

AUSTRALIA

DANCE

# COLOSSUS

STEPHANIE LAKE COMPANY

## EDUCATION RESOURCE



Image: Mark Gambino

**PERTH  
FESTIVAL**

Founder

Principal Partner



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Perth Festival respects the Noongar people who remain the spiritual and cultural birdiyanga of this kwobidak boodjar. We honour the significant role they play for our community and our Festival to flourish.

# CREDITS

**Choreographer** Stephanie Lake

**Lighting Designer** Bosco Shaw

**Composition & Sound Designer** Robin Fox

**Costume Designer** Harriet Oxley

**Dancers** From the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts and LINK Dance Company

**Producer** Claire Bradley Duke

# BIOGRAPHIES

## STEPHANIE LAKE COMPANY

Stephanie Lake Company is a multi-award-winning Australian dance company that tours the world. Known for a gutsy, poetic choreographic style and striking visual aesthetic, Stephanie Lake Company strives to create performances that are affecting and relevant. Working in collaboration with Australia's leading dancers, designers and composers, the company has been presented in major festivals and venues around Australia and toured internationally to France, Germany, Hong Kong, Denmark, Singapore and the UK. Artistic Director Stephanie Lake has won Helpmann, Green Room and Australian Dance Awards for Choreography and is a Sidney Myer and Australia Council Fellow.

## STEPHANIE LAKE

### CHOREOGRAPHER

Stephanie Lake is a multi-award-winning Australian choreographer, dancer and director of Stephanie Lake Company. Her major works including *Colossus*, *Replica*, *Pile of Bones*, *Double Blind*, *DUAL*, *A Small Prometheus*, *AORTA* and *Mix Tape* have been presented by Melbourne International Arts Festival, Sydney Festival, Dance Massive, Arts House, Sydney Opera House, Theatre National de Chaillot (Paris), Theater im Pfalzbau (Germany), Dublin Dance Festival, Tramway (Glasgow), M1 Contact Festival (Singapore), Aarhus Festival (Denmark) and Hong Kong Arts Festival among others.

In 2013 Lake was appointed inaugural Resident Director of Lucy Guerin Inc, which included working as Guerin's choreographic assistant at Lyon Opera Ballet. She received a prestigious Sydney Myer Creative Fellowship in the same year and the Dame Peggy Van Praagh Choreographic Fellowship in 2012.

Lake has been commissioned by Sydney Dance Company, Chunky Move, Queensland Ballet, Dancenorth, New Zealand Dance Company, Tasdance, Expressions Dance Company, Stompin, Frontier Danceland (Singapore), Sydney Symphony and the Victorian College of the Arts. She collaborates across theatre, film and TV, visual art and music video and has directed several large-scale public works involving over 1,000 participants.

Lake sits on the Victorian College of the Arts Advisory Board and is the Patron of Moves Festival, Hobart. Her performance career spans 20 years, touring and dancing extensively with Gideon Obarzanek's Chunky Move and Lucy Guerin Inc as well as with choreographers Antony Hamilton & Byron Perry and Anouk Van Dijk. She was a founding dancer in Phillip Adams' BalletLab.

# A NOTE FROM THE CREATOR

In 2018 I had the big idea of attempting to create a show for 50 dancers. I recruited 50 young dancers from across Melbourne and with a commission from Arts Centre Melbourne and Melbourne Fringe was able to realise the show. The astonishing response to the work (both in real life and with our viral video) has been surprising and wonderful.

With just two weeks of rehearsal this new cast, made up entirely of local Perth dancers, has not only learned the entire show but has comprehensively owned it and evolved it. It's fascinating for *Colossus* to be interpreted by these new dancers and to see their unique dynamics.

*Colossus* shows strength in numbers and the power of the mass. It explores solidarity, mob behaviour, protest, intimacy and control. *Colossus* asks if our societies, crowds and social networks are more than simply collections of individuals, but its epic scale extends beyond the human, with movements echoing the grand systems and patterns of nature. *Colossus* explores both the beauty and the ugliness of the collective experience.

– Stephanie Lake



Image: Mark Gambino

# ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Driven by a cast of 50 dancers *Colossus* by Australia's Stephanie Lake Company explores the push and pull of humanity, how humans in numbers can work with purpose and solidarity to achieve great outcomes, contrasted with the negative when crowd behaviour turns ugly and violent.

The 50 dancers shift in and out of allegiances, couplings, micro-societies and also isolation, representing the human desire to share communal experiences yet also assert individuality.

The sheer scale of the work allows *Colossus* to extend beyond the human, echoing grander systems of nature, reminiscent of patterns and structures of the natural world.

The work also looks at how we create and follow icons and the subsequent rejection of those leaders – whether they be ideological, political or even celebrity.

