CHALKDUST THEATRE INC

PRESENTS

RUBY MOON

By Matt Cameron

Directed by Jonathan Llewellyn

TEACHING NOTES

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Life appears to be picture perfect in Flaming Tree Grove. At least until little Ruby Moon sets off to visit her grandmother at the end of the cul-de-sac and is never seen again. When an ominous parcel arrives on her parents’ doorstep, Sylvie and Ray Moon are promoted to call on their enigmatic and eccentric neighbours in an attempt to solve the mystery of their daughter’s disappearance. But life behind the average suburban front door is not what it seems.
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Dear Teachers…

I have used a variety of resources for these notes. Some of them I cannot acknowledge as they were given to me through other people. If you see something that is yours, please email me on henris101@hotmail.com so I can add you to the list of resources and acknowledgements.

I have also decided to focus the debate of what makes Contemporary Australian Theatre, and if *Ruby Moon* is in fact a good example, and if current productions are challenging the notion of Contemporary Australian Theatre Practice, and if so how? Use the articles mentioned as they are great discussion starters.
Introduction

I have decided not to include too much on the actual play as the HSC online, Malthouse Theatre and STC educational notes as well as the text HSC drama Vol 1. from Five Senses notes covers this aspect well enough.

Contemporary Australian Theatre (and its practice)…

There are some excellent articles to get the ball rolling for discussion on what makes a contemporary Australian play, and how it has changed. It is imperative students have some knowledge of this area, to help them assess and engage with their texts as well as gauge if they are still relevant to what is being asked of them in the HSC exam. It is no longer good enough to just have a list of techniques rote learnt, and regurgitated in an exam situation (or whole essays for that matter, but that is another debate altogether!). Students need to have some idea as to how playwrights, their plays and Australian Theatre are seen by the industry, it’s patrons and society as a whole.

Many students do not see much theatre, for some just the plays being studied in either Drama or English, so unless they read reviews etc. they have little appreciation as to how drama has changed yet again since this text was first produced. The social context may be similar, but the technical of theatre has changed; more multi media, less set, taking the old and literally turning traditional theatre it on its head. (Arthur Millers’ Death of a Salesman with Colin Friels, Belvoir Theatre being one of them of late.)
Three excellent articles to discuss are…

“Enter Stage Left” Louis Nowra SMH Spectrum April 13-15th 2001

“And the audience went mild” Angela Bennie SMH Spectrum Oct 23-25th 2004

“Little stories for Australian stories on Sydney’s Stages” Sun Herald May 30th 2010

“Between the Lines” SMH Spectrum July17-18th 2010 Joyce Morgan

Some quotes from the above articles to use as stimulus for Ruby Moon discussion:

“Theatre that is based on two people just talking to each other on stage in the one room hasn’t really caught up with the way we take in information in the modern world.” Sam Strong

“In the past five years, the ways of making theatre have transformed.” Lyn Wallis - she continues “I think the whole of our industry is going through this collapse of boundaries between art form and practice and the ways things are made.”

“Shows often have just one production in Australia, they have this short life and they’ve gone-it’s like a dream.” Lally Katz

Tommy Murphy “there is genuine effort to nurture and encourage new Australian playwrights but there was also a clear need for more voices. There are not enough playwrights who reflect the diversity of Australia at the moment. We need a mix of everything but when you look at the percentage of Australian work that we put on the Australian stage it feels like those numbers are disappointing.”

Angela Bennie “generally speaking however, on Australian stages there is no sense of a new world order, that a revolution has taken place in international affairs and moral law.” This is backed up by the then theatre critic from the SMH Bryce Hallet when summing up 2003, and 2002 years in theatre, stated the Theatre companies were playing it safe.

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QUESTION TO DEBATE: Is that the case here and now in 2013????

Explore reviews of theatre from the SMH for the last 12 months. Where does Ruby Moon sit in amongst all this? Is it still a solid example for CATP?

Some claimed it would take some time before Australian writers found an angle in monumental and global issues.

“The best productions of my plays were those where the director and actors made it come alive in a ways I’d never thought possible.” Louis Nowra

“Contemporary playwriting has lost its ability to unnerve and engage in a debate with its society.” Louis Nowra

A good topic for debate:

Has ‘danger within the art of playwriting and staging Australian plays, been replaced by a theatre’s need for a safety net? Has theatre become too commercial at the expense of creativity?

OTHER ARTICLES

Read, explore, discuss, debate what is contained in the following articles.

OVERLAND print issue 200 Spring 2010

Alison Croggon ‘How Australian is it?” - Nationalism and the theatre.


This article has some very interesting discussion on what makes Australian Theatre and how it has changed. I like the quote “it makes little sense to define art by nationality.”
It explores how our theatrical landscape has changed, and it is good to see the influence of directors on how theatre is perhaps focussing on not just performance and design but on text.


http://newmatilda.com/2010/01/08/changing-face-australian-theatre

9th Jan 2010 Jana Perkovic- “Changing the Face of Australian Theatre.”


July 17th 2010 Joyca Morgan “Why theatre spurns Australian plays”

**Responding to a play**

It is unusual for most if not all people who attend and approach a play to do so completely objectively. This is a factor you need to take into consideration when assessing the merits of a production.

What sort of place is the venue?

Where are you sitting in relation to the action?

What information do you have about the production?

What kind of acting is required?

Recognising the elements of acting: what specific demands are made on actors in terms of physical representation and vocal dexterity?

Appraising the effectiveness of acting.

When writing about an actor’s performance consider the distinction between character and actor choices.

What has the design contributed to the play? Assess the impact of design on the production as it affects how a play’s themes are assimilated and understood by an audience.

What impact has the Director had on the play? Always try and discern the balance between the actors’ achievements and the director’s.

How is lighting used?

Who is the audience? Every production has a target audience.
DISCUSSION QUESTION

Assess the production you have seen recently. What were the distinguishing feature which made it memorable? You should take into account all areas of the production.

As the dramaturg for this production, I have spent time early on working with the director and the actors. I have provided them with research on the play, productions, themes, the HSC drama course, performance conventions, theatrical styles and looking at the play from a literary and performance standpoint. We discussed issues and angles, and tried to come up with a framework to help all involved.

The actors did a great deal of process work, using the research provided as well as providing their own insights.

Students have little understanding as to the role of the dramaturg, yet they act as one when they study their texts for the HSC drama course.

SO what is a dramaturg and dramaturgy?

(SOURCE: Amy Steele Dramaturgy 101.

Amy Steele is the resident dramaturg at the Alley Theatre in Houston, and a member of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas.)

It involves researching and investigating the social, political, cultural and historical contexts on the play’s world (much like the actual Rubric for CATP!) By doing this we then begin to understand and appreciate how rich a play can be.

It can be compared to the first reading of this play-some of us do it in class, using key scenes to explore various techniques, issues, then getting the students to express what they think of the play, at the start then at the end.

Teachers are dramaturgs as they challenge their students to explore. We ask our students to think as directors, designers actors and to some extent as audience, and through all of them make an artistic vision a reality.

In this instance I did not collaborate with the playwright to help shape this script, but instead aimed to be the ‘keeper of the text’ and ‘audience surrogate’ ensuring the production stayed true to their intentions, as read in the script.
A dramaturgs’ checklist:

1. Meet with the director
2. Do initial readings
3. Create a text glossary
4. Research the playwright’s background
5. Research the backgrounds(s) of the play
6. Study the play’s production history
7. Review other material that reflects the world of the play

Some activities you could do with your students:

ACTIVITY 1.

Review other material that reflects the world of the play

1. Art, music, popular culture
2. Timelines
3. The work of the playwrights contemporaries
4. Other artists that influenced the playwright
5. Music and visual images that evoke the play’s mood, tone or themes
6. Video references, documentaries that suggest the play’s world ie. the Daniel Morecombe case is exceptionally good as is One Night the Moon DVD
7. Maps and photographs of the plays geography or key images (eg. the flame trees, cul-de-sacs, the different kinds of Australian suburbia.)
8. Magazines and newspapers from the time period in which the play is set.
9. Children’s books that often convey background information.
ACTIVITY 2.

Dramaturgy teams

Assign the entire class a play to read, and then break them into dramaturgy teams. Each team is responsible for completing one assignment in the dramaturgy process. Once the team has completed its work, the members should compile their information into a packet that can be shared with the entire class. Encourage students to summarise and paraphrase written material in their own words rather than simply copying information from books or printing it off the internet. It’s important for dramaturgs to have solid writing skills and to present their research in an attractive and professional manner. Teams should then share their packets with the entire class in an oral presentation. They can get as creative with this as they’d like, but the goal of this part of the activity is to work on verbally communicating what they’ve learned. Dramaturgs spend a lot of time talking about their knowledge and ideas; therefore, good communication skills are a must.

After each group has presented its materials, organise them into one final production notebook that may be used for other class projects or as a resource for the play if it is ever produced at the school. Indeed, doing this project for a play that is going to be presented during the school year would be especially meaningful.

An advanced version of this activity would be to assign each team to read separate plays that vary in style and period and then require individual team members to complete one step of the research needed. Each team, therefore, would create an entire packet of the research needed for its assigned play. Once the teams finish their project, the class would have multiple completed play packets to review, allowing students to see how each team interpreted the tasks and how their processes differed depending on what type of play was researched.

ACTIVITY 3.

Dramaturgy bulletin boards

This activity can be done as an extension of the dramaturgy teams activity, on its own, or as part of a play rehearsal. Assign individuals or teams a play to read and research according to the dramaturgy procedure I’ve outlined. Instead of gathering information into a production notebook, however, students will present their research in a visual manner, either through decorating a bulletin board in the classroom or rehearsal hall, developing a power-point presentation, creating a website, or utilising some other visual medium. To finish the project,
students have to present their bulletin boards to the class, explaining how the elements reflect
the world of the play. This activity encourages students to see their plays and research
visually, helping them understand how painting, photography, sculpture, maps, book
illustrations, cartoons, advertisements, magazine and newspaper spreads, production photos,
design sketches, film and dance clips, etc. can convey the play’s world.

**Additional Miscellaneous classroom dramaturgy activities**

Dramaturgical skills are applicable to all areas of theatre, and can also be used in script
analysis, playwriting, scene work, and design assignments. Because dramaturgy is so
multifaceted, I would advise doing a dramaturgy unit early in the school year to help students
learn how to effectively read, respond to, and investigate plays.

**ACTIVITY 4.**

**Rehearsal dramaturgy**

Although the above classroom activities are certainly applicable to the rehearsal process, here
are some dramaturgy activities specific to preparing a play for production.

