

Presented by La Boite, Sydney Opera  
House and W Lance Reynolds

# BIGGER & BLACKER

By Steven Oliver

## EDUCATION NOTES

By Ari Palani



**LA BOITE**

 Australian Government

 Australia Council for the Arts

 Queensland Government

La Boite Theatre Company is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its funding and advisory body

La Boite Theatre Company is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland

## ABOUT THE SHOW

### SYNOPSIS

*Leave your judgement at the door and everything you know...*

**Bigger and Blacker** is an invitation into the heartfelt, funny and completely fabulous cabaret journey of Steven Oliver's life.

In this world premiere production, Oliver generously shares his story from ABC's hit television series **Black Comedy** through to heartache, loss, performing and living your truth.

Audiences will be in for a shimmying and side-splitting hour where Oliver shows his skills as a consummate performer in dance, song and poetry - throw in a disco ball, spicy banter and the musical prowess of his onstage companion Michael Griffiths and you've got a cabaret that is indeed bigger **and** blacker!

Oliver is a descendant of the Kuku-Yalanji, Waanyi, Gangalidda, Woppaburra, Bundjalung and Biripi peoples and was born in Cloncurry, the traditional lands of the Mitakoodi, Kalkadoon and Pitta Pitta peoples in Queensland. He is a long-time friend of La Boite (**From Darkness**) and his return to the Roundhouse Theatre is sure to be one like no other!

### CAST AND CREATIVES

**Performers** Steven Oliver and Michael Griffiths

**Director** Isaac Drandic

**Set & Costume Designer** Kevin O'Brien

**Lighting Designer** Chloe Ogilvie

**Composer & Sound Designer** Brady Watkins

**Sound Operator** Sophie Watkins

**Stage Manager** Pip Loth

### RECCOMENDED FOR

Suitable for grades 11-12

### WARNINGS

- Moderate Course/Crude Language
- Adult Themes
- Contains themes that may be difficult for some viewers



Photo by Morgan Roberts



## MEET THE ARTISTS

**STEVEN OLIVER**  
**WRITER/PERFORMER**

Steven Oliver is a descendant of the Kuku-Yalanji, Waanyi, Gangalidda, Woppaburra, Bundjalung and Biripi peoples. He was born in Cloncurry in North West Queensland and grew up in Townsville before moving to Perth to study performing arts.

He has worked with numerous theatre companies and arts organisations across Australia but became notorious with ABC's hit sketch show *Black Comedy* as a writer/actor/associate producer. He has starred in ABC i-views' *Tiger Cops*, hosted *A Very Sexy Xmas* for the ABC and was one of only two recipients of Screen Australia's inaugural Blackspace Initiative; which saw the creation of his premiere web series *A Chance Affair*, which screened internationally as well as on domestic and international flights with Virgin airlines; SBS on demand; and has been nominated for best web series in the LGBTIQ Australian Awards and Screen Producers Australia Awards. He is also a published poet (*Ora Nui*, Australian Poetry Journal, Solid Air) and playwright (*Proppa Solid*, published by Playlab Press) and featured in the 2018 National Play Festival with his play *From Darkness*; later performed at La Boite Theatre in 2019. *Looky Looky Here Comes Cooky* for which he was co-writer and presenter of, won best documentary at the Australian International Documentary Conference 2021.

His poetry and comedic work has collectively garnered tens of millions of views online, with his comedic work bringing him to the attention of renowned New Zealand director, Taika Waititi. This led to a cameo that saw him alongside Chris Hemsworth and Jeff Goldblum in *Thor: Ragnarok*.

His one man cabaret show *Bigger & Blacker* made its world premiere at the 2019 Adelaide Cabaret Festival to rave reviews; was listed as an AdCabFave, and will tour nationally, starting with La Boite Theatre.

