

Patron Saint of Broome: Stephen “Bamba” Albert

Eulogy/Tribute 12/12/2019



Stephen “Bamba” Albert was a giant on whose shoulders we were all carried. He was a friend to everyone of all nationalities and backgrounds. He was a living example of how great Australia could be, and how much fun we could have, if we could build our future on the foundation of first nations culture while being inclusive of the multi-cultural rainbow of peoples who have come to settle here.

Bamba was known in every Aboriginal community across the country but he never left his home town of Broome to which he was absolutely committed. With his hat and Aboriginal braid children from Roebourne to Wreck Bay from Thursday Island to Shepparton to Bass Strait would, seeing him, run out of their houses and yell his name and follow him everywhere. It was like walking with the pied piper. The children felt they knew him as a father or an uncle. They wanted to touch him and it gave him so much joy, and like Jimmy Little, Bamba had this way of making every child feel special.

Bamba was a legendary troubadour. He could entertain and thrill audiences from the camp fire to the Opera House stage. The reason why people loved him was because he was the salt of Broome. He absorbed everything growing up in Australia’s cultural melting pot. As his mate Kevin Fong was fond of saying: Broome old town, you learn to think ten different ways. With the great Jimmy Chi and Stephen Pigram and his family Bamba was royalty and their sheer talent eclipsed Broadway or the West End of London or the

Bolshoi or Paris. On a winter night with the moon in the sky there's was the greatest show on earth. Bamba can not be replaced but he will never be forgotten and his example lives on for the next generation of Broome's forever, extraordinary talent.

Bamba's hat was symbolic. It was an emblem of his many, many skills and roles. Bamba was not just one of the greatest Aboriginal singers, actors and performers we have ever seen, he was an educator, a policy maker, a chairman, a community catalyst, a role model, a pioneer of cultural tourism, an ambassador for Broome and, most of all, an advocate for Aboriginal sovereignty in every sphere of life from film, radio and television to land rights. There he would be talking to the real movers and shakers Sammy Lovell or Vincent Angus or Doody about the past and the future when it really mattered. If you followed Bamba you would talk to the grass roots leaders of Aboriginal Australia the people doing the real hard yards. He always understood what was going on at grass roots levels from the need for better housing for transient country men and women to better schools in remote communities.

It could have been easier for Bamba. He could have had just one career. He could have had a desk job back in the day that set him up with superannuation and all the perks. But like all giants, the people who really change things for the better and create a legacy and an example for all of us, he took the road less travelled. There should be a statue for Bamba in Chinatown. He was the life of Broome walking around in human form. For visitors he inspired joy and wonder. For locals he was trusted to not give away too many secrets about the most wonderful destination in all of Australia and probably the world. He was the wind in the luggers sails.

One of the things that I will treasure is those sessions deep into the night in Broome when the air was cooler. Bamba's stories of his Japanese step-dad and Aboriginal Mum were part of the fabric of life 'behind the gate' that makes Broome so wonderful. It was a community where segregation worked in favour of the future and where the white Australia policy did not apply. This is why Broome is the New Orleans of Australia. Its people have a beauty beyond compare. Its culture has a depth and sophistication that no other place in Australia has. Above all it has music and I am so glad we will always have [Bamba Baad](#) to remind us of these things.

A measure of the man for actors, singers, performers, artists is that he could perform at any place, at any time, for any audience at the drop of a hat. He had this joy in his heart that was boundless. Nothing gave him more pleasure than to share it. Bamba will never be forgotten in Broome and around the country. He is with us now and always will be. So long bubli, rest well and entertain that mob up in the stars. You always were, and always will be, one of our brightest lights.

PCB

- Circulated to friends and family Broome, 12/12/2019
- "What a wonderful world" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfRNOpUkEqA> tribute by Mark Cochrane
- Bamba Baad - <https://www.isx.org.au/projects/baamba-baad>
- Attached below a sketch "The Patron Saint of Broome" I sent to Bamba in 2012 to cheer him up after his foot surgery. He was too modest I think to show it to anyone. I hope it captures something of the greatness and fun of the man, something for the cast of the fantastic new tour of Bran Neu Dae.

“PATRON SAINT OF BROOME”

A PLAY TO CELEBRATE THE ONE AND ONLY STEPHEN “BAMBA” ALBERT

ROUGH DRAFT ONLY

Circa 2012

Peter Botsman
02-44-65-1665



ACT ONE

DREAMTIME

A hospital bed with drip is off to the side of the stage. Bamba is dreaming.

