

This summary is part of research on performance training in Australia undertaken by Professor Peta Tait and Dr Melanie Beddie in 2017 funded by La Trobe University. It researched the influences on, and the training of, prominent teachers working within key training institutions circa 1980 to 2010.

## Brian Syron

An Aboriginal man of Birripi heritage, Brian Syron was born in Balmain to Dan Syron and English migrant, Elizabeth Murray. He was the first Australian to study with Stella Adler at her New York City acting studio and one of the few Australians to learn the Stanislavski's technique from such a direct source.

Syron began his training with Hayes Gordon at the Ensemble Theatre Studios before travelling to USA in the early 1960s where he began his studies with Stella Adler. In 1963 Syron visited the UK and worked with Cicely Berry and the Uta Hagen-trained method acting teacher, Doreen Cannon, at the Drama Centre in London. Syron then returned to the USA to continue training and working as an actor and director. On his return to Australia in 1968, Syron directed the prison play, *Fortune and Men's Eyes* by John Herbert, for The Ensemble Theatre and his production provoked considerable political attention. In the USA, Syron had been inspired by the American Civil Rights Movement and his return to Australia coincided with the emergent Aboriginal Rights Movement and with Paul Coe he set up the Black Theatre in Sydney in 1969. In that year he also began giving acting classes in a studio in Darlinghurst for Aboriginal actors which he later opened to non-Aboriginal people. He continued teaching these classes intermittently until 1992, and his students included John Hargraves, Helen Morse, Rhoda Roberts and Lydia Miller and many others. In 1973, Syron invited Stella Adler to Australia to give a series of workshops and in 1974 Syron travelled to LA to work at Adler's studio there. During the 1980s Syron took over the teaching work for Hayes Gordon at the Ensemble Theatre Studios when Gordon took time out to once again tour with *Fiddler on the Roof*.

An activist as well as an artist, Syron co-founded the Aboriginal Theatre Company (ATC) in 1982 and its first production was Robert Merritt's play *The Cake Man* which Syron directed. Syron was the founder of the Eora Arts Centre in Redfern, Sydney. Syron was instrumental in initiating, with Katherine Brisbane, the Australian National Playwrights Conference in 1973 and in January 1987, Syron founded the National Black Playwrights Conference (NPBC).

Syron's teaching and directorial process was influential for a great many contemporary actors. His approach was the unique combination of his awareness of 60,000 years of Aboriginal performance practice, his own training with leading teachers internationally and his keen awareness of the need to develop a national culture that included Aboriginal Australians.

