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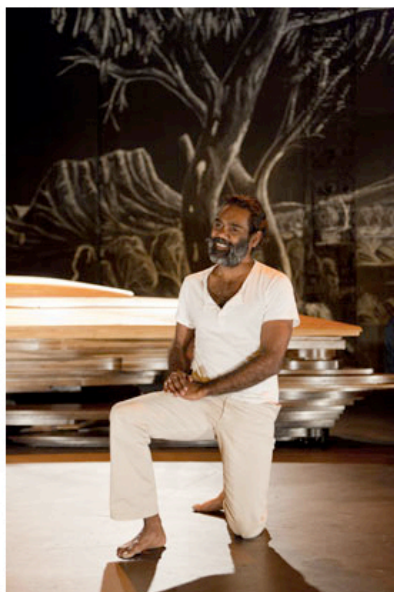
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## Namatjira | Belvoir & Big hART

Written by [Helen Barry](#)

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Left - Trevor Jamieson. Cover - Trevor Jamieson and Robert Hannaford. Photos - Brett Boardman

It doesn't happen often, but sometimes, if I'm very, very lucky, a production or a performer comes along that stops me in my tracks – one that's so undeniably good that I'm literally lost for words. Thankfully, such experiences are tantalisingly rare - or I'd never get any work done - but when they happen, I find myself in awe of the power of theatre and it's ability to transport us beyond the bounds of language alone. **Trevor Jamieson** is such a performer and **Namatjira** is that kind of production.

It's true that you can't have a great performance without good material, and **Jamieson** has been given a gift in this regard, based as this production is on the true story of our most famous Indigenous artist, Albert Namatjira. It's a life that's laced with a series of intriguing historical firsts. For Albert was not only the first Aboriginal to learn to paint in the European style but, as a result of the international fame his exquisite watercolour landscapes received, he also became the first to be offered citizenship (something that in context actually comes off as rather farcical when you consider that the main motivator at the time was to tax him on the fortune he was making).

But more than the extraordinary life of one man, **Namatjira** is a story about friendship, as it chronicles his connection with mentor Rex Battarbee (the whitefella who taught him how to

wield a brush); and it's a tale of love: both between Albert and his soul mate Rubina and between Albert and his extended community that, for better or for worse, he finds he must financially support.

While it's a great yarn in and of itself, it's how it plays out that leaves me dizzy, grasping for words. **Scott Rankin** and **Wayne Blair** unite to co-direct a piece that pays tribute to a diverse array of musical genres. From moving missionary songs sung in snippets of the Western Arrente language to a full-blown camp cabaret version of Barry White's "Can't Get Enough Of Your Love, Babe" the terrain is expansive, entertaining and highly original.

**Jamieson** frequently juggles multiple characters in conversation with each other, the result being something that feels akin to a channelled performance. One minute he's *Albert*, the next he's *Battarbee* and yet the back-and-forth illusion is jaw dropping. And the way he moves is something else entirely - his agility in conveying a sense of place with his body is simply unparalleled. His cohort, **Derek Lynch**, is a firm crowd favourite too. A talented young performer, **Lynch** frequently generates rapturous rounds of applause thanks to his many hilarious costume changes which serve to lighten the mood at appropriate junctures.

The innovative stage design (**Genevieve Dugard**) which features a carved movable platform resembling a rocky outcrop, much like the ones Albert painted, is inspired; however it's the actual descendants of Namatjira, who surround the stage working on a marvellous chalk mural of ghost gums and rolling hills together, that's the ultimate touch of magic. Oh, and did I mention that the acclaimed portraiture artist **Evert Ploeg** (who's won the People's Choice Award at two Archibalds) paints **Jamieson** as *Albert* throughout the show?

This super smart, highly evolved and ambitious piece of theatre is a real testament to the production company that made it, **Big hART**. A not-for-profit organisation that works intensively with disadvantaged communities creating social and political change through art and performance, **Big hART** were behind the award-winning *Ngapartji Ngapartji* (which was co-created and performed by **Jamieson**). With this production they've built on the connections they made in Alice Springs, spending two years developing this piece directly with Albert Namatjira's family and community. The actors even travelled to Hermannsburg where the family taught them how to paint.

The meticulous care and love that's been put into this production is written all over it, and the result is a triumph of art-meets-storytelling-meets-song-meets-music that's a one of a kind.

Belvoir & Big hART present  
**Namatjira**  
 by *Scott Rankin*

Directed by **Scott Rankin & Wayne Blair**

Venue: Upstairs Theatre | 25 Belvoir St Surry Hills  
 Dates: 25 September - 7 November, 2010  
 Times: Tuesday 6.30pm, Wednesday - Friday 8pm, Saturday 2pm & 8pm, Sunday 5pm  
 Tickets: Full Price \$57, Concession \$35  
 Bookings: [www.belvoir.com.au](http://www.belvoir.com.au)