---



## **ISAAC DRANDIC** **DIRECTOR**

Isaac Drandic is a Noongar man from the south west of Western Australia. He is a dramaturg, writer, award-winning actor and director. His productions have earned numerous Green Room Awards including *Blood on the Dance Floor*, which won most outstanding independent theatre production, *The Season*, best new writing, best direction and the coveted award for best production in the Theatre Companies category. His highly acclaimed production, *City of Gold* won several Sydney Theatre Awards including a nomination for Best New Australian Work.

Isaac has held the positions; Associate Director of ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, Resident Artist at Playwriting Australia and Resident Dramaturg at Queensland Theatre among others. He is a member of the Independent Expert Panel COCA (Cairns) providing advice to Arts Queensland, a member of Playwriting Australia and Australian Plays National Advisory Panel and is currently Associate Artist at Queensland Theatre.



## **MICHAEL GRIFFITHS** **MUSICAL DIRECTOR**

Michael graduated from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) with a Bachelor in Music Theatre in 1999 and has a Diploma in Music Composition.

He won the Helpmann Award for Best Cabaret Performer in 2016 for his Cole Porter tribute and was nominated for a Green Room Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance as Bob Crewe in *Jersey Boys*. He has also appeared in *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *We Will Rock You!* and *Shout!* His acclaimed cabaret shows have delighted critics and audiences across every cabaret festival in Australia and beyond.



## CURRICULUM LINKS

### FORM, STYLE AND CONVENTIONS

First Nations Perspectives  
Theatre of Social Comment  
Contemporary Performance  
Collage Drama  
Linear and Non-Linear Forms

### SENIOR SYLLABUS UNITS

Unit One: Share

Key Ideas – celebrate, document, empower, share understandings of human experience, recreate, share.

Unit Three: Challenge

Key Ideas – educate, empower, question society at this time, advocate for change, communicate, challenge.



Photo by Morgan Roberts

<b>Cognitive Verbs</b>		
Knowledge Retrieval and Comprehension	Analytical Processes	Knowledge Utilisation
<i><b>Define</b></i>	<i><b>Compare</b></i>	<i><b>Comment</b></i>
<i><b>Document</b></i>	<i><b>Critique</b></i>	<i><b>Create</b></i>
<i><b>Identify</b></i>	<i><b>Determine</b></i>	<i><b>Develop</b></i>
<i><b>Recall</b></i>	<i><b>Discriminate</b></i>	<i><b>Discuss / Explore</b></i>
<i><b>Recognise</b></i>	<i><b>Distinguish</b></i>	<i><b>Evaluate</b></i>

### THEMES

First Nations Perspectives  
Identity  
Queerness  
Fame  
Comedy and Sadness  
Equality  
Majority / Minority  
Colonisation, Decolonisation, Indigenisation  
Mental Health

## PRESHOW ACTIVITIES

### CLASS DISCUSSION

#### Themes and Ideas – Identity: Seeing and Being.

Our identities are unique and often shaped by biology, culture, history, geography and politics that inform who we are at this very point in time, and as these elements shift, so do we. **Bigger and Blacker** reflects on these elements of Steven Oliver's life, how they intersect, and his sense of self.

- What are the different aspects of you? What elements of who you are visible, or not?
- Do you see yourself, your communities or stories like yours represented in media often? In positive or negative ways?
- Conversations around identity happen on small and massive scales throughout history – what conversations about identity have you seen lately on a global or national scale? What about within your own city?
- As a young person, how are you and your perspectives portrayed? What assumptions are made about you before you even speak or meet someone? How might this be similar or different to conversations about race, sexuality, gender etc.

#### **TASK:** Mapping Yourself - Who, Where and When are You?

Beginning with who and where you are, design a map that expands out to show place, history and community. You can use words, pictures, song, texture, weblinks – whatever you can use to describe the various visible and invisible aspects of who you are!

#### **TASK:** Privilege Walk – Intersections of Identity.

We all benefit and are disenfranchised differently. From how the world caters to us currently to the way we engage with it, our privileges and marginalisations are part of a complex web of intersections, many of which are visible and some that are not. The Privilege Walk is a physical exploration of these intersections. This activity might be confronting, and trust must underpin this process, but it can be incredibly rewarding to discuss these powerful aspects of our world.