## MAJOR THEMES

Major themes within the work include human nature and how in group situations individuals can shift their own behaviour to align with that of the group both positively and negatively, the human desire to assert individuality versus the need to fit in and be part of the group, and human's relationship to the natural world.

## KEY IDEAS TO EXPLORE

Key ideas to explore with students could include:

- The power of humans when they work together in a collective, both through improvisation practices and choreographic tasks.
- How rhythms and repetitions of movement can reflect both societal behaviours and patterns in the natural world.
- The power of unison and canon in choreography to show connection.
- How isolating one dancer can have both positive and negative connotations depending on the choreography, and how this is reflected in life.

## RESOURCES

<https://www.stephanielake.com.au/colossus>

<https://themusic.com.au/article/uMigqq2sr64/stephanie-lake-colossus-miaf-anthony-carew/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYk1wVYf-dg>

<https://www.timeout.com/melbourne/dance/colossus>

<https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/reviews/colossus-stephanie-lake-company-melbourne-international-arts-festival/>

<http://www.danceaustralia.com.au/reviews/stephanie-lake-company-colossus>

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/dance/colossal-work-puts-50-finely-tuned-dancers-together-on-stage-20180928-p506kq.html>

<https://dancemagazine.com.au/2018/08/colossus/>

# Q&A WITH STEPHANIE LAKE

## **What was the inspiration for the show?**

In 2018 I had the big, crazy idea of attempting to create a show for 50 dancers. Ever since I began choreographing as a teenager, I have loved working with large casts and some of my most satisfying creative experiences have come from creating works for large companies. There is something profound and powerful in seeing so many people occupying the stage space – all of the patterning, cooperation, discord, the tension between the mass and the individual. With just 50 bodies I feel like I'm able to say things about the way societies and communities operate and about human nature itself. *Colossus* also draws inspiration from the systems of the natural world like flocking, herd behaviour and wave forms. It's microscopic and cosmic all at once.

## **Why did you decide to work with so many dancers?**

There are so many choreographic possibilities presented when working with a large group. I knew that creating a work of this scale would offer up immense possibility, but I also knew that it would be enormously challenging on every level – creatively, logistically – but I was at a stage where I was up for the challenge. There was a high chance that the work would fail but I was feeling brave and bold. I have done a lot of work with young people – youth companies and tertiary students – over the years and I wanted to bring elements of those past works into a new, ambitiously large-scale version. I also see so many incredibly talented young dancers in Melbourne and across the country and I wanted to provide a platform for them to perform in something grand and in a professional context. I could never have predicted the success *Colossus* would have or that it would continue on past its first season and be learned by dancers across the country and around the world.

## **What are the challenges and rewards in working with a large cast as opposed to a small one?**

I have to be far more organised in my planning and visioning of the day's rehearsal when working with this huge group. The rehearsal room is full to the brim and there is a huge amount of energy and enthusiasm in the studio that needs to be directed and channeled. The challenge is making sure the rehearsals don't become chaotic and loud. But the rewards are enormous. I'm rewarded by immense choreographic potential and energy. Simple ideas – movements, sounds – expanded out onto 50 people become exciting. A huge reward from *Colossus* is also the beautiful bond formed by the dancers and the new collaborative relationships and friendships that are born out of being part of such an intense process together.

## **What is the experience like for those involved?**

From what I hear it's amazing! It is unique to share a studio and the stage with so many people and as a dancer it's a powerful experience to be amongst so many others and to breathe and sweat and strive together. The collective is strong. They have to navigate space in a really smart way so as not to collide and they have to work to develop the group brain. I've been very touched by how the casts have supported each other and worked together with so much care and kindness and huge dedication – it's inspiring. The dancers only have two weeks of rehearsal together before they are in the theatre. What they achieve in those two weeks is extraordinary.

## **How would you assess the health of the contemporary dance scene in Australia at the moment?**

There is incredible, original work being created across the country, especially in the small to medium-sized companies and by our independent choreographers. We have strong regional companies and Australia is famous worldwide for its uniquely brilliant dancers. I'm inspired greatly by my peers. Unfortunately, the funding situation is very unstable and many, many artists struggle to make a living. We're seeing the fall out of brutal funding cuts with the closure of companies and many dancers and choreographers having to leave the field which is sad. I am optimistic that it will turn around and that the arts will be recognised and valued as intrinsic to a healthy society.

# BEFORE THE SHOW

## IMPROVISATION

### OBJECTIVES

Students will develop their awareness and understanding of:

- Improvisation practices
- Group work skills and collaboration

### DISCUSSION POINTS

Discuss what it takes to work collaboratively in a large group; focus, attention, commitment, listening (be it audibly or physically) etc.

