



Fire Water

This year, *Fire Water*, a spectacle of illumination on Sydney Harbour, will take the 1797 sinking of the merchant ship *Sydney Cove* as the launching pad for a wildly colourful and fantastical Bollywood meets colonial drama.

Presented by Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, and held over four nights from 11-14 June, the story is told by a young Indian-Australian girl as she researches her ancestor, a crew member of the ill-fated ship, for a school project.

The *Sydney Cove* was owned by merchant Robert Campbell after whom Campbells Cove, the site of *Fire Water*, is named.

Travelling from Calcutta loaded with 30,000 litres of rum, *Sydney Cove*'s crew included 44 Indian sailors known as Lascars.

In February 1797, the ship was wrecked and subsequently abandoned at Preservation Island, off the north coast of Tasmania. A large amount of the supplies were salvaged.

With the crew's health deteriorating, 17 members set sail in a long boat for the mainland, landing near Eden on the south coast of New South Wales, and then undertaking a 600 kilometre trek north through uncharted terrain to Port Jackson.

The walk took over two months and only three of the original 17 crew members survived, whereupon Governor Hunter ordered two ships to depart to save the rest of the crew and cargo.

On their journey back, one of the ships was shipwrecked with its crew and eight surviving members from the *Sydney Cove* lost.

The Authority's Creative Producer Michael Cohen says *Fire Water* asks the audience to reconsider their perception of a mono-cultural Anglo-Saxon colonial settlement.

'Our history is a lot more complex than is often presented. It's not just a story of two clashing cultures. Our nation has had, from its early colonial days, a long engagement with a number of Asian countries including India.

'Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, as place manager, is always looking to interpret The Rocks' history in new ways that are relevant to contemporary audiences.

'*Fire Water* is a real departure from classical forms of historic interpretation. It's a dramatic spectacle of fire, aerial performances and animation – all staged on the harbour.'

Michael says the difficulty in staging this story is that it takes place in a number of different locations over an extended period of time.

'We needed to find a way to present the story as a single piece of theatre whilst keeping the audience engaged – who may be sitting on the foreshore up to 100 metres away from where the drama is unfolding on the harbour.

'What we have done is to show the story of the *Sydney Cove*'s Lascar crew through the eyes of a young girl. She has naturally fictionalised and romanticised the tale, as we all do when re-telling an event.

These twists include a mass Bollywood style dancing finale and a budding romance for the girl's ancestor.

'It's a playful spin on history, presented in such a way that our theatrical liberties are obvious to the audience,' says Michael.

The Foreshore Authority first presented *Fire Water* last year and Michael sees it becoming a key event on the Sydney calendar.

'What's so exciting about presenting a production with Sydney Cove as the stage and star, is that we have such a breadth of exciting stories to tell of which most Sydneysiders are unaware.

'It's sad that for most of us, our knowledge of our city is so limited and one-dimensional. When you start delving, you see a richness and a depth in the adversity that previous generations endured and overcame.

'Whether it's a theatrical spectacle like *Fire Water* or the Aroma Festival of coffee, tea and chocolate, we want audiences to leave our events in The Rocks with a heightened sense of this place and the layering of history.

'All on top of having a great time out,' says Michael.

Fire Water

Time: 6pm – 9pm (35 minute shows at 6.15pm, 7.15pm and 8.15pm)

Date: 11-14 June, 2011

Location: Campbells Cove, The Rocks

Presented by Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority

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The Rocks Discovery Museum is proudly managed by Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority