

ILBIJERRI

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MEDIA RELEASE

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ILBIJERRI Theatre Company Welcomes Andrea James as New Artistic Director and co-CEO, Honouring Rachael Maza's Extraordinary Legacy



Andrea James (All photos by Jacinta Keefe)

Australia's longest running First Peoples theatre company, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company proudly announces the appointment of acclaimed Yorta Yorta/ Gunaikurnai playwright and director **Andrea James** as its new Artistic Director and co-CEO, following the remarkable 18-year tenure of **Dr Rachael Maza AM**.

Andrea's appointment, the result of a rigorous national search led by ILBIJERRI's Board of Directors and supported by REA arts + culture, specialists in executive search for cultural leaders across Australia and Aotearoa/NZ, heralds a bold new chapter for Australia's longest running First Peoples theatre company.

Andrea James said, "I have been privileged to witness the rise of a theatre organisation that came from the ground up, to the staunchly Blak and highly respected company that ILBIJERRI is today. Rachael Maza leaves a legacy that has taken ILBIJERRI to the national and international stage with community and

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cultural integrity at the core.

“Theatre brings people and communities together and in these dangerous times, if ever we’ve needed a company that celebrates Boldness, Blakness and Brilliance in all its full power, it is now.

“I am honoured to build on the ‘Maza-era’ to continue to platform First Peoples stories of national significance with an invigorated focus on our surrounding communities and their thriving waves of spirited Blak talent.”

Ping Flynn, Executive Director and co-CEO, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, said, “Seeking our new Artistic Director was as much about looking toward the future as it was honouring the past 18 years of Rachael’s trailblazing leadership. Andrea James is an exceptionally talented playwright and director, who has already had a tremendous impact on the company with her work on *Big Name, No Blankets* and *Coranderrk: We Will Show The Country*.

“Her wealth of theatre-making experience and unwavering commitment to First Peoples storytelling will bring the company into its next chapter with brilliance.”

Dr Eugenia Flynn, Chair of ILBIJERRI said, “The Board of Directors recognises the unique place ILBIJERRI holds within the First Peoples arts and culture sector and the broader theatre landscape, grounded in the Koorie communities of Victoria. After a rigorous national search, we are delighted to welcome Andrea James as Artistic Director and co-CEO. Andrea brings exceptional experience, deep cultural grounding and an exciting artistic vision that will carry ILBIJERRI’s bold, Blak and brilliant storytelling into an even stronger future.”

Dr Rachael Maza AM, outgoing Artistic Director and co-CEO, said, “I’m incredibly proud of everything I’ve built with ILBIJERRI over nearly two decades as Artistic Director. It was important to me to embark on this next chapter at the right time and the company has never been more solid.

“Andrea James’s appointment fills me with excitement for the future of Blak storytelling. Her sharp contemporary voice is rooted in identity, creative sovereignty and truth-telling. Andrea’s extraordinary talent as a writer, director and producer will honour ILBIJERRI’s legacy of bringing bold and impactful Blak stories to the national and international stage. I can’t wait to see her carry this vision forward.”

L to R: Dr Eugenia Flynn, Andrea James, Dr Rachael Maza AM, Ping Flynn.

A Legacy of Bold Blak Storytelling

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Founded in 1991 on Kulin Country, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company emerged from a collective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists determined to tell their own stories, in their own voices, on their own terms. Over more than three decades, ILBIJERRI has become a national and international force, creating a body of work that celebrates the strength, resilience and creativity of First Peoples.

From early works such as *Up the Road* and *Chopped Liver*, to landmark productions including *Jack Charles V The Crown*, *Black Ties*, *Heart is a Wasteland* and *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country*, ILBIJERRI has forged a reputation for fearless storytelling with cultural integrity at its core. The company has toured extensively across Australia and overseas, from remote communities to world stages, ensuring First Peoples voices are heard everywhere.

Under Rachael Maza's transformative leadership since 2006, ILBIJERRI expanded its reach, built enduring community partnerships and achieved critical acclaim, all while remaining grounded in culture and community.

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About Andrea James

Andrea James is a Yorta Yorta/Gunaikurnai woman and graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts. A celebrated playwright, director and producer, Andrea creates work that reflects her identity and shares historical and contemporary Aboriginal experiences in a striking contemporary theatrical language.

Her acclaimed works include *Yanagai! Yanagai!*, *Coranderrk: We Will Show The Country*, *Sunshine Super Girl*, *Winyanboga Yurringa* and *Big Name, No Blankets*. Her productions have toured nationally and internationally, and she has directed and written for companies including Melbourne Theatre Company, Griffin Theatre and Urban Theatre Projects.

Andrea's accolades include the Mona Brand Award for women stage and screen writers (2021) and a National Theatre Award (2024).

Fast Facts: ILBIJERRI Theatre Company

- **Founded:** 1991, on Kulin Country, Melbourne
- **Distinctive Legacy:** Australia's largest and longest running First Peoples theatre company
- **Productions:** 40+ original works created and toured nationally and internationally
- **Audiences:** Performed to hundreds of thousands across remote communities, major cities, and international festivals
- **Milestone Works:** *Big Name, No Blankets*, *Jack Charles V The Crown*, *Black Ties*, *Heart is a Wasteland*, *Coranderrk*, *Chopped Liver*
- **Awards:** Multiple Green Room Awards and national arts honours for innovation and cultural impact



Thanks to Our Supporters

ILBIJERRI gratefully acknowledges the support of **Creative Australia** and **Creative Victoria** in making this leadership transition possible.

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