

BACK
TO
BACK
THEATRE

BACK TO BACK THEATRE

SMALL METAL OBJECTS
EDUCATION PACK A
PRE-SHOW RESOURCE

WRITTEN BY CLAIRE WEARNE

2023



FIRST NATIONS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Back to Back Theatre acknowledges that it lives and works on the lands of the Wadawurrung people. They pay their respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. They acknowledge there is no treaty and that this is stolen land. Back to Back Theatre acknowledges the lands of First Nations people everywhere, in Australia and in the world.

CONTENTS

| | | | |
|--|----|---|----|
| First Nations Acknowledgement of Country | 2 | Devising Process | 23 |
| About Back to Back | 4 | Theatrical Styles | 28 |
| smo Reviews | 6 | Key Conventions | 30 |
| + Activity – Evaluative Language | 6 | + Activity – Devised Performance | 32 |
| Central Themes | 8 | Dramatic Elements | 33 |
| Performance Description and Synopsis | 9 | + Activity – Devised Ensemble Performance | 37 |
| Pre-show Tips | 10 | Production Areas – Sound | 38 |
| Vocabulary | 11 | Production Areas – Costume | 41 |
| Character Bios & Key Quotes | 12 | Production History | 45 |
| + Activity – Character Quotes | 14 | Company Awards History | 46 |
| Contextual Information | 15 | Supplementary Material | 47 |
| Performance Skills | 17 | Curriculum Links | 48 |
| + Activity – Timing Through Movement | 19 | | |

PLEASE NOTE:

small metal objects has an extensive performance history. The images contained in Pre-Show Pack A depict performers, props and costume designs you may not see in the performance you attend. Please click or scan here to access our regularly updated image cache for the 2023 season.

+Image archive



cover image credit

small metal objects performance image
Photographer: Jeff Busby

Year: 2005

Location: In studio

Description: Image of Simon in red tracksuit

ABOUT BACK TO BACK THEATRE

Based in Djilang on Wadawurrung Country, colonially known as Geelong, Back to Back Theatre was first formed in the mid 1980s, coinciding with a period of deinstitutionalisation of people with disability. The company was soon creating distinctive work drawn from the lived experience of actors perceived to have intellectual disabilities, giving insight to marginalised sections of the community for the very first time. It was a voice that hadn't been modified by educational institutions or value enriching marketing mechanisms. It was raw, honest and heartfelt. Or in the case of Mark Deans, a competitive gymnast before becoming an actor, it was shot out of a cannon.

Forty odd years later, and Back to Back Theatre is now widely recognised as an Australian theatre company of national and international significance. The company is driven by an ensemble of actors who identify as having an intellectual disability or are neurodivergent, and is considered one of Australia's most important cultural exporters. Their stories are personal, political and cosmic; they are attentive to all elements of the stage, particularly design, light and sound.

From 2009 to 2021, the company has undertaken 83 national and 116 international seasons of its work. From 2009 to 2022, community and education workshops have been delivered to over 33,000 community members and students, with a focus on artistic excellence. Back to Back Theatre has received 22 national and international awards including the International Ibsen Award, a Helpmann Award for Best Australian Work, an Edinburgh International Festival Herald Angel Critics' Award, two Age Critics' Awards, a New York Bessie and the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Group Award for their long-standing contribution to the development of Australian theatre.

They take Australia to the world and return with gathered knowledge. By showing accessibility, they increase it. They are a beacon for best practice.

Scan the QR code to watch a short clip introducing the company and its work





small metal objects ARTISTIC TEAM

Co-Authors
& Co-Devisors

Simon Laherty
Sonia Teuben
Jim Russell
Genevieve Morris
Bruce Gladwin

Director

Bruce Gladwin

Cast

Steve: Simon Laherty
Gary: Brian Tilley
Alan: Jim Russell
Carolyn: Genevieve Picot

Sound Composer
& Designer

Hugh Covill

Costume Designer

Shio Otani

AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Back to Back Theatre would like to acknowledge the absence of Sonia Teuben in this season of small metal objects. Sonia was a co-author and co-devisor of this piece; in particular, she was the irreverent and creative mind behind the character of 'Gary'. Sonia revelled in introducing Gary to audiences around the world, insisting on wearing his dodgy fake yellow moustache each and every time. Sonia passed away in January 2021; her absence remains vast for the team at Back to Back Theatre.

small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Location: In studio

Year: 2005

Description: Image of Sonia Teuben
and Simon Laherty in red tracksuits

+ ACTIVITY

EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE

Using a highlighter, annotate each of the reviews below, looking for evaluative language. Compile a list of these phrases for your own use in our Post-Show Pack.



We value critical feedback in the form of reviews and give them due consideration, acknowledging that not everyone will like what we do. Our work is frequently reflected back to us in the form of unsolicited responses via social media and online. These commentaries regularly articulate an emotive response rather than an intellectual assessment. It's a gratifying experience for our artists when audience members claim emotional ownership and feel the work spoke personally to them.

BACK TO BACK THEATRE

REVIEWS

“How to describe Back to Back’s theatre? It...peels away the illusions that sustain us...generates a fugitive sense of freedom and joy. By its end, their audiences are left facing themselves. The voyeurism that shames us...our unbearable fragility, our mortality.”

The Monthly, Australia

“It was the sort of deeply felt and intellectually dazzling work that has come to define this company and I can’t stop thinking about it.”

Arts Hub, Australia

“Challenging, arresting, supremely considered theatre from a world-class ensemble, Back to Back leaves most theatre for dust in terms of daring and emotional intelligence, and will dispel utterly any preconceptions the audience might have about artists with disability.”

The Age, Australia

small metal objects

REVIEWS

“This small story in the middle of the New York chaos has a poetic stillness that is quite moving and often even magical”

The New York Times, USA

“Shakespeare’s suggestion that ‘all the world’s a stage’ has seldom been better demonstrated, and the achievement of small metal objects is that it not only makes you look, it makes you see.”

The Guardian, London, UK

“The issue is in no way that it’s remarkable that people “perceived to have intellectual disabilities” could make a show this good — the issue is that it’s remarkable that anyone could make a show this good.”

New York Theater, USA

“Every now and then a production comes along that surpasses the normal connotations of theatre and enters the realm of something truly original. Back to Back Theatre’s breaking production small metal objects is such a performance.”

Forte Magazine, Geelong

“I’ve not seen a Back to Back Theatre show that hasn’t sought to revolutionise our assumptions about what theatre, performance and life can be.”

The Saturday Paper, Australia

“There are really two plays going on in small metal objects.

One tells the story of two men who are invisible in a world that measures visibility by economic value. The other is the wonderful, ever-changing drama of a station concourse at peak hour with a cast of hundreds of people moving into the “theatre” created by a seating bank and an audience. It is a theatrically brilliant idea...an unforgettable theatrical experience.”

The Age, Australia

“Its beauty lies in the way that it forces you to concentrate on the things and people who are normally rendered invisible. In their accidental participation in the show, the people in the crowds become distinct individuals...”

Time Out London, UK

“This is an astounding, funny, poetic piece of theatre. It makes magic of the humdrum, and communicates a take on the world that is — without any hyperbole whatsoever — totally unique.”

The Podium, UK

“Small metal objects turns the notion of theatre and the everyday inside out. It is a pure, open-hearted, complex and breathtaking production and a unique meditation on human worth.”

Sydney Morning Herald, Australia

CENTRAL THEMES

- + FRIENDSHIP
- + TRUST
- + LOYALTY
- + ABLEISM
- + CLASS
- + PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS
- + CAPITALISM
- + VISIBILITY
- + EXISTENTIAL CRISIS



small metal objects performance image

Year: 2017

Photographer: Unknown, supplied by West Kowloon Cultural District

Location: West Kowloon, Hong Kong

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve and Sonia Teuben as Gary

'The thematics around capitalism, redefining success and championing the idea of human relationships, our society's obsession with accumulating capital – that feels quite timeless to some degree, and still feels very relevant.' – **Bruce.**

PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION & SYNOPSIS

Content Warning: Suggestion of drug use, sexual references and coarse language.

Running time: 55 mins

TRAILER



We (the audience) are in a public urban space, somewhere in the world. This space is not a theatre. It is peak hour for pedestrians. Corporate types and buskers, students and rough sleepers intermingle. We gaze out, seated on tiered banks, plugged into individual headphones. Startled passers-by stop and wonder what we are all watching; in that moment, they unwittingly become performers in the show they can't see. Some stare expectantly back at us, and for a moment, the power shifts and we become the performance. **We are unnervingly exposed here**, without an apparent context; we become the focal point before any actors are even apparent. But nothing happens, and people move on.

Time passes. Then, above the music, two conversational voices are piped through our headphones. We are, once again, the audience, looking for a show, **looking for these particular performers** in this nameless throng of pedestrians. But we hear something specific – the timing, the cadence, the rhythm and the tone of these voices shapes what we are looking for. We are looking for disability. And then we catch ourselves... and ask ourselves the first of many questions small metal objects poses to us: what does 'disability look like...?' And once again, we are self-conscious and insecure.

But the contrast between the harsh anonymity of the city scape and the palpable intimacy of the dialogue we are eavesdropping on, lulls us into the tender friendship of Gary and Steve who emerge, in their own time, through the human swell. Their firm affection for each other becomes apparent, as Gary discusses his upcoming operation, reassuring Steve that they will both make it through.

The warmth and intimacy of their dialogue through our audio feed is interrupted with a crackling and solicitous phone call from someone calling themselves Alan who is determined Gary 'helps him out' before a function later that evening. Gary provides his location, and shortly thereafter, we are fed Alan's voice live, as he approaches passers-by, asking if they might be Gary. We search for the new character, who appears in tailored corporate suiting, furtive and incongruous against Gary and Steve's broken down streetwear.

After negotiating terms for their exchange, Gary starts to question whether he knows Alan from an earlier time in their lives, but Alan rejects his suggestions, attempting to hurry their exchange along. Steve takes possession of the money, counting it, but when it comes time to head to the lockers to complete the transaction, Steve is not

comfortable leaving the spot he is standing. He is having **an existential crisis of sorts** and wants to stay where he is to think through it. Gary senses Steve's discomfort and calls off the transaction, leaving Alan flustered and confused, but agrees to a coffee with Gary, whilst his question of 'how long this is going to take' is left hanging in the air.

After a while, Alan runs out of patience and approaches Steve alone, trying to hurry him out of his reverie. When this exchange is unfruitful, we hear Alan make a crackly, pleading call to his friend Carolyn, who is also keen for Gary to 'help them out' prior to that evening's function. Carolyn arrives, and she and Alan convince Gary to encourage Steve to talk to her, as she is a psychologist. Carolyn then attempts to convince, then coerce and finally seduce Steve into enabling the transaction, but Steve is not willing to move from his position to do so. Carolyn loses her temper and she and Alan leave, their sights fixed on other options.

Steve then thanks Gary, telling him that he feels much better and they wander off together, disappearing into the swarm of other people, all driving their own unique, personal intimate narratives...



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Location: Flinders Street Station, Melbourne, Australia

Year: 2005

Description: Genevieve Picot as Carolyn, Jim Morris as Alan, Alan V Watts as Gary

PRE-SHOW TIPS

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE: As you might be attending small metal objects in an outdoor space, you may be wise to consider sunscreen and water, or potentially, some layers to keep you warm. Back to Back Theatre asks you to avoid taking notes during the performance; focus on engaging with the show as it happens. We also ask you to keep your phone switched off, and in your bag. However, if you are participating in a post-show Q&A, feel free to take notes or audio record the session. Please do not film performers or facilitators without explicit consent. It's also a great idea to prepare for the performance [and your subsequent assessment] by engaging with the following pre-show contextual information, activities and ideas.



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Location: Hobart, Australia

Year: 2007

Description: Sonia Teuben as Gary,
Simon Laherty as Steve, Genevieve Picot
as Carolyn, James Saunders as Alan,

VOCABULARY

Here are some terms which are relevant to small metal objects. They appear in this pack, or in the show itself, and will be useful to comprehend when analysing this performance.

ABLEISM: Ableism is a form of discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities, including physical, cognitive, or intellectual impairments. It can take many forms, including exclusion, stereotyping, and the denial of access to goods, services, and opportunities. Ableism can be conscious or unconscious, and can be perpetuated by individuals, institutions, or societal norms and values. Examples of ableism include assuming that people with disabilities are less capable or competent than those without disabilities, treating individuals with disabilities as objects of pity or inspiration, and denying individuals with disabilities equal access to education, employment, and other opportunities.

CO-AUTHOR: Someone who collaborates with another person or group of people in creating a written work, such as a book, academic paper, or script. Co-authors are typically listed together as authors of the work and share credit for the creation of the work.

CO-DEVISOR: Someone who collaborates with another person or group of people to create, refine, and develop an idea or project, often by combining their skills, expertise, and knowledge. The term is commonly used in the creative fields, such as theatre, dance, and music, where multiple artists collaborate on a performance or production. In these contexts, co-devisors may work together to develop the storyline, characters, choreography, or music, and share credit for the final product.

DEINSTITUTIONALISATION:

A process that involves moving people with intellectual, developmental or physical disabilities, and sometimes, mental illnesses out of large, centralized institutions and into smaller, community – based settings that provide more individualised care and support.

DENOUEMENT: Refers to the final part of a narrative, usually a play, movie, or novel, in which the plot is brought to a conclusion and any remaining questions or conflicts are resolved, where the loose ends are tied up, and the outcome of the story is revealed. In French, denouement literally means “unknotting” or “unravelling,” which reflects the way in which the various strands of the plot are resolved and brought to a satisfying conclusion.