**World-of-the-play presentation**
A dramaturgy project I’ve found particularly effective for an educational theatre production,
is a world-of-the-play presentation during the first rehearsal. The presentation provides the
dramaturg with the opportunity to immerse the cast in the play’s context. An element of the
presentation may include bringing in food from the play’s time period and/or setting that
somehow symbolically represents characters or issues in the play. Playing music and
displaying artwork and other pictorial materials that evoke the play’s mood and style is also
fun. Once the actors have a had a chance to soak up the aural and visual imagery and snack
on the food, the dramaturg should explain why she chose each component, and then review
the research packet she’s compiled. This presentation is an instructive and creative way to
prepare for the first play reading, and it generates enlightened discussion.
ACTIVITY 5.

Audience study guides

Preparing study guides for student audiences is a common practice in the theatre. For a high school play, why not develop study guides for students, teachers, and other staff not involved in the production? Distribute them to English classes and other subject areas and leave copies in the main office for visitors to read. Make them available to audience members to read before or after the production by placing them in the theatre lobby. Guides often include the same type of information a dramaturg provides to the cast, with the addition of material that introduces audiences to the play’s context and illustrates major themes; pre- and post-performance discussion questions are also great to add.

ACTIVITY 6.

Program notes, pre-performance discussions, and lobby displays

Educating the playgoing community beyond providing study guides is another valuable dramaturgical duty. Student dramaturgs can write notes for the program to give audiences pertinent background knowledge about the play and/or organise pre-performance discussions with audience members to verbally present them with information that will help them better understand the play they are about to see (we call these “Informances” at the Alley). If they’re adventurous, student dramaturgs may even organise and moderate a post-show talkback during which audience members may ask the cast, director, and dramaturg questions about the production. Lobby displays that include attractive and educational materials for the audience to peruse before the show and during intermission may also be created by the dramaturg (materials from the bulletin board project could be used for this).

Although not an exhaustive list of dramaturgical duties, the process and activities I’ve outlined are a good introduction to the work involved prior to mounting a production. Once they’ve been exposed to these assorted skills and recognise just how integral dramaturgy is in making the world of a play come to life, students will be ready to flex their knowledge and imagination for the next project.
Dramaturgy resources

Here’s a list of websites, books, and organisations that are useful to dramaturgs.

1. *Arts Journal*. This online digest offers a comprehensive reference for current events in all art areas; updates can be sent via a daily e-mail. ([www.artsjournal.com](http://www.artsjournal.com))

2. *Arts Lynx International Theatre Resources*. An online resource that includes an array of timelines, dictionaries, miscellaneous theatre links, and other research tools. ([www.artslynx.org/theatre/drama.htm](http://www.artslynx.org/theatre/drama.htm))

3. *Dramaturgy Bibliography*. Compiled for a university theatre course, this site has a [comprehensive annotated bibliography](http://www.artslynx.org/theatre/drama.htm) with sources useful to the dramaturg.


6. Lexis/Nexis Academic. This database found in research libraries contains an extensive newspaper and legal archive.

7. Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. This dedicated group provides a supportive network for dramaturgs. An LMDA student membership is also very affordable. The website includes many resources and links to other reliable dramaturgy websites.

8. MLA Bibliography. A thorough bibliographic database found in most libraries.

9. Theatre Communications Group. *TCG* is an advocacy group for the professional not-for-profit American theatre that publishes *American Theatre* magazine, among other useful resources.
Who is CHALKDUST THEATRE INC?

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Our Mission Statement
Chalkdust Theatre Inc. aims to provide its members and audiences with an opportunity to learn about and engage in a variety of theatrical experiences. (1997)

THE ORGANISATION
Chalkdust is a non-profit organisation that was formed by a group of Drama Teachers. Our membership has now grown to an eclectic mix of teachers in general, theatre professionals, tertiary students, and many other trades and professions. Our members have this in common – they want the opportunity of being involved in putting on the best possible productions, learning along the way and having some fun too!
Ruby Moon by Matt Cameron

Plot: In picture-perfect Flaming Tree Grove, a little girl called Ruby sets off to visit her Grandma at the end of the cul-de-sac, but she never arrives. When a strange package appears on her parent’s doorstep, Ray and Sylvie Moon are prompted to interview the various quirky characters in their street.

Themes/issues

• Prevailing fear of our times - losing a child and actually look at the nature of that unease, that disease, that lurks and hovers in the world that we live in at the moment.
• Context = In this country at the time of writing the play there was a climate of fear being sold to us by our government. They claimed their actions were about easing and removing that fear, but I think they were nurturing it, feeding it. It’s the classic ploy of corrupt power, to convince us that we are in peril and then offer themselves as our only protection from it.
• Anxiety, doubt, loss and barely suppressed terror
• Mystery - truth
• The grieving process - Grief
• The missing child - powerlessness
• Political points of view explored, a change that is needed in society
• The affects of Ruby’s disappearance on that community - Parent/child relationships
• Innocence vs loss of innocence
• Light vs dark
• Fear of the unknown

Dramatic Forms

Heightened Naturalism

• Recognisable characters and situations
• Stylistic presentation
• Beyond realism

Fractured Fairytale

• Characters are frightening and weird | Grimm’s fairytales

CHALKDUST THEATRE INC TEACHING NOTES 2013 PRODUCTION RUBY MOON © H.STATHOPOULOS
• Fairytale motifs repeated throughout the play
• Fractured fairytales change the characters, setting, points of view and or plots.

Symbolism
• Universal archetypes characters covering key forces in our society: religion, science, art, military etc.

Gothic Theatre Conventions
• Tragedy/comedy/opera
• Music spectacle
• Gloomy/dark
• Shock and wonder
• Fantasy
• Shock and wonder
• Nightmarish ambiguity

Metaphors within the play
• Mannequin | a surrogate for Ruby, parents can’t let go
• Doll | Physicalisation of their fears | destruction of childhood
• Cul-de-sac | dead end, cyclical

Surrealism
• Nightmarish
• Surrealist works feature the element of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions and non-sequitur
• Explores the far reaches of one's imagination, dreams and desires.
Brechtian Elements in General (not all are found in Ruby Moon!)

- Epic storytelling
- Direct address by actors to the audience
- Narration
- Multiple characters
- Exaggerated
- Montage- events shown in self-contained scenes juxtaposed with each other
- The use of song
- Explanatory placards
- Reason- a theatre where the audience is made to question and think
- Concerned with encouraging audiences to think rather than becoming too involved in the story
- Didactic/political lessons are important

Absurdist Elements

- Themes: futility / pointlessness - repentance and salvation, time, place, night and the dark, food, sleep and dreams, illogical / irrational, no purpose, isolation, despair- suffering and religion - biblical themes and references.
- Startle the viewer - shaking her/him out of this comfortable, conventional life of everyday concerns
- Anti-theatre
- Bizarre and macabre
- Surreal, illogical, ‘conflictless’ and plotless
- Distrust of language as a means of communication
- Fractured plays that deal with an existential view of life = questioning our existence
- Stream of consciousness = a continuous flow of thoughts and feelings expressed uninterrupted
- Characters stripped down to the bare essentials of their humanity
• An audience is compelled to project their own interpretation of the work
• Against Realism
• Exploring themes of the human condition
• Themes of human survival against the odds
• Not taking the literal meaning
• Obsessions = personal idiosyncratic obsessions
• Minimal staging
• Comical elements
• The audience is as much a part of the work as the work itself
• Surreal dreams and nightmares
• No clear objective
• Events/character distorted
• Unpredictable/ bizarre
• Disturbing our view of the world
• Challenging out understanding of reality
• Transformation theatre
• Cyclical: occurring or repeated in cycles

Black Comedy
• Grotesque or morbid humour used to express the absurdity of the modern world, exaggeration far beyond the limits of normal satire or irony, socially based, excessive language: intended to instruct, political messages, propaganda, comparing and contrasting images.

What is real?

*Nightmare logic | nothing is certain, what is real in this world?
*Was there ever a Ruby Moon? | We begin to wonder if she was ever real.
*It is never specified how long she has been missing for
*Ambiguity of situation | no background to characters.
*Most questions never answered, no definitive ending | repetitive cycle

By the conclusion we see that this whole event will carry on again the next night, and has done before.

**Essay strategies**

*If you can do Costa Loucopoulos’ Essay writing course do so. He provides some great strategies in his essay cookbook. (Contact him through Erudioeducation.com)

One idea I like to use with my students are sample sentences - this is an excellent scaffold for the weaker student. Where possible avoid 1st person, so use some of the following when discussing workshop examples:

*This was made clear through/when/by

*As evidenced by

*This was shown/demonstrated  (instead of “I did this”)

Obviously there are times 1st person really resonates with what is being discussed.

Eg.

My Research

Our group

We explored performance through...

We used our bodies to create...

In a class workshop students created...

In class we explores language activities that...

Students need to think like drama students, actors, directors, designers, and as AUDIENCE (I use the acronym of DADA (with jazz hands…))

Consider dramatic and theatrical styles, forms and conventions and how these influence the making of meaning.

CHALKDUST THEATRE INC TEACHING NOTES 2013 PRODUCTION RUBY MOON © H.STATHOPOULOS
Use terms relevant to drama (NOT English)

eg. the play or text (Not novel!)

The actor/performer/designer/director/audience (Not the reader)

Playwright (Not author or writer)

Discussion/Essay questions

1. “I make a conscious effort in writing plays to make them theatrical and abstract.”

   Matt Cameron

   To what extent does Cameron achieve this in Ruby Moon?

2. “The idea is that hopefully there is room in the play for an audience to associate what they see on stage – however strange – with their own lives.”

   Matt Cameron

   How would a director explore this request theatrically?

3. “Cameron wants a strong emotional effect, empathy from an audience – The play is full of ambiguity.”

   Discuss this quote in relation to your understanding of Ruby Moon, and explore how Cameron achieves this.
Forms and Conventions

Gothic Theatre

Gothic drama is a style of play and theatrical presentation that depends strongly on heightened emotional situations, their effectiveness often reinforced by intricate stage designs. Artists working within the genre will often include familiar scenery, to ease audiences into a play presenting challenging material.

Typical themes, characters, settings, and imagery used in Australian Gothic Theatre may be historical, cultural, racial, sexual or gendered (which the Gothic genre typically addresses).