The activity can be found here: <https://peacelearner.org/2016/03/14/privilege-walk-lesson-plan/>. It can be done in its entirety or used to prompt conversation. Make sure that students know they do not have to answer if they feel their safety is at risk.

**TASK:** Respond to the following segment of Steven Oliver's poem *I'm a Blackfella*. Discuss how this communicates the aspects of identity concerning one's perspective of themselves and others' perceptions.

*I'm a blackfella.*

*Not a drunk criminal, uneducated, unemployed, welfare dependent slack fella.*

*And if you try to tell me different well you might just get a smack, fella.*

*Not that I condone violence,*

*I just don't condone silence.*

*And when you try to tell me about what it means to be an "Aborigine,"*

*With your stupid ass jokes, stereotypes and Discovery Channel mentalities,*

*Well, I'm afraid I have to speak up and let you know about me.*

*See, I ain't what you see in travel magazines,*

*And I haven't got the look from your history book.*

*Nobel? Maybe.*

*Savage? No.*

*Unless you're talking about my words in the way that they flow –*

*But this isn't about style. It's about attitudes.*

*If you stood by our sides and simply just talked, and some of the times in our footsteps you walked then maybe you'd see we're not young and free.*

### Storytelling – Celebrate, Document, Empower and Sharing the Human Experience.

Storytelling is a powerful tool in communicating people's experiences, histories, and personal narratives. These stories share perspectives in context through retelling in linear and non-linear forms using various elements such as still image, soundscape, movement, monologue, enactment, flashforward/flashback, dreamscape, parallel action, juxtaposition and montage. These approaches range in style, often borrowing from a wide range of conventions like Verbatim, Documentary and Collage drama.

Storytelling at its core necessitates the performer and ensemble understand and use the elements of drama (character, contrast, dramatic focus, language, mood, movement, place, relationship, role, situation, space, symbol, tension, time) to structure their narratives and create dramatic action and meaning – telling their story, their way.

- What narratives have you seen lately that celebrate, document and share the lived experiences of a person or community?



- What makes a great storytelling experience? Does this require a stage and live audience? How do these change the relationship to teller and listener when added?

Contemporary life has also changed quite dramatically due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Many narratives emerging from this time will share experiences that individuals may have had, or that we have shared in a national or international context.

- What are some experiences that are unique to a time of pandemic or epidemic? How do these differ nationally or internationally? How have they changed historically?
- How has the nature of storytelling changed due to the challenges of quarantine, isolation, and digital connectivity?

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives – a Drama Classroom Context

Learning, teaching and sharing stories in so-called Australia exists in a colonized context and we all play an important role in respecting our past, challenging systems of oppression and advocating for transparent, equitable understandings of our history and future. In a classroom context this should extend to:

- Asking yourself/your students 'Am I the right person to be telling this story?' If not, who should or could be? Why is their voice not apparent to you, or within this context? What can be done to reflect a truer version of our diverse population?
- Ask ourselves what practices reinscribe systems that privilege a singular majority perspective and how can we move towards ways of working that champion diversity and justice.
- Ask how we can embed First Nations perspectives, safely and with appropriate (always consider consultation with Elders/relevant community groups), in all that we do – inside and outside of the classroom.

#### FURTHER RESEARCH:

The [Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies](#) (AIATSIS) is an essential first resource in understanding First Nations histories. In Australia there are more than 250 Indigenous languages including around 800 dialects. Language is a direct connection to identity, survival and geography. Exploring the AIATSIS interactive map, look at the location of your school and communities and learn about the land you are on.

Additionally, as we move into the Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2023, AIATSIS has curated a playlist featuring songs containing lyrics in these diverse languages: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1AGsr7ME2iID9e2b6sBJU0>. Listen to these songs, research their artists and the context of their work with your students.