EXISTENTIAL CRISIS: A period of deep reflection and questioning about one’s purpose, identity, and values. It often involves feelings of confusion, anxiety, and a sense of meaninglessness or emptiness. An existential crisis can be a difficult and challenging experience, but it can also be an opportunity for growth, self-discovery, and the development of a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in life. Many people who have gone through an existential crisis report emerging with a new sense of clarity and direction in their lives.

HEADPHONE SHOW: A headphone show is a type of performance or event where the audience members listen to

the sound through headphones rather than through traditional speakers. Each member of the audience wears a set of headphones, which allows them to hear the sound directly in their ears, creating a more intimate and immersive listening experience. One of the benefits of headphone shows is that they allow performers to create complex, layered soundscapes that would be difficult or impossible to achieve through traditional sound systems.

HOT SEATING: A technique used in Drama and Theatre education and creation in which an actor, character or expert is placed in front of an audience, who then ask them questions to learn more about their motivations, thoughts, feelings and experiences. The term “hot seating” comes from the idea that the actor or expert is being put on the “hot seat” or under pressure to respond to questions from the audience.

METAPHYSICAL: The branch of philosophy that explores the nature of reality beyond the physical world, such as the existence of abstract concepts like truth, goodness, and beauty. It seeks to answer questions about the fundamental nature of existence and reality, and the relationship between mind and matter.

SEATING TRIBUNE: Also known as a bleacher, is a tiered seating structure typically made of metal or concrete that is used for seating spectators at outdoor or indoor events. It is characterized by its raised, tiered structure, with each level

providing a different viewing angle and perspective of the event or performance.

OPERA PROMPTER: A member of an opera production team who sits in a hidden area near the stage and prompts the singers with their lines and cues during the performance. The prompter’s position is usually concealed from the audience, and their voice is traditionally amplified through a small speaker located on the stage floor. In the case of small metal objects, this role is played by Bruce Gladwin, the director, and he prompts the performers through their headsets.

VCAA: The organisation responsible for developing, implementing, and assessing the Victorian Curriculum, and for selecting which performances are selected for study in VCE Drama.

VERISIMILITUDE: The appearance of being true or real.

CHARACTER BIOS & KEY QUOTES



GARY

Loyal, level-headed,
protective, confident

"If a guy ever came to my house with a gun, I would stand in front of my wife and kids."

"I want to give."

"Everything has a value."

To Steve: *"I want to see you happy."*

Gary about his friendship with Steve: *"Steve doesn't want to leave and I won't leave Steve on his own."*



STEVE

Compassionate, deep
thinker, vulnerable,
dependant, reflective

"I really want a girlfriend and I can't find the right girl."

"I've got a couple of DVD's on love. I watch them, but it hasn't worked out."

"I don't want to look like a tear-jerker."

"Everything has a value."

"I've started being aware of myself... I'm missing something, a feeling."



ALAN

Lawyer,
property investor,
self-serving, conflicted,
out of his depth

“Basically, Darren was ‘helping me out’ tonight ... I’ve become the idiot who’s organizing this stuff then of course it’s fallen through and now I’ll be in a bit of strife.”

“I just want to get the job done, get out of here.”

“No, I must have one of those faces.”



CAROLYN

Alan’s colleague,
psychologist,
corporate, calculated,
manipulative, ruthless

“I am very busy, if you were to ring the office you would have to go on the waiting list for 6 months.”

“Tell me, what do we need to do to make this transaction go ahead?”

“I am pretty desperate at the moment. If you help me out, I’ll help you out.”

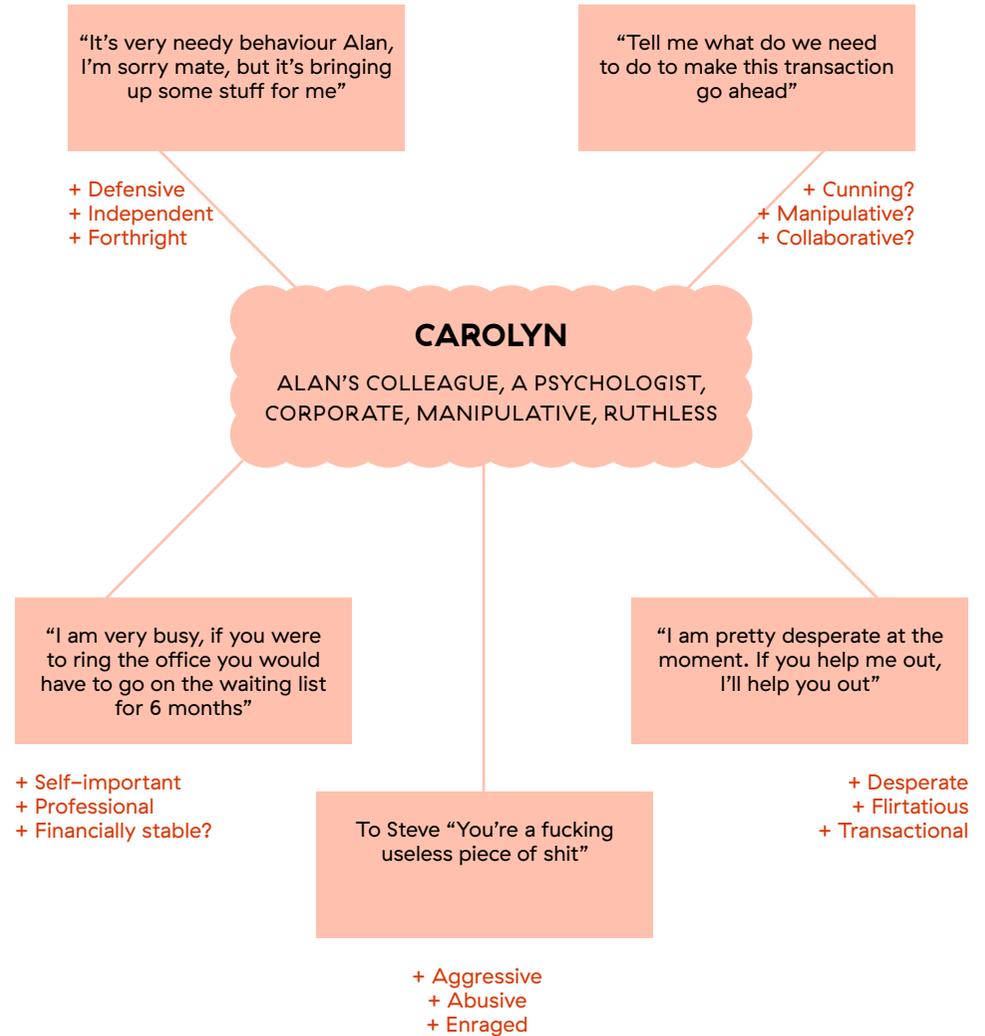
+ ACTIVITY

CHARACTER QUOTES

Create a mind map analysing the selected dialogue above. Create a separate map for each character, inserting the provided information into each box. Analyse each character's dialogue to identify and explore your preconceptions about them. We will come back to these mind maps in the Post-show Pack.

You may opt to use digital software like Canva or PowerPoint, or you could hand draw your own mind map on poster paper or in your workbooks.

+Link to Canva



CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

‘Because small metal objects (smo) has had such a long and varied performance history, we've had to make modifications in the costume depending on where and when we've performed it. Sometimes the actors have worn big coats and gloves, like when we performed it in New York in the middle of winter. In other shows, we've made modifications by introducing hats, so the actors are safe from sunstroke...The costuming signposts specifics about characters, but we've also just had to adjust to fashion for the corporate characters, what was appropriate business attire has changed over the last 18 years. We've continued to work with our costume designer, Shio Otani, to modify the costumes to keep them in context.’ – Bruce



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Nikki Watson

Location: Tokyo, Japan

Year: 2018

Description: Yumi Umiumare as Carolyn,
Jim Russell as Alan, Sonia Teuben as Gary,
Simon Laherty as Steve

Between 2000 and 2004, several notable social, cultural, and historical influences shaped Australia's identity as a nation. When the creative and development stages of smo were underway, John Howard was elected Prime Minister for a third term. The Howard government implemented a range of strategies, including a controversial immigration policy that involved mandatory detention of asylum seekers, as well as policies aimed at strengthening national security in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in 2001. The Howard government's policies regarding immigration and national security were perceived by some as conservative and nationalist. The policies were seen as serving the interests of the wealthy and powerful, emphasising financial growth while neglecting the rights and well-being of disadvantaged communities. When asked about the influence of these social and political aspects of the context around the creation of smo, Bruce recalled 'I definitely think there was an awareness for us in terms of 'the haves' and 'the have nots', and class and social divide. That was something we really wanted to try and acknowledge within the work.'

In terms of Australian culture, the early 2000s saw the continued rise of Australian cinema, with films like *Lantana*, *Moulin Rouge!*, and *Rabbit-Proof Fence* achieving critical acclaim and international success. These films showcased the diversity of Australian perspectives and helped to establish the country as a major player in the global film industry. However, Australian theatre was not yet enjoying the same level of global recognition. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2003, Australians purchased 86.3 million cinema tickets, while 16.7 million theatre tickets were sold.

Here is how Bruce describes the local and global theatrical context surround the creation of smo:

'When it came to theatre, it was a time when globalisation was really taking off in terms of international festivals. And we'd had maybe 15 to 20 years of international acts coming to Melbourne. And so we'd had a number of years of seeing works which had come here from Europe, particularly.

But SOFT, the work that we made before smo, was really the first work that took off

as a touring work. And it didn't have a lot of destinations, but we went to Zurich and Hanover, and we had the opportunity of playing that show in Europe. And as a result of that, we started seeing work from around the world in cities other than Melbourne. So, as makers of work, we started having a much a much broader concept of what we could do within the international theatre environment. And I think it was the director of the Zurich Festival who said, 'I'm really interested in seeing work that comes from the source.' It's quite an abstract comment, but the way I interpreted that was that they weren't interested in work that wasn't coming from like state theatre companies, or the major theatre companies that are putting on Chekhov or Shakespeare or Strindberg, or, you know, they were interested in work that was coming from community and from organisations or groups or companies that are rooted within the fabric of society. And they recognised something within Back to Back Theatre that spoke to them about that.

And then we started to see ourselves as who we were was a real asset, that the company had come from the community, in Geelong, Victoria. Back to Back Theatre had started as a series of workshops at a disability service provider in the northern suburbs of Geelong, and then grew into its own arts organisation and was touring work regionally, and then to a couple of capital cities in Australia. And then, by this time in the early 2000s, that was when we were really ready for a bigger environment, a bigger opportunity to engage audiences.

The whole strategy was actually to take the show outside of the theatre and create our own contexts where the actors felt really empowered in this work. When we first made smo, it felt pioneering and new and no-one had done it before. We hadn't seen anyone do this with headphones and radio mics and we were using the 'forefront of technology' to achieve what we were doing.

When we developed the show, we also had to think about the logistics. We had to ask ourselves 'If we tour the show, then how would we deliver headphones to different cities?' Then we realised we were going to have to purchase these headphones, and we're going to have to freight them from city to city. But the advantage of that is that once we outlay that cost, then, it was going to be quite a cheap show to present. We had to put up a seating bank in a public space and get permits for that, but that's quite cheap. So, working out the logistics made the show possible as well. And us bankrolling the expenditure around the equipment, really helped.

So, I guess, the ducks lined up. Some of that was strategic, and some of it was just serendipitous. You're just lucky to be in the right spot at the right time.'

Whilst luck may have played a minor part in the initial accomplishments of small metal objects, it has no role in the show's continued level of success. There are no other Australian productions which can boast such a vast touring history over such a long period of time.

This type of legacy can only be made possible through the ideal combination of a gripping, inspirational and unique production and unwavering and talented company management.



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Berni Sweeney

Location: New York, USA

Year: 2008

Description: Sonia Teuben as Gary,
Simon Laherty as Steve

PERFORMANCE SKILLS

FOCUS

(A.K.A. That time in Copenhagen when that passerby almost called the cops.)

‘Focus is the ability of the actor to commit to their performance and to use concentration to sustain characters. Focus may also be used to create an implied character or setting through the manipulation of the audience’s attention towards a specific place. The manipulation of focus may assist the actor to develop an effective actor–audience relationship.’

–VCE Drama Study Design, 2019–2024

Performing in non-traditional spaces, amongst a largely oblivious general public, requires actors to demonstrate extraordinary levels of focus. Hear from Director, Bruce and performer, Simon talk about exactly this:

BRUCE: *Because we’re in an environment that we can’t control in a theatre, you’ve got so much control. But in a train station or a public square, we don’t know what’s going to happen. Someone could intervene, there might be a medical emergency and an ambulance arrives. A group of 40 school children might walk by and it’s too noisy for the actors to deliver their lines and they pause. We’ve had people intervene in the performance either by talking to the actors or the audience.*

INTERVIEWER: *Tell me about that. That’s fascinating. Simon, can you remember a moment where something particularly unexpected has happened whilst you’ve been performing smo?*

SIMON: *There’s the time in Philadelphia where I got cuddled by one of the general public during a curtain call.*

INTERVIEWER: *Just gave you a hug*

SIMON: *Yeah.*



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Nate Schilling

Location: Adelaide, Australia

Year: 2021

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve,
Brian Tilley as Gary

INTERVIEWER: *Just a random off the street? Not even an audience member? How did you feel about that?*

SIMON: *It was awkward.*

BRUCE: *In Copenhagen, we had an elderly woman who was passing by and saw the way that the character of Alan was talking to Simon’s character Steve and intervened and said, ‘I don’t like the way that you’re talking to this young man and you need to stop now and move away from him’.*

INTERVIEWER: *Wow...how did you handle that, in the moment, Simon? When that stranger just stopped the scene, what did you do?*

SIMON: *Well, the character Alan, who was played by Jim at that time, said, ‘Look, I was just talking to my friend. Okay? Just go away and mind your business.’*

INTERVIEWER: *So you both stayed in character? And how did the woman respond?*

SIMON: *She went away in the end.*

BRUCE: *She said she went away to call the police.*

INTERVIEWER: *Did she call the cops?*

BRUCE: *No, the Stage Manager called her backstage [to explain].*

INTERVIEWER: *Fantastic. That speaks about the incredibly convincing nature of the show, and the performance between you and Jim in that moment.*

SIMON: *Yep.*

And here is a story from Jim about the time a drunk passerby recognised him from TV, and he **STILL KEPT HIS FOCUS:**

THE SYDNEY STORY

'When we were mid-performance in Sydney in the crowd in Circular Quay, a drunk guy was passing by, and he stopped and just came up, interrupting the whole show and said to me, "Mate? I know you. You're on that TV show." I was on a sketch show called Comedy Inc. on Channel 9 at that time, but because I was mid-performance, I went, "No, buddy, I think you've got the wrong guy." He went, "Nah, nah, nah, nah. You're in the comedy show. I seen you. Fucking funny." And the audience, I could hear them laughing. He kept saying "No, no, no... You were that guy." And I was just going, "No, mate. I must have a doppelganger or whatever. But I am not that guy. I don't know what you're talking about." And he kept going on about his mate who's really funny who should have been on the show, and that I should meet him.