Gothic spaces

- a haunted spot
- eerie landscapes and sounds
- night worlds with contrasted light and dark areas
- ruins, caves, prisons, graveyards
- impressive built structures bearing significant historical or collective meanings: ‘the castle’
- urban underworlds: sewers, tunnels, dark, polluted, ruined or twisted ‘cities’
- candles, knives, chains
- storms, moonlight and shadows
- interiors invaded by threatening exterior forces
- windows or other permeable spatial boundaries
- a place which powerfully and malevolently determines the fate of the characters
- a world which is ‘alive’ and a participant in the action
- a plunge into the extreme reality of the dream or fear
Gothic characters and themes

- cross-overs between worlds (living and dead, past and present, normal reality and other potential realities)
- fluid characterisations: characters who are somehow double or multiple, surreal transformations of character or ambiance
- a historical absence or silence which becomes all too present
- all-powerful authority figures, all-powerful tyrants or relentless fate
- history erupting into world of the present
- atmosphere of foreboding or menace
- the return of the dead (or of the unborn)
- a feared and dreaded Other
- a demon lover (whether desired or dreaded)
- incomplete or grotesque bodies, monsters and mutations
- cross-species or other hybrid characters mixing animate with inanimate, human with animal, human with supernatural
- ‘shadows’ or ‘doubled’ characters
- a heroine who confronts the nightmare alone
- Australian specials: the lost child in the bush, menacing bushmen, being threatened by the indigenous, the weird and eerie landscape

Gothic experiences

- extreme, perverse or forbidden desires and manifestations of sexuality
- claustrophobia, spatial confinement and imprisonment
- irony, black humour, campness, self-reflexivity about the form
- liberation from a historical world which is dead or dying
- an underworld journey, a movement from heights to depths, journeys to the centre
- burial alive, death-in-life
- attraction towards death, dissolution of identity
- violence or dismemberment
- stealing or invasion of one’s body
- defeat and annihilation, madness and loss of identity (or fears about this)
- muteness, physical immobility or powerlessness
- panic flights towards safety in a hostile or metamorphic world
- escape from oppression
- laying to rest the troubled past, healing the monster
The Window, the Mannequin, Sound

Discussion Questions:

Each character “looks out” – we assume it’s a literal window but where do they look? Do they look into the audience or is there a prop window? What is the significance of this both literally and metaphorically? For example, Sylvie looks for safety and routine inside and is threatened by the night and the Wizard outside under the streetlight.

What is in the dark? Is the outside safer than what is being revealed or faced on the inside? How much is this the same as the characters’ own external and internal worlds?

Why are all the characters directed to “look out”? What does this communicate dramatically about the fears, desires and needs of each character? What feelings about the world outside, beyond the window, are created for the audience to experience? Where are we positioned in relation to the action and our appreciation of what Cameron is trying to say about the Australian suburban landscape?

Exercise:

In pairs or groups of 3, find five moments in which different characters “look out.”

Stage each moment, making a choice of where “looking out” is staged and how the moment is blocked.

What is the effect of this repeated image?

What feelings were created for you as an audience?

How successful were you in creating some of the messages Cameron is trying to say about the Australian suburban landscape?
**Exercise:**

Block a scene using the mannequin making specific choices about how Ray and Sylvie touch the doll and/or interact with it to communicate any or all of the following feelings - a sense of tenderness, replacement, abuse or power play. What is Ray and Sylvie’s different relationships to the mannequin, and what does this communicate to us about the play?

How can the mannequin be used to create tension/build distrust/disturb/haunt/evoke sympathy?

How successfully is the mannequin used? Refer to this and any other production you have seen in your answer.

**Sound**

**Discussion Questions:**

Cameron uses different door knocks for each of his characters as part of his soundscape.

How does this theatrical technique pre-empt the characters we are going to meet?

**Exercise:** Describe the door knocks Cameron uses for each character.

Does this door knock capture the essence of this character/stereotype? Why/Why not?
Themes and Issues

1. What themes and issues present themselves in this play?

2. Find a line or scene or exchange between characters in the play that illustrate/portray this theme. (You may find several and from different characters)

NB: You may like to present the answer to questions 1 and 2 in a table.

3. Grief is a central theme for both Ray and Sylvie. Long-term grief can break people down; make them feel empty and completely exhausted. Do Ray and Sylvie want answers? Answer separately for each character. Do they get any?

4. Did Ruby really disappear? Was there really a Ruby to begin with?

5. How long do you think it has been since Ruby disappeared?

6. Why do Ray and Sylvie portray all of their neighbours as suspects?

7. Sylvie accuses Ray some say timidly; do you think that the emotions and the repetition of this story break down their trust of one another?

8. How does Sylvie try to convince us as an audience and herself that Ray is guilty? How does Ray attempt to turn this around? Does Ray turn this around?

9. What type of acting/directing or staging techniques are used in the final scene to create this exhaustion from the characters (Ray and Sylvie)?

10. What do you believe happened to Ruby?

Practical Workshop

Write an ending to the story. This could be a monologue of the father’s discovery, or from the viewpoint of the kidnapper; or an outsider explaining how the family have or have not moved on, or anything else you imagine. You can present this in what ever performance/acting/directing style you choose

Explain how Matt Cameron utilises these forms and conventions of theatre in his play Ruby Moon? Provide examples from the text in your response.

Write (not type!!) between 6-8 hand-written pages.
Characters, Transformation and Transition

CLASS ACTIVITIES

1. Each character is given a name and a role. List each character and their role in this play.

2. Each character is given a significant prop. List the prop given to each character and discuss how these props become a theatrical and dramatic technique in forming part of the outer layer of the characters’ identities.

3. As each character’s experiences and understanding of the world unfolds, what impact does this have on the imagined ending of this story?

4. Several characters have a ‘routine’ that they perform. Identify each character’s routine. Choose one and discuss what the performance reveals about this character. What is the other character’s reaction to the routine as the performance takes place? Why is this reaction important for the audience? (Their perception of the situation) Does this affect the way in which we view the character?

Practical Workshop

Select a character to become, either Ray or Sylvie. Bring one prop which will portray their character to the audience. Now select one other character in the play that you can create. Bring one prop which will personify this character (i.e. you will need two props for class tomorrow).

You will explore these characters through transformation. You will deliver key lines from these characters’ dialogue in your presentation. Experiment with delivery and the elements of drama to find interesting ways of presenting these characters. Remove your prop in character, return to neutral and then move into the next character. Remain aware that the audience is watching at all times (Brechtian technique).

Connect each movement with breadth and voice and the character’s movement centre and stance. Transform into each of these characters.

Record and analyse the presentations.

Complete a logbook reflection, and do a combination of visual and written responses.

Write a paragraph you could include in an essay on the workshop experience.
**Ruby Moon** Scene Endings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Ray and Sylvie prepping to interview the neighbours ‘again’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>Dulcie as the parrot “..where’s the pretty girl?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td>They form a family portrait behind the mannequin as they stare out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3</td>
<td>The Ruby mannequin stands under the street lamp with the moon hovering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 4</td>
<td>Sylvie acknowledges Veronica’s nightly ‘show’, Ray dismisses it and pretends he doesn’t know what she’s talking about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5</td>
<td>Veronica implies Sonny Jim is responsible. She recounts Sonny Jim digging in the churchyard lowering a bundle into the hole he dug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 6</td>
<td>Sonny Jim implies Dawn is responsible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 7</td>
<td>Reconvene but have ‘two’ conversations, each with themselves. Another package arrives, the Ruby mannequin is no longer under the light of the street lamp. Sylvie is curled on the armchair listening to a music box lullaby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 8</td>
<td>Rain and thunder. Dawn hands the doll’s (Ruby’s?) dress to Ray. He is left holding the clothes. Dawn implies Professor Carl Ogle is responsible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 9</td>
<td>Ray and Sylvie</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sylvie is looking out (the window). She believes she is getting through to the neighbours, “They’re cracking. Don’t you see? They want to be caught.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene 10</th>
<th>Sylvie and Carl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carl “It’s a black hole. It’s ravenous.” The sound of police sirens in the distance.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epilogue</th>
<th>Ray and Sylvie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents are silhouetted by the blood-red moon with the rocking horse rocking slowly back and forth. The Ruby mannequin standing sentinel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Script Analysis

(with thanks to Mathew Clauson)

1. List important facts about the play eg. info about playwright style where and when first produced information about other productions

2. Identify conflict of the play (not in the play). What is it?

3. Describe major crisis of the play - what, when, where, how?

4. Where is the climax - if there is one, and how it occurs

5. List characters

6. List obstacles

7. Identify main themes and other secondary issues

8. Clarify issues

9. Discuss mood/atmosphere, language, dialogue rhythm and tempo of play and subsequent changes

10. Technical features that impact on the play or are essential
Jonathan Llewellyn - Director - discusses the play...

The Directorial vision was worked on with the dramaturg, after endless discussions on what we all thought were the main ideas of the play.

Ruby Moon is a real challenge. There are so many layers, so many possible ways to go. My process is largely organic – allowing the play to inform the production with very few preconceived ideas. I don’t like coming into the rehearsal space and immediately putting up blocks to other creative ideas. My job is to bring all those ideas together and shape the big picture. The big picture for Ruby Moon hasn’t always been clear and a special thank you to Henri our dramaturg, for feeding us with information along the way to help bring clarity to the production.

Ruby Moon is essentially a play about two people who are stuck, grieving, trying to find answers, find themselves and each other again, trying to survive. What happened to Ruby – I don’t think its actually important – she might have been a stillborn baby, she might have been lost to SIDS, abducted, murdered by a stranger or even by her own parents – the audience can decide if its that important. What is important is that the grief Ray and Sylvie Moon feel is not uncommon but it is a grief that is often hidden by people to the prison of their own homes.

It’s no secret this play can be confusing and leaves the audience with more questions rather than answers – I think that’s its strength – and a strength of live theatre.

How do you see the play what is it relevance to today?
Kids still go missing. SIDS and still-born children are still realities. Children are removed from their parents care by DOCS. Of course the play is still relevant. Parents still grieve. Until those things change this play will still be relevant.

Is this still a good example of Contemporary Australian Theatre if so why? If not why not?
Yes. Would it be produced again and again if it wasn’t an HSC text? Maybe not. Is it an Australian play that people feel compelled to see? – I think no. It’s too dangerous, too challenging, too confrontation and sadly, requires too much thought.

Poster concept
Mystery
Uncomfortable
Intriguuing
Disturbing
Truth for expectations
Set design the whys and hows for the Lend Lease Darling Quarter Theatre -
include photos of designs and set up
Sight lines are important – the space is very wide and allows for an intimate feel.
Set design is about creating spaces that are voids – don’t have a sense of dimension, depth,
location, - allows audiences in to view part of a world without clear edges eg. where is the
door, what is up, what is down, where is the audience looking from eg. the bed scene allows
the audience to view from above.

*(See Production Photographs in Appendix 2)*

Lighting design what they are hoping to achieve
To assist in creating spaces that don’t have defined edges - soft edges
Haze important to assist in blurring lines
Shadows on faces and uneven lights – fragments of information available to the characters,
memories that are fading, recreated.