The State Library of Queensland has links to [Indigenous Knowledge Centres](#) around the state that can assist with programs, activities and events that may support your classroom work.



Photo by Morgan Roberts

## POSTSHOW ACTIVITIES

Now that you've seen the show, use your knowledge and audience perspective to explore the following –

### RESPONDING: ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

Using the table below, recall an example of each Element of Drama from the and note how it was used. We've provided a table of examples for you to fill in and some points to get you started.

<b>Element of Drama</b>	<b>Example of Use</b>
Characters <i>Personal qualities, depth, histories, traits and intentions. This can also include the role of the character – their position in the larger structure of the narrative.</i>	<i>Steven juxtaposes who he is with a number of character moments. These serve the role of highlighting who he really is and how he feels.</i>
Relationships <i>The connections, interactions and reactions that the characters go through as the narrative progresses.</i>	
Time <i>Time of day, year, history or the future. Changes of time within scenes, between scenes and over the entire piece.</i>	<i>As an audience we are aware that we are watching a show, but through retelling and the sharing of memories we see historical elements of Stevens life.</i>
Place <i>Where the dramatic action takes place and the factors that help define these environments.</i>	
Symbols <i>Design elements, props and costume etc. that convey a deeper layer of meaning to the narrative and action onstage.</i>	
Tensions <i>Dramatic action can be created by the problems</i>	



*of achieving a certain task, making the right or wrong choice, stresses in relationships, the unexpected and mystery.*

## RESPONDING: FORM STYLE AND CONVENTIONS

Using the table below, recall some examples of styles and conventions from the show. What impact did they have on your experience of the narrative journey? Again, we have provided a table of examples for you to fill in and some points to get you started.

<b>Form, Style and Convention</b>	<b>Example of Use</b>
First Nations Perspectives <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the oldest living cultures in human history and their sovereignty, which has never been ceded, predates colonisation.</i>	
Theatre of Social Comment <i>Elements such as social commentary, that question the world and advocate change.</i>	
Contemporary Performance <i>Fragmentation, openness of form, intertextuality, hypertextuality, appropriation, non-linear.</i>	<i>Time and place are mixed – at different points of Steven’s career, in a domestic setting but at the same time a cabaret stage.</i>
Collage Drama <i>Performance shaped around a theme, a collection of material or arrangement of elements such as prose, poetry, song, dance etc.</i>	
Verbatim Theatre <i>Elements that capture, reproduce and mirror/repeat real life.</i>	<i>Steven speaks, sings and raps about real life moments. Some songs included: [please list]</i>

<b>Authorship and authenticity through autobiographical performance.</b>	
Linear and Non-Linear Forms <b>Events taking place in chronological order from beginning to end, or the disrupted or discontinuous sequence of events often including flashback or flash forward.</b>	

**TASK:** Design a Playlist of Your Life.

Music plays a key part in *Bigger and Blacker* by **Steven Oliver**, allowing parts of his life to be shared beyond just words. His original songs document the different parts of his identity, just like we associate songs with certain parts of our lives and memories. What are some songs for the following?

- A song that reminds you of your home or family?
- A song that captures the spirit of your childhood?
- A song that expresses what it means to be a young person in this day and age?
- A song about love, longing or a deep connection with someone?
- A song that gets you energized, empowered and ready to face the world?

How can you curate these songs so that someone could discover more of who you are by listening to them together, chronologically or otherwise? What are the commonalities between these songs, or what aspects of you stand out?

**TASK:** Telling Your Own Story, Your Way.

Storytelling can take many different forms. As above, there can be elements from Verbatim and Collage Drama, in linear and non-linear forms to create a work of Contemporary Performance.

