to drop the curtain and let people in. "Who are these people? How did they even come across Zorba the Greek? There's always so many questions," says Bond. "This is a chance to get a bit close and personal."

With autobiographical elements, Djuki Mala weaves physical storytelling with video and audio from Elcho Islanders to paint a picture of the key moments – both tragic and joyous – that have shaped the lives of the group's members. And to further drop the curtain, performers open the forum up to questions from the audience after the show.

And it's catching. "Go out to the communities and there's a plethora of new dance groups popping up everywhere," Bond says. "It's empowered so many young people; whether dancing, or telling their own story or just being proud young Aboriginal kids."

Whatever your understanding of this part of the world, Djuki Mala promises to be a rare insight into the lives and experiences of these young Yolngu artists and the life of their community. And all with a large dose of trademark Chooky fun, cheek and humour.

Djuki Mala will kick off the tour in Darwin and see over 40 regional and major centre performances Australia wide throughout 2014. Artback NT Performing Arts Touring Manager Angela O'Donnell says the arts have been a significant employer for remote artists for a long time, and the Chooky dancers are a shining example of that. "They are undoubtedly one of the Territory's greatest exports."

When: Fri 28 Feb | 8pm

Where: Darwin Entertainment Centre

Cost: \$35 | \$30 Conc & Child

Info: artbacknt.com.au

NT TOUR

Where: Godinmayin Yijards Rivers Arts and Culture Centre, Katherine

When: Sat 1 Mar

Where: Barkly Regional Arts – Nyinkka Nyunyu, Tennant Creek

When: Tue 4 Mar

Where: Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs

When: Thu 6 Mar

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Photo By Wayne Quilliam

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