In the end, I had to say, "Buddy, can I be really honest with you? You're right. I am that guy." And I'm getting close to him, so the audience is just laughing. He's looking at the audience going, "What are they laughing at?" And I'm going, "I have no idea who they are or what they're looking at." He's like, "Is this some sort of art installation where you look at life? What a fucking waste of government funds."

And I said, "I am that guy, but I'm not that guy anymore. Before I was that guy on TV, I was a lawyer, and now, I'm not that guy anymore. I've gone back to being a lawyer, and right now, I'm in a really, really difficult situation. It's really tricky, and I need some privacy." And he, thank god, just went, "No problem, mate. No worries. I'll give you some space, but I love your work on telly. It's great." The audience were laughing their heads' off. It was much easier to perform the show overseas back then because no-one would recognise me.'

small metal objects performance image

Year: 2007

Photographer: Unknown, provided by Wentworth Arts

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve

Location: Adelaide, Australia

ENERGY

'Energy is the intensity an actor brings to a performance. At different times, an actor will use different levels of energy to create different performance dynamics. An actor may use low energy to create pathos. Conversely, an actor may use high energy to create a moment of tension.'
- VCE Drama Study Design, 2019-2024

Read over what Gen, says about her character's energy throughout smo:

'Energy shifts in terms of her trying to get what she wants, and Carolyn thinks she's very smart. She understands people, she's a psychologist, she's top of her game, she can shift organizations, and she's used to wielding power and people taking notice of her. And this is probably the first time in a long time she's actually met something that she can't budge.

Carolyn comes in with that "I can fix this" attitude, almost a flippant energy to start with, as though she thinks "I can sort this in five seconds." For her, the energy is light but fast, and then it becomes much more intensely driven as the problem gets more difficult for her. When she realizes the problem is slightly more complicated and requires a little more nuance, she controls the energy, making it less chaotic and amorphous; it becomes very sharply focused.'



TIMING

'Timing is used to control or regulate the pace of a performance. Timing may be manipulated in drama to build dramatic tension, to evoke feeling, to coordinate effective synchronisation within an ensemble and to develop the comic potential of a scene.'

- VCE Drama Study Design, 2019-2024

'Alan moves fast, but these two, they dawdle through the space.' - Jim

Read Jim's description of the importance of timing in both the devising process and the performance itself:

'Timing was a really big part of the devising process. Before we'd ever even gone into the idea that the show was going to be about a drug deal. Bruce would say, "Let's see a scene where timing is just pulled apart. Just make it explode. You've got to learn a new sense of timing. Let's see a moment between you, Jim, and you, Sonya, where Jim starts by having all the status, and somehow we flip it and Sonya ends up with all the status."

One scene where this happens is where Gary says, "The deal's off, mate. I'm going to get a coffee. My friend's over here. He's having an anxiety attack. Do you want one?" For a moment, Alan thinks "Wait, wait. What do you mean, do I want one? He's literally going to walk away from me and go and get a freaking coffee at this point?" This just defies every notion of the way Alan thinks human beings should behave at this moment, and I have to change my timing. In order to maintain the relationship with Gary (to get what Alan wants in the end), my pace picks right up. I've got to chuck all the social norms away and just run after him and say, "Mate, I'll have a coffee, (whatever it takes to make you stay). Yeah. I'll flat white with one. That'd be great." But internally, Alan is howling "We're doing a business deal!!! You don't walk away and just ignore me!!"

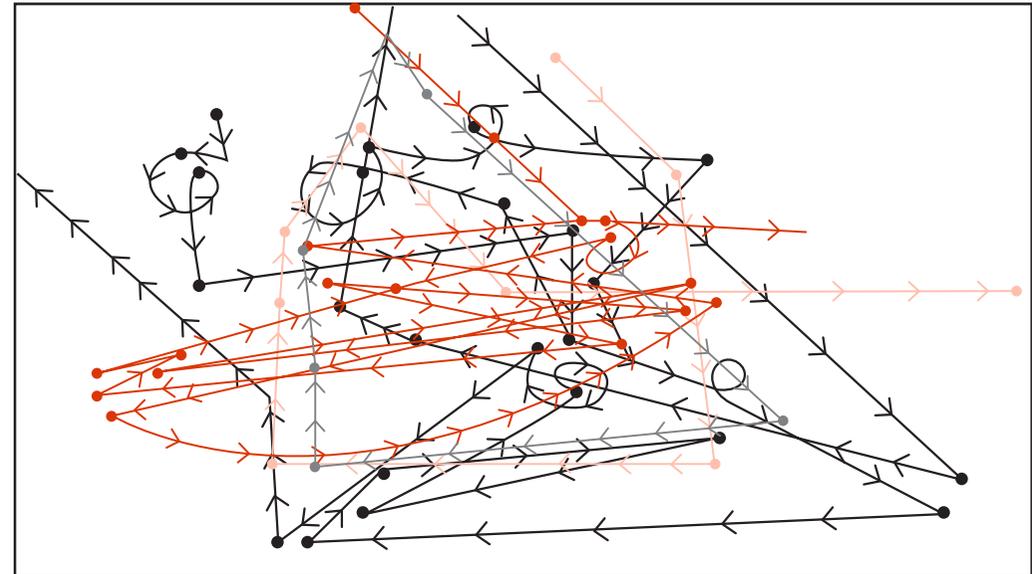
Read over how Gen describes the shifts in timing throughout smo:

'Timing's such an important aspect of this whole play. It's so beautifully timed, the way it's written, with the use of music, with the way the scenes are broken up. I mean, that's partly because it's also such an unusually physically staged play, so the audience has to catch up with the storyline, and where the people are, and who they are. But the pacing is very interesting in the sense that by the time Carolyn comes in, the atmosphere has become a bit desperate, so it's quite fast. She gets a hold of the situation and she's just, "I've got to solve this, you're a pain in the neck, we've got a party, I want to go, blah blah blah." And then it has to really slow down when she actually meets and has to deal with Steve, because Steve is taking it at his pace and he is not going to change that for anybody. And she picks that up pretty quickly.'

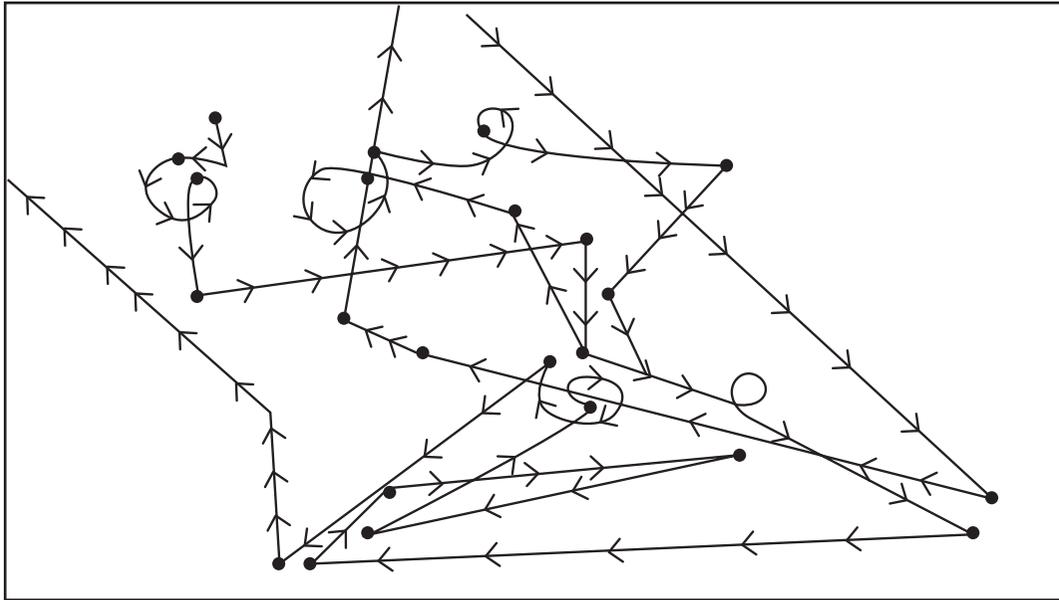
+ ACTIVITY

TIMING THROUGH MOVEMENT

On the next page, you will see a colour-coded blocking map for each of the four characters in smo. Compare each character's quantity of movement and their overall use of space, as indicated in these maps. After analysing these, refer back to the Key Character Bios and Quotes on Page 12, then speculate as to which blocking map might belong to which character.