DREAM SEQUENCE 1

DOCTOR

It's got to come off.

BAMBA

My twinkle toes, not my twinkle toes

DOCTOR

If we don't take off your twinkle toes, then
it'll have to be even higher up

BAMBA

Ohhhhhhhhhhh no!

Dancing nurses appear dancing, swirling around Bamba and the stage with
meat cleavers.

SONG: IS YOU MY BABY¹

BAMBA

How am I going to multiply the Aboriginal
race

NURSES CHORUS

Without your jumbo/noora in place!

BAMBA

Is you my baby? Is you my baby? Is you

NURSES CHORUS

You'll have nothing but your warm embrace

BAMBA

I'm still part of the human race

NURSES CHORUS

Is you my baby, Is you my baby, is you..

Dancing nurses swirling around Bamba sing "Is you may baby" disappear
into smoke leaving Bamba standing alone centre stage.

BAMBA

Well even in this country with or without all
my parts I still know how to pick up the tarts

¹ Jimmy Chi & Stephen Pigram

DREAM SEQUENCE 2

Moaning and groaning from the hospital bed

MONOLOGUE FROM THE BED

I bin drinkin. I bin drovin. I bin a Christian.
But most of all I bin true to myself. Most of
all I bin true to myself.

BAMBA

(Spoken) There's nothing I would rather be
than be an Aborigine and watch you take my
precious land away, For nothing gives me
greater joy than to watch you fill each girl and
boy with superficial existential shit, Now you
may think I'm cheeky but I'd be satisfied to
rebuild all your convict ships and sail you on
the tide.

SPIRIT

Well you told us straight Bamba

BAMBA

Who that!(sits up right in the bed) What kind
of dubu you? A philosophical guwingan?
Those convict ships never sailed back home
though...

SPIRIT

But you caught a whisper of times past.

BAMBA

When will those times return

SPIRIT

Thanks to you mate they're coming back

BAMBA

But what about my lagurr... hey their still
here!

SONG: NOTHING I WOULD RATHER BE²

Corrobooree of doctors and nurses sing "Nothing I would rather be" lead by
Bamba from the bed on wheels swung from one side of the stage to the

² Jimmy Chi

other.

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DREAM SEQUENCE 3

Moaning and groaning from the hospital bed.
I need to feel the sea air. That will heal me.
Where are you crying my pretty Aileen.

Lugger sails emerge from the wings.

OKAMURA

C'mon Stephen we need to catch the tide

BAMBA

I come in and go out with the tide. Hey
nanganmanda

OKAMURA

Let us alight that stairway tonight my boy.

Midst the lugger sails and a backdrop of a stairway to the moon, divers with full helmets appear for Town by the Bay dance sequence.

SONG TOWN BY THE BAY³

Why are you crying my pretty Colleen,
Why are you eyes filled with tears,
Let me come over and dry all your eyes
and tell you the way that I feel
Just one step closer don't throw me away and

³ Jimmy Chi

carry me back to the town by the bay
When the darkness is falling at pass of days
won't you cherish the memory of the town by
the bay..

OKAMURA

You have created that bran nue dae my boy.
You gotta get back home son to enjoy it and
make it all come together.

BAMBA

You mean I'm not going to die.

OKAMURA

My man you'll never die, you gotta get back to
perform those miracles. Prince tadpole there's
majic in the air.

BAMBA

Hey I can smell that fish and rice?

DREAM SEQUENCE 4

Nurses and doctors and physiotherapists
appear around Bamba teaching him how to
walk.

BAMBA

This bloody diabetes it nearly got me

NURSES & DOCTORS

You gotta get back to that traditional cuisine!

BAMBA

I'm not going to make it, tripping over my
feet.

NURSES & DOCTORS

You gotta get back to that Kangaroo meat!

BAMBA

I got a better idea

SONG: I FEEL LIKE GOING BACK
HOME

NURSES & DOCTORS

I feel like going back home!

BAMBA

Right now when the mangoes are ripe!

NURSES & DOCTORS

Frangipanis starting to bloom

BAMBA

And the bluebone starting to bite

NURSES & DOCTORS

Hey Mum I can just taste your fish soup and
rice

BAMBA

I'm going back home to you

All this time Bamba is being taught how to walk again and gradually he starts to walk
again and even starts to manage a dance

NURSES & DOCTORS

Can't hack the pace of the city life

BAMBA

Soon I'll be dreaming of Broome

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ACT TWO

MIRACLES

MIRACLE 1: THE LAND

BAMBA IS WALKING WITH HIS STICK IN THE PARK. WHEN SOME COUNTRYMEN RECOGNISE HIM AND CALL HIM OVER.

