Scott Rankin is the Creative Director of Big hART. His projects have been included in the Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Ten Days on the Island and Edinburgh festivals, and toured Dublin, London, Nederlands, Sweden, Iceland, South Africa, New Zealand and Germany. Scott’s work includes *Namatjira* (national tour), *Ngapartji Ngapartji* (national tour), *Nyuntu Ngali* (Windmill and STC) and *Box the Pony* (Leah Purcell). Scott is renowned for creating works in varied genres—such as the award-winning outdoor public housing work *Stickybricks* (Sydney Festival), the floating video installation piece *Junk Theory* (Sydney Festival), the international hit comedy *Certified Male* with Glynn Nicholas, large-scale film and radio installation project *Drive In Holiday*, and experimental works like *Beastly Girl*. Scott has won three Green Room Awards for Best Direction and Most Innovative Production, and a Sydney Theatre Award for Best New Work for *Namatjira*. Big hART receives awards from many different fields for its theatre, film and community cultural development work, including a World Health Organisation Award, an AFI Award, eight Coalition of Australian Heads of Government Awards, a Deadly Award and recently the Myer Performing Arts Group Award.
Namatjira
written for the Namatjira Family (Aranda)

Ngapartji Ngapartji
written for Trevor Jamieson (Pitjantjatjara)

Two plays by Scott Rankin
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## Contents

*Introduction*

_Sophia Marinos, Alex Kelly and Scott Rankin_ vii

**Namatjira**  
Act One 7  
Act Two 28  
*Ngapartji Ngapartji* 47
Introduction

These two seminal works for theatre were written by Scott Rankin, with social innovation company Big hART, through a unique creative process spanning 2005 to 2011. These uniquely Australian stories have graced the stages of the country’s major festivals and most prestigious venues, as well as being performed outdoors in dry riverbeds in some of the country’s most isolated and remote communities.

Utilising Big hART’s unique creative process, they have grown from, and been developed with, the communities where these stories originate. Namatjira was created with the extended families descended from the acclaimed artist Albert Namatjira, who come from Western Aranda country, west of Alice Springs. It was through their generosity, along with that of Gayle Quarmby (Rex Battarbee’s daughter), that this piece resonates with authenticity and heart. Similarly, Ngapartji Ngapartji was created thanks to the gift of the Jamieson family’s story—of diaspora in the face of the Cold War British Nuclear testing on their homelands—and the generosity of the Pitjantjantjara community in sharing many aspects of their language, culture and wisdom.

Both these theatre works are bursting with stories that go right to the heart of the intersection between indigenous and non-indigenous experience in this country. Both are interwoven with the depth and breadth of common human experience. They are stories of family, friendship, land, myth, life and death, with all the peaks and troughs that touch us all. They celebrate life, and its complexity, diversity and adversity. They are contextualised within the social, political and historical framework of their times, locally, nationally and internationally. This may be part of the reason for their box office popularity—they resonate universally, yet at the same time capture unique moments in Australian history and experience.

Namatjira and Ngapartji Ngapartji are part of a long line of critically acclaimed plays written by Scott Rankin, a number of which have been invitations from, or collaborations with, indigenous people and communities. These works include Box the Pony for Leah Purcell, and
Riverland for Ian W Abdulla and Wesley Enoch. Scott and Trevor Jamieson have maintained a rich, collaborative relationship, working together for over ten years on many productions including Namatjira, Ngapartji Ngapartji, Nyuntu Ngali, Career Highlights of the Mamu, Knot @ Home and others. Now, with Namatjira, Scott is also working with the remarkable Derik Lynch on new works.

Big hART has been producing long-term intercultural projects such as Namatjira and Ngapartji Ngapartji for twenty years. Big hART is a not-for-profit, social change, arts company made up of artists, producers, arts workers, community builders, field workers, and researchers. The company strives to create exquisitely finished art at the same time as working with the country’s most marginalised communities and individuals, providing opportunities for individual change, community change and social policy change at a national level.

Big hART tries to experiment with this process of making art, over a minimum of a three-year period, utilising varied artforms such as theatre, film, television, painting, photography, dance, new media and radio.

Remarkably, over this time, Big hART has emerged as Australia’s highest producing and most critically acclaimed arts and social change company. From 2004 to 2011 Big hART presented twenty works, to high acclaim, in festivals in Australia and overseas. Since its inception in 1992, Big hART’s programs have assisted over seven thousand people experiencing severe disadvantage in forty-two communities across Australia, assisting many of them to make sustained changes in their lives.

It is against this backdrop that these two projects emerged, these two plays were created, and these two scripts are being published. Ngapartji Ngapartji is the product of work with Pitjantjantjara communities, and Namatjira with Western Aranda communities.

