



# Balun Budjarahm - River Dreaming

By Justine McClymont. Photographed for *Clarity* by Gary Parker.

**"Heads and shoulders, knees and toes, we all clap hands together."** It's a chorus sung by excitable pre-schoolers all over the country. The sound of young hearts and minds learning as they go. But for a group of Grafton pre-schoolers they sing together in a different language. The language of Bundjalung Country.

"*Gunggalair*," says Dean Loadman. The children in the room stop and look up. It takes a moment for them to settle down from all the activity, but it's obvious they know what it means ... *listen*. "Who remembers the word for kangaroo?" Dean asks. Hands shoot up in the air and the young voices call out "*gurraman!*".

Artist and youth worker Dean Loadman is visiting the pre-school as part of Balun Budjarahm Cultural Experience, a Clarence Valley based cultural education organisation. Together with fellow artist Bianca Monaghan and Uncle Roger Duroux, Dean shares local language, songs, stories, art, artefacts and traditional dance through pre-schools, schools, youth programs and community events.

"Balun Budjarahm means 'river dreaming' in Bundjalung language," Dean explains. "The connection to the river is very significant. The river connects the three nations, the Bundjalung,

Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl. It's a unique spot here. It's like the crossroads where the three nations all connect. The name also came from the connection with our youth dance group Us Mob Balun Ngahriga and how we perform up and down the river."

"A lot of our culture was lost as it wasn't allowed to be practised in the past," says Dean. "By bringing it back and bringing the language back we're just wanting to share with everyone, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. It's about bringing everyone together and the healing process. I think it's so powerful. Learning and sharing and teaching the culture," says Dean.

Uncle Roger, a respected Bundjalung

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Gumbaynggirr Elder, says that learning together is all part of the process. "Listening and learning from each other. And hearing a different story every time makes it more, you know, exciting. The three of us learn from each other," he says.

"There's 13 clans in the Bundjalung. And you'll find the Clarence River runs along there and up into Tooloom. I think they say there's 380km of river and then it makes it way down and that's

where some of the stories start and they go along and connect up the whole river," says Uncle Roger.

Bianca explains that she learnt the story of the river from her grandmother (reproduced below). "I was pretty lucky growing up," says Bianca. "Being from Baryulgil we had a fair bit of culture out there. My grandmother, she told me the story of the river Dirrangun so I pass that one on in the schools. She was a highly regarded Elder so I was really lucky to have her as a grandmother. I think as a kid you take it for granted. She was forever telling us to sit down and listen and we'd just want to run and play. You don't realise until you're older. We're just lucky that she made sure we knew her

stories and knew our language and knew our seasons of hunting."

"My hope is that our

Aboriginal culture is part of everyone's knowledge. Everyone should know the stories and know the language. We are teaching the kids from here to say 'Jingi-wala'. So if they grow up with that when they travel they can say, 'where I'm from we say 'Jingi-wala'. That simple one word can mean a lot. We've got non-indigenous kids in our dance group, and they love it just as much as the Aboriginal kids. And that's what it's about."

**Somewhere in the mountains near Tooloom**, in those forests of tall trees, somewhere in those mountains hidden by drifting mists, the old woman Dirrangun kept hidden her sacred spring.

This old woman didn't want anyone to know where the water was. It was good water and she used to get it herself. But one day she was sick. And there

was a young man called a *bulagaan*.

He was a very well-built young man, he was handsome. She asked this *bulagaan* if he would go and get the water. She sent him up to this secret spring to get the water. She had to direct him and tell where it was. So the *bulagaan* set off into the mountains to get some of the

water in a bark coolamon.

When the *bulagaan* got to the water he found that Dirrangun had dammed the water up. The *bulagaan* broke the dam and the water started to run away.

When Dirrangun saw the water coming, she started to try and dam the water. But the water broke through. And at last the water came down and went into the seas which we call in the language *Burraga*.

That's how this river, the Clarence, came to be here. This Mount Ogilvie here, that's one of the dams Dirrangun made. The gorge down below Baryulgil here is that place of the last dam that Dirrangun made. But the water broke through.

When the water got down to Yamba, Dirrangun realised that she couldn't stop it, so she cursed it and made it salt so that no one could drink it.

Somewhere in the mouth of the Clarence is the last stand of Dirrangun as she tried to stop the water. She threw herself in front of the water to try and stop it with herself, but the water just rushed over her and she was turned into stone.

Extract from 'Dirrangun' by Bronwyn Bancroft, with permission from Harper Collins.

## Dirrangun at Baryulgil

*As related by Bianca's grandmother Lucy Daley*