*(See Production Photographs in Appendix 2)*

Soundscape composer(s) and why the decisions made? Is it an original soundscape? if so
who is composing it?
Soundscape created from collected sounds and existing sounds and recordings. Eg.
reshow, Prologue and Epilogue is Lunatic Sound System Db7,
As Director I compiled and pulled the sounds together to create my soundscape

Stage managing the play-what issues did the SM face in finding appropriate props etc
Props have largely been collected by cast and director
Use of props has been challenging for our ASM allowing for objects to appear and disappear
from the space without being seen. Using techniques similar to puppetry methods this has
been achieved.

Budget and working within one..what issues did you face?
At the beginning of rehearsals we weren’t sure what we would need. Didn’t want to inform
the scenes too much before so budgeting was approximate. We discovered some things we
wanted for scenes and some things that the script indicates that we don’t need.
Biographies

Director
Jonathan Llewellyn

Jonathan studied at Theatre Nepean (UWS) and the VCA graduating in Events and Production Management. He has also studied at RMIT in Multicultural Arts Professional Development. He is a performing arts and community events producer and enjoys working closely with culturally diverse communities. He is the Artistic Director for Chalkdust Theatre Company. Previous projects include choral event In Harmony, fundraiser The Vagina Monologues, events for Big Laugh Comedy Festival and World’s Funniest Island, and Mardi Gras Festival seasons at Riverside Theatres. Directing credits include Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Cinderella and Seussical the Musical, Jonathan Harvey’s Beautiful Thing, The Laramie Project, The Peach Season by Debra Oswald, Love Letters by AR Gurney. He is currently the Marketing Manager – Performing Arts for Penrith Performing & Visual Arts.
Lighting Design and Stage Manager

Sam Johnson

Sam completed his Bachelor of Dramatic Arts (Production) at National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in 2010, where he continued to develop his skills with a special interest in technical production and stage management. Sam travelled out to Albury where he staged managed the World Premiere of the new Australian work, *Disarming Rosetta* with the HotHouse Theatre Company. Sam staged Managed *Ishamel and the return of The Duguons* with ATYP, assistant stage manager for the World Premiere of *Stainless Steel Rat* and stage manager for Monkey Baa’s *I am Jack* and *Goodbye Jamie Boyd*. In 2012 Sam toured the Eastern States of Australia with *The Gruffalo’s Child*. Sam has just recently finished working at the Royal Easter Show (Sydney) and was very fortunate to assistant stage manage the Lord Mayors Picnic New Years celebrations. Sam has worked as freelance theatre and events technician in many Sydney performance venues.
Lighting Designer Sam Johnson Speaks about his design...

Lighting Design for *Ruby Moon*, was complex with an interesting script that has been created for us to all enjoy. From a lighting designer point of view you ask yourself “Where to begin?”. A good start is to know the venue that you are going to be working in. Reading the technical specifications, as well as knowing what lamp stock you have to play with. Also great to get to know the technicians at the venue, as they are also helpful in knowing how to use light in ‘their’ space.

After basic discussions with the director, we talked about the world that we wanted this place set. The discussions included;
“Where do you see these characters?”
“How do we want to transport people to the different worlds?”

As this production didn’t have a set, we heavily relied on the lighting to help move the play’s action along and also to create the different areas/places.

The director wanted to create the illusion of things ‘appearing and disappearing” in what we would like to say ‘like magic’, hence we used a puppetry/illusion technique with a corridor of light. For this illusion to work we needed two main things, lots of smoke and side lighting for everything for this to work.

Side lighting has it pros and cons. It adds lots of dimension; and you are able to create mood and atmosphere really easy. However, you have to be really careful with set and blocking as the actors or set items can create shadows on each other. For our case though, shadows worked well adding further gothic dimensions.

To help create the effect of things appearing and disappearing into the darkness we needed to haze the building up. When lights are controlled and using the shutters effectively, you are able to create ‘a wall’ and everything outside that wall becomes invisible. Our ASM had to be dressed in black clothing head to toe so we didn’t see her move in and out. The haze helped us make a wall, and showed up the beam angles cleanly which was something I personally really liked.

Another important thing with this production was the use of colour. I only used 2 colours in this rig. I was a bit worried that perhaps I should have added more colours to the sidelight, but having the warm colour coming in from the side was effective. The Steel blue down light was used to create a somewhat sterile unnatural feel.

The play itself is not a clean, it’s mixed up, it’s uneasy. I feel that colour really suited the situation. The warm lighting coming in from the side, really just lifted the warmth as face light but also contrasted with the blue coming from the down light. With the change of intensity you are able to make a scene feel many different emotions, a dark low feel a bit scary, creepy, a bright state can make it feel happy. The power of playing with levels.

CHALKDUST THEATRE INC TEACHING NOTES 2013 PRODUCTION RUBY MOON © H.STATHOPOULOS
Overall, I was very happy with how this production turned out. The way it has suited the performance and what the director wanted to achieve out of it. I hope you enjoyed the performance.

An ASM speaks...

Bridget James

What do they think of the play?

This play is incredibly moving, both abstract but realistic in emotions. Nothing is really ever declared as being the definite truth which I think forces the audience to really think and challenge the way they view the world around them, seeing the situation from others point of view.

I found this play very interesting in looking at the way we perceive people who suffer from mental illness or simply choose to live their lives in a way that is a little out of the ordinary for whatever reason and how we are changing as a society to become more suspicious and guarded in our interactions with each other. Each of the characters are called in to suspicion during the play and accused of sinister motives for innocent or kind deeds. Some examples are Sid being accused of being a pedophile and being beaten by the police due to his friendly relationship with Ruby, Professor Karl being accused of inappropriate conduct for leaving a flower on the doorstep as a way of saying thank you to the little girl who helped him when he fainted outside his house, help that he was too proud to accept graciously at the time and Dawn for giving the child she babysat a toy to play with which she made. All these things would have seemed relatively normal 10-30 years ago but with time we are slowly becoming more and more paranoid about the possible dark hidden motives of our fellow human being and judge people more harshly based on whether how they live their lives fit into society's "norms". My mother often tells me stories of how her neighbours would allow her to come over in the afternoon to watch their television after school however, in today's day and age most parents wouldn't trust others with their children in that manor. Reference to the growing sensitivity and fear of parents concerning their children's safety and the sometimes ridiculous boundaries we place on them is referenced in Sids reenactment of the day Ruby was lost when he plays the news reported telling parents "not to kiss their children good bye as it may make them vulnerable to predatory advances."

Stage managing the play- what issues did the SM face in finding appropriate props etc

Building trust with the actors was a big part making sure things ran smoothly for me as ASM. The actors had to trust that I would be there with what they needed and would not leave them waiting. Once we had built this trust the actions began to flow more smoothly and the
transitions became more dreamlike without any hesitation making the world around the actors seem more real.

As an ASM it is incredibly important to ensure you are organised. This play used a great deal of props that were often very small but essential to each scene. This meant there were a lot of pieces to keep track of and ensure they were in the right place at the right time. Lists and cue sheets are important tools which I used to help ensure that all the props I was responsible for were ready and correctly placed. On each side of the stage I hung a list with which props had to be pre-set on that side of the stage, a list of the order of the scenes and then a cue sheet which was a breakdown of my movements during the play and involved having a cue line written down and then the action that I had to preform after it listed as a reference in case I felt I had forgotten something. Another way I made sure I was on top of things was that I ensured that at the end of each show I immediately pre-set for the next show regardless of whether it was 2hrs away or the next day. This meant that props were less likely to go missing as they were all in their proper place and not scattered about. Also if for whatever reason I was delayed getting too a show I knew that I would not have to waste any further time pre-setting. It is important when working on a production to ensure your space is clutter free and packed away each night to make the situation less stressful and make sure things are well cared for.
Trent Gardiner - RAY

Trent is an actor, director and singer having graduated from the Ensemble Acting Studios in 2009. His recent theatre credits include The Laramie Project, The Peach Season and Ruby Moon (Chalkdust Theatre Company) What Now? at the NIDA Playhouse and Showtime for the Ensemble Theatre. For Ensemble Studios he performed in Five Women Wearing the Same Dress, Sugar and Spice, Saturday Night Drinks at the Existential Bar and Grill, Time of My Life and the 2007 Premiere production of Showtime. Over the years he has worked with a number of local theatre groups appearing in Cosi (Lewis), The Golden Age (Peter), California Suite (Stu), Two Weeks with the Queen (Alistair), The Importance of Being Earnest (Algernon), The Real Inspector Hound (Simon), Night Must Fall (Hubert), The School for Scandal (Benjamin Backbite), Charley’s Aunt (Lord Fancourt) and the World Premiere production of James Easton’s Jack the Ripper. He has enjoyed an annual stint as Santa at the Rocks Markets and Sydney Airport, a number of TV commercials from Doritos, Austar Pay TV and Virgin Velocity to filming corporate training videos for a wide variety of different companies and educational institutions. Trent is a proud member of Equity.

Actors perspective: what issues did you face in preparing for the various roles?

My biggest issue was deciding whether Ray and Sylvie were actually the other characters or themselves. Once I got my mind around this issue many other things fell into place. Sara and I gave great thought to the play and came up with our own interpretation of what happened to Ruby. We have never discussed these decisions with each other or with the director. I feel that this allowed us to each have an individual journey through the play, instill the notion of hope from each character and strengthen the mystery of the play as a whole.
What did you think of the play?

I really liked the play when I first read it. There were moments throughout rehearsal when I loathed the show but am now very happy post production that I had the opportunity to do it. It pushed my capabilities as an actor, I learnt a great deal from the experience and I think I am now a better actor because of it.

How did you find the rehearsal experience?

The rehearsal experience was different to any other I have experienced. Working with an ASM on a concept that involved distinct lighting and sound cues, props to appear from nowhere and an uncertain elements of trust was difficult.

Costumes...what and why...designs and pictures!

Ray was kept very simple. Because he works in 'books' I imagined him as a door to door encyclopedia salesman. Brown pants, white shirt, black shoes, dull beige trench coat - devoid of personality. The additional characters each had a simple case costume;

Sid - skull cap and clown nose

Sonny Jim - Army Jacket and Crutch

Carl - Lab Coat and Doctors bag with nifty but unusual objects

(See Production Pictures Appendix 2)
Sara de Vries - SYLVIE

How do you see the play, what is its relevance today?

I think many elements of the play are indicative of many aspects of family life in Australia.