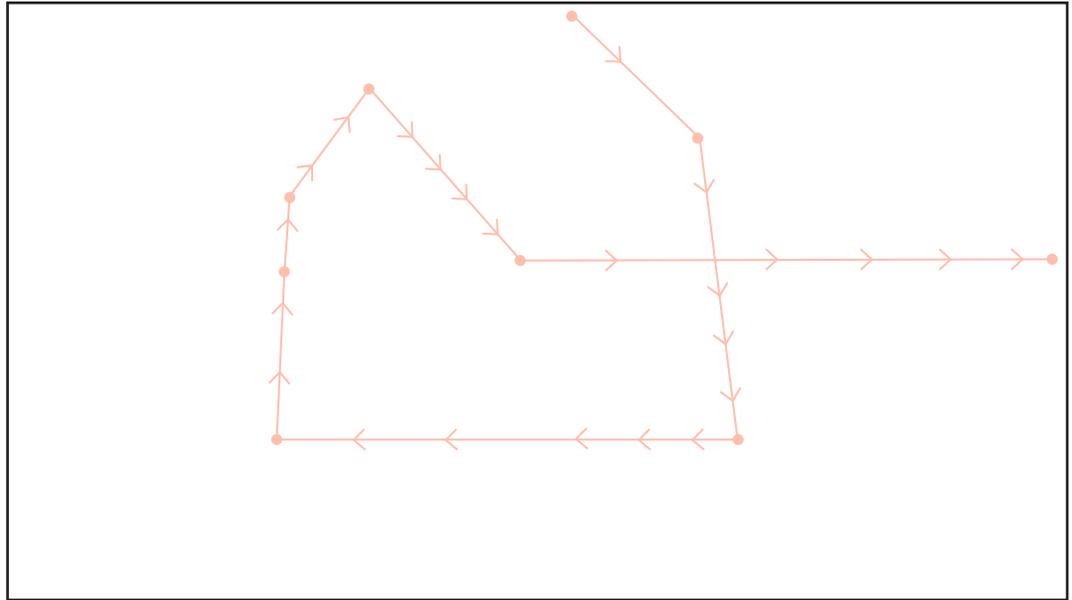


CHARACTER: _____



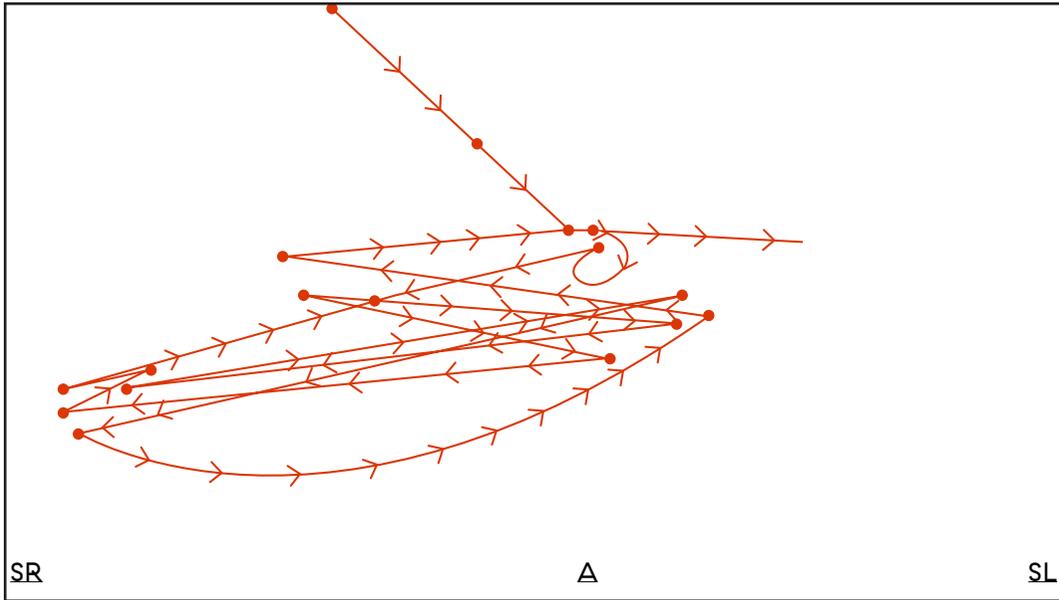
SR A SL

CHARACTER: _____



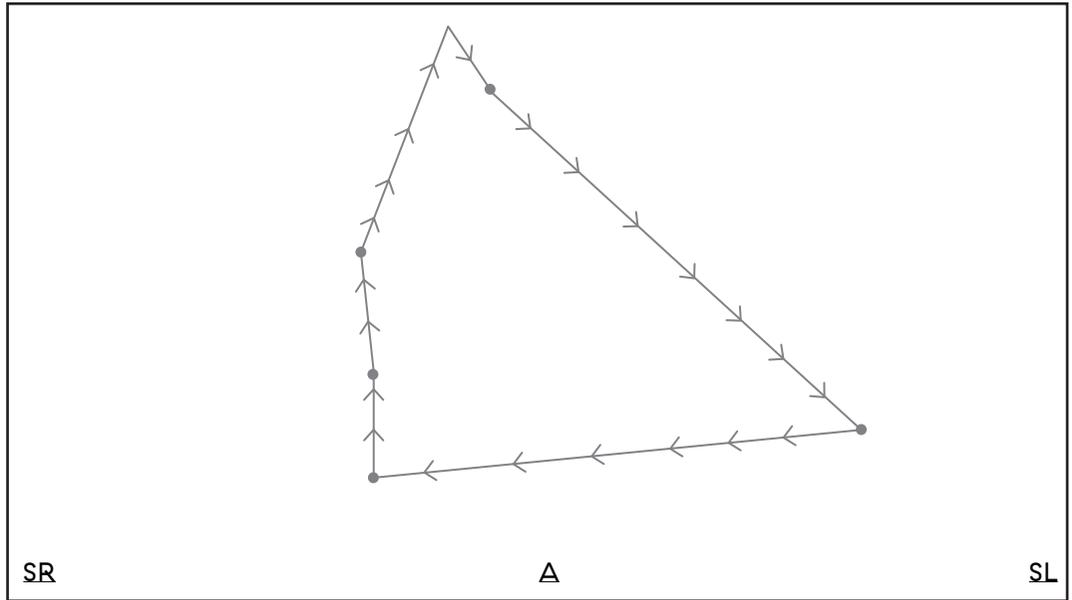
SR A SL

CHARACTER: _____



SR A SL

CHARACTER: _____



SR A SL

ACTOR-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

'The actor considers what impact they intend their performance to have on the audience. The actor-audience relationship is the way in which an actor deliberately manipulates the audience's moods, emotions and responses to the action. This may be done through the placement of the actor in relation to the audience, the way the actor addresses and engages the audience, and the emotional and intellectual response to the character's situation. An actor-audience relationship only exists as part of an actual performance.'

- VCE Drama Study Design, 2019-2024

'We didn't know how the audience would react to being asked to sit in a public space, and then we realised all these other things were happening: that the audience had been observed by the public and that's putting a real edge on the experience for them.' **- Bruce.**

One of the reasons attending small metal objects is such an indelible experience is because of the show's iconic and unusual actor-audience relationship. The question of 'who is watching who' has multiple answers in this show, and they shift in and out of focus throughout the whole performance. This dynamic is shaped by a number of factors.

Firstly, in some of the early moments of the show, we as the audience inadvertently become very much a part of the performance, particularly prior to the Back to Back Theatre actors appearing. Here, we sit tentatively waiting for the context of 'a performance' to grant us permission to feel comfortable sitting in a large group, wearing headsets, on a seating tribune in a public arena. Passersby stop and gawk expectantly at us, trying to make sense of us; here, they unwittingly break the fourth wall, eyeballing us directly, connecting with us out of curiosity, confusion, jest or in some cases, a strange aggressive defiance. This is a pivotal experience for the audience because, in this moment, we experience vulnerability. We are stared at. We are made to feel out-of-place and self-conscious. We are othered. In this moment, the audience experiences an unpleasant glimpse into how people who live with disability can be made to feel on a daily basis. The audience becomes 'the other'. And for many audience members, this might be a foreign and unfamiliar feeling.

Later, during the middle of the show, once we are lost in the narrative, we find ourselves watching the Back to Back Theatre performers tell a story amongst the general public, who appear to have become a chorus of hundreds of trained actors,

some of whom seem to be highly skilled in the art of Naturalism, as they seamlessly dart about their business.

Then at the conclusion of the narrative, the opposite happens; in the ultimate stroke of Realism, our Back to Back Theatre actors appear to melt back into the masses, once more becoming part of the general public. And we are blindsided by the fact that every single person we can see has their own struggles, their own joys, their own stories. Even us, the audience, who are riding the waves of this strange, shifting actor-audience relationship, we have our own stories, too. And despite this awareness of our individuality, we are all united and equalized through our common humanity: actors, audience and passerby.

Here below, Simon clarifies the way the cast recognise this shifting dynamic during the closing moments of the show:

INTERVIEWER: *There's a moment in the curtain call where you turn and you clap behind you.*

SIMON: *Yeah. That's the general public in the space. You acknowledge that you know they were there also.*

INTERVIEWER: *Yeah. Nice. So, it's acknowledging that you are performing, but the passersby have actually been part of that.*

SIMON: *In a way. Yes.*



small metal objects performance image

Year: 2017

Photographer: Unknown, provided by West Kowloon Cultural District
Location: West Kowloon, Hong Kong

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve
Oni Chan as Carolyn



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Location: Flinders Street Station, Melbourne, Australia

Year: 2005

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve,
Alan V Watts as Gary

Now, hear about Actor–Audience Dynamic from Gen’s perspective (A.K.A):

WHEN REALISM GETS TOO REAL...

‘The first performance that we all did was a learning experience for all of us, it was extraordinary. Because it was the first time as a stage performer where you weren’t ever actually taking in the audience. You were in the world that you were in, in the railway station, in the public square, in the shopping mall, and you were having a conversation with that other character, that person. And it was almost like a film, it’s like performing for a camera. And it’s only toward the end of the play, where we get closer and closer to the audience, that you actually become aware of that bank of seats. So, I never really brought them into my sphere of concentration.

In fact, what you’re more aware of is that it’s the real people around you... because they can actually interfere with what you’re doing. So that’s where my concentration was, it’s more on real people than it is on the audience. The scariest stuff was when we were in Hamburg, and the people who chose the venue actually chose a railway station area where drug deals are actually done. And the drug dealers were not happy we’d taken over their space...

During the first performance we were wondering, “What is going on?” because we could feel all these people who had been shadows in the background coming out and going, “What is going on, what are you doing? You’re on our turf.” And it became pretty scary to start with, because you could feel the tension. And they weren’t people that we could just say, “Please, do you mind? I’m having a private conversation here!” It became quite hairy, and bit of a conversation had to happen between the crew... and these guys.

And then, they actually became part of the show, which was kind of fun. They were like extras in the background. They seemed to enjoy it, and we got to know who they were. Sometimes they’d just stroll across and check out the audience, pretending they were just a member of the public. But of course, to me, they stuck out like dog’s balls!

Jim also has a thing or two to say about the Actor–Audience dynamic:

‘The passers-by aren’t in the show, but are very much part of the show. The seated audience are just loving watching the whole scene, with all these hundreds of extras, wondering ‘Who is that? What’s your story? What’s going on for you?’ It’s just lovely. When we did the show at Flinders Street, it was Derby Day, and we did a 11:00am show. And all these people went through the concourse of Flinders Street heading for Flemington, beautifully groomed women and men all stilettos and tuxedos. And then we did the evening show at seven o’clock and they all came home. Oh my gosh... One had a pee on the tiles in the concourse and then slipped on it, and it was like a BNS ball (Bachelors and Spinsters Ball: A match making social gathering usually held in regional and remote areas.). He dragged her and she was saying, “Let me go.” They were holding one shoe, but they’d lost the other shoe. They all looked so gorgeous when they’d been going off in the morning... Every show is very different!’

DEVISING PROCESS

'The shows that we make are our mind, are our words, are our imaginations.' – **Simon Laherty, Back to Back Theatre Ensemble**

'Remember, when you're making a piece like this, you don't know what you're making, so you don't quite know what you've got until you've got it...' – **Bruce Gladwin, Artistic Director**



small metal objects was devised between 2003 and 2004, by Back to Back Theatre Ensemble members, Simon Laherty and Sonia Teubens, performers Jim Russell and Genevieve Morris, and Back to Back Theatre's Artistic Director, Bruce Gladwin.

Here below is the transcript of an interview with Bruce about what that process involved, using the structure of play-making techniques stipulated by VCAA:

RESEARCH

'There were a number of questions which were raised around economics and human value as a starting point for this. Economics is such a complex kind of understanding and each of the people in the room, (the ensemble and myself and some guest actors), but everyone had a different understanding of what Economics is, so we needed to find a common denominator. So, we talked a lot about money and capital and Marxist concepts; how we as workers exchange our labour for money to live off, in this pursuit of the idea of accumulating and building capital. All the actors in the room had some relationship to money, whether earning an income by working as an actor or having a disability pension, and understanding the money has come from the government to support them as a person with a disability in society. We drew a lot on people's personal experience with money.'

'Then we visited an agency in the centre of Melbourne that supports homeless people, and we went and spoke with them about people who are in the situation of not being able to support themselves to rent or buy a house, essentially people living on the street. We were interested in the idea of maybe creating a story around someone that might find themselves in that situation.'

small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Cristos Sarris

Location: Athens, Greece

Year: 2016

Description: Sonia Teuben as Gary and Jim Russell as Alan

BRAINSTORMING

'Then we started talking with the actors about characters that they would like to play. Sonia Teuben, who was one of the co-authors and co-devisors behind *smo*, and who played that role until very recently, really wanted to play a successful businessman, so she based her character, Gary, on a drug dealer that she had a personal interaction with. A lot of the detail is real. Gary is a combination of Sonia's own personal philosophy in life and her observations of this real-life character who none of us had met, apart from Sonia.

The other starting point that we had was we wanted to make work for the Melbourne International Festival [now called 'RISING']. There's a kind of cultural epicentre in Melbourne for the arts: The Hamer Hall, the National Gallery, maybe some of the parks that are really close to St Kilda Road, maybe The Forum Theatre, the Athenaeum Theatre, a couple of other theatres that are really central to Melbourne in the Arts Precinct. **Most of the shows for the festival take place in these big cultural institutions and we thought 'Let's make a show that happens outside of those, but in a really busy place.'**

With our previous headphone show, where we started working with the actors being radio mic'd and the audience was wearing headphones, we realised that we could create an 'aural architecture' where we were using radio frequency to create a performing space. The space is defined by how strong the radio frequency signal is from the actors' radio mics, back to the sound desk and we thought 'Well, if we're going to do that then let's put the actors in the busiest place imaginable'. So the original season of *smo* took place at the Concourse at Flinders St Station, we had a very defined location: *smo* wasn't going into a proscenium, it wasn't going into a black box, it was going into a train station.

That started us thinking about Sonia's character being based on a drug dealer, so maybe it's a story about a drug deal... the space came before the narrative. The space itself really helped define it. So we thought if we were doing something in a public space, we should do something that is quite subversive but has these whispered conversations that happen amongst hundreds of people. That was the starting point. That helped us start to build a narrative; once you've got characters and they might have some sort of objective in what they're doing, then it's about putting obstacles before them, and creating a tension.'

IMPROVISING

'Then, we started doing really simple improvisational exercises, like Hot-Seating, where we just put one actor after another, and everyone else would ask questions about their character. We kept up with Sonia's character of Gary and she would just go into the role, and then respond with these improvised answers.

We also played a game that we devised. It's called 'I have, I use, I am', and it's a listing game. Basically, four people come up in front of an audience and they each take turns making a list about things that they have. For example, one person says, 'I have an ironing board'. Someone else then says the first thing



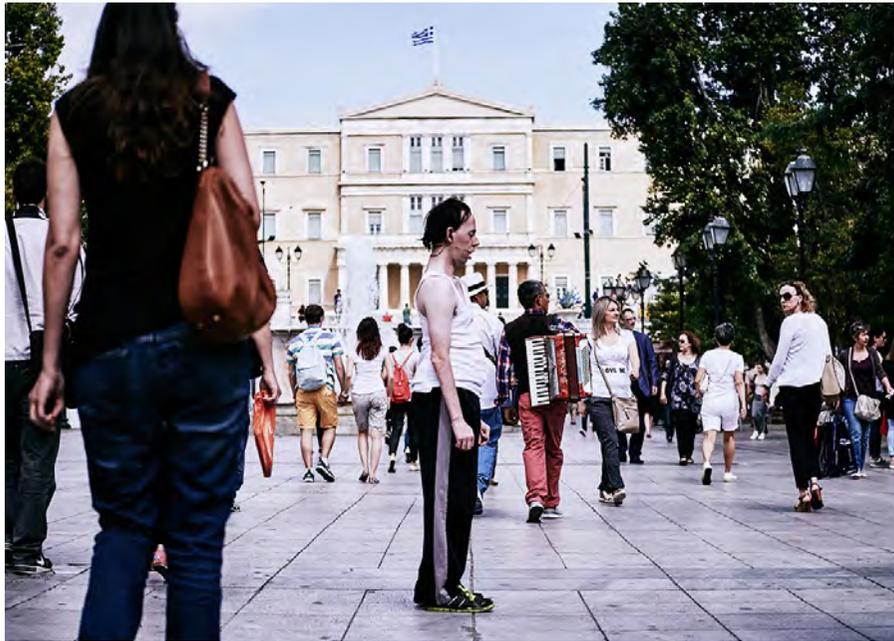
small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Cristos Sarris

Location: Athens, Greece

Year: 2016

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve and Sonia Teuben as Gary



that comes into their head: 'I have a leg', or 'I have you'. These possessions can either be physical, or spiritual, or emotional. It's about building on things that you have or things you use, and also how you define yourself, who you are as a person. **It's really about identity.**

We use that game with the actors in character, and then instead of just listing things, we started to build a world. Once we established the world of Gary, we thought 'Oh! Simon could play Gary's apprentice.' So, Simon created this character, Steve, and once we started fleshing out Steve's world through Hot Seating, we already had this amazing list from Simon of all these odd things, like a black key ring shaped like a shoe and four stubby holders. All this stuff came from like these really detailed little impros, a combination of the actors' own lives and these fictional characters that we started building.

