

SPOTLIGHT ON EVA MULLALEY

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
AT YIRRA YAAKIN, PERTH



Sassy, gutsy and daringly defiant, Yamaji woman Eva Grace Mullaley brings a tangible fiery passion to theatre that sets careers alight for First Nations artists and creates opportunities for communities to tell their stories. Along the way she's played the role of admin assistant and stage manager, actor, director, lecturer, mentor and all-round creative force for positive change.

“Some of the best shows I've ever seen are the ones for the mob – the shows that are taken back to share with the community they represent. Watching an audience see their own lives on stage is the most beautiful thing to experience.”

Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

As part of the executive team at Yirra Yaakin, I manage staff and plan our arts programs, including workshops and community opportunities, which means I'm also responsible for community involvement and engagement. And with everything I do and say, I think about how that will represent and reflect on my community. I do a fair bit of advocacy work for First Nations artists too. I'm not an agent, but I answer lots of enquiries from people looking for First Nations actors and artists for film, theatre, art projects and collaborations and point them in the right direction.

Did you always plan to work in this industry?

I remember a teacher asking me what I wanted to be when I left school and my answer was 'Everything.' They told me I couldn't do that, and I replied, 'Watch me!' My idols have always been people who can sing, dance and act, and the subjects I scored straight A's in were music, art and drama. But from school, I started a Bachelor of Social Sciences and got a job in hospitality because I love meeting and working with people.

Then one day, I saw an ad for a one-year Aboriginal Theatre course. I thought I was too old to start an arts career at 23 but applied anyway and graduated from WAAPA in 2003. From there, I knocked on Yirra Yaakin's door and they signed me up for some children's theatre work, performing in David Milroy's production called *Whaloo is That You?* And soon my evening hours were also full, performing with *Black Swan* (Tear from a Glass Eye) and several student film projects.

So, how did you get into directing?

Aboriginal theatre became my community, and I showed real passion and interest in being whatever the industry needed me to be. Yirra Yaakin gave me work on the admin side, as office manager, community liaison, artist liaison. I was doing everything, and soon came to the realisation that my true calling was not acting but directing.

I directed a whole bunch of small productions for community events and tour managed a couple of dance troupes across Europe and Malaysia. Then I got asked to direct with Yirra Yaakin while also lecturing and mentoring at WAAPA and studying an advanced diploma in stage management. From there, I hopped over east to direct, dramaturg, plan and manage productions in Tassie, Sydney and Victoria, working with Ilbijerri, Moogahlin, Circus Oz, Melbourne Theatre Company and others. At that time, I was also learning as the development/executive producer of a forming peak body for First Nations performing arts, and brought all the business and strategic planning skills I'd gained back to Yirra Yaakin.

How would you describe yourself?

I'm a doer who likes to get things done. People say I must have lots of energy, but it's really my passion for new challenges and new ideas that fuels my fire. I love thinking outside of the box and redefining things. I'll learn the way other people do things and then I'll find my own way of doing it better with the best interests of my First Nations arts community at heart.

What do you love most about the industry?

It's ever-changing and we're constantly evolving to keep up with the world and lead it too. Our industry is really shining a light on how we can change for the better as a society, as human beings. We're recognising the past and telling the truth. And we're dreaming and visualising a positive future.

What's the best part of your job?

I love being able to facilitate and create platforms that allow young and emerging First Nations artists to really shine, sparkle and dazzle. I love seeing their culture and stories retained and represented in the arts. And for me, some of the best shows I've ever seen are the shows for the mob – the shows that are taken back to share with the community they represent. Watching an audience see their own lives on stage is the most beautiful thing to experience.

What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

Skills pay the bills! The more you're willing to do and learn, the more employable you are. Put your hand up for anything going. Any kind of training and study you put in can really pay off and put you within easier reach of your end goal – whether that's stage management or acting or directing.

And what's next for you?

I want to get all around WA, and into South Australia and the Northern Territory to work with more communities and provide platforms for them to tell their stories, their way. Those communities don't have any First Nations theatre companies and I want them to know that theatre is here for them too.

We've also been collaborating with New Zealand and Canada and I'm hoping to get back over there soon to work with the First Nations theatre companies there. I'd love to find a collaborative piece we can all contribute to and tour with.

Find with Eva online

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

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