Co-written and narrated by Aboriginal performer Trevor Jamieson, The Career Highlights of Mamu is an epic work, because much has happened to his kinship family from the spinifex country of Tjuntjuntjara, just over the border between South and Western Australia. Mamu, the spirit demon has not only caused much havoc over a very long time but more recently the Spinifex people have been caught up in one of the true terrors of the 20th century. Part of their homeland is a stretch of country - deemed uninhabited by the British and Australian authorities - known as Maralinga.

Mamu begins with personal history. Jamieson, who grew up in Cundeelee Mission in WA before moving 2000 kms south to Kalgoorlie, calls upon a group of family members and elders to reconstruct a story of the courage and determination of his people. Introducing himself by name, the actor narrates a living documentary accompanied by multi-media screens and onstage music. “It was an idea for a one man show, and then this mob took over” he laughs as he welcomes elders including Dinny Smith, Roy Underwood, Fred Grant and Stella Wicker, brothers Jarman and Milton Hansen, musician Steve Richter, composer Iain Grandage and Japanese performer Asako Izawa.

Dressed in black t-shirt and trackies, Jamieson describes the importance of kinship and the lore relating to birthplace, then talks about his family. In the spirit of Black Swan’s other innovative work, Bran Nue Dae, in which Jamieson himself had a lead role, the wedding of his parents is re-enacted as the cast members enthusiastically gather around. There are always Mamu presences looming however, which bring a grimness to the story.

There are songs, written and sung by Jamieson and Milton Hansen, and comic scenes of the first sighting of a steam train in the desert and bush mechanic car repairs which end with a Chuck Jones boom - much to the delight of the first night audience, including the many Aboriginal people attending. The Emu dance is performed, never seen outside the Tjuntjunt-
The generosity of the elders in sharing such ceremonies with us has a profound effect.

The central stories relate to Hiroshima and Maralinga. Jamieson is filmed in Hiroshima talking with a survivor describing his experiences as a nine year old. Asako Izawa, in traditional kimono, recites accounts while graphic images of the bomb blast and its horrific casualties are screened. Then the Maralinga tests are described - first from upbeat Movietone news footage and official British assertions about the “emptiness” of the area. It is powerfully ironic to hear elders describe, some on film and some first hand, the experience of being summarily moved on, and the ordeals and loss of life in trying to return to the contaminated homelands.

This production is brimming with material and the participants create a memorable living history with candour and great dignity. Black Swan collaborators - director Andrew Ross, designer Genevieve Dugard, Debbie Gittins’ film work, Iain Grandage ‘s music - have contributed much and Trevor Jamieson has imagined a terrific project. It is astutely anti-theatrical and a marvellous story which tells itself - almost. As lead, Jamieson still needs to provide more narrative focus and fluency before this show is the breakthrough it promises to be.