Once we established the characters of Gary and Steve, that was the point really where we started bringing in the other two devisors, Jim and Genevieve, who are actors from outside of the company. They both have very solid backgrounds in improvisation. Their characters were generated very quickly, it was one or two improvisations and we had enough material to make that work. My direction for them was to explore this idea of the characters of a lawyer and a psychologist because these are two professions that ultimately should be helping these characters of Gary and Steve. They're the ones who are empowered within mental health and the legal system, but they end up utilising their skills for nefarious reasons.

And hats off to those four actors, because those improvisations which came really quickly became the show. I thought 'Well, maybe we've got just one scene and will go on to devise more, but then it just seems quite economical and judicial in terms of its use of language. It seemed...enough in a way.'



small metal objects performance image (top)

Photographer: Cristos Sarris

Location: Athens, Greece

Year: 2016

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve

small metal objects performance image (bottom)

Photographer: Cristos Sarris

Location: Athens, Greece

Year: 2016

Description: Sonia Teuben as Gary

SCRIPTING

'Devised work is often seen as the 'poor cousin' of scripted work, but I think that our level of crafting and shaping that happens in the rehearsal room is just as valid and important. And the thing with Verbatim theatre, which smo has elements of, is often people think that the script is all highly personal, but by the time it's been developed over a number of months, then often another performer ends up delivering the material that someone else initially contributed anyway, so it becomes quite non-personal in many ways. It's just that **the actors themselves are a reliable source of content.**

It's not like a play with a classic narrative structure. You meet the characters of Gary and Steve and then you meet the character of Alan, the lawyer who is wanting to conduct this drug deal with Gary. Then Steve's emotional dilemma becomes an obstacle that Gary has to work around. But it's all played out in a very fluid and loose way.

You picture Steve as a character who is being manipulated by these two corporate types, but in the conclusion, you have this switch where you think 'Actually, maybe he [Steve] was manipulating them all along as well.' So, there is this reversal in terms of the power structure within that.'

EDITING

'At different points, we'd thought, 'We will do this scene here at the Station and then we'll go down to Flinders Lane and we'll do another scene there, and potentially, it might move around the city and just keep going'. But actually, just the logistics of setting us up in one location!! Yeah? No...And also, it's enough narrative-wise. Even though it's a short work, [it runs for maybe 50 minutes], **it feels whole.** It doesn't really need any more than that. That's enough of an experience for an audience to be satisfied.'



small metal objects performance image (bottom)

Photographer: Cristos Sarris

Location: Athens, Greece

Year: 2016

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve
and Genevieve Morris as Carolyn



REHEARSING

'We all immersed ourselves in the original location [Flinders Street Station] and spent time there, looking on. We also used public transport and observed how other people operate in civic spaces. This was important; it really affected the performance style. It departs from the traditional convention of an actor standing on stage and arching their back and throwing their voice to the back of the stalls. **The actors needed to be in the space and camouflage in with the passing public...they couldn't bring too much attention to themselves.** Often, we'd talk to the cast about acting through your back, so sometimes your back is to the audience and you've got to deliver these lines, knowing that what the audience are watching is a tableau of you, with your back to them. It's a very different concept of performance.'

REFINING

'Then we thought, 'Let's test it'. So, we did a showing with an audience of about 50 people. We set up a small seating bank at Flinders Street Station. We put the audience in headphones, and we put the actors out in space, and we tried it...We didn't know how it would go. We didn't know how the audience would react to being asked to sit in a public space, and **then we realised all these other things were happening:** that the audience had been observed by the public and that's putting a real edge on the experience for them. It creates a vulnerability. We didn't know it was going to work until we gave it a go...We got affirming feedback from our trial audience, but I also think we just sensed it ourselves.'



small metal objects performance image (top)

Photographer: Cristos Sarris

Location: Athens, Greece

Year: 2016

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve and Jim Russell as Alan

small metal objects performance image (bottom)

Photographer: Cristos Sarris

Location: Athens, Greece

Year: 2016

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve, Jim Russell as Alan and Sonia Teuben as Gary

THEATRICAL STYLES

'With this show in particular, there's a kind of hyperrealism. So it's in a real world location and as much as possible, the actors are given a direction, which is to blend into the crowd...the hyperrealism of being in a real space and allowing that audience to have that joy of discovering the actors so that they don't stand out initially. I think it creates a new set of theatrical paradigms for this performance. For us, it was like new territory. A lot of the conventions that we had for previous theatrical works were out the door.' – Bruce

small metal objects is an example of Eclectic Theatre. Eclectic Theatre is a modern theatrical style which draws upon a broad palette of theatrical conventions from a wide range of genres, and traditions, using them in unexpected and innovative ways. In smo, you will see evidence of the following conventions from each of these styles:

ABSURDISM:

Absurdist plays often feature characters who struggle to make sense of their existence. The style often explores themes of alienation, the search for meaning in an uncertain world, and the human condition in the face of an indifferent universe.

DEVISED DRAMA:

A theatrical form created collaboratively by a group of performers, rather than being scripted by a single playwright. The performers and director work together to develop the characters, plot, and themes of the play, often through a process of improvisation and experimentation. Because devised drama is created collaboratively, it often reflects the collective experiences and perspectives of the performers. This can result in a more diverse and inclusive range of stories and perspectives being represented on stage.

DISRUPTED REALISM:

A style of performance that seeks to challenge traditional approaches to Realism and disrupt audience expectations. Can involve the use of unconventional techniques and devices, to create a sense of disorientation or ambiguity for the audience. Disrupted Realism in theatre can also involve a blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction, with characters or situations that may be ambiguous or difficult to interpret. The style often explores complex themes and issues, such as identity, memory, trauma, or social unrest.

HYPERREALISM:

An extreme form of Realism that seeks to create an extremely realistic, almost photographic representation of life on stage. It aims to replicate reality in every possible detail, from the physical appearance of the actors to the smallest aspects of the set design. Hyper-realistic plays often require a naturalistic acting style that aims to create a convincing portrayal of real-life characters. The sets and costumes in hyperrealistic productions are also designed with great attention to detail, using authentic materials and furnishings to create a sense of verisimilitude. Hyperrealism in theatre often addresses topical or controversial subject matter, and the extreme realism of the performances can create a powerful emotional impact on audiences.

IMMERSIVE THEATRE:

A style of performance that seeks to position the audience not as merely passive observers, but active participants in the performance, interacting with the environment in a non-traditional way. Immersive theatre can take many forms, such as site-specific performances in non-traditional spaces. The performances in immersive theatre are often designed to **blur the line between reality and fiction**, creating a sense of heightened realism that can be both thrilling and unsettling for the audience. The environment may also be designed to enhance the immersive experience, challenging audiences' expectations and engaging them on a deeper emotional and sensory level.

METATHEATRE:

Theatre that self-consciously comments on its own nature and conventions, **highlighting the artificiality of the theatrical experience**. In other words, it is a form of theatre that draws attention to the fact that the performance is a performance, and not real life.

REALISM:

Realism aims to depict life on stage as accurately and truthfully as possible, with an emphasis on everyday life and the struggles of ordinary people. Often involving a naturalistic acting style, with actors portraying characters as realistically as possible, using authentic, everyday language and gestures. The sets and costumes are also designed to reflect real-life situations and locations, with attention paid to historical accuracy and detail. Realist plays **often focus on social issues and the struggles of ordinary people**, and they tend to feature characters from the working class or lower classes. Usually, the plays also feature a straightforward, cause-and-effect narrative structure, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

VERBATIM:

A style of performance that uses the exact words spoken by real people as the basis for a script. Verbatim theatre is often used to explore social and political issues, and personal experiences. Verbatim theatre gives voice to the individuals and communities whose stories are being told, presenting a truthful and authentic portrayal of their experiences. Verbatim theatre can be **a powerful tool for social change**, as it allows marginalized or underrepresented voices to be heard and validates their experiences. It can also challenge traditional notions of theatre by blurring the lines between reality and fiction, and by foregrounding the voices of ordinary people rather than professional actors or writers.



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Nate Schilling

Location: Adelaide, Australia

Year: 2021

Description: Brian Tilley as Gary
and Simon Laherty as Steve

KEY CONVENTIONS

PATHOS:

The quality of a performance or a character that evokes a feeling of pity, sympathy, or compassion in the audience. It is an emotional appeal that aims to create a sense of connection between the audience and the characters or situations depicted on stage. It can be created through a variety of theatrical devices, such as the use of music, lighting, dialogue, or physical performance. Pathos can also be created through the portrayal of characters who are vulnerable, oppressed, or facing difficult challenges. **By highlighting the struggles and hardships of these characters, the audience is able to connect with them on a deeper level** and feel a sense of empathy or compassion.

Costume designer Shio Otani understood the potential of conjuring a sense of pathos in the audience through her medium: 'Bruce really wanted to show Steve's vulnerable side and in order to do that, he wanted to show Simon's bone structure around his neck.' Read the rest of Shio's insights into the thinking behind the costume design in [smo](#) on page 44.

Here is an observation from Gen about how she and Jim both use pathos to present their characters:

'Both Alan and my character Carolyn use pathos to manipulate. I go, "Oh look, you know, I can see you're in trouble. But shit, I'm in trouble too," which is a classic tactic. Acting like "Please help me out," usually makes people feel better when you ask for help, and Carolyn uses that plea as one of her last tactics. I always think in terms of what the character wants to achieve, and I hope the audience goes along with it. So, I only ever use pathos if I think the character's using it, rather than the actor. I want the audience to be sympathetic with Carolyn here, I want the audience to know who that character is.'

And now pathos from Jim's perspective:

'There are moments or images. Bruce would describe them as images, photographs, filmic images, or still images, almost. I first started rehearsing the show and devising the show I was saying to Bruce, "A person would never do that, Bruce. No one would do this to another person in public." Like the moments when Gary says, "No, mate, the deal's off." And I try to give him more money. That moment tells the past and the future, and it really indicates these characters' personal values.

And when we get to Gary going off to get the coffees, and Alan thinking, well, I'll go and see if I can resolve this situation with Steve by myself, without Gary. It's incredibly

cruel what Alan does to Steve. You don't have to be Einstein or overly emotionally intelligent to know that what he's doing to Steve is incredibly intimidating. And he's happy to do it to get to the end bit, to get what he wants. It's just horrible.

I can imagine an audience feeling incredibly sympathetic for Steve at that point. It's full of pathos. But at the same time, for every attempt that he makes to try and belittle this guy, and intimidate this guy, he fails. And he's doing it because he can sense that the character of Steve, there's something odd about him. This Alan guy is prepared to exploit that and trample all over the top of that. Alan is smart enough to know that that's disgusting to do that, but he's happy to have a crack at it. But he doesn't succeed. I guess that's where the bulk of the pathos comes from: this guy, in his silence and in his diminutive stature and his terror, is able to stand his ground. Somewhere there's power in Steve. And it's much stronger than Alan's power, much more.'

STILLNESS & SILENCE:

Performance conventions whereby the deliberate use of pauses and periods of stillness during a performance to create tension, heighten the emotional impact of a scene, or draw attention to specific moments or details.

Here is Gen describing a specific moment where she uses silence and stillness very intentionally:

'Literally it's at the very end of the play, when Steve starts blocking Carolyn, I use silence and stillness. Carolyn thinks she's a very clever woman; she's a psychologist, and she's got this boy's number, (yeah, she thinks of him as a boy I'm afraid), I think she's a bit patronizing. And when he blocks her, she looks, "Okay, I know you're neurodiverse, I know you're going to take time to process, I'm going to take time to process too. I hold the power, I'll have a good think about how to approach you next and persuade you to do what I want.'

And each time he doesn't play, so she has to find another tactic. And she uses the stillness and the silence to do two things, one, for her to process and think, and two, to go, "I can play this game, I can be quiet too. I can find another way through this, you can't beat me." Except that he does, which really annoys her. So, as an actor, it's a very deliberate use of silence and stillness, to manipulate and to appear to be taking in what he said, and to appear to be trying to understand him. And it's only at the very end she reveals how she really feels. Well, obviously Steve has seen right through her.'

And here is Jim discussing the unnerving impact that silence has on his character, Alan:

‘Stillness brings out Alan’s anxiety in a world where he has very limited experience. Not just the world of dealing with a ‘down and out’ street dealer of drugs, but a world where there is silence. It’s always “Yeah, mate. Yeah, got your back. Yeah, no problem. Let’s do a deal. Let’s do coffee. Let’s have a wine. We’re going to smash it. Cheers, buddy. Bye.” And he’s confronted, I think, for one of the first times in his life, where somebody doesn’t use those social norms of keeping noise happening and words happening; he’s just confronted with silence. His world is ripped from underneath him. And he has to, all of a sudden, invent a new way of communicating. So silence, in that moment, throws Alan out of his comfort zone in a really big way.

The silence is incredibly empowering for the character of Gary, and very empowering for the character of Steve, as well. Gary is a character who is so at home in his own body and who he is, that he doesn’t give a shit whether there are moments of silence and stillness or not. It’s something that Alan has to practice and learn, I guess. So, Alan starts to play the game too, and thinks, “Well, I’ll be silent as well.” He has a crack at it. And in that moment between Alan and Steve, where Gary’s gone off to get the coffees, and Alan’s looking at this peculiar, small-statured man whose been left out on his own in the middle of a crowd, he says to himself, “Well, maybe I’ll play the silent game with him, and then try and intimidate him by the difference in our size.” Steve’s probably terrified, but he stands his ground beautifully in the silences. Alan’s quite happy just to intimidate Steve with silence, and his size compared to Steve’s size, and the physical proximity that he’s happy to get between Steve and himself.’

