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OF PARRAMATTA

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STOLEN

STOLEN

Produced by National Theatre of Parramatta



Audience Engagement Brief

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Copyright & Credits
3. About NTofP
4. Audience Engagement Activities and Resources
5. Audience Engagement Feedback
6. Director and Writer Notes
7. Interview with Vicki Van Hout
8. Design Elements
9. Workshop Outline

1. INTRODUCTION

These notes suggest practical activities to enhance student learning in the HSC Contemporary Australian theatre topic area. They also provide students with reflections on professional practice surrounding the creation of contemporary Australian theatre.

*The notes were originally written to support and accompany the playreading and discussion of *Stolen*, staged at Riverside Theatres, Parramatta, in June 2013, and were written by director Anni Finsterer. The activities at the end of these pack were part of these original notes collated by Amy Matthews.*

In 2016 National Theatre of Parramatta has re-staged the work under the director Vicki Van Hout. The notes from designers and sketches have been added to incorporate information from this new production.

2. COPYRIGHT AND CREDITS

Education pack written and compiled by National Theatre of Parramatta and can be used for educational purposes only

3. ABOUT NATIONAL THEATRE OF PARRAMATTA

National Theatre of Parramatta is based in Sydney's geographical heart and was launched in November 2015. National Theatre of Parramatta reflects the diversity of Australia today through contemporary and bold performance, education programs and its audiences.

As the resident theatre company at Riverside Theatres, National Theatre of Parramatta is raising the profile of performance and engaging the imagination and creative ideas of Western Sydney and beyond, across the nation and ultimately internationally.

We aim to contribute to Western Sydney's vibrant artistic community by fostering the creation of new works, building capacity in the arts, facilitating education and development through performance, and engaging audiences, as we join in the vital task of enriching the cultural life of Australia's fastest growing region.

4. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

Q&A Sessions

Stolen offers post show Q&A's after each school performance. These Q&A's could also be available for general public audiences.

Audio recordings of Q&S's with the cast and director Vicki Van Hout from the premiere season at Riverside Theatres in June 2016 can also be made available.

Stolen: After nearly 20 years

An audio recording of playwright Jane Harrison and Director Vicki Van Hout is available.

Workshop

A special movement workshop is available to provide students with the opportunity to develop their movement skills while understanding where the inspiration for the choreography in *Stolen* originated. Members of the cast will work directly with students, taking them through the motifs, while putting into context the inspiration for the movement which originate from the various communities of the actors and those which the Director has visited.

Please see complete workshop outline in section 9.

School Resources Kit

A supporting educational *Stolen* Resource Kit is available for teachers to discuss with their students. This educational component explores the various historical and production elements of *Stolen*. An example from the 2016 season is available in PDF format [here](#).

5. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK

Stolen is widely studied and is on the school curriculum for drama in NSW. It is worth noting that teaching of the *Stolen* generations is on all school curriculums within Australia and therefore *Stolen* is of interest to all schools..

“I liked the presentation, it made me want to learn more about costumes and sets”

“It was very personal, I liked everything about the experience and the depth of emotions”

“I liked meeting the actors and now want to learn more about the *Stolen* Generations”

Lurnea High School.

“Students found the performance really compelling. Q&A afterwards was worth at least 5 extra ATAR points alone!” Calrossey High School

6. DIRECTOR & WRITER NOTES



From the Director – Vicki Van Hout

“I am always surprised by the power and presence of humour, especially when times appear at their bleakest and this play readily utilises humour to this effect. This play is ultimately not about lives in the home care system, but of the resilience to overcome an appalling start in life. This work operates as a sort of modern day urban song cycle, the storytelling occurs in a kind of dreaming time, where chronology and geography is fluid and secondary to the essence of who these characters are.

I am always seeking to embed my own works with the knowledge I have and am continuing to accumulating as a long time alumni of NAISDA. At NAISDA we learned dances, were told stories, lore and law, we made our own props from simple materials, often including, developing and substituting the traditional artefacts with urban equivalents at hand.

I have enhanced the idea of Stolen occurring as a song cycle, sung or conceived by the character Ruby. Because she is deemed disturbed, I see her character as accessing the Dreaming more readily.” Vicki Van Hout

From the Playwright – Jane Harrison

“What can I tell you about Stolen, the first play I ever wrote? Firstly, that I was honoured to be given the opportunity to write this play by Ilbjerri Theatre Company. It was an honour, and a deep responsibility, to be tasked with creating a story that, in its simple way, tries to encapsulate the experiences of the Stolen Generations.

I can tell you that it took six years to write and workshop and finally get to the stage. And that it has taken on a life of its own since, touring many parts of the world along with cities and regional towns across Australia and that even in a place as culturally different as Japan it still resonated.

I can tell you that half the Aboriginal actors I know, it seems, have performed in it at one time or another in the 18 years since it premiered! And that everyone who performs in it

or directs it brings their own poignant stories and experiences to the story, enriching it with their commitment and talent.

For audiences, I hope it brings understanding that we are all part of this story, it is part of our history and our present. For the Aboriginal community members in the audience, it is my profound hope that we do your stories justice.” Jane Harrison

7. INTERVIEW WITH VICKI VAN HOUT

“Twenty years on and Parramatta Riverside play Stolen still a poignant reminder to act with humanity” Daily Telegraph, 26 May 2015

PARIS on a cold January day in 2013. Choreographer Vicki Van Hout was there on a resident artist program, working in a building near the Memorial de la Shoah, the French Holocaust Museum.

