

# Taking Zorba to the Greeks, Elcho Island-style



The Chooky Dancers of Elcho Island, now a worldwide sensation on YouTube.  
Photo: *Glenn Campbell*

Lindsay Murdoch, Darwin  
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ABORIGINAL teenagers on isolated Elcho Island, off Australia's far northern coast, raised a few laughs late one night when they danced a version of *Zorba the Greek* with a sort of chook shuffle.

Twelve months later the "Chooky Dancers" are a worldwide hit on the internet. By yesterday their hilarious performance had been viewed by 364,773 people on YouTube.

Now the group of 12, who perform in bare feet and loincloths and ceremonial white body paint, have received invitations to perform in Greece, and will begin a tour of Queensland in March. Other invitations are flooding in.

Lionel Djirrimbilwuy, 21 — who came up with the idea to fuse *Zorba the Greek* with traditional dancing from his Yolngu clan — yesterday returned with his troupe to Elcho Island from Darwin to a hero's welcome.

"It's fantastic the world wants to see us dance," Lionel told a cheering crowd of 50 waiting at the airport. "Who would think a whitefella audience would react like that? It's incredible."

Said his father, Frank, 56, who is the island's best-known singer: "We still can't believe it. I posted video of the dance on YouTube just for a bit of fun, and it just took off."

The dance is such a sensation in Greece that cafe owners have screened it. Six of the dancers, aged between 12 and 22, had never been to Darwin until this week, where they performed for the first time outside Arnhem Land, the vast Aboriginal-owned region of the Northern Territory.

Onlookers in the foyer of the Supreme Court yesterday went wild, clapping and cheering. "Well, I'm sure nobody will be claiming we stole the idea from them," Mr Djirrimbilpilwuy, who now manages the group. "It's more up-tempo than the original *Zorba the Greek*."

Mr Djirrimbilpilwuy said the dancers, who speak English only as their second or third language, hope they will be seen as role models in indigenous communities struggling with alcohol and drug abuse.

There are few jobs on Elcho, where many of the 2000 Aboriginal residents still hunt such traditional tucker as mud crabs, turtles and dugongs.

"We are trying to get away from all the politics and the indigenous intervention and all that, and paint a picture of how these kids can make a go of something," Mr Djirrimbilpilwuy said.

Asked how teenagers who had never before seen a city bigger than Darwin would think about travelling to perform in Greece, Mr Djirrimbilpilwuy said: "It will be just magic."

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/taking-zorba-to-the-greeks-elcho-islandstyle/2007/12/11/1197135463196.html>