Ngapartji Ngapartji

The Ngapartji Ngapartji project headquarters were based on Arrernte country in Mparntwe (Alice Springs, Central Australia) between 2004 and 2009. The Ngapartji Ngapartji theatre production was one part of a much broader project which included ninti.ngapartji.org, an online Pitjantjatjara language site; a long-term arts language-based
community development program throughout the Central Desert; an ABC documentary, ‘Nothing Rhymes with Ngapartji’; a language policy campaign; and the acclaimed theatre production.

‘Ngapartji ngapartji’ translates roughly as ‘I give you something, you give me something’, a concept of reciprocity which governs relationships in Pitjantjatjara society and culture. This concept of reciprocity underpinned the entire project—reflected in the working practice on the ground, where skills in language and arts practice were equally valued and shared across cultures and generations; and in turn, the website and theatre shows offer an opportunity to participate in a rare and intimate experience of language and culture.

At a policy level, the project sought to highlight the dire status of indigenous languages and help generate a national and international groundswell of support for the maintenance and preservation of these languages. Behind these over-arching goals is the fact that Australia has witnessed the largest and most rapid loss of languages of anywhere in the world, over the last century. According to the 2005 National Indigenous Languages Survey, the situation of Australia’s indigenous languages is ‘very grave and requires urgent action’, and Australia has been identified as the place with the most rapid and widespread loss of indigenous languages anywhere in the world over the last one hundred years:

Of an original number of over 250 known Australian indigenous languages, only about 145 indigenous languages are still spoken and the vast majority of these, about 110, are in the severely and critically endangered categories.

In response to this the Ngapartji Ngapartji project, together with a group of indigenous language professionals devoted to helping languages to thrive, was successful in facilitating the Federal Government to announce a National Indigenous Languages Policy in 2009. There is still a way to go, but this is one of the many legacies of this project in co-operation with others.

The work of the Ngapartji Ngaparjti project over six years in Alice Springs and the Central Desert also paved the way for the Namatjira project to be conceived and developed.
INTRODUCTION

Namatjira

At its inception, the *Namatjira* project was a small idea to tell a big story. Elton Wirri, a kinship grandson to Albert Namatjira, had been touring the country with the *Ngapartji Ngapartji* production. When introducing Elton to audiences at the conclusion of the performances, it became clear that they wanted to know more about Albert Namatjira, and so, gradually this project developed, working with the families and communities descended from the renowned painter.

My name is Lenie Namatjira, I’m the granddaughter of Albert Namatjira… and I would like to say something about my grandfather. I’m happy that you mob can tell this story… people from all over the nation can see, what we’re doing, this lovely painting.

Lenie Namatjira
Granddaughter of Albert Namatjira

*Namatjira* is also a multilayered project. It is a creative community development process; a touring new Australian theatre work; a touring contemporary watercolour exhibition; a strategy to assist the Namatjira family to be able to take trips to paint ‘on country’ in important places; teaching watercolour painting to younger generations; a film and documentary process; working with, and recording the Choir in Hermannsburg; and a contribution to social policy discussion around the vital role of Indigenous Art Centres and remote indigenous communities.

At the core of the project is a partnership with Ngurratjuta ‘Many Hands’ Art Centre in Alice Springs. Ngurratjuta supports contemporary Central Desert watercolour artists, many of whom are grandchildren and descendants of Albert Namatjira and artists from the original ‘Hermannsburg School’. The national *Namatjira* tours and accompanying exhibitions of vibrant watercolours aim to leverage greater income and exposure for the contemporary school of Central Desert watercolour painters.

Growing from this partnership with Ngurratjuta, the *Namatjira* project has made it a focus to support Indigenous Art Centres more broadly. Art Centres are owned and governed by Aboriginal people, and are a vital part of community life. Often the only source of externally generated
income in remote communities, they are hubs for innovation, creativity, cultural expression, non-welfare-based income, local leadership, health and wellbeing.

As part of the ongoing Namatjira project, Big hART continues to engage Federal Ministers and policymakers in discussions to highlight the unique opportunity Indigenous Art Centres present to help build sustainable communities.

It is with true thanks that we acknowledge how much these two projects and the stories contained within them continue to teach us, about creativity and resilience.

Sophia Marinos, Alex Kelly and Scott Rankin

Sophia Marinos is the Creative Producer for the Namatjira project. Alex Kelly is the Creative Producer for the Ngapartji Ngapartji project.