- Helicopter parents, wrapping our children up in cotton wool and preventing opportunities for building resilience for fear of the worst case scenario - “We should have confiscated that doll” Sylvie, “I don’t even go out anymore” Dawn

- Insular families, our homes become a reprieve from the world, we hide from the over stimulation including extended families, we often hide our real identities from extended family members because we want to fight cultural and family expectations. Typically Australian to just put up with adversity without talking or complaining about it and tension then builds up within the family home sometimes destroying it. “Your house needs a grief chimney too, we just kept breathing it in, plumes of black smoke. All these years. Nowhere for it to go.” Dawn Many European family units are much closer and involve many extended family members to share the burdens of daily life and emotional strains and they are also very vocal about it. Grief is not hidden in European culture but widely accepted and acknowledged.
• There are too many well known cases of putting on a shiny happy face, driving nice cars, living in the dream home with a picket fence, having plenty of money and a perfect family all disguising the ugly, miserable truth of an empty life.

**Is this still a good example of Contemporary Australian Theatre, if so why?**

Drama and theatre has always represented the social and cultural issues and interests of the time it was performed and composed in, and this is reflected through the Australian drama and theatre we see now in the contemporary society. As our society has become more complex so has the dramatic forms and styles to deal with these new realities,

While there have been some cultural shifts since Ruby Moon was originally written I still think this play reflects issues present today. We still live in a country full of eclectic views on politics, religion, war, crime, pop culture etc which shape the way we either embrace, accept, negotiate or fight the journey of life.

**As an actor, what issues did you face in preparing for your roles?**

• As with any play, before you can make any offers when commencing blocking it is important that the actors and director are united in the concept and style of the play. Particularly given the short rehearsal period, there was very little time to experiment with this

• Lines were quite difficult to learn not because of the quantity but because of the disjointed nature of the dialogue. Characters would often respond to a question 3 lines later so Trent’s lines weren’t necessarily logical cues for mine. I also find it much easier to learn lines once motivations become clear.

• One very intelligent Dramaturg reminded us at the beginning of this process of the importance of listening to one another and being in tune. (ie ‘what are you ‘saying’ to each other through both your words and actions?’.) This was a rewarding challenge as Trent and I had to listen to each other while the characters themselves were so out of sync and self absorbed with their own grief that they rarely listened to one another.

• The text for each of the female characters is written with very similar speech patterns, short sharp sentences and very few unnecessary words. This meant as an actor I had to make clear distinctions and choices in physicality and tone alone to bring 4 different characters to life.
What do you think of the play?

• I love the play, I think it shows a side of humanity that we know exists but often chose to ignore until it effects us directly. It exposes audiences to issues of grief and the human condition in a way that allows them to be empathic towards the characters to a level they are comfortable with.

• I like texts that challenge the thinking of audiences at different levels. Some will be challenged purely by the ‘who dunnit’ aspect and others by the secrecy and further still others will begin to question the bigger picture and the status of humanity. Brilliantly written.

How did you find the rehearsal experience?

• Difficult! There is a lot to layer on in this play in terms of subtext. A lot of that subtext is delivered through physical responses to the other characters and this is crucial to the success of the play, this is the stuff that goes on “behind the curtain”. However, once we got into the theatre with puppetry lighting, a bigger space, sight lines and haze we had to quickly adjust our delivery of the subtext using vocal responses and bigger physicality so as not to lose the subtext.

• Blocking all of the Ray and Sylvie scenes first allowed us to follow that emotional journey and it allowed us to find elements of Ray and Sylvie in the other characters.

What did you hope to achieve with your interpretation?

• To connect with the audience allowing them to empathise with Sylive; her utter despair in the circumstances surrounding her grief; the pain of a broken relationship, a lost connection replaced by co dependence with no idea of how to get back.

Costumes, what and why...designs and pictures

• For Sylvie, without much guidance I decided I originally wanted a grey dress to reflect the depression. Often in a state of depression it is difficult to see colour or hues. Given time constraints I had no time to make something so I went with a dress I saw that was one colour, suitable for the age of the character and had a bit of flow in the skirt. The flow was important to fit with the Laban choice I’d made of ‘Float’ and to give me enough movement for the physical aspects of the blacking.
• I’m not sure I would use the same costumes again for the additional characters... not sure they were all entirely necessary...Although I did like that we went with a green feather boa for Veronica to represent the envy Sylvie felt towards Veronica’s relationship with Ray.

• The red dresses for the dolls, mannequin and myself I designed and made. I began with the dress for the mannequin knowing that design would be restricted by the immovability of the arms and needing to dress and undress her quickly on stage. To make this process easier the dress was completely open at the back and Velcro used to fasten it.

• Once I had made the Mannequin dresses I made 2 smaller versions for the dolls and then made mine. (See APPENDIX 2)

Was there a real Ruby?

• This is something that was not discussed between actors and director to assist with the mystery...I have a number of theories none of which change the fact that Sylvie’s despair and brokenness were a result of prolonged, unresolved grief.

Are they both just mad?

• Not at all

What problems did you face with this play?

• Being able to detach from the emotional aspects of the content especially when there was no Q and A after the last show. I actually found the Q and A sessions good for debriefing and rationalising what just took place! I actually felt a little like Sylvie by the end of the season...She didn’t get to bury her little girl but I didn’t get the chance to resolve the issues that were broken between Ray and Sylvie, we didn’t get to see them head towards the light! I know I’m a sucker for the Hollywood ending!

What research have you done on such cases?

• Thanks to our wonderful Dramaturg, much of the research was done for us. We were given readings on The Beaumont Children, Daniel Morcombe, Lindy Chamberlain. These helped to make the story of the Moons much more real.

• I researched the psychology behind grief and advice given to parents who have not been able to bury their child and who are indeed still searching. This helped with my motivation for the skipping scene, increasing wellbeing through exercise to be empowered to keep up the search with every new clue.
• Research into ELIZABETH KUBLER ROSS - 5 stages of grieving for parents who are searching for their child also helped me to understand why Sylvie behaved in ways that would otherwise seem quite peculiar.
Appendix 1.

A DIRECTOR SPEAKS

Directorial Vision – Sydney Abba DRAMAC - Macquarie University Drama Society Production 2012

Q: How do you see the play?

Q: What is its relevance today?

Ruby Moon is jam packed with meaning making multiple interpretations possible. To best describe my take I begin with a quote from a mentor of mine – my step-father. He has a saying when referring to stories of any kind: what is the story about, and what is the story really about?

The story is about two parents, it’s about grief and it’s about pain. But this is distinct from what the story is really about. For me, the universal concept of Ruby Moon is human capacity for truth. In a nutshell:

Can we know the truth?
Is there a truth?
Can we hear the truth?
Can we speak the truth?
Do we accept the truth?

And this then begs the question: is “knowing” actually knowing. Will this solve it?

Ruby Moon is often let down by a lack of vision. Often there is a sense of “let’s throw all interpretations on stage and let the audience decide”. I have instead ‘solved’ the story for the audience. I explore in plain terms what I think the parents are doing every night.

This leaves the audience to consider higher plains of meaning, the very concept of truth and capacity. Both are, I believe, foundational to parenting, relationships and certainly to being 'okay' with one’s self.

I feel such a vision allows the play to continue to be relevant. If we concentrate on Ruby, instead of concentrating on her parents (those she has left behind) we fall into the trap of alienating our audience. Theatre, especially Australian theatre, becomes universal when the
audience feels they can relate to and understand the story. Australia has a very strong sense of pain and communal grief; because of this, I feel it is especially important to open up the issue of ‘coping’ to every member of the audience. If we do this, the next step may very well be communal resilience.

Briefly this is how I see it: the two parents are role playing each night, a sort of psychotherapy gone wrong in an attempt to cope with the loss of their daughter. They cycle through the characters, each of which explores a part of themselves they can no longer express – but each neighbour is deficient in some way. All through the play there are moments of knowing, where the parents look at each other and understand what they are doing. They press ahead anyway. It wraps up as it always does in a tragic display of two young parents at the edge –but Ray finally pulls himself together. He sets up the house again, which is now in ruins, ready for the next night, because this is all they know. All they have is each other.

**Is this still a good example of Contemporary Australian Theatre? If so why? If not, why not?**

I think in some ways it is a very good example of Contemporary Australian Theatre. Certainly the issues it deals with such as grief, suburban paranoia, communal isolation etc. are still very relevant to Australian life as are the neighbouring characters created by Cameron. Audiences easily understand the stereotypes.

However, there are elements that are less identifiable to audiences. I feel that the absurdist nature of the play is very European (obviously). When put next to plays like David Williamson’s *Don’s Party* which is evidently very Australian) it feels foreign. Yet such bold choices with dialogue and staging find intrigue in younger audience members. It’s fresh and fiery which is often what younger audiences need to maintain focus and interest.

Further, since Australia is a young country, its theatre lends itself to endless possibilities. Especially when dealing with a category like ‘Contemporary Australian’. It is not so much a specific culture that identifies itself as Contemporary Australian, but one that can still successfully tap into those watching.
Poster Concept

The poster was designed by me and my designer Luke Howlin. The concept largely rests on three notions – simplicity, isolation and Ray and Sylvie’s relationship. My aim is really to emphasise the relationship between the young parents – the present issue that the play is dealing with. The poster reflects their separation, and the dominance or really the more active participant in the relationship: Ray.

It is isolated both in terms of their house and the figures themselves. This is because in the end they are alone except for each other, and even then we can’t always be sure. I think the simplicity is both a visual element as well as a theatrical one – I am a big believer in focusing on a core issue without being side tracked by other notions. I think a poster is visually more appealing that way too. Otherwise one runs the risk of feeling overwhelmed and having a sense of clutter.

The tones are darker as I feel any brightness would take away from the tragedy which is a core element. Granted, I have chosen to include the big moon and the bold red writing because these are two elements that are closely associated with the play. It is important to
balance both my interpretation and the expectation of audience members. There must be a middle ground of identification.

Set design - the why’s and how’s for the Lighthouse Theatre- include Photos of designs, and set up

I have taken great liberty with the set as I believe in utility for this production – if a set piece or prop does not function as an active piece then it should be cut. I therefore do not feature a red curtain or a rocking horse as I did not find use for them within the story.

The Lighthouse Theatre has a great space but it is often difficult to utilise – it is therefore necessary to construct a set that uses the entire space and takes advantage of its depth whilst making allowance for the at times limited lighting equipment.

In terms of the set concept, I have stayed true to the requirement that the set is a timeless, spaceless place. The set is a synthesis of an abandoned playground and a living room. It features no date stamps as we hope to emphasis the cyclical nature of the parents’ plight.

There are two important pieces within the set – the first is the scrim. This is a large piece of canvas stretched across a wooden frame which stands in the centre at the back of the stage. This is our change area – each actor disappears behind the scrim, and with a light projected against it, morphs in and out of the characters. The audience sees shadow; the audience sees each character take form and shape. It is this that emphasises the ‘role play’ nature of their story, yet also suggests its uncertainty.

