

# British Theatre Guide

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## Beautiful One Day

Devised by the Company

Ilbijerri Theatre and Belvoir

Purcell Room, Southbank Centre

24–25 June 2015

In November 2004, an Aboriginal man died while in police custody on Palm Island, which forms part of Queensland's Great Barrier Reef (its Aboriginal name is Bwgcolman). This led to a riot in which the police station, the courthouse and the home of arresting officer Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley were all burned down.

After much delay, a coroner's inquiry found Hurley responsible for causing Mulrunji Doomadgee's fatal injuries, but no charges were then brought against him. That came later, but in 2007 Hurley was acquitted on charges of assault and manslaughter and in 2009 a Court of Appeal overturned the Coroner's findings.

That story, far from forgotten, is at the centre of *Beautiful One Day*, but it is part of a much longer history of the treatment of Aborigines by the Australian authorities that is told here from their perspective by a company that includes three real Palm Islanders: Magdalena Blackley (who is the show's cultural consultant), Harry Reuben and Kylie Doomadgee, Mulrunji's niece. Rachael Maza (who is also Ilbijerri's artistic director) is also closely linked to the island for her father was born there when his father was sent there when it was being used as a penal colony.

The Queensland government started settling Aborigines on Palm Island in 1918 and were soon using it as a place to send disruptive aborigines who lived under the harsh terms of laws by which the white administration controlled almost every aspect of their lives.

It wasn't just that you had to get permission to marry, you needed permission even to wave to your wife. No traditional languages or ceremonies were permitted, there were places you couldn't walk down, you couldn't talk to a white, and had to do 30 hours unpaid labour every week; every aspect of life seems to have been controlled. Although the Aborigines Act has now been repealed, its effects still persist.

Devised by director Eamon Flack and the performers with input from dramaturge David Williams and Sean Bacon, creator of the audio visual elements, and developed in collaboration between Melbourne's Aboriginal and Torres Strait theatre company Ilbijerri and Sydney's Belvoir, this is a combination of documentary and verbatim material and personal testimony on video that mixes direct address with physical demonstration and audio-visual images that offer both background and a glimpse of the island's attractions.

*Beautiful One Day* (the title comes from Queensland's tourism slogan "Beautiful one day... perfect the next") isn't conventional drama, more living newspaper, but it has been constructed with a subtle sense of theatre and holds through its very simplicity. Its performers could be telling this story for the first time they do it so freshly and with such feeling.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)