For more detail on the Namatjira and Ngapartji Ngapartji projects, visit these websites:

www.ngapartji.org
www.bighart.org
Namatjira
written for the Namatjira Family (Aranda)
Namatjira was first co-produced by Big hART and Belvoir at Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney, on 25 September 2010, with the following cast:

PERFORMER Trevor Jamieson (Pitjantjatjara man)
PERFORMER Derik Lynch (Yankunytjatjara man)
MUSICIAN Genevieve Lacey
PORTRAIT ARTIST Robert Hannaford
SECOND MUSICIAN Nicole Forsyth
SECOND PORTRAIT ARTIST Evert Ploeg

Grandchildren and descendents of Albert Namatjira performing as artists on rotation throughout the Belvoir season:

Kevin Namatjira
Elton Wirri
Gloria Pannka
Ivy Pareroultja
Hilary Wirri
Lenie Namatjira
Betty Wheeler
Mostyn Kentaltja

Co-directors, Scott Rankin and Wayne Blair
Set Designer, Genevieve Dugard
Costume Designer, Tess Schofield
Composer and Music Director, Genevieve Lacey
Sound Designer, Jim Atkins
Lighting Designer, Nigel Levings
Creative Producer, Sophia Marinos
Assistant Lighting Designer, Christopher Page
Stage Manager, Luke McGettigan
Assistant Stage Manager, Jessica Smithett
Sound Operator, Nick Shipway
Associate Producers, Cecily Hardy and Clare Atkins
Community Producers, Shannon Huber, Sia Cox
Social Policy, Pru Gell
Cultural and Family Consultants: Lenie Namatjira, Kevin Namatjira, Betty Wheeler, Mostyn Kentaltja, Gloria Pannka, Ivy Pareroultja, Kevin Wirri, Joseph Rontji, Rahel Engwaneke, Judith Ingkamala, Gayle Quarmby.

Big hART’s *Namatjira* project is a long-term, multi-layered arts and community development project, with a touring performance piece and a grass roots project working with Aranda people in Alice Springs and Hermannsburg. For more about the project and about Big hART visit www.namatjira.bighart.org
MAIN CHARACTERS

JONATHAN NAMATJIRA (Western Aranda name: NAMATJIRRITJA), Albert’s father
EMELIE (Luritja name: LJUKUTA), Albert’s mother
ALBERT NAMATJIRA (Western Aranda name: ELEA)
REGINALD ‘REX’ BATTARBE (later named UNTJWAARA by Western Aranda men), whitefella landscape artist
WILMOT, old blackfella living in the Warrnambool forest
PASTOR, at Lutheran Hermannsburg Mission, speaks a blend of German and English
RUBINA (Western Aranda name: ILKALITA), Albert’s wife
OTHER CHARACTERS

ARMY SERGEANT, Fifty-Eighth Battalion
ARMY MEDIC, at Bullecourt, France
BAKERY EMPLOYEE, in the inner city
MISSION MEN, at Hermannsburg
AUSSIE BLOKE 1 & 2, tourists
KID, at mission
MELBOURNE SOCIETY WOMAN
CHARLES MCCUBBIN, prominent artist
LADY HUNTINGFIELD, wife of the Governor of Victoria
MR T.H. GILL, a pompous gallery owner
CUZ 1, 2, 3 & 4, mission humbuggers
WHITEFELLA 1 & 2, in Alice Springs
OLD ARANDA MAN, elder
GOVERNMENT MEMBER, in Parliament
OPPOSITION MEMBER, in Parliament
GOVERNMENT MAN, bureaucrat
MAURICE, one of Albert and Rubina’s sons
MAISIE, one of Albert and Rubina’s daughters
SYDNEY SOCIALITE
QUEEN ELIZABETH II, Queen of England
NEWSPAPER REPORTERS
MAGISTRATE, Mr Dodds, a Senior Magistrate
SETTING

The action of the play takes place in various Australian locations during the lifetime of Albert Namatjira (1902–1959).

The stage features several large sculptural shapes, made of wood, creating a variety of landscapes and locations.

To one side is a portrait artist with easel, and a chair in which his model sits from time to time.

Two other artists (from the Namatjira family) are drawing a large black-and-white landscape in chalk across the back of the stage.

HYMNS

The following hymns appear in the text.

‘Fierce Raged the Tempest’ (p.9)
Words: Godfrey Thring; Music: John Dykes (1862). Arranged by Genevieve Lacey. Translated into Western Aranda by TGHS (1964).

‘Follow On’ (pp.16 & 23)
Composed by Rev. W.O. Cushing (1878). Arranged by Genevieve Lacey. Translated into Western Aranda by David Roennfeldt.

‘Kumbaya’ (p.19)
Traditional. Arranged by Genevieve Lacey.

‘Stille Nacht!’ (‘Silent Night’) (p.28)
Composed by Franz Xaver Gruber (c.1818). Arranged by Genevieve Lacey. Translated into German by Carla Verwer.

‘Abide With Me’ (p.45)