Our set also features what we have termed the ‘performance space’ – essentially a rug that sits in the front centre of our stage. It serves as an area which each character will begin to perform in – whether it’s Veronica seducing Ray or Sonny Jim reading his poem to Sylvie. It once again emphasises the theatrical element of this play though it’s domestic utility continually reminds us that the story is grounded in reality.

Lighting Design

As ironic as shadows are when talking about lighting, the idea of shadow is essential to understanding the stories of missing children. Shadows hide people; they distort truth and follow us wherever we go. They can’t help it. The set features the scrim. This is our shadow. The characters morph in and out with just shape and light, it’s the only way to hide and be transparent simultaneously. And that is what makes it important: contradiction. Truth is never straightforward, life isn’t either.

CHALKDUST THEATRE INC TEACHING NOTES 2013 PRODUCTION RUBY MOON © H.STATHOPOULOS
The other element is theatre: the whole story revolves around role play. These characters play characters. We must highlight this fact. And again, theatre contradicts. Some describe it as a lie, others describe it as truth, and some say it is when a person becomes most vulnerable. Ray and Sylvie are all of these things. Our central ‘performance space’ and transitional spotlight realise this theatrical magic, and it is a feature of the lighting design to reveal clearly that this is all performance. Though isn’t everything?

Our lighting design is being completed by Jeremy Page, who now works professionally in the theatre.

Soundscape

Q: Who is the designer/composer(s) and what decisions were made in making selections?

Q: Is it an original soundscape? If so who is composing it?

Sound designer Jacob Hkeik on his choices for the show…

The play has been given a soundtrack, tailored specifically to the characters and dramatic meaning of the play. Briefly, the scenes of Ray and Sylvie feature a series of piano tracks that evolve as the play progresses, though they corrupt both in clarity and harmony as the play progresses, highlighting the state of madness that is reached. This is resolved in the epilogue, the track literally reversing; it reverses the damage done, it reverses their plight and it reverts to their starting point.

The characters of Ray feature music that reveals his mind blackened by guilt, his initial disarray crystallised by the choices in music. His soundtrack is that of a shadowed manic, unable to overcome the stress his daughter’s disappearance has thrust upon him.

The characters of Sylvie feature music that reveals a woman disillusioned by an inability to accept her daughter’s disappearance; she regresses back to the mind of a child, taking her place and absolving herself of any responsibility. However her innocence does not mask an odd detachment from the absent child.

The music reflects the psychological contrast between Ray and Sylvie. As a whole, the soundtrack parallels the mindset and the motivations of each of the characters, both as a couple, and their extended personalities, whilst they suffer the cyclical stumble down Flaming Tree Grove.

The soundtrack features music from lesser known artists. Popular association is not right for this production – it is about feeling what the music reflects without being side tracked by popular artists and recognition of this fact.
It is a requirement of the play that we follow two pieces of music - the curtain girl and the crying bed. We do use these but they do not feature as boldly as in other productions. Veronica’s song is not sung by the actress on stage and is instead a recording – this emphasises the idea that she can no longer sing (her deficit) and also functions practically so we did not have to spend time rehearsing the song.

**Stage Managing the play**

**Q:** What issues did the SM face in finding appropriate props?

**Ruby Moon** was a relatively simple play to source for. The production team had access to a tire swing, appropriate costumes and even a gramophone; but there was one item that eluded us all: the mannequin. When a play demands such a specific set piece (being that the mannequin had to be female, roughly six years old, able to be dismantled and had to be able to stand by itself) and finding an appropriate one is always an exciting challenge. The mannequin was one of the last prop or set pieces that we acquired for this production and was the culmination of hours of searching. I don't know what I would do without Google.

**ACTORS PERSPECTIVE**

**Hanni Trewin Biography**

**Sylvie**

Hanni Trewin is an actress in high demand having spent a great many years performing, producing and directing. Her acting career from 2006-2011 includes both straight dramatic work and musicals such as "My Fair Lady" (2007) and “Footloose” (2007) and “Love Song” (2010). This year for DRAMAC, Hanni played the role of Pearl in "The Iceman Cometh", Lolita in the student work "The Phoenix Rises from the Ashes" and Mrs Claire Ganz in Neil Simon's "Rumors".

Hanni deferred her bachelor of Theatre/Media in Bathurst to spend three months in an orphanage in Ghana and has future plans to continue her aid work. Hanni consistently astounds audiences with her diversity and skill and brings great depth to her role in “Ruby Moon”.

*What issues have you faced in preparing for the role?*

It is, of course, quite difficult to jump between characters flawlessly and without slipping out regularly. Also, the play mixes in between very serious scenes and comic scenes; it is certainly challenging to balance the two.
What do you think of the play?

The play is a beautifully written piece of theatre that really delves into the psyche of a broken couple desperate to have closure regarding their missing child. It's a great play for actors as it really allows them to show off their skills (provided they have them!) and play around with the multiple characters in one play.

How did you find the rehearsal experience?

Intense. Very intense. Working with a very experienced and talented director means that rehearsals incorporate a variety of activities to get us into character and mindset. With a 2 week line deadline, it was a lot easier to feel comfortable in our roles because our lines were all learnt so far in advance, so there was a lot of time for perfecting.

What do you hope to achieve with your interpretation?

A wonderful balance between comic and dramatic excellence! I want people to laugh, cry, think and awe over us and I want people to have an excellent theatre experience!

Gus Wyllie- Biography

Ray

Gus Wyllie first graced the stage at the age of eight, and has been involved in theatre ever since. Whilst his focus always falls back to acting, he is also an accomplished producer and director. Recently, Gus produced the acclaimed ‘Rope Burn’ for the Sydney Fringe Festival to great success.

With a special focus on improvisation, Gus has had extensive acting training in both the USA and Australia as a comedic and dramatic actor. His acting credits include ‘Our Town’(2009), Australian Improv Team (2009/2010), ‘Life, Death, Food’ (2012), and ‘Never Wonder’ (2012) among others. Gus is currently studying a Bachelor of Marketing and Media, and hopes to continue his work in the theatre industry.

Actor’s perspective -what issues did you face in preparing for your role?

I think the most complex area of the play is the relationship between Ray and Sylvie. From the perspective of an actor playing Ray, the emotional complexity of the relationship is an absolute minefield. Under my interpretation, Ray and Sylvie aren’t in love. They may love one another, but they are far from being in love. The loss of their child has driven a wedge between them, and the constant repetition insisted upon by Sylvie only serves to further complicate the rift between them. I think Ray feels an obligation to try and repair the
relationship, but there is also a deep seeded sense of acceptance within him. I believe Ray is aware that the relationship is beyond repair, but keeps trying to fix it anyway. He is absolutely devoted to Sylvie, yet he has resigned himself to the fact that the relationship can never again work.

It’s very easy to focus on the disappearance of Ruby as the main cause for the rift in the relationship. I feel that the issues within the relationship are far more complex than that. Yes, the disappearance of Ruby is a tragic event for the couple, yet the problem has been magnified by a few major factors. I think the real issue that exists between the two lovers is the lack of a firm, tangible truth. Their constant quest for this actually overshadows the disappearance of their daughter. Ruby actually becomes the embodiment of a need for truth.

Yet it’s interesting again how Ruby’s effect evolves over the course of the play. At the beginning of the piece, it is clear that she is a massive barrier between the two. Her absence makes meaningful communication between Ray and Sylvie impossible. At the end of the piece, her effect has completely reversed. She has now evolved to be a bridge between the lovers. Their constant quest for this tangible truth is a barrier, but it is also the only thing holding the couple together. Ray remains in the relationship because of his perceived obligation to the woman he loves, yet the cause of this same obligation is the main barrier between the two lovers.

I could actually write 30 pages on the relationship, and how difficult it is to find a suitable emotional balance. As an actor, the above factors dictate a specific, yet complicated relationship between Ray and Sylvie, and this is a very difficult energy to capture.

What do you think of the play?

Absolutely love it.

At the first read, I didn’t fully understand the play. It was a bit too ethereal for my liking. When we started to do some blocking, and I started to really think about my character, something clicked. The characters and action of the scene became grounded in a beautifully tragic reality. The overwhelming sense of futility, opposed to massive amounts of energy and emotion are brilliantly raw. Moments of comedy and drama are balanced really well, and the action is not specific to the here and now. The piece also deals with both specific and non-specific issues. Specific concepts such as suburban paranoia are generalised by universal concepts of truth and closure.

How did you find the rehearsal experience?

Rehearsals got better as time went by.
As Hanni and I discovered more about our characters, and more about each other’s characters, we began to appreciate the complex energy of the relationship. Sydney was an awesome director to work with.

It’s interesting as well that Hanni and I work in very different ways. Where Hanni likes to think through and plan, I’d prefer to try things and feel my way through the piece. This made for a few scenarios where we learnt from each other, and evolved the action on the stage better than if we did it alone.

*What do you hope to achieve with your interpretation?*

It would probably be easier to ask what I don’t hope to achieve…

I think there are two main prevalent points in my interpretation. First, is the concept I spoke about before about Ruby being both a barrier and a bridge between Ray and Sylvie. The second I also spoke about before, and that is this underlying concept of truth, and how that makes the basis of a doomed relationship between Ray and Sylvie.

**Costumes**

*What and why... designs and pictures!*

*(Included in the back – Attachment two)*

The costuming is based around the notion of utility (similar to our set). It is minimal for two reasons – first it is practical for the actors to perform quick changes behind the scrim. Second, it is a constant reminder that these characters are just variations of Ray and Sylvie. Especially true of Ray, who remains in the same trousers throughout, we felt this would draw attention to the fact that they play every neighbour. That they do this role play every night.

A small point: the performers do not use shoes. It is both a performing preference and an ironic twist to the idea of ‘walking in some else’s shoes’ – which they neither longer do nor attempt to do due to their isolation. They wear no accessories nor wear excessive make up as it is all about performance of the performer – not make up of the make-up.

**Budget and working within one.**

*What issues did you face?*

Working within a limited budget always causes difficulties as there is a limit not only on how authentic you can make the production, but on the production itself. It is essential to strike a
balance between meeting a budget and fulfilling the director's vision for the play. This was no less apparent in *Ruby Moon* which is a fairly prop and costume heavy play. Having a smaller budget meant that the production team had to play around with where to find certain items as well as compromising on certain pieces. For example, much of the set was procured from our own houses and many props were brought at a bargain via E-Bay.

**Frequently Asked Questions by School Audiences…**

*(These are answered less formally, more the musing of a director…)*

*Was there a real Ruby? Are they both just mad? Why did you decide to set it this way?*

This question I expect every night; it is essential to the story. My opinion is what is reflected in the production and many may disagree with me.