Imagine you were to perform your own show sharing your life thus far with an audience, how could you design the following:

- Set – where does this story take place? What does it make the audience feel by seeing your story performed there? Is it quite minimal, able to transform into many different spaces, or is it highly detailed? Why?
- Lighting – Does the lighting represent time, space, mood, or a combination of them? Is it lighting that is natural for the scene or distinctly different?
- Sound – Where does the sound come from? Do we hear music that supports what is being seen, or juxtaposes it? Is the music coming from an instrument, or

a part of the set like a radio, or from the speakers inside of the theatre architecture?

- Vision – do you use projection to help support the scene? Does it represent thought, or is it used to offer additional information about what is being visually represented?
- Costume – What are you wearing that can help the audience learn who you are? First impressions count, so what do you wish the audience to know about you before you have the chance to speak?
- Marketing – who would you want to come to your show, and why? How would you impress them to buy a ticket? Do you have a tag line that might attract them to hear your story?

### **TASK:** Linear and Non-Linear Forms

The order of a story creates meaning. To share your own story with an audience, where could you begin? Where would you want to end your narrative? Use the following prompts to inspire a framework for your own story – consider what order they are in:

A Monologue about your Life.	A Question.	An Answer.	A Pledge.
A Call to Action.	A Happy Memory.	A Painful Memory.	A Transformative Moment.
An Old Memory.	The Present Moment.	Hopes for the Future.	Someone Else's Perspective of You.



Photo by Morgan Roberts



## **CHECK IT OUT**

Below are some articles and websites for yourself and your students. These can be used as further research, pretexts or intertextual references. It is important to include indigenous, social, and historical contexts in the work you are doing with your students and organisations.

### **My Grandmothers Lingo**

<https://www.sbs.com.au/mygrandmotherslingo/>

An award winning interactive animation that teaches words from the Marra language.

### **'Awaken' SBS On Demand 2014-2016**

<https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/program/awaken>

An indigenous news and current affairs program, with interviews and reports.

### **Digi Youth Arts**

<http://dya.net.au/>

Digi Youth Arts is a not for profit arts organisation that shares the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

### **Bangarra Dance Theatre**

<http://www.bangarra.com.au/>

Bangarra Dance Theatre is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and one of Australia's leading performing arts companies, widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for their powerful dancing and theatrical voice.

### **ILBIJERRI Theatre Company**

<https://ilbijerri.com.au/>

ILBIJERRI creates innovative works by First Nations artists.

### **YIRRA YAAKIN**

<https://yirrayaakin.com.au/>

Yirra Yaakin produces award-winning, world-class theatre, sharing Aboriginal stories through exciting, entertaining, educational and authentic new works

## **CONNECTING WITH DIFFICULT CONTENT AND MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES**

*Bigger and Blacker* by Steven Oliver contains deep discussion regarding identity, mental health, loss and love. It is important to know that there is always help, whether it be from family, friends or communities, but also through confidential professional counselling helplines and programs:

- Gallang Place Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation Counselling Services on **(07) 3899 5041**
- The Arts Wellbeing Collective - 24/7 Wellbeing Helpline on **1800 959 500**
- Qlife - Australia-wide anonymous and free LGBTI peer support for people wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings, or relationships. Call **1800 184 527**

If a young person aged 12-25 is experiencing a tough time there is also a range of 24/7 online chat, call and helpful information services provided through

<https://headspace.org.au/ehespace/>

# CONTACT US

## CURRICULUM & WORKSHOP ENQUIRIES

Visit [laboite.com.au/education](http://laboite.com.au/education) or contact La Boite's Youth & Education Producer, Ari Palani, via [ari@laboite.com.au](mailto:ari@laboite.com.au).

## SCHOOL BOOKINGS ENQUIRIES

Visit [laboite.com.au/education](http://laboite.com.au/education) or contact our team via [schoolbookings@laboite.com.au](mailto:schoolbookings@laboite.com.au) or 3007 8600.



**LA BOITE**

  
Australian Government

  
Australia Council for the Arts

  
Queensland Government

La Boite Theatre Company is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its funding and advisory body.

La Boite Theatre Company is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.