SYMBOLISM:

Objects, sounds, actions, or images that represent an idea, emotion, or concept beyond their literal or surface meaning. **Symbolism can be used to explore complex themes and ideas**, such as the nature of reality, the human condition, or the relationship between the individual and society. Symbolism in theatre may also involve the use of non-realistic or stylized elements, such as costumes, set design, lighting, and sound, to create a heightened sense of theatricality and to reinforce the symbolic meaning behind the performance. In smo, the title of the show references a symbolic element of the narrative, as Bruce unpacks here:

‘The title small metal objects really refers to the idea of coinage or a form of currency. The narrative is about a choice between the characters face between making a profit from an exchange, a business deal, or maintaining and supporting a friendship.’

Bruce also explains the symbolism evident in his use of space and timing when blocking the action in the following discussion:

‘Steve is much more human in that closer range, whereas some of the others, say Alan and Carolyn, when you first meet them, you meet them from quite a distance. So, they’re almost like a tableau or a silhouette in the space in that their performance or their characterization is about speed and moving through the space with some sense of urgency. Whereas Simon is very static and placed and grounded and through his physical being, he’s saying, “I’m not going, I’m not moving. I’m fixed here until I can sort out this internal dilemma that I’m working through”.’

To watch the full discussion around Symbolism, [click here](#)



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Location: Flinders Street, Melbourne, Australia

Year: 2005

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve and Genevieve Picot as Carolyn

+ ACTIVITY

DEvised PERFORMANCE



PERFORMANCE FOCUS

Create a solo or group short performance based on the concept of loyalty. Include the following:

- an attempt at an implied transaction
- interaction between characters with conflicting motivations using pathos
- demonstration of an actual person, either alive or dead, has experienced existential crisis

PERFORMANCE STYLE:

Eclectic with aspects of Realism

CONVENTIONS:

Students are required to select one convention from the following list and apply it throughout their performance:

- pathos
- song
- stillness and silence
- use of fact

DRAMATIC ELEMENTS:

Students are required to select one dramatic element from the following list and apply it throughout their performance:

- conflict
- contrast
- space
- tension

STIMULUS MATERIAL:



+ An Australian 10 cent piece

Trust is earned, Respect is given,
and Loyalty is demonstrated Betrayal
of any one of those is to lose all three.

Ziad K. Abdelnour

+ An adage about friendship



+ A crowded public area

+This track by Boards of Canada



DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

Dramatic elements are essential features of every performance. Actors manipulate dramatic elements to shape and enhance meaning. According to VCAA, the Dramatic Elements for VCE Drama are:

CLIMAX:

Climax is the most significant moment of tension or conflict in a drama and often occurs towards the end of the plot. Multiple climaxes and/or an anti-climax may also occur. The action of a drama usually unravels after the climax has transpired but the work might finish with a climactic moment.

Bruce identifies one particularly climactic moment where ‘the audience, they’re questioning, *‘All right, is she going to be successful or not in manipulating [Steve]?’ That for me is the climax, really. And then we’re in a kind of musical denouement at the end.*

To hear Bruce and Simon debate about where the climax of smo is, [click here](#) 



CONFLICT:

Conflict generally occurs when a character cannot achieve an objective due to an obstacle. This obstacle may be internal or external and between characters or between characters and their environment. Conflict may be shown in a variety of ways, for example through physical, verbal or psychological means. Conflict may be embedded in the structure of the drama.

Simon describes Steve’s internal conflict around the questions: *‘Does he want to go? Does he want to stay? Is Gary going to stick to his word..?’*

To hear Simon and Bruce unpack various points of conflict in smo, [click here](#) 



Sometimes it can be tricky to pinpoint exactly when conflict occurs. Here, read about how Gen sees it for her character in smo:

‘In terms of the way Carolyn sees it, the real conflict is not until the very end. She thinks there’s resistance but not conflict, and the conflict doesn’t actually happen.

small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Location: Flinders Street, Melbourne, Australia

Year: 2005

Description: Jim Russell as Alan and Genevieve Picot as Carolyn



Steve rejects every single one of her offers... that’s conflict, and what does she do? She’s in public, so she throws a vicious verbal barb, but then walks away. She recognizes she’s not going to win that conflict in that space, but that’s the first time I think conflict probably even enters her sphere, right at the very end.’

CONTRAST:

Contrast presents the dissimilar, or opposite, in order to highlight or emphasise difference. Contrast may be explored in many ways and may include contrasting characters, settings, times, themes, elements, production areas and performance styles.

Simon refers to the contrasting characters, and who really holds the power: *“I guess you could see the world of Carolyn and Alan and Gary and Steven in a different way. Some parts, it’s Alan and Carolyn’s world, but mostly, it is Gary and Steve’s world.”*

To hear Simon talk about the contrasting power between the protagonists and the antagonists, [click here](#) 





small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Location: Flinders Street, Melbourne, Australia

Year: 2005

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve, Jim Russell as Alan and Alan V Watts as Gary

When asked about how her character introduces contrast upon her entry, Genevieve responded:

'Alan, he's playing lower status a lot of the time with Steve and Gary. And the contrast is when Carolyn comes in, she plays higher status, even when she's trying to play equal status, she still plays higher status. So that is a very strong contrast in terms of behaviour.'

Jim reckons that contrast is completely vital for his character Alan in [smo](#):

'There are massive of contrasts visible with Alan, from being a powerful character in his normal world of law and conveyancing, to just being someone pathetic and completely out of his depth. I think it's a beautiful part of the script as a whole to see him with Carolyn at the end, as an absolute loser trying to maintain his dignity. The comedy is in the contrast between Alan's character at the beginning of the show, compared to the end. We go from this smooth operator, but then he starts to tread water, but he's still trying to be cool and in control right to the very end where he becomes like a little puppy dog, sucking up to her.'

'Wouldn't we all love to see knobs like Alan just brought down to where they really belong?'

He also recognises contrast in various other ways:

The cruellest line in the show is when Carolyn says something like, "What is it? You're lonely, aren't you? Now I get it." For her to say that Steve is just so horrid. Contrast this with the audience's relief when Steve's response says, "I'm staying here. I don't want you to set me up with somebody, or I don't want you to do that to me." There's great hope in the show, I think.'

MOOD:

Mood is the overall feeling or emotion that a performance may evoke. This may be achieved through manipulation of acting, conventions or production areas.

Bruce recalls the impact of the mood shift which occurs when Carolyn attempts to seduce Steve in the climax of the show: *'There's a number of times where Carolyn is almost whispering into Steve's ear, and at times, as a director listening to it, I've really had a shot up my spine.'*

To understand more about the directorial perspective around mood in [smo](#), [click here](#)



Gen adores the mood shifts in [smo](#)..:

*'The mood starts off as so delightfully banal and gentle. And **the mood just builds through the whole piece**. Even with the music, it builds until you think something really horrible is going to happen. And it does in a way, Carolyn's so really nasty to Steve. And then the mood just gets completely undercut by Steve's, "I'm good now". Steve knew he won, he beat the supposedly smartest person in the room. And so the transitions in mood are brilliant: it just starts off banal, it builds a bit, then a mood of frustration develops, it gets a bit tense and anxious, particularly around Alan. And it's undercut by some of Gary's humour, but for me the mood gets very tense, until Carolyn cuts Steve off and leaves. Then I think there's this amazing vacuum until Steve says, "I feel better now". Because Steve is someone who would often be seen as low-status or vulnerable, he can be treated patronizingly. But Steve won that moment, and I think the mood then shifts to gloriousness. I love it!'*

RHYTHM:

Rhythm is a regular pattern of words, sounds or actions. Performances have their own rhythm that may be influenced by the emotional nature of the plot, the pace of line delivery, the dialogue (long and/or short lines), the pace of scene transitions and the length of scenes.

Simon describes the importance of a deliberately slow delivery of dialogue in the opening exchange between the two central protagonists: *'Well, Gary and Steve, from the first two scenes, we go very slow... the audience is to hear every word, every syllable.'*

To hear how this initial rhythm is created for the actors, [listen here](#) 



Gen talks about this importance of rhythm in performance:

'Rhythm, I've realized a bit late in my career, 40 years on, how important it actually is in any performance piece, film, television, theatre. If it's at the same pace, the audience get bored. And rhythm is massively important to keep the interest up for the audience.'

I think **rhythm is one of the hardest things to grasp**, and I think really clever directors snap onto that really early. And when I look back on a lot of work that I've done I've realized the biggest problem with it was that rhythm wasn't paid attention to by the director; good writers write that in, and more naïve writers tend not to. But as a director, you can encourage actors to speed up or slow down to compensate for this.

I think this piece, the way it's structured and written, it creates a very deliberate rhythm, which is... you know, I find it hard to explain the timing, but it starts as a nice, gentle wave, and then it goes not quite staccato, but an odd kind of rhythm shift happens when Alan comes in. And the music in between gives the audience space. It's space to go, "Where are these actors? What's going on?" But the rhythm tightens up as it goes on. I think when Carolyn comes, some new energy comes in, and the rhythm changes, and it gets faster because she wants to get this over and done with, and then the rhythm changes again. It's quite modulated through the music, through the scene, through the scene structure, and through the dialogue. I think the rhythm is incredibly important in this show because it almost lulls the audience. Then there is that lovely moment at the very end when we disappear, and it's like the audience has been on waves, and then it just flattens to a quiet ocean...'

SOUND:

Sound is created live, by the actor, in the performance. Voice, body percussion and objects can be used individually or in combination to create sonic effects in performance and to enhance meaning. Sound may include silence or the deliberate absence of sound.

Simon describes an unforgettable moment where he had to use silence, or the deliberate absence of sound, to hold focus during an intervention from a passerby:

SIMON: 'There were some people who'd come for the races. A drunk crowd was coming through there. They just walked on stage, pulled their pants down. It was awful.'

INTERVIEWER: Oh God. Someone dacked themselves? Did you remain silent then?

SIMON: I had to.

INTERVIEWER: Very professional focus.

To hear more about Simon's strategic use of silence, [click here](#) 



Here is Gen's similar trajectory around the use of silence to create tension:

'I think the moments of tension are defined by silences in this show. And Jim's beautiful work too, his tension is actually defined by sound. He fills it a lot with vocal mannerisms; you can really hear his distress, his tension, as he is struggling. He gets that croaky kind of crackle as he is thinking, "How the hell do I deal with this?" It's mainly vocal and silence, that determine the tension. There are very few physical moments, except possibly at the end when I shake Steve. That's the only probably physically tense moment. Otherwise, they're determined I think more by sound or lack of it.'

SPACE:

Space involves the way the performance area is used to communicate meaning, to define settings, to represent status and to create actor—audience relationships. This may be achieved through the use of levels, proximity and depth. The use of space may be symbolic.

Here is what Gen says about performing in large scale, non-traditional spaces, such as Federation and Market Square:

'The space is one of the most amazing things in this production, because I mean yes, we do have blocking. It has to adjust sometimes because of where passers-by choose to stand in the space, or various things that happen on the day. But within that, you had one of the biggest theatre spaces you've ever been in because you've got the entire mall, for example. But, conversely, you don't have to perform 'big' anymore. The bigger the spaces you're in as an actor in theatre, the more you think, "Okay, I have to rely on body language a lot more to tell the story." But in this, because the sound is right inside people's ears, it makes the audience feel that the performance is very intimate, even though you don't necessarily know who's speaking initially. It's really weird: you feel like **you're doing something incredibly intimate in a very big space**, which is an odd, but interesting thing. I love it, and the space really does determine the tone. If it's outside and windy, that'll make a big difference to how you talk and deal with the text. If it's in an enclosed mall, and it's noisy, that would all slightly shape the tone, too.'

At Federation Square, I actually had to cross the road with trams, traffic and people. And that just felt like so weird because when you're in a theatre, you're actually in a fake space; you always know you're in a fake space. But when you're in the real world it's a very odd juxtaposition, it's quite mad in a way. Your brain goes really weird. Here am I performing, and no-one knows who I am, but the audience do know who I am, and I'm in public. And what used to be really weird when we originally performed smo nearly 20 years ago, was that we stuck out like scarecrows because we had things in our ears. Well, now everybody has things in their ears..!'

To listen to Bruce and Simon discuss the influence space has on the actor—audience relationship in smo, [click here](#) 



And to hear the thinking that goes into fictionalising real spaces in smo, [click here](#) 



TENSION:

Tension is the suspense that holds an audience's attention as a performance unfolds. The release of tension may have a comic or a dramatic effect.

Bruce describes the tension the audience feel being seated in a public area without any visible context for the passersby: *'The audience are on edge from the start, and there's a tension between the audience and the passing public. Like, "Is someone going to come and talk to us? What's going on here? What's my relationship to the theatre show that I'm about to see?" Everything's upended.'*

To listen to Bruce discuss instances of tension in [smo](#), [click here](#) 



Here, Jim vividly describes how tense he feels when depicting his character, Alan:

'As an audience member, if you're watching this show, you might look at my performance and think, "pretty cruisey, easy gig". But you are holding so much tension in your body, holding just the air, the silence. The tension is enormous; you can't just do 'Alan' without feeling it. You have to stay in that moment as a performer with your sphincter clenched and your toes curled in your shoes the whole time, holding onto a whole bunch of tension.