My view is that Ruby certainly did exist. The family was a normal family. The tragedy comes from the realistic nature of the situation – children go missing. Most are never found. Their disappearance my never be explained. This can send relatives mad, though I do not think either of them is; I think they are grief stricken.

The play is so much more universal when we look at the parents – who are left behind. A story must always be one of character and their journey. The two characters are Ray and Sylvie. It felt obvious to me that they were what the story was about and what I should emphasise.

*What problems did you face with this play?*

Gosh do you have three hours? I think the hardest part is creating and sustaining a vision. I harp on about a lack of one so I give myself the difficult task of ensuring I *have* one. I spent a good couple of months pouring over the play, letting the dialogue wash over me in an attempt to understand what it meant. It did finally click one evening; at exactly 11:17pm I sat up in bed and I thought THAT’S IT! I have it! I had finally discovered that neat little way of phrasing my concept – but that still didn’t mean my job was over. It’s so very hard to make every element work within your ‘vision’. It requires great thought and creativity – and probably a bit of luck too.

Another problem was the sheer amount of publicity required – granted, I am a perfectionist and everything I do will be done at 110%. Publicity for amateur productions is always hard – because our budget and capacity works against us. The secret is really just asking. If you ask for the review, or ask for the newspaper story or even ask for the HD screen rotation, you are
much more likely to get it. It’s just hard to balance everything, and find the time to do the asking.

_What makes it a contemporary piece of Australian Theatre?_

As above

_Is the play about mental illness?_

In my opinion, it is certainly not about mental illness. This is because it makes no sense to be about mental illness – the audience will find no empathy for the parents if they can’t be connected to ‘normal’. People can sympathise with mental illness but it is a removed emotion. This isn’t the goal of theatre. It works so much better if people look at the story and the characters and say ‘that could be me’.

_What research have you done on such cases (e.g. Daniel Morecombe case is a good one to explore with your cast?)_

This may feel like a cop out but I promise it is not – I myself have not completed any research as I feel the only relevance would be to watch distraught parents and how they speak to the media about their loss. Even this I find to be a slightly futile attempt at tapping into Ruby’s core message.

I recently did a show for the Sydney Fringe and my director said something that I think I will always remember. It is especially relevant to the issue of research and preparation, the method v classical training etc. He said:

“In the end, it doesn’t matter about research or really finding the character – that’s all crap. It’s about being in the moment. When you get on that stage you commit to everything 100% and you live and breathe those moments with every fibre of your being. That’s why Colin Friels is so compelling to watch in ‘Death of a Salesman’ – he just is. The energy he commits must keep him up nights but every night he is Willy Loman.”

I could not have said it better myself. Research helps us to sympathise but understanding it within ‘yourself’ helps one to empathise. And when it comes to acting I will always choose the latter.
Production Team Bios

DIRECTOR:

Sydney Abba is an accomplished performer, having spent a great many years performing in both school and amateur groups. Specialising in comedy, Stanislavsky and improvisation, Sydney has spent the last three years writing, producing and performing student and professional works with great acclaim.

This year, she produced the mammoth production of "The Iceman Cometh" and played the role of Kathlyn in the highly acclaimed Sydney Fringe Play "Jack Killed Jack". She is currently completing a Bachelor of Arts Law majoring in Modern History at Macquarie University whilst maintaining a successful amateur theatre career.

She can be reached at: Sydney@rubymoon2012.org

PRODUCER:

Abbie Hartman brings to the production what maple syrup brings to hash browns; a dose of total randomness. This is not Abbie’s first foray into DRAMAC: in the past year she has been involved in almost every production, including Producer for "Resolution" as part of Godzilla 2012 and Stage Manager for Comrev Twenny-Doz.

Abbie usually prefers to remain backstage as crew, tech or stage manager or else be behind the scenes as producer, and continues to stun everyone with her seemingly endless supply of stories. Abbie looks forward to the opportunity to bring Ruby Moon to life and share Sydney’s vision with the world.

She can be reached at: Abbie@rubymoon2012.org

CREATIVE CONSULTANT

Jacob Hkeik has been involved in the performing arts industry for the past 11 years. Prior to studying business and psychology at Macquarie, Jacob graduated from Newtown High School of the Performing Arts in 2012. Whilst there, he was accepted in numerous drama and music companies which toured both nationally and internationally.

Jacob also gained admission into the NSW Public School State Drama Company in 2012 and the teachings he gained there serve a testament to the work that he brings to Ruby Moon. As Creative Consultant, Jacob brings a unique and experimental approach to sound design.

He can be reached at: Jacob@rubymoon2012.org
Websites and thanks to:

BOARD OF STUDIES Rubric for Contemporary Australian Theatre Practice

HSC ONLINE  hsc.csu.edu.au  Drama-resources-links- Drama Ruby Moon

MALTHOUSE THEATRE RUBY MOON NOTES

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STC EDUCATION NOTES Ruby Moon

Australian Theatre  RAISING THE CURtain


With thanks to VALERIE MILLER, MICHELLE TREFLER and SANTINA GAMBRILL and MATTHEW CLAUSON for their teaching ideas.

Nicole Bonfield for editing

The Cast and Crew

Sydney Abba for use of her notes and comments from her own production 2013- DRAMAC Macquarie University

Many thanks also to DRAMAC for the loan of Ruby Doll
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APPENDIX 2

Production photos to discuss - staging, lighting, character relationships. All Photos taken by John Baltaks
MAKING COSTUMES

[Image of a table with fabric and sewing materials]

[Image of a dress and a doll, presumably the same dress]

CHALKDUST THEATRE INC TEACHING NOTES 2013 PRODUCTION RUBY MOON © H.STATHOPOULOS
A Review to Discuss

Hazy Moon – A Chalkdust Theatre Production May 6, 2013
Matt Cameron’s *Ruby Moon* (2003) has become something of a contemporary Australian classic over the last decade. As a result, it is frequently performed which creates the challenge for each new adaptation to distinguish itself from the pack. Chalkdust Theatre’s latest production offers some new twists.

Ray and Sylvie Moon live on Flaming Tree Grove, in suburban heartland. Their daughter, Ruby, has been missing for some time, and they are struggling to deal with their loss. On this particular evening however, something very different happens: a new clue comes to light. With a glimmer of hope, Ray and Sylvie set off once again down the street to question the collection of quirky neighbours. Yet, as the play progresses, it becomes apparent that the parents are playing the litany of characters themselves. So no matter how far they dig, nothing new will ever come to light. They are working in a closed system. By the play’s end, it would seem that the question is not what happened to Ruby, but rather how do we cope with a loss. The script is textually very rich with elements of absurdism, fairy-tales, detective fiction and a plot that won’t resolve, leaving plenty of room for interpretation.

Sara de Vries as Sylvie and Trent Gardiner as Ray

Director Jonathan Llewellyn has done a wonderful job with the lighting and set. A corridor of light and a constant shroud of mist create a claustrophobic atmosphere, which drives home the idea that these characters are caught in a closed universe. They may seek new information but when everything is of their own construction nothing new can reach them and what information there is, is cloudy and
undefined. Props seem to float in and out of the light giving the piece an eerie dream-like quality. During the Q&A session Llewellyn stated that his intention had been to present the play as a collection of fragmented and distorted memories, and although the text could potentially support such a reading, on viewing it wasn’t particularly evident. Indeed, outside of the creative lighting and set choices the play appeared to offer a pretty straightforward interpretation. This is a definite shame as the idea of memory, if it had been developed further, could have made for interesting theatre.

Sara de Vries as Dulcie

Although there are some eight characters in the play, there are only two actors, making this 90-minute piece something of a performance marathon as the actors are required to play four roles each. Certainly, it’s a difficult task, especially when you have to snap in and out of characters at a moment’s notice. Unfortunately, at times both Sara de Vries and Trent Gardiner struggled to achieve this. Pacing inadvertently caused the biggest difficulty. Whilst the speed certainly dealt with some of the more problematic dialogue, notably in the first scene, the actors often went too fast, not giving themselves enough time to think. Consequently, the dialogue wasn’t always genuine. Further, the Ray and Sylvie scenes were consistently angst ridden. Emotions ran high from start to finish, and although both tried to map...
their character’s journey, it was frequently lost behind a constant stream of ‘generic raised voice’.

Of Trent Gardiner, the piece requires that he play a misunderstood clown, an intense ex-soldier and a guilt-ridden professor all on top of the emptiness of a grief stricken father. Gardiner often lacked the energy required to pull off some of the more erratic characters. His choices were basically right, but many laughs were lost because he opted once again for generic angst.

Sara de Vries, who arguably had a more difficult task, was required to play an old religious spinster, a washed up cabaret singer, a disturbed babysitter as well as carry off the borderline madness of a lonely mother. Similar to Gardiner, de Vries often opted for generic angst. This sometimes collapsed one character into another, but in the wrong way. Of de Vries, more variation was required. This could have been achieved, at least in part, with further costuming. Nevertheless, de Vries moved very well – she was always graceful and produced a very fine interpretation of Dawn the disturbed babysitter – this too was Gardiner’s best scene.
Generally, both de Vries and Gardiner possessed some very fine stagecraft – a testament to the amount of hours that were surely put in. Ultimately though they fell short of making us believe they’d lost a child. Although this production may not add much to the plethora of Ruby Moon adaptations which have come before it did however contain some nice ideas and the standard of performance is certainly noteworthy when it is considered that this was not professionally produced.

Unfortunately Ruby Moon has now finished its run, it was however performed at the Darling Quarter Theatre.
Ruby Moon: Pathos with Unexpected Humour at Castle Hill

Castle Hill Players (NSW) will present Matt Cameron’s Australian drama Ruby Moon from April 13, 2012.

Ray: It's not her Sylvie. You know that.

Sylvie: Let me pretend.

Ray: It's all we do.

Ruby Moon is a hauntingly evocative journey into the hearts and minds of Sylvia and Ray Moon, whose little girl Ruby disappeared without trace from her own street in Flaming Tree Grove. It is an atmospheric blend of drama, pathos and unexpected humour.

Cast members Faith Jessell and Jeremy Johnson are challenged to create not only Sylvia and Ray, but also an array of eccentric neighbours – whom they believe hold the key to Ruby’s fate.

‘A play with only two actors presents unique challenges,’ says director Jewel Johnson. ‘But the cast and I have thoroughly enjoyed facing them head on, and hopefully have done justice to a play that’s earned its place on this year’s HSC list.'
'I felt the crucial responsibility that came with directing *Ruby Moon* is its being on the HSC syllabus and the students that would come. How could we, the Castle Hill Players, ignite a love of theatre in a new, extremely tech-savvy generation?

‘From their audition together I knew Jeremy and Faith had what it takes for what can be nothing less than tour-de-force acting, because the play is 2 actors playing 4 characters each without interval. I had extremely high expectations of what they would bring to the production and they have both exceeded that already. I look forward to watching their run.