COUNTRYMEN

Hey Bro come and have a drink with us.

BAMBA

I'll sit down with you.

COUNTRYMEN:

Why is there no place for us bro but just to sit out here in the park

BAMBA

You own this town bro and this land and this park...

COUNTRYMEN:

If only, the only think we own is this bottle and it'll soon be empty.

BAMBA:

Not only does this land belong to us in spirit. We own it as legal title bro. It's us that says what is what, what can be done and what must be respected. So as you sit there in the park you must start to do your town planning bro. The best town planning is done in the shade here in the park.

Country men and women start to dance in the park.

SONG: WIND OF FREEDOM⁴

Kimberley a callin, in the accents of an ancient land,
Like this wild rain falling, it's in a language that I understand
Yes Kimberley is calling, any heart cares to learn her ways
Sure when Kimberley's a calling, this is one heart that obeys

⁴ E. Pigram

Range land and river, winding far and free
Challenging forever, with its magic and
mystery...

Stage darkens characters re-assemble for the next scene.

MIRACLE 2: THE SEA

SUNSET DOWN BY THE BOAT RAMP. TWO FISHERMEN WATCH
THE MOON COME UP. IT'S THE NIGHT OF THE FAMOUS
BROOME STAIRWAY TO THE MOON.

FISHERMAN 1

Bone fish are on the bite

FISHERMAN 2

The moon will put an end to that..

The moon comes up and to the incredulity of the Fisherman Bamba walks
on the water up the stairway to the moon.

BAMBA:

Stand back you shallow water men, let a deep
sea diver through! I've got a story to tell and
it's all about the sea. It was the sea that
brought so many different people to our
country. Something happened here that didn't
happen anywhere else. All of us Aborigines,
Japanese, Malaysians, Torres Strait Islanders,
we became friends, lovers, relatives beneath
the segregated barriers, and we made
something special that no-one can take away.
It's the essence of Broome. It's our time now
and it began with the saltwater cowboys.

SONG: SALTWATER COWBOY⁵

Lend me your body tonight my bluewater lady
This salty wind is getting to my bones
These lugger sails are moving too slowly
For this saltwater cowboy sailing home
This old copper hat is, aching my shoulders
These lead weight boots don't need any spurs
To ride these waves and bare back mermaids
Ah this saltwater country is my home
Stand back you shallow water man let a deep

⁵ David & Stephen Pigram

sea diver through.
Selamat tingal, nakula jarndu
Sayonara, so'n, gallow nyundu
These lugger sails are moving too slowly
For this saltwater cowboy sailing home.

Stage darkens

MIRACLE 3: CULTURE

THE SOAK. A CORRUGATED HUMPY. FIRE. A DISCUSSION OF
THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF SOPHISTICATED.

BAMBA:

Ladies and gentlemen I would like to welcome
you to tonight's Rabibi oration, a collective
effort from our most esteemed scholars

ELDER 1:

Tonight we ask ourselves why the songlines
go north and east but there are only whispers
from the south and west. What has happened
to our brothers and sisters who were in the
frontlines of the invasion? How can we revive
their spirit?

SONG: OLD MAN FROM THE BUSH⁶

Bloodwood burning bright on this cold and
lonely night
Bringing thoughts and dreams to my mind,
Raging tongues of fire reaching out like a
friend
Keeps me warm and lets the smoke to my
head...

MIRACLE 4: GRANDMOTHERS AND THE DRUNKS

DOWN IN THE BAR. FIGHTS AND DRINKING. LOUD MUSIC. A
GROUP OF DRINKERS SURROUNDS BAMBA.

BAMBA:

You know I don't know why I come in here
anymore. You have to stay close to the pulse

⁶ David & Stephen Pigram

but what's the point if this publican steals all
our money and makes us sick.

DRINKERS:

Ev'ry time my baby an' me we go uptown
Police come an' they knock me down --
Johnny Walker, all around my brain.
Hey, baby, won't you come here quick;
This old JW is 'bout to make me sick --
JW, all around my brain.

BAMBA:

Yonder come my baby, she's dressed in red,
She's got a shotgun, says she's gonna kill me
dead --
Too much red wine, all around my brain.
Hey, baby, will you come here quick;
This old flagon 'bout to make me sick -
Flagon wine, all around my brain.