Discuss how improvisation means playing with movement, can be a fun way to explore new movement ideas and how important it is in the development of choreography.

## ACTIVITY

### INTRODUCTION

Introduce Stephanie Lake's work *Co/ossus* including key themes and ideas of the work. Discuss improvisation as a way to explore movement and how it is used by dancers and choreographers to create dance works.

### WARM-UP

#### FOLLOW THE LEADER

In lines of about six people in length, students take turns at the front of the line doing some form of locomotor activity around the space. Encourage creativity of movement and repetition so everyone in the line has a chance to copy. Pause the music for the leader to go to the back and a new leader to commence.

### IMPROVISATION ACTIVITY 1 – FLOCKING

Students in groups of four make a diamond spatial formation.

Explain how each of the four facings (front, side, back, side) will have a different leader and everyone else in the group is to copy that leader. As the leader turns a new person will become leader.

Encourage slow repetitive movement to begin with so people can follow along and the group can find unison.

An example can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C\\_7esQ08tGE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_7esQ08tGE)

If students are struggling with what kinds of movement to do or need a starting point to create movement, encourage them to try and create patterns in nature with their bodies such as the movements of waves, the rustling of leaves in trees, the ebb and flow of the tides or the weightlessness of gravity. This can also be used in Improvisation Activity 2.

### IMPROVISATION ACTIVITY 2 – SCHOOL OF FISH

Building on from flocking, School of Fish is an improvisation practice for a large group.

Students start in fairly close proximity and like flocking follow the movement of the person at the front of whichever direction the group is facing. As the group turns and changes facing, a new leader will emerge and take ownership for the movement of the group. If two people begin the school can split and then merge again.

Considerations – travelling movement

- The influence of different music
- Repetition and then contrast to break the repetition
- Changes in dynamic, tempo, levels.
- Students discuss experience of School of Fish, note observations and then start again.

## SHARING

Share the experience with some students watching and others participating. This can be done by splitting the class in half, the teacher pulling out students at random or by students 'tag' performing (when a viewing student tags a performer and takes their place).

Use the sharing as a springboard to repeat the activity with new considerations and viewpoints.

Discuss observations of both participating and viewing. Discuss improvisation as a way of creating new movement, exploring movement to develop choreography and also as a performance in its own right.

# PERFORMANCE PROTOCOLS

## MAKING THE MOST OUT OF THE PERFORMANCE

These activities are intended to maximise the theatre experience for all audience members. These activities guide students through a series of engagements intended to get them thinking about how and why they should behave in particular ways and what their behaviour means in this context.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will develop their awareness and understanding of:

- Theatre etiquette
- Appropriate behaviour for an audience
- Relationship between performers and the audience

### DISCUSSION POINTS

Live performance involves performers acting and interact in real time, before your eyes. The audience is active in the way they view the performance. The performers on stage can hear and see you; your reactions and your behaviour can contribute to, disrupt or disturb their performance. The audience can have a big influence on the energy, pace and vibe of the actors and the performance as a whole.

### ACTIVITY

Talk to your students about whether they have been to the theatre before. Use the following questions to guide their discussion:

- What show did you see?
- Who did you go with?
- Where did you see it?
- What was the show about?
- Were the performers professional or amateur?
- What did it make you think about?

Split the class into small groups and ask them to create a list of behaviour they consider appropriate and inappropriate for different settings. Assign the groups the following settings:

- Footy match
- School assembly
- Cinema
- Rock concert
- Theatre

Come back together as a whole group and ask groups to feed their thoughts back to the group. Create a matrix that compares different kinds of behaviour across each setting. For example:

	Footy Match	Assembly	Cinema	Rock Concert	Theatre
Talking	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Eating					
Walking in and out					
Laughing / crying					
Booing / shouting					
Using your mobile phone					

Based on the above, discuss the conclusions students have come to about attending a live performance and compile a series of protocols to guide their behaviour. Ensure elements in the appendix at the end of this document are included.

# AFTER THE SHOW

## OBJECTIVES

Students will develop their awareness and understanding of:

- How the natural world can inspire the Arts
- Creating movement with sound.
- How movement choices convey ideas.
- Unison, canon and repetition

## DISCUSSION POINTS

Encourage and support participation and everyone's contribution in this group discussion.

- Discuss how individual interpretations are valued in the Arts and that it's ok to be different from other people.
- Discuss how people could come up with different movements to reflect the same ideas and that there is no right or wrong way to creating movement.
- Discuss ways to create and maintain a rhythm both with and without music in the group activity.
- Discuss the value of being able to be still in a performance is just as important as moving – for the circle showing.

