

SNAPSHOT

CHRISTINE WARD IN CONVERSATION WITH JOHN HARDING



Photograph by Steven Rhall

John Harding is one of Australia's leading playwrights, with eleven productions staged, and broadcast locally and abroad. A founding member of Melbourne's Ilbjerri ATSI Theatre Cooperative, he works in the hope of creating a space for Indigenous people on the Australian Stage.

John wrote Ilbjerri's first production Up The Road, and won the Australian Human Rights Award, for its second extended production and national tour in 1997. Belvoir Theatre toured nationally with the play, which was directed by Neil Armfield. He directed his last three

major productions: Enuff (Malthouse, 2002), No Parking (Theatreworks, 2001), Second Helping (North Melbourne's Arts House, 2005).

An accomplished performer, John co-wrote and co-starred in Blak and Tran II (2004), with Hung Le and Natives Striking Blak (2007) for Ilbjerri Theatre.

He worked for the ABC TV show Blackout and on the SBS TV ICAM Program. While at SBS, he created the first Indigenous comedy show, The Masters, directed by Michael Riley.

John is also a published poet, and in 2007 he completed his first film about the Pitjatjanjara Land Rights Act anniversary Festival, Nganampa Manta. In 2008, he followed up with the documentary Fitzroy Stars; More than a Game, for ABC TV, which aired the same year.

Christine caught up with John in his office in Melbourne:

Where were you born and who are your mob?

I was born in Melbourne. My mother came down from Queensland when she was only about 19. My mother's mother is from the Torres Strait, from up Darnley Island in the Torres Strait. My mother's father is from Hopevale, Cape York way, where Noel Pearson lives. We're basically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. My father was non-Aboriginal.

What are you doing at the moment?

I'm currently working as a Research Officer for an Indigenous Professor, Mark Minchinson at RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology]. I've been doing that for about four months.

You're also a writer yeah ...

Yeah, I'm a playwright. I think I've written about ten shows, and I've made two docs in the last two years. I'm kinda moving into the film world a little bit now. I'm getting a bit over theatre, but I'm doing one more play next year, with a friend of mine from Tasmania, Jim Everett, an Aboriginal playwright. I think he was the second ever Aboriginal playwright after Jack Davis.

So Jim Everett has inspired you?

Yeah, he and Jack Davis were the first two black playwrights I read.

That's quite a privilege, isn't it, to be able to work with someone like that?

It is. I mean I couldn't believe it. He just came up to me and said, 'Johnny