Because there's not a lot of words in the show either, and it's only a one-hour show. And you're aware that the audience aren't here, they're way, way back. Sure, they're getting the close-up. It's very filmy. That's probably something we'll talk about later. But it's very filmy, and I feel like the audience are watching a big wide shot at the start. Well, throughout. And when it becomes intimate, it's the headphones that gives them the extreme close up or when to bring it into here. And you're aware of that, and you're aware of wanting the audience to experience that. It's so weird and it's fun, but you are playing film and theatre at the same time, just constantly juggling it at the same... It's so much fun. It's so great.'



[small metal objects](#) performance image (top)

Year: 2005

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Description: Genevieve Picot as Carolyn,

Location: Flinders Street, Melbourne, Australia

Jim Russell as Alan and Alan V Watts as Gary

[small metal objects](#) performance image (bottom)

Year: 2005

Photographer: Unknown, provided by Mildura Wentworth Arts Festival

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve

+ ACTIVITY

DEvised ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE



Break into pairs, then read through the following excerpt of dialogue from an exchange in small metal objects. Use realism, pathos, stillness and silence and symbolism in your interpretation. Rehearse your performance for no more than five minutes, and then perform it for your classmates for constructive criticism, focusing on the successful implementation of the prescribed style and conventions.

STEVE: I've started being aware of myself.

GARY: Is that good?

STEVE: I'm missing something, a feeling.

GARY: A good feeling?

STEVE: A feeling that I've felt, sensed and known that I've always had.

GARY: Hmm

STEVE: It's my task to be a total man.

GARY: Ok

STEVE: I want people to see me. I want to be a full human being.

(Gary places his hand on Steve's shoulder)

GARY: Yes

STEVE: I just want to wait over here and think about it.

GARY: You want a coffee?

STEVE: Cup of tea thanks

CONVENTIONS

Students are required to select one convention from the following list and apply it throughout their performance:

- pathos
- song
- stillness and silence
- use of fact

DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

Students are required to select one dramatic element from the following list and apply it throughout their performance:

- conflict
- contrast
- space
- tension

PRODUCTION AREAS

SOUND

Here are some insightful gems from smo's Sound Designer and Composer, Hugh Covill.

Can you please describe the factors which influenced your artistic choices in smo:

'Bruce and I had done lots of shows together before smo and, as a result, there was a good conversation that existed between us around making art and what constituted great theatre. We knew what we liked, and what we didn't like.

SMO was always conceived as a work that took place in a public space, so a lot of decisions were influenced by that. Bruce was very keen that the space the work was performed in was part of the sound design palette, so consequently there are big pauses in the musical components that allow that space to be heard within the soundscape. The space and the people in it are integral parts of the composition and you get to hear that. Having these moments where you can hear the everyday comings and goings of the public is really important.

From a sound design perspective, smo is a headphone show. Bruce and I had invested in the headphone technology when we'd done another headphone show previously and we wanted to further explore the potential of that.

We wanted to make a work that was more intimate for the audience and the notion of immersive sound through the headphone sets was intriguing. The headphones we chose sat on the outside of the ear so that the audience is still hearing other stuff that's happening around the actors, as opposed to enclosed headphones which are designed to block out exterior sound.

I think one description of the style of this piece is 'Disrupted Realism'. smo isn't like a repertory show; there is the chaos of the public space. Really interesting characters transpire on any given day, serendipitous moments unfold; there is always something unpredictable! There are always interesting new moments to watch. Occasionally whole train loads of people get off and just file past the seat, looking straight at the audience. Sometimes these interruptions threw the actors out significantly. But, there are definitely some joyous, unpredictable moments.'



small metal objects performance image
Photographer: Photographer unknown
Location: Seoul, South Korea

Year: 2011
Description: Audience bank in situ,
no performer identifiable



What about the process you undertook when devising the soundscape and the composition for small metal objects?

*'As director, Bruce gave me a whole lot of departure points: the stuff that he had been listening to that he liked, the music that he was using in the rehearsal room through the developmental periods of *smo*. We bounced off each other and I'd say 'well, what about this?' and I would send him chunks and some of it he loved and some of it he didn't. I wanted the sound to have a moodiness to it...and moments where there was no sound, where the soundscape was punctuated by silence.*

The music Bruce was sending through as departure points was moody and had a soft tension to it. That was so something I was trying to achieve; this soft tension punctuated with lots of long delays, not sharp cuts, just delays that bleed into the space and allow the space to speak. These are some of the artists we were sending each other during this period:

SMO-SCAPE INSPO:

Ryuichi Sakamoto



Ryoji Ikeda



Boards of Canada



Autechre



'It's not very often that a piece has such a life; not many contemporary works have that type of longevity, but nothing has changed in the soundscape or composition since it was written. I like theatrical sound design where you could take the theatre away completely and you could listen to that piece of music in its own right.'

small metal objects performance image (top)

Photographer: Nate Schilling

Location: Adelaide, Australia

Year: 2021

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve and Brian Tilley as Gary

small metal objects performance image (bottom)

Photographer: Nate Schilling

Location: Adelaide, Australia

Year: 2021

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve and Brian Tilley as Gary

Can you please describe the work of mixing the sound in this unique performance? It's quite complicated because of all the variables.

'My role as the sound designer is two-pronged; there is the art, and then there is the science of sound design. The art is the interpersonal stuff with the director, the composing of sound, whether that's producing a score or making electronic music, or recording. Then the sciences involve the sound system, sound reinforcement, and working out how you are going to execute the design technically.

Mixing for live theatre is quite different to doing Rock'n'Roll. I've done a lot of theatre and musicals and everyone's wearing radio mics and it's line mixed. There's technical reasons for this: if two performers are in close proximity, it can create a kind of smearing of the sound when both mics are picking up the same sound but one has a slight delay due to the physical distance from the source. The practice of mixing radio mics for theatre is very much you bring one mic up at a time as the person speaking, so it takes a lot of concentration and attention to detail. Whereas, in Rock'n'Roll, you just get the mix right, and once it's good, you don't f*** with it!

Even though Bruce had originally suggested one track to play underneath the action, we thought it would be difficult to achieve clarity and consistency in some significant moments in the narrative if we did this. Because the timing changes so much for each individual performance, it could get really out-of-whack with the action on stage. So we ended up with four tracks which allowed the work to reset at defined points.

As designer and composer, I never live-mixed smo; it would be hard to be the sound designer and to be the same person who is operating the show, because you just couldn't be objective about it. During the show, the operator is very acutely focused on specific aspects of the mix rather than the larger interrelationship between the design disciplines, whereas, as a sound designer, you need to step back and see the bigger picture.'

To hear Bruce and Simon discussing the importance of precision in the execution of smo's sound design, [click here](#) 

Would you like to hear the music the actors can hear during small metal objects? [click here](#) 



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Jeff Busby

Location: Flinders Street, Melbourne, Australia

Year: 2005

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve

and Alan V Watts as Gary

COSTUME

'The great thing about working with Bruce is we're quite good at reading each other's visions.' – Shio.

Here are some great insights from our Costume Designer, Shio Otani, about her process and areas of consideration when designing for smo.

Can you please describe the process you undertook when designing the costumes for small metal objects?

Whenever we have made a show together, it's always been Bruce asking me if I want to design for it. Then he often talks through what each character's going to look like and what he's trying to do. Before getting into the script, I often speak to Bruce first, or he tells me what each character's going to be about. Maybe that's the first protocol with Back to Back Theatre and with this project. Then I go into meeting the actors and speaking with them. That also is a really big input into what I do.

Then I started to write down key words for myself. Then I do a lot of internet searching and collect all the pictures and just start collating pictures together. I then have this image collection that I could show to Bruce and Bruce usually goes, 'Oh yeah, that's great. Do it.'

But for the actors, I guess **each little item of the costume is quite important for them to grasp what the character's about.** So they often talk a bit about the details, like 'it's got to be this shoe, otherwise it's not going to be right.' It's really lovely talking to the actors about how they see their characters and how they see themselves in the whole setup. My job is to just collate all the information that I can get and then put it into the actual garments and combinations and then make sure that everyone is comfortable. I am always mindful of talking to the actors; I'm also interested in realising their vision of the character as well. **It's a collaboration.**

I don't think I could ever just present a final costume without collaborating with the performers first. I don't ever want to work like that. I always want my performers to feel comfortable and be truthful to themselves. My belief is that only then can they actually give the best of themselves when they're performing. So even though I'm dressing for the character, for the story, for the show, I still feel like each character comes from the actors. Anything they do, actors, dancers, performers, a circus person, the starting point for them is themselves, being in the character and the show and doing the special things that they do.

When designing for smo initially, I did walk around Flinders Street Station, where the original show was set, and just observed what type of people

walk around there and made a mental note of how people dress and carry themselves. I also thought about where they come from and what kind of social and cultural background they have come from, what kind of jobs they might do, and whether they have family or not, that kind of stuff. I often do this as a starting exercise when I'm designing. It's like colouring in details into this person that you are imagining in your head.



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Nurith Wagner

Location: Vienna, Austria

Year: 2015

Description: Sonia Teuben as Gary and Simon Laherty as Steve

Can you give some examples of these backstories for each character, and the factors you considered for each actor?

GARY

'Because Gary and Steve were the initial contact for the audience and they came in first, Bruce was really mindful about them blending into the surroundings. We were very careful about making sure that they are wearing clothes that aren't new, but are worn-in, and comfortable, and quite similar to what other people at the location are wearing.'

Initially, we were also thinking about Gary pushing a pram. That was an interesting concept. He's got a family and he's got things other than his business. He's also really caring and we thought the pram might show that side of him more...with Back to Back Theatre, we start off having all sorts of ideas, but Bruce is really into stripping things back. This is part of the development process. We often try few ideas, just try finding out if it works or not. But often the focus goes back to the actors. I think this is a really good concept to learn as a costume designer, because often we want to put things in, but we need to remember that it has to be about the character, about the actor, not just about the look. And this is the biggest tip, when the actor is most comfortable, they perform their best.'



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Nate Schilling

Location: Adelaide, Australia

Year: 2021

Description: Brian Tilley as Gary

STEVE

'Bruce really wanted to show Steve's vulnerable side and in order to do that, he wanted to show Simon's bone structure around his neck and shoulders. Simon's quite skinny and pale, so when he's wearing that dirty white singlet, his features really pop out. Simon's character, Steve likes wearing this garment and that's why it's soft; and he's comfortable in it. Also, I didn't feel like putting him in the darker colours because I knew that in Melbourne, everyone wears dark colours. So, even though he needed to blend in, he still had to stand out as an actor once the show is in full swing. That's the other reason we had to put him in a lighter coloured top. But, it was a bit cold so we had to be practical about it and found him a beige coloured hoodie to go on top the weather comes into it big time too. Especially when you are designing for an outdoor settings like this piece.'

Simon was quite set on wearing those Adidas-looking pants. They go with that character anyway, so I was happy to incorporate them into the look. Oftentimes, actors have certain kinds of ideas about the character and what they want to wear to become that character. So as a costume designer, I have to make sure that these ideas work with my ideas about what the final costumes should look like. Theatre making is all about collaboration. It's about working together with everyone else while still being clear about what your vision is.'



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Nate Schilling

Location: Adelaide, Australia

Year: 2021

Description: Simon Laherty as Steve

ALAN

'He is a young guy who works in an office somewhere in the city and he is trying to be cool around his boss. He's good at his work, but it's also a bit of a stretch for him as well; he has to work hard to be good. He's not like Carolyn who knows how to wrangle stuff from nothing, he's actually a hard worker. But that's a really lovely thing about this character: he is a hardworking man and he cares a bit about these two people who are from completely different social backgrounds to him or Carolyn. You can see that he cares about them a bit more than Carolyn does. It's not just about getting shit done, which she is all about. That's what she wants, she decided that's what she wants.

I think Alan has a soft side, and that's why we decided to take his tie off. Initially, I think he had a tie because he came straight from work. I think he's that kind of guy who can wear ties to work, but he doesn't necessarily feel comfortable. He finds wearing them after work a bit too much and is like, 'I'm going to take it off. I'm out of the office.'

Initially, I thought it would be good to give him just a little bit of an identity. With the suit, I'm always mindful of it being in current fashion. Initially, that was a bit of a shock for the costume budget though; it was like 'I think we need to actually spend money on this one.' I couldn't do an op-shop because those characters would not be wearing op-shop clothes. I had to go and buy some proper suits.'



small metal objects performance image

Photographer: Nikki Watson

Location: Wellington, New Zealand

Year: 2016

Description: Jim Russell as Alan

CAROLYN

'Carolyn comes across as lovely, but also as a very calculated person. That's where the heel height often comes in with this character. I think I've always wanted the actors who've played her to feel nasty enough, by giving them that extra height. Carolyn is not afraid to get nasty to get her way. Even though she's not that nice, she is a very interesting person.

So, I think she cares about the world. We came up with this idea that she's maybe sponsoring a child in Nepal or sponsoring this whole village. She's got money to throw around and she also wants to do good things for the world.