DRINKERS:

You take Sally, an' I take Sue,
Ain't no difference between the two --
Bundy, all around my brain.
Hey, baby, ya better come here quick;
This ol' bundy 'bout to make me sick --
Bundy, all around my brain.

BAMBA

Hey young fella that speed your using for
horses, an' it's not for men,
Doctors say it'll kill you, but don't say when --
Speed all around my brain.
Hey, baby, ya better come here quick;
This old white powder 'bout to make me sick
--
Drugs and alcohol all around my brain.
Hey, baby, you better come here quick;
This drugs and alcohol 'bout to make me sick
--

Into the bar strides the grandmothers on night patrol.

GRANDMOTHER 1:

Well lookie here all these boys are high as
kites and they think they lookin pretty cute

GRANDMOTHER 2

And you girls hangin out like you're day old

washing...

GRANDMOTHER 1

What a sad thing that all these brothers and sisters don't know about the real Aboriginal high...

DRUNK:

What you talking bout the strongest think you old ladies have ever had is billy tea... and I can tell you Nana just don't work for me...

GRANDMOTHER 2

Well young brother let me tell you about what makes me high and sonny when you know this high you don't need to hang around this Roebourne Tavern paying out your money to white fellas up to no good..

GRANDMOTHER 1

You tell em hun

SONG DRY RIVER BED⁷

GRANDMOTHER 2

When you're drifting on the ocean, and the sea is a perfect blue
But those storm clouds on the horizon, are keeping you true to who are you
So take me cross the spinifex plains, where the true mirage never ends
And the smell of the rain is a long way away,
lay me down on a dry river bed

Drunks start to hush and dance around the grandmothers listening to their song.

GRANDMOTHER 1

Don't have no white picket fence, don't have no English lawn
Just got the heat waves dancing for me, on the red dirt I was born
So take me away cross the spinifex plains,
where the true mirage never ends

⁷ S.A.D.G.P.S Pigram, P. Mamid

And the smell of the rain is a long way away,
lay me down on a dry river bed

BAMBA AND DRUNKS

Feel the heart of the country, beating to them
lonely blues
Gotta get back there, gotta get back there, I'll
be back there real soon
For faraway 'cross the spinifex plains, where
the true blue mirage never ends
And the smell of the rain is a long way away,
lay me down on a dry river bed.

GRANDMOTHER 2

Well what you waitin for, pack up your
money, join us we're on course for a true
Aboriginal high....

The whole gang disperses leaving a bemused
barman wondering whether a bomb has
dropped. Bamba puts his head around the
stage, Come on brother and the barman leaps
across the bar to join him.

MIRACLE 5: PROSPERITY

Bamba's parade through China town. People all up and down the street greet
him as they go about their business.

BAMBA:

Ngadyi mingan bubli? (How are you bro?)

BAMBA:

Kalia mabu mingan ngunu? (Are you good
sister?)

BAMBA:

Konnichiwa (Good day)

BAMBA:

Mabu ngangan wuba (I am good son)

BAMBA

Wuan (Good day)

BAMBA

Ngady kurridyin mabudyin (Are you good?)

BAMBA

Which wei (Giday Torres Strait)

The finale is a super dance routine demonstrating the incredible diversity of Broome – a model for Australia without a white Australia policy – celebrating Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Japanese, Chinese culture.

SONG: NOWHERE ELSE BUT HERE⁸

BAMBA

Meditating at a fireside in this beautiful land
of Aus
Could heaven be a better place than well
supposing that it was
If heaven is in some future with a tomorrow
so unclear
Then home for me I guess could better be,
nowhere else but here
Nowhere else but here, ooh yeah, nowhere
else but here, ooh no
Home me I guess might be never be nowhere
else but here

If daunted by the many many times things
don't turn out as planned
Or haunted by the feeling of that unfamiliar
hand
Just listen to little honeysuckle singing sweet
and clear
The sweetest honey is in the tree that's
nowhere else but here
Nowhere else but here, ooh yeah, nowhere
else but here, ooh no
Home me I guess might be never be nowhere
else but here

The cast re-assemble on the darkened stage in a gambling circle playing Broome mahjong. As each character wins a hand he or she bows and departs. The final departure is Bamba: "Larri we got Buttha in front!" As he leaves he throws out frangipani flowers into the audience.

⁸ E. Pigram

THE END