## ACTIVITY

### WARM-UP

- Everyone stands in a circle.
- Each person is to think of a word or a sound effect (can be the student's name especially if the class is not familiar with one another) and an action to go with that word / sound effect.
- One person starts and says their word with accompanying action.
- Everyone else then repeats and then the next person adds their word and action, which again everyone repeats.
- This goes around the circle until everyone has included their word / sound effect and action.
- See if students can repeat in unison with a constant beat. Repeat changing tempo or even try repeating backwards (reversal).

### BRAINSTORM

As a class brainstorm various patterns and structures we see in systems of nature (At least 10 examples).

Examples could include:

- The ebb and flow of tides
- Birds flying in formation
- Schools of fish
- The orbiting of planets around the sun
- The rolling and crashing of waves
- The beating of a heart

### GROUP ACTIVITY

In small groups choose three patterns from the class brainstorm. For each pattern the groups are to create a unison movement with accompanying sound (vocal, claps, stomps, clicks etc.) that can be repeated. Once they have created their three movement ideas, they are to use repetition, unison and canon to create their own unique structure. Encourage a lot of repetition to set a rhythm / rhythms within the group.

### CIRCLE PERFORMANCE

The groups all stand in a big circle. Each group stands in their starting position. One group starts and as soon as they freeze the next group starts their performance. Everyone is in tableau whilst watching the other groups perform.

### OPTIONAL EXTRA

Get multiple groups performing together, depending on the students' ability mix up the spatial design. Students can view multiple patterns working at the same time to see the effect of multiple systems work together to reflect a whole (like the various systems of the human body working together to make it function).

# REVIEWING LIVE PERFORMANCE

There are many different ways to write a review, as reviews express an individual's thoughts and feelings about a show.

Traditional reviews will often:

## **Give the reader brief background information about a production**

- Title of show (mention playwright or choreographer if relevant)
- Is it an adaptation of another text? An original work?
- Identify the company presenting or performing the show
- Where is this show being performed?

## **Briefly outline plot and themes**

- Make sure not to include any spoilers
- Were the themes/issues effectively conveyed to the audience?
- How do the characters and relationships communicate these?
- Does the design (e.g. set, costumes, lighting, sound and filmic elements) contribute to the conveyance of themes/issues? Consider symbols and metaphors.
- How do style and form play a part in communicating these?

## **Provide an idea of what the design elements are**

- Think about set, lighting, costume, filmic elements and sound
- How did the design choices convey place, time and situation (dramatic meaning or context)?
- What atmosphere and mood were the creative team aiming for?
- How successful were they in achieving their goals?

## **Evaluate the writing, production and performances**

- You might consider things like: Were there any stand out performances or design elements? Why? What were the technical aspects of the production that stood out?

Reviews should reflect how you felt about a show, not what you think you should have felt.

In the digital age, the act of reviewing has changed immensely. It has enabled platforms for a broad range of voices to participate in the reviewing process that previously would not have been heard.

Have a go at writing a 140-character Twitter review of the work.

# SPECIFIC LINKS TO CURRICULUM

## DANCE

Connections to Year 7 Dance: Students build on their understanding of improvising and experimenting with the elements of dance (BEST) and choreographic devices to create dance that communicates an idea. Safe dance practices underlie all experiences, as students perform within their own body capabilities and work safely in groups.

- Improvisation skills to explore new movement ideas (ACADAM013)
- Group work practices (sharing ideas, problem-solving, giving feedback, listening skills) in dance (ACADAM017)
- Different elements of dance: body, energy, space, time (BEST), explored and combined to develop choreographic intent (ACADAM014)
- Choreographic devices (unison, canon, repetition) and choreographic structure (narrative) to create dance that communicates meaning (ACADAM016)



Image: Mark Gambino

# APPENDIX

## **Latecomers**

The show will start promptly and latecomers will not be admitted until an appropriate break in the show. Be aware that for many shows, you will not be admitted if you arrive late.

## **Lock out**

If you leave your seat during the performance, you may not be allowed back in. Make sure you go to the toilet and have a drink of water before the performance and/or during the intervals.

## **Noise**

Food wrappers and plastic packets make a lot of noise. It is generally accepted that the audience does not eat during a performance. If you absolutely have to have lollies (such as a cough lolly), ensure it is out of the wrapper prior to the performance.

## **Mobile phones**

Please ensure mobile phones are turned off. If your phone rings during a performance, it can be very embarrassing for you and very distracting for the performers. It is inappropriate to receive a text during a performance.

## **Talking**

Allow everyone – performers and the audience – to focus on the performance by not talking. Talking is annoying for other audience members and can be very distracting for performers.

## **Photographs**

Taking photos, videos or audio recordings is not allowed.