‘The play is about every parent's worst nightmare, and the story really lives inside the psychological and emotional terrain of that experience.

‘My challenge as a director was to keep a compassionate viewpoint, and touch points for that intact. At best, the most 'Ray' and 'Sylvie' can hope for remains a surreal situation, no matter how things could be resolved in the future, which is left open in the play. That quite literally drove the 9 of us on the Artistic Team to manifest the perfect world to bring this play to life in.'It opens at the Pavilion Theatre, Castle Hill Showground, Doran Drive Castle Hill, on Friday, April 13th and runs until Saturday, May 5th, 2012. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 8.15 pm, Sunday matinee 4.30 pm.

CHALKDUST THEATRE INC TEACHING NOTES 2013 PRODUCTION *RUBY MOON* © H.STATHOPOULOS
Ruby Moon


Matt Cameron’s play about the isolation of suburbia and the “darker recesses of human nature” (Matt Cameron) is haunting and confronting and, in the macabre manner of black comedy and absurdism, sometimes funny. Because its scenes interconnect and inter-relate, it is important that it be run, as the playwright instructs, “strictly without an interval”.

But I doubt that Mr Cameron ever anticipated that it would be allowed to run for 2 hours and ten minutes! And that’s how long this production (which started 20 minutes late because of two groups of latecomers) actually ran on its second night! No audience should be made to sit for that long, on hard seats, watching a play that should run for about 90 minutes. But there we sat, eventually! A full house of mainly
That being said, young director Sidney Abba has made some interesting theatrical decisions. A sand pit and hanging tyre is used to symbolise suburbia and reduce somewhat the wide acting space of the Lighthouse Theatre stage. Particularly effective is a backlit screen, where Sylvie and Ray Moon (Hanni Trewin and Gus White) transform into the neighbours they visit to enquire, once more, about the day their daughter Ruby disappeared.

Gus White uses this screen skilfully, especially as he transforms to Sid Craven, the pitiful, disillusioned clown. He moves to and fro behind the screen, enlarging, diminishing and finally emerging, twisted and cowering. White comes into his own in this scene, especially as he takes Sylvie through his interview with the police. His characterisation of detectives, reporters and the police dog calls upon all his improvisation experience.

As Sonny Jim, the soldier, he is equally threatening and funny, and pitiful – especially as he gestures Sylvie to sit and listen to his macabre poem, “Mother”. As the inventor, Professor Ogle, he is disturbed, restless almost deranged as he rambles about the ‘black hole’ he has created and those who have ‘disappeared’ through it.

Hanni Trewin is not quite so effective in her character transformations, except as Dulcie and her parrot, where she is fast and funny. Her portrayal of Veronica needs to be more clumsily seductive, more overtly suggestive; her Dawn more introverted, self deprecating and afraid.
However, it is as Sylvie and Ray themselves that both actors are less believable. They speak too slowly. The pauses are far, far too long. The looks between them too drawn out. Sure both characters are depressed, suspicious, guilt ridden. But they know what each evening will bring. They know by heart the game they will play. It happens in households all the time! But by dragging it out, they lose the impact of the relationship and all its problems – and in the process let the tempo of this very well-written play become pedestrian and dreary.

There is much that is good in this production – and that is a credit to the vision of its young director – but her direction of the action needs to be ramped up! Let Ray and Sylvie be more real … and absurd! Let them get at each other, shout now and again, use some variation in volume and pace and pitch.

And get it down to the ‘about 90 minutes’ that is advertised in the foyer!

Carol Wimmer
Ruby Moon – Theatre Review for the Melbourne Theatre Company
By Casey Bradley (2010 MTC Youth Ambassador)

Matt Cameron’s enigmatic play ‘Ruby Moon’ maps the tribulation of two parents whose daughter disappeared down the cul-de-sac on her way to Grandmother’s house one mysterious afternoon. It’s Little Red Riding Hood with a twist – this modern drama heightens its own mystery through Cameron’s intricate plot, leaving the audience with enough knowledge to form their own denouement. Aiden Fennessy directs this whirlwind journey of accusation and malicious assumption, with a cast of two actors; Christen O’Leary and Tyler Coppin.

The plays consistent, stylised non naturalism required the frequent transformation of character; as O’Leary and Coppin play all eight characters. Each character transformation was accomplished with great finesse and intricacy; each character with their own definitively distinctive gait, accent and set of idiosyncrasies. The audience depended heavily on this clarity of performance as the quick changes in character were defined primarily by the acting rather than elaborate changes to costume. Cameron wrote ‘Ruby Moon’ with O’Leary in mind, and her precision and definition in her objective and personal obstacles were so clearly accomplished. She created the climate of fear in her street, home and within herself. The ambiguity of her daughters’ disturbing disappearance threw her grip of certainty and reality to the wayside. Coppin plays his base character, Ray Moon, with mysterious allure. One is never quite sure of where he stands, and as the play progresses the audience grow more and more confused about his position in Ruby’s macabre disappearance.

Cameron writes with a grotesque and confusing sense of ambiguity. He never specifies how long Ruby has been missing for, and towards the end of the play begins to question whether or not Ruby was ever real in the first place. It is a never ending cycle of unanswered questions, presented in a non naturalistic, presentational manner. The fact that the denouement had no definitive ending gave the mystery of Ruby Moon allure and substance. As all good playwrights should, Cameron did not spoon feed his play to the audience, however presented it as a tantalisingly malicious meal for the audience to feast upon; picking and choosing clues and elements to create their own linear understanding of the mystery of Ruby Moon.

The set was so wonderfully chaotic. Through all the clutter and noise, it was profoundly organised in the most kaleidoscopic way. Everything seemed to slot into place, finding its own purpose which was revealed throughout, or left to the interpretation of the viewer; ultimately adding to the concept of the chaos. The culmination of the set, lighting and the soundscape provided the play with the gripping edge it needed to create the confusingly chilling backbone of the play. Set Designer Andrew Bailey created what appeared to be a suburban jungle to encompass the distracted, episodic lives of the Moons and their neighbours. Guilt becomes an obsession within the character, and as the questions began to pile up into disordered threads of thought, it paralleled the physicality of the set – piles of unexplained ambiguous objects; once with a purpose but now left unacknowledged and apparently forgotten amiss the woes of life.
The impeccable soundscape and lighting design were harmonized to create a picturesque accompaniment to the action. Together, they transformed scenes from one setting to the next, marking changes in time and place. It was fantastically simple in nature, mostly consisting of clear beams of light, and even more basic – the manual flicking on and off of the lounge room lamp. It was so cleverly plotted so that with a simple change in lighting, a new mood could be introduced, and was then established by the soundscape.

Fennessy has created a fantastic, hauntingly provocative piece of theatre, perfectly suited to the Melbourne Theatre Company’s Education Season in the intimacy of the Lawler Studio, as it presents a delightful array of theatrical conventions and intrigue; the text and the performance both providing interesting and relevant areas of study for theatre.

Playing until the 5th of May at the Melbourne Theatre Company, Lawler Studio.
Interview with Ruby Moon Playwright - Matt Cameron

What was your initial inspiration in writing the play Ruby Moon?
To some degree I was inspired by headlines. Sadly those sorts of headlines are a constant, but for some reason there may have been a number of them at the time which sparked me. A missing child is such a universal tragedy with a primal impact. It arouses such potent emotions in the people that it immediately affects, and then beyond that, to communities. I can read a story from the other side of the world concerning a missing child and it still has a powerful emotional effect so empathy is not just about proximity. The challenge with Ruby Moon has been finding a way of writing a play that told a fictional story about a missing child that was distinctive because in some ways it is familiar territory.

Did you have any dramaturgical input for Ruby Moon and would you talk about the process?
I definitely had dramaturgical input. I feel relatively self-sufficient as a playwright, but at the same time I crave collaboration and, for me, the best dramaturg is the director of the play – assuming I approve of the choice of director. In this case that’s Aidan Fennessy and I’ve been working with him for many years now. Aidan’s contribution has been enormous. He is a wonderful writer and, to my mind, a great director. What he provides can seem so simple but it’s a revelation to me. He helps focus and distill the ideas. It can come from him talking about how he might stage a scene and just hearing that helps to clarify for me how I should rewrite it in order to make it more effective. He has also provided direct suggestions of edits and ideas that I have brazenly adopted and claimed as my own.

Were there any particular themes or concepts you wished to highlight in the play Ruby Moon?
On some level, although it’s probably obscure, I felt like the play was about the prevailing fear of our times. I was trying to get beyond the fear of losing a child and actually look at the
nature of that unease, that dis-ease, that lurks and hovers in the world that we live in at the moment. In this country there is at present a climate of fear that we are being sold by our government. They claim their actions are about easing and removing that fear but I think they’re nurturing it, feeding it. It’s the classic ploy of corrupt power, to convince us that we are in peril and then offer themselves as our only protection. So I was quite interested in trying to explore notions of anxiety, doubt, loss and barely suppressed terror. To me anyway, it feels like the pervasive fear and mistrust that exists in Flaming Tree Grove is something of a microcosm of where Australia is at the moment. Like an ache in our collective soul that we haven’t yet worked out how to heal.

**How would you describe the style of your play?**
Gothic, absurd, nightmarish, surreal. I make a conscious effort in writing a play to make it theatrical and abstract. I think there are playwrights who do naturalism brilliantly, so I leave that territory to them. However, I think that playwrights who don’t do naturalism well are responsible for boring theatre. So if I can’t write great naturalism then I would rather not write it at all. *Ruby Moon* is written, therefore in the style that I favour which is a type of heightened naturalism. It is still very much predicated on universal human emotions but isn’t directly about topical events or specific places, but hopefully evokes them.

**Did you envisage a particular space or set for *Ruby Moon***?
This is not specifically the set that I envisaged but I love the set for this production. I certainly can’t take credit for it. When I was writing *Ruby Moon*, I imagined the literal landscape, knowing that we would be representing that on stage, and that we’d be trying to trigger that image. So I was trying to imagine a street in my head which had these old, dark trees and street lamps, with pockets of light and vast shadows. I was imagining a street at night even though the story of Ruby’s disappearance begins on a screamingly hot summer’s day.

Overwhelmingly the street felt to me like a street that probably looks picture-perfect during the day but at night suddenly becomes frightening and portentous. I grew up in the sad, bare outer suburbs. This particular image, though, was probably more inner suburban with old deciduous trees, a really established suburb. So I imagined that real, natural world and then imagined the context for it on stage. I started to imagine a room, a room that was arrested in time because, for these parents, the loss of their child has caused everything to stop and has allowed the dust to accumulate. I imagined that everything was locked in a time warp.