But the dark side of this is that she knows that by doing that, she's actually really showing off, saying that 'I'm pretty cool'. It's her clout, I guess. As a business person, she knows that she gives off that look. By being supportive and being aware and woke.'



small metal objects performance image

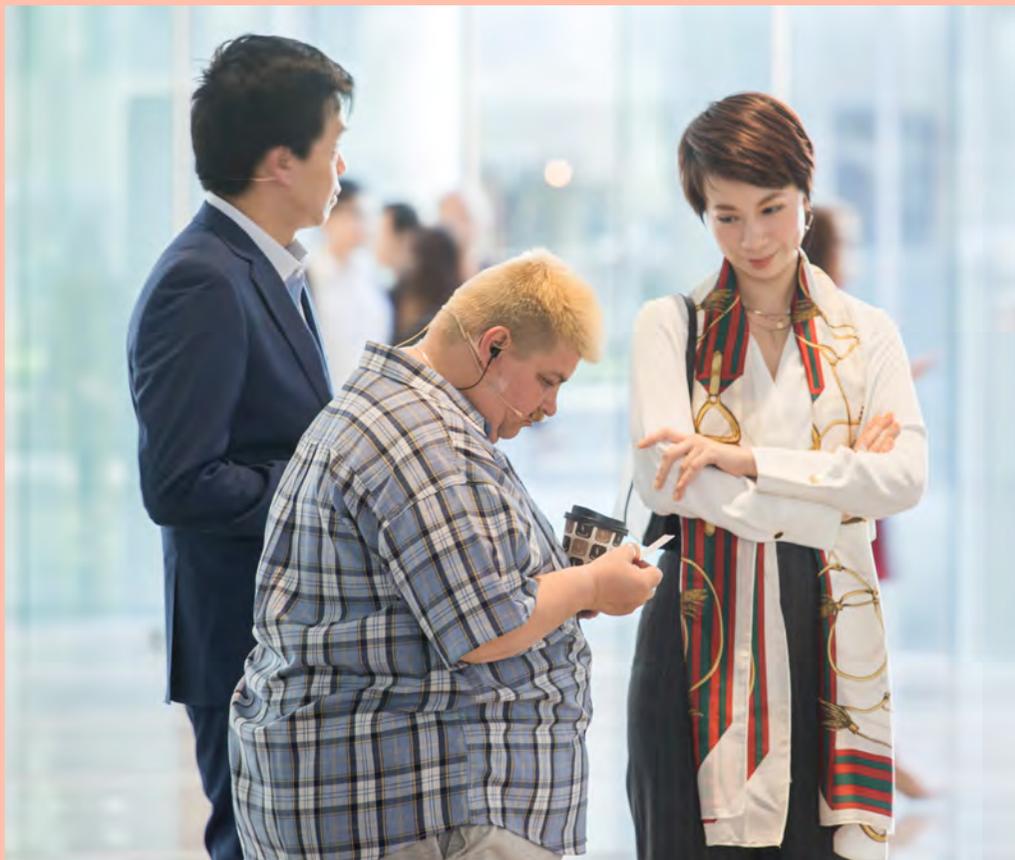
Photographer: Nikki Watson

Location: Wellington, New Zealand

Year: 2016

Description: Genevieve Morris as Carolyn

SHIO'S TOP TIPS FOR AWESOME COSTUME DESIGN:



small metal objects performance image

Year: 2017

Photographer: Unknown, provided by West Kowloon Cultural District

Description: Hollis Ngai as Alan, Oni Chan as Carolyn and Sonia Teuben as Gary

Location: West Kowloon, Hong Kong

DESIGNING FOR DANCERS IS A DREAM!

If you get a chance to design costumes for circus people and dancers, take it. Through their training and instincts, they know how to work their bodies to make costumes look good.

CREATE THOSE CHARACTERS...

Consult with the director and actors about a backstory for each of the characters you are designing for. This way, your designs will be cohesive with the show as a whole.

SIZE MATTERS

Do a proper fitting with every piece of costume, because the fit and the finish contribute to how an audience reads a character.

LEARN HOW TO SEW

If you want to get into costume design, you must know the basics so get your sewing machine out and start sewing today. It's the quickest and best way to show what your vision is. In the future, others may do the sewing for you, but it's really important to have that language to share with your team.

ALWAYS TAKE THE ACTORS SHOE SHOPPING

Shop with the person who's going to be wearing the shoes. This way, they can try the shoes for comfort, style and safety.

RESEARCH THE LOCATION THE SHOW IS SET IN

When designing a contemporary show which draws on Realism, go to the location in person, if you can. If not, use Google Earth or Instagram to see what people are wearing.

IT'S ALL ABOUT COLLABORATION!

Always work with the director, the actors and the other creatives throughout the whole performance making process. This way, everyone will be happy with the final product because it belongs to all of you. Theatre making is a team sport so don't forget to enjoy the process as much as what comes out as the final product.

To watch Simon and Bruce discuss the influence the performance's context has had over costuming choices in various seasons, [click here](#).



PRODUCTION HISTORY

Since its Melbourne premier in 2005, small metal objects has toured to 38 cities across the world, some of them multiple times. Hot Tip: Simon is the only actor who has performed in each incarnation. Here's what he says about each and every one of those performances: *'Because all those audiences, they're all different. So each show, no shows are the same... and I love the change..'*

Here is a list of where and when smo has been performed:

| | | | |
|------|---|------|---|
| 2023 | Market Square, Geelong, Australia Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia | 2007 | Barbican, London, UK Dublin Theatre Festival, Dublin, Ireland Zurcher Theater Spektakel, Zurich, Switzerland Noorderzon, Groningen, The Netherlands Paris Quartier d'ete, Paris, France Kobenhavns Internationale Teater, Copenhagen Denmark Theaterformen Festival, Hanover, Germany Ten Days on the Island, Hobart, Australia The Capitol Theatre, Bendigo, Australia Mildura Wentworth Arts Festival, Mildura, Australia Arts House, Melbourne, Australia Brisbane Powerhouse, Brisbane, Australia Perth international Arts Festival, Perth, Australia Sydney Festival, Sydney, Australia Australian Performing Arts Market, Adelaide, Australia |
| 2021 | Adelaide Festival, Adelaide, Australia | 2006 | |
| 2018 | Tokyo Festival, Tokyo, Japan | 2005 | Melbourne International Arts Festival, Melbourne, Australia |
| 2017 | Freespace at Taikoo Place, Hong Kong | | |
| 2016 | New Zealand Festival, Wellington, New Zealand Onassis Cultural Centre, Fast Forward Festival, Athens, Greece | | |
| 2015 | Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, Austria | | |
| 2012 | Cardiff Unity Festival, Cardiff, Wales | | |
| 2011 | Seoul Performing Arts Festival, Seoul, South Korea | | |
| 2010 | Westfield Shopping Centre GPAC, Geelong, Australia | | |
| 2009 | The Kennedy Center, Washington DC, US Philadelphia Live Arts Festival, Philadelphia, US Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland, US Arnolfini, Bristol, UK Kampnagel, Hamburg, Germany Exodus Festival, Ljubljana, Slovenia Linz 09, Linz, Austria | | |
| 2008 | Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, US Under the Radar Festival/Public Theater, New York, US | | |
| 2008 | On the Boards, Seattle, US Flynn Centre for the Arts, Burlington, US PuSh International Performing Arts Centre, Vancouver, Canada Harbourfront Center, Toronto, Canada Singapore Arts Festival, Singapore | | |

COMPANY AWARDS HISTORY

SMO AWARDS

- 2008 Bessie Award, New York
- 2007 Green Room Award – Best Theatre Production (New Form), Australia
ZKB Appreciation Prize, Zurich Theatre Festival
- 2005 Inaugural Age Critics' Special Commendation, Melbourne Festival

BACK TO BACK FILM AWARDS

- 2022 *SHADOW* | Film, SXSW Film Festival Audience Award Winners
- 2020 *ODDLANDS*, Best Short Film | Canadian Diversity Film Festival
- 2019 *ODDLANDS*, Audience Choice Award | Oska Bright Film Festival
- 2017 *ODDLANDS*, Audience Award for Best Short | Adelaide Film Festival

BACK TO BACK THEATRE AWARDS

- 2022 International Ibsen Award
- 2019 *THE SHADOW WHOSE PREY THE HUNTER BECOMES*, Green Room Award for Best Ensemble
- 2016 Performance Studies Internationals' Artist-Scholar-Activist Award
- 2015 Australia Council Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatre
- 2014 *GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH*, Edinburgh International Festival Herald Angel Critics' Award
GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH, Kunstfest Weimar Very Young Jury's All Round Award
- 2012 *GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH*, Green Room Award Best Ensemble Performance in Alternative & Hybrid Performance
GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH, Green Room Award Best Direction in Theatre
GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH, Green Room Award Best Production in Theatre
GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH, Helpmann Award for Best Australian Play
Australian Disability Enterprise of Excellence Award
- 2011 *GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH*, Melbourne Festival Age Critics' Award
- 2009 *GANESH VERSUS THE THIRD REICH*, Kit Denton Fellowship for Theatrical Courage
- 2005 Sidney Myer Performing Arts Group Award, Australia
- 2002 *SOFT*, The Age Critics' Award for Creative Excellence, Melbourne Festival

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

FURTHER RESEARCH

If compelled, you may be interested to investigate some of these sources for further information about the themes and ideas brought up in this performance:

TED talks

+ Lasting friendship



+ Existentialism



+ Happiness



YOU CAN'T ASK THAT — ABC

**Both episodes include strong language.*

+ Assistive technologies



+ Down Syndrome



ONE PLUS ONE — WITH KURT FEARNLEY

+ Interview with Dylan Alcott



+ Interview with Eliza Ault-Connell



CURRICULUM LINKS

VCE DRAMA

UNIT 3, AREA OF STUDY 3

Analysing and evaluating a professional drama performance

In this area of study, students analyse and evaluate a professional drama performance selected from the prescribed VCE Drama Unit 3 Playlist. Students analyse the actors' use of expressive and performance skills to represent character and to communicate meaning in the performance. They consider how the actor–audience relationship is created and manipulated and analyse and evaluate how the conventions, dramatic elements, production areas and performance styles are used in the performance. The prescribed VCE Drama Unit 3 Playlist is published annually on the VCAA website.

OUTCOME 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate a professional drama performance. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

KEY KNOWLEDGE

- Performance styles and conventions and their use in performance
- The actors' use of expressive and performance skills to represent characters in performance
- Manipulation of dramatic elements and production areas to enhance performance
- Drama terminology associated with performance styles and practitioners from contemporary and/or historical and/or cultural traditions relevant to the performance

KEY SKILLS

- Analyse and evaluate the representation of characters within a performance
- Analyse and evaluate the manipulation of conventions, dramatic elements and production areas within a performance
- Analyse and evaluate the use of performance styles within a production

- Analyse and evaluate the actors use of expressive and performance skills in a performance
- Analyse and evaluate the establishment, maintenance and manipulation of the actor–audience relationship in a performance.

AREA OF STUDY 2

PRESENTING A DEvised PERFORMANCE

In this area of study students present to an audience a devised solo and/or ensemble drama works based on a range of stimulus material relevant to the student's personal, cultural and/or community experiences and stories. The performance should be based on the work devised in Outcome 1. Students use a range of performance styles to present these stories, ideas and characters to an audience. They also begin to explore and develop skills in establishing and maintaining an appropriate actor–audience relationship.

OUTCOME 2

On completion of this unit the student should be able to perform devised drama works to an audience.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

KEY KNOWLEDGE

- Ways of creating and sustaining character and role in performance
- Understanding how stories and ideas are given form and meaning through performance
- Ways dramatic elements can be enhanced and manipulated through performance
- Characterisation and techniques in transformation of character through the manipulation of expressive and performance skills
- Conventions associated with a range of selected performance styles

- Application of symbol and transformation of character, time and place
- Presentation of characters and ideas using a range of performance styles
- Ways relationships between actors and audience are created and manipulated
- Production areas and how they can be used to enhance performances.

KEY SKILLS

- Present a solo and/or ensemble performances
- Sustain role and character in performance
- Shape and give form and meaning to stories and ideas
- Manipulate expressive and performance skills to present characters, ideas and stories
- Incorporate appropriate conventions from selected performance styles
- Manipulate dramatic elements to communicate meaning
- Apply symbol and transformation of character, time and place
- Create an actor–audience relationship that is appropriate to the selected performance styles
- Effectively incorporate and manipulate production areas.

END OF YEAR EXAMINATION

WRITTEN EXAMINATION

Description

The examination will be set by a panel appointed by the VCAA. All the key knowledge and key skills that underpin Unit 3, Outcomes 2 and 3, and Unit 4, Outcomes 1 and 3, are examinable.

CONDITIONS

The examination will be completed under the following conditions:

*Duration: one and a half hours.

*Date: end-of-year, on a date to be published annually by the VCAA.

*VCAA examination rules will apply. Details of these rules are published annually in the VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook.

*The examination will be marked by assessors appointed by the VCAA.

FURTHER ADVICE

The VCAA publishes specifications for all VCE examinations on the VCAA website. Examination specifications include details about the sections of the examination, their weighting, the question format/s and any other essential information. The specifications are published in the first year of implementation of the revised Unit 3 and 4 sequence together with any sample material.

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM

DRAMA– LEVELS 9 & 10 CONTENT DESCRIPTORS

RESPOND AND INTERPRET

Evaluate how the elements of drama, forms and performance styles in devised and scripted drama to convey meaning and aesthetic effect (VCADRR045)

Analyse a range of drama from contemporary and past times, including the drama of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to explore differing viewpoints and develop understanding of drama practice across local, national and international contexts (VCADRR046)

LEVELS 9 AND 10 ACHIEVEMENT STANDARD

Students analyse the elements of drama, forms and performance styles and evaluate meaning and aesthetic effect in drama they devise, interpret, perform and view. They use experiences of drama practices from different cultures, places and times to evaluate drama.

Community & Education Producer
Marketing & Development Coordinator
Screen Coordinator

Nikki Watson
Elysa McInnes
Zia Gul Sadeqi

This project is supported by the City of Greater Geelong through its Creative Communities Grant Program; the Department of Education Victoria, through its Strategic Partnerships Program; the Anthony Costa Foundation; and the Cassandra Gantner Foundation. This project is also supported by the Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund – an Australian Government initiative.

small metal objects was developed with support from Arts Victoria and assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council. Initiated through the Victoria Commissions, supported by the Victorian Government, through the Community Support Fund.

Back to Back Theatre is supported by Australia Council for the Arts, Creative Victoria and the City of Greater Geelong.



Australian Government
RISE Fund



Department
of Education