It was Holocaust Memorial Day and a name-reading ceremony began. They were the names of those taken by the Nazis — men, women and children — read aloud.

“It was winter, but I left my windows open to listen,” she recalls . “It was such a powerful reminder to act with humanity.”

Van Hout is currently directing the National Theatre Of Parramatta (NToP) production of Jane Harrison’s play Stolen for Riverside Theatres.

Published and premiered in 1998, the play follows five Aboriginal characters who are dealing with the ongoing ramifications of having been taken from their birth parents under Australian government policies of decades past.

And Van Hout sees a resonance between the reminder to act with humanity the Paris Holocaust Day name-reading ceremony and restaging an almost 20-year-old play now for a new audience. It, too, is a reminder to act with humanity.

“It’s a reminder not to repeat those actions, you speak to people and some of them say, ‘get over it’ but this play is a reminder not to play with people’s lives as if they were frivolous, because every life is important,” she says.

This is the second outing for the NToP which was founded by, among others, former Sydney Theatre Company artistic director Wayne Harrison and media personality Annette Shun Wah.

And it’s the second play the NToP has staged that is directed by a choreographer. So with that hat on, Van Hout will be teasing out new aspects of Stolen, which is regarded as a contemporary classic. “I don’t want to dilute the potency of the original message because there is so much gravity in this show of displaced people that has resonated across the generations, but I’m also trying to find another way

to make it relevant,” Van Hout says. “And when I read it I saw in the script a lot of opportunities for movement interpretation.”

To that end, Van Hout cast her two dancers in Henrietta Baird and Berthalia Selina Reuben, as well as three actors with skills in acting and movement in Mathew Cooper, Kerri Simpson and Matilda Brown.

“She is doing something really different, it has changed from the original blocking, because there is movement in everything we do; some of it is dance, some of it is physically portraying what they’re talking about, so it is physical theatre,” Matilda Brown says.

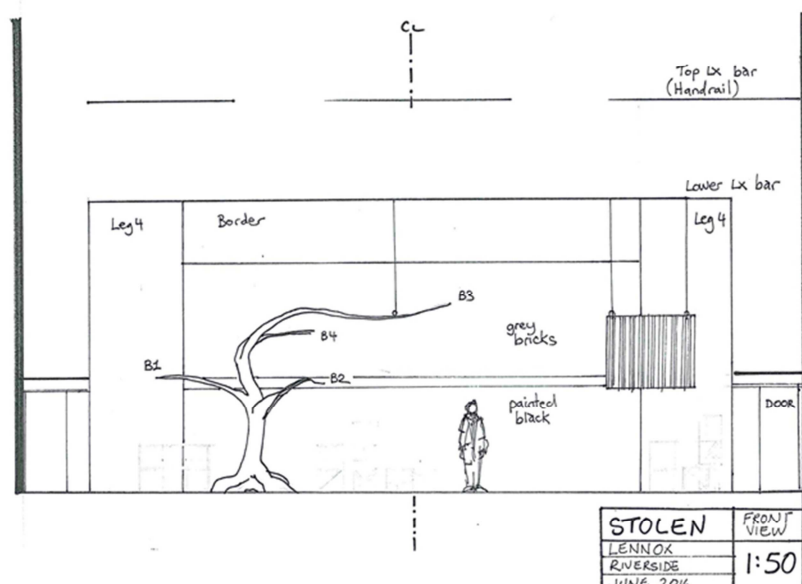
But it doesn’t make the subject matter any easier. “It is confronting, I actually find I have to take myself out of the story and just empathise, to make sure I don’t get too emotionally involved, as it is very confronting telling these kinds of stories,” Simpson says.

8. DESIGN ELEMENTS

Imogen Ross co-designed *Stolen* with Vicki Van Hout. In this collaborative process between the Director and Designer, the two of them came up with various concepts to re-imagine this Australian classic.

“We decided to wrap a tree in yarn to represent the making of culture in a man-made sense - devoid of its natural course - ie. stolen culture continues to wrap itself around objects, making its own sense and shapes of them. In this way, I could see that the characters in *Stolen* are wrapping their stories around the tree - they and countless others of the *Stolen* generation are re-weaving the culture that was lost, and in doing so, they are weaving their stories together in the landscape. The tree is growing out of the wasteland of empty cardboard boxes - a reminder that the Aboriginal spirit is still strong and powerful and will not disappear, despite being removed from its natural habitats, and forced to grow in amongst empty boxes.” Imogen Ross

The complete Designer’s Notes can be found in the Schools Resource Kit.



9. WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Vicki Van Hout presented the play *Stolen* in the manner of a song cycle with each character having their own movement motif. The motifs for each character have been influenced by the experiences with remote communities Van Hout had learning individual communities motifs and movements.

Examples are a clicking sound for Sandy, Shirley has a knitting motif. Each of the motifs include physical phrases.

The movement workshop provides students the opportunity to develop their movement skills while understanding where the inspiration for the movement in *Stolen* originated. Members of the cast will work directly with students, taking them through the movement and motifs while putting into context the inspiration of the movement and the community that it comes from.

Students will experience techniques used through rehearsal. They will explore the specific techniques the cast used to engage with the text through movement.

Students of dance or drama will be able to widen their knowledge of the